OVERVIEW OF METHODS SUPPORTING THE DE-RADICALISATION AND DISENGAGEMENT OF ISLAMIC RADICALS

Heidi Maiberg

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Abstract: Europe is increasingly struggling to support the reintegration of people who have returned from ISIS-controlled areas and have been adherents of their ideology. There are a variety of methods developed to support the de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals. This article provides an overview of the methods and discussion topics used by practitioners in the framework of such de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes. The research is based on interviews with experts from Austria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom. As a result, the author has drawn the following conclusions: 1) The selection of methods used for de-radicalisation and disengagement depend on the individual in question. In this context, the most important starting point is to gain an understanding of the factors that contributed to that specific person's radicalisation and/or involvement in an extremist organisation; 2) The main supportive methods are mentoring, socio-economic aid/assistance, psychological and religious counselling; 3) The discussions with mentors and other sponsors are aimed at developing new perspectives. The main topics of discussion are related to identity, belonging, foreign policy and possible new ventures; whereas the issues of religion and ideology are the focal topics for people whose radicalisation and/or engagement with extremist organisations was motivated primarily by those aspects. Overall, the results indicate that the methods used to support de-radicalisation and disengagement should be tailored to the needs of the individual. However, there is still a lot of work to be done by organisations running such radicalisation and disengagement programmes in order to improve their capacity to deliver a variety of activities to support an individual's reintegration in a holistic manner.

Keywords: ideology, de-radicalisation in Europe, disengagement, rehabilitation, violent extremism, terrorism

1. Introduction

The interconnected nature of religion, migration, integration, radicalisation and psychology was on full display during the European migration crisis of 2015, when the proposed relocation and resettlement schemes raised questions in Estonia as well as in other European countries about the points of

contact between different religions and cultures, as well as potential conflicts, and other issues related to integration and religious radicalisation.

These issues remain pressing to this day, because the civil war that erupted in Syria back in 2011, followed by the European migrant crisis, has fuelled religious and cultural conflicts, put pressure on national adaptation systems and provided fertile ground for the proliferation of both Islamic radicalism and right-wing extremism. As a result of these developments, there was an increasing number of radicalised people in Europe who wanted to join the brutal terrorist organisation ISIS, and many of them did; whereas those who remained in Europe engaged in activities to support ISIS in their home countries. The emergence of the ISIS terrorist organisation, joined by numerous fighters coming from Europe, created a new security paradigm. It is estimated that between 2013 and 2018, approximately 41,490 people from around 80 countries joined ISIS operating in the territories of Iraq and Syria[1].

As a result of the civil war in Syria, the activities of ISIS and the migration crisis, there has been an increase in the threat of radical Islamist terrorism, which has also fuelled the rise of the far right. That, in turn, increased the risk that ISIS supporters returning to Europe from Iraq and Syria might use migration routes to carry out terrorist acts.

Before the European migration crisis of 2015, jihadist terrorists were primarily characterised based on Michael M. Laskier's theory of frustration among second- and third-generation migrants. However, the new radical Islamist movements that emerged from the Syrian civil war, their recruitment practices and stakeholders have created new target groups for radicalisation[2].

There are also numerous ISIS supporters who, despite their extremist ideological views, remained in their European home countries, with many of them serving time in prison. At the same time, due to the setbacks suffered by ISIS in recent years, there is a growing number of people wanting to return to Europe. While some countries have welcomed these people back,

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[1]   **Cook, J**.; **Vale, G**. 2018. From Daesh to "Diaspora": Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State. ICSR Report. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), Department of War Studies, Kings College, p. 3. https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf.

[2]   **Laskier, M**. 2008. Islamic Radicalism and Terrorism in the European Union: The Maghrebi Factor. – Inbar, E.; Frisch, (eds.) 2008. Radical Islam and International Security: Challenges and Responses. Besa Studies in International Security. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 93–94.

there are also examples of European nations refusing to do that (e.g. the case of Shamima Begum in the UK)[3].

This article explores the answers to two questions: 1) What methods are being used in the process of supporting the de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals? 2) What topics are the focal issues covered in discussions with mentors and other practitioners?

2. Methodology and Research Sample

The author of this article sought answers to these questions by interviewing 21 experts from six European countries that have developed and implemented programmes to support the de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals as a result of the considerable upsurge in the activities of ISIS in recent years. Due to the remarkable adaptation abilities exhibited by terrorist organisations, most resources produced before 2015 have become obsolete and there are not many new publicly available governmental documents and research papers on this topic. The semi-structured interviews conducted between May and November 2018 in the framework of this research enabled the collection of the most up-to-date information from experts working in the field and allowed for a closer examination of select topics on which there is little public information available. Interviews were conducted with experts from Finland, Sweden, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria. These experts included researchers, social and youth workers, the creators of de-radicalisation programmes and also civil servants. In addition to Islamic radicals, a number of interviewees also had experience in working with other extremists, e.g. neo-Nazis and white supremacists. In order to protect their anonymity, the names of the interviewees will not be mentioned.

3. Theoretical Framework

Terms such as '*terrorism*', '*fundamentalism*' and '*radicalisation*' are widely used in research on de-radicalisation and disengagement; however, they may carry different meanings for different authors and across disciplines. This study uses these core terms in the following meanings:

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[3] **Shamima Begum: Ex-Bethnal Green schoolgirl who joined IS 'wants to come home'**. 2019. – BBC News, February 14. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47229181 (22.09.2019).

- **Terrorism** refers to politically motivated violence that intentionally targets civilians and non-combatants. As a tactic, terrorism typically comprises symbolic acts of violence that are intended to influence the political behaviour of a target group via the deliberate creation of fear.[4]
- **Extremism** is the most extreme form of radicalism, rejecting democratic values and processes. Extremists present their own ideology as universally applicable and believe that it must be imposed upon the population, if necessary by the use of violence.[5]
- **Islamism** refers to ideologies and movements that strive to establish some kind of an 'Islamic order' – a religious state, sharia law, and moral codes in Muslim societies and communities.[6]
- **Fundamentalism** implies a rigid in-group and out-group distinction between the superiority of our 'true' belief and a modern world that is contradictory or hostile to our religion.[7]
- **Radicalisation** is generally defined as a process of social and psychological change whereby an individual adopts beliefs and attitudes that can motivate, among other things, involvement in terrorist activity.[8]
- **De-radicalisation**[9] is the social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalisation is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and

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[4]   **Neumann, P**. 2009. Old and New Terrorism. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 7.

[5]   **Demant, F.; Slootman, M.; Buijs, F.; Tillie, J. N**. 2008. Decline and Disengagement. An Analysis of Processes of Deradicalisation. Amsterdam: Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES), p. 13.

[6]   **Bayat, A**. (ed.) 2013. Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 4–5.

[7]   **Verkuyten, M**. 2018. Religious Fundamentalism and Radicalization among Muslim Minority Youth in Europe. – European Psychologist, Vol. 23(1). Special Issue: Youth and Migration: What Promotes and What Challenges Their Integration? pp. 21–31. http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=00453911-778e-44a1-900c-397ba451abd5%40sdc-v-sessmgr02&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=2018-12389-003&db=pdh.

[8]   **Horgan, J**. 2017. Psychology of terrorism: Introduction to the special issue. – American Psychologist, Vol. 72(3), pp. 199–204; **Jackson, B. A**. 2006. Training for Urban Resistance: The Case of the Irish Republican Army. – The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes. Ed. by Forest, J. F. Vol. 1. Westport, CT: Praeger, pp. 118–135.

[9]   According to experts, this particular term has a negative connotation, which is why a wide range of terms are used, e.g. deprogramming, rehabilitation, integration, disengagement, counter-ideology or counter-brainwashing. In in this article 'deradicalisation' is used throughout to avoid ambiguity. For a more detailed discussion see: **Elshimi, M**. 2017. De-Radicalisation in the UK Prevent Strategy: Security, Identity, and Religion (Routledge Critical Terrorism Studies). London, New York: Routledge, p. 58. [**Elshimi** 2017]

engagement in violent activity.[10] In more general terms, it is the process of changing an individual's belief system, in the hope that the individual would reject the extremist ideology, and embrace mainstream values.[11] De-radicalisation can be both individual and collective, focusing either on just one person or on changing the attitudes of the collective or the organisation as a whole.[12]

- **Disengagement** is a dynamic process resulting in behavioural changes (i.e. refraining from violence and withdrawing from a radical organization) but not necessarily in a change in beliefs. This process is usually set off by a trigger (e.g. traumatic event or emotional crisis), creating a cognitive opening that leads to questioning and serious deliberation about remaining in the group and supporting its ideology, eventually culminating in a decision to leave the group. After exiting, the former radical needs to create a new identity and reintegrate into mainstream society. However, although a person can exit a radical organisation and refrain from violence, they may nevertheless retain a radical worldview. What is more, a distinction is made between physical and psychological disengagement.[13]

- **Reintegration** is the process of developing a commitment to a different ideological system – a moral community – through nurturing a more complex sense of self related to different identity groups that together inform moral evaluations and behaviour.[14]

While '*de-radicalisation*' refers to the process of moderating a person's radical beliefs, '*disengagement*', on the other hand, refers to the process of changing one's behaviour by withdrawing from a radical organisation and refraining from violence. However, it is important to bear in mind that a

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[10] **Horgan, J.; Braddock, K**. 2010. Rehabilitating the Terrorists? Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-Radicalization Programs. – Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol. 22, March, p. 280 (pp. 267–291). www.start.umd.edu/start/publications/Derad.pdf.

[11] **Rabasa, A.; Pettyjohn, S. L.; Ghez, J. J.; Boucek, Chr**. 2010. Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, National Security Research Division, p. xiii. https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1053.html. [**Rabasa** 2010]

[12] **El-Said, H**. 2015. New Approaches to Countering Terrorism. Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs (New Security Challenges). Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 10–11.

[13] **Rabasa** 2010, pp. xiii, 11–12.

[14] **Marsden, S**. 2017. Reintegrating Extremists. Deradicalisation and Desistance. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, p. 80. [**Marsden** 2017]

person can, at the same time, be de-radicalised but take part in an organisation's activities, or be disengaged but still hold radical views.

In the course of conducting this research, the interviews covered examples of people who had been convicted for terrorist activities, but also those who had merely been radicalised and/or joined an organisation without engaging in the planning or execution of terrorist activities. Owing to that, throughout this paper the term '*radical*' is used, instead of '*terrorist*' or '*extremists*'.

4. Results

This section provides a brief overview of the methods used to support the de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals. It is important to note that the approaches adopted differ across EU member states. This section provides a general overview of the most commonly used methods and approaches used by organisations and agencies that deal with these issues either by court order or on a voluntary basis.
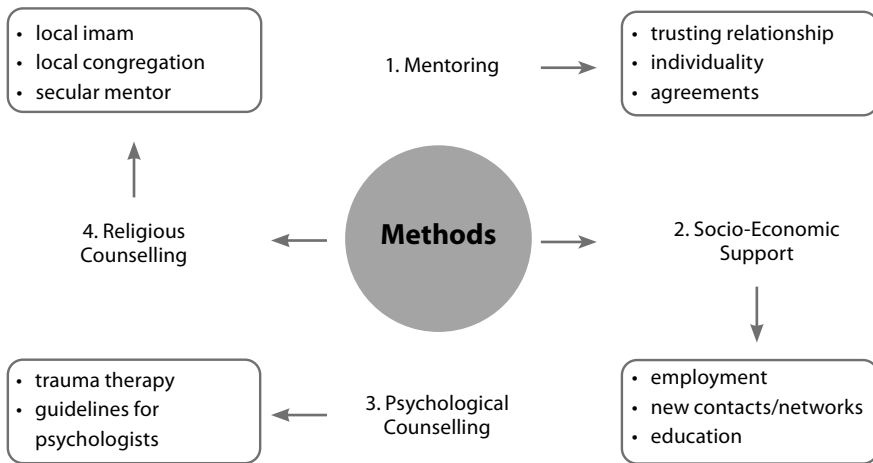

Figure 1. Methods for Supporting De-radicalisation and Disengagement.

4.1. Mentoring

Mentoring entails one-on-one work with a specialist with the aim of supporting a person's individual development. This is one of the most frequently used methods to support the reintegration of Islamic radicals. Islamic radicals often want to disengage from the rest of society, and in those cases, the role of mentors is akin to a bridge between the Islamist and the rest of the world, helping them find ways to return to the society from which they have tried to disengage.

Although the types of persons who offer such mentoring differ across countries, they are primarily social workers who support personal development through their activities and attitudes, as well as by helping their mentees develop a more positive attitude towards society.[15] For example, in the Netherlands, mentors are appointed by the state but their duty is to provide individual support as somebody the mentees can talk to, not only about crime and punishment, but other personal issues as well. Usually they are Muslims who are well-regarded in their local community or people who have relevant knowledge about Islam or Islamist radicalism.[16]

After being convicted Islamic radicals usually lose their existing personal support network and mentors often play a critical role as the people they can always turn to in need. After establishing trust, work continues one-on-one, depending on the needs and preferences of the individual, with meetings usually taking place once a week. In this setting, it is essential to develop mutual trust and cultivate open communication in order for the mentee to open up to the mentor. In addition, separate agreements are concluded with mentors, i.e. to establish when they are obligated to inform the police. Since many radicals often lack critical life skills and a support network, having a mentor can prove to be a critical bridge between a person and the so-called outside world. For example, in Austria, mentoring meetings are arranged at least twice a month.

> We usually meet at the youth centre or somewhere the mentee prefers. Mainly we talk about things that are currently going on in their lives. For example, tomorrow I'm meeting a man who is in the middle of a divorce, and the court's ruling should be announced by now, so we'll talk about how things are going with his wife and kids.[17]

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[15] **Marsden** 2017, p. 48.

[16] Interview with an expert from **the Netherlands.**

[17] Interview with an expert from **Austria.**

Thus, mentoring is one of the methods that the state or the NGO sector can use for reintegrating Islamic radicals.

4.2. Socio-Economic Support

The larger community plays an essential role in the process of reintegrating Islamic radicals[18]. The most likely scenario awaiting Islamic radicals who are trying to reintegrate is that of inactivity, unemployment and criminal networks because contacts with loved ones and immediate family have shrunk, as have job prospects and thus, also the outlook for reintegration.[19] Social and economic support can be divided into three larger strands: employment, networks and education.

4.2.1. Employment: (Re-)entering the Labour Market

Employment is an excellent way to help people stay on track and not fall back into criminal habits, enabling them to acquire new experiences and develop new networks. This is all the more important given the fact that approximately 30% of European Islamists have had a criminal background before radicalisation.[20]

In the context of (re-)entering the labour market, mentors can offer invaluable support to the Islamic radicals. Marsden has pointed out that many young radicals are highly sceptical about mainstream society, one could even say that they are fearful (e.g. they may fear to go to work centres by themselves), and mentors can offer support, e.g. by accompanying them.[21]

For example, Finnish experts mentioned that they often help people find new alternatives to their existing jobs, such that would be better suited to their knowledge and skills (e.g. suggesting to former drug dealers – people with sales and marketing experience – to consider applying their skills in a non-criminal environment, e.g. as a car salesman).[22] Experts maintain that

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[18]   **Marsden** 2017, p. 47.

[19]   **Andrews, D. A.; Bonta, J**. 2003. The Psychology of Criminal Conduct. 3rd ed. Cincinnati, OH: Anderson, p. 245. [**Andrews, Bonta** 2003]

[20]   **Rekawek, K.; Matějka, S.; Szucs, V.; Beňuška, T.; Kajzarová, K.; Rafay, J**. 2018. Who are the European Jihadis? Project Midterm Report. Bratislava: GLOBSEC Policy Institute (Defence and Security Programme), p. 10. https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GLOBSEC_WhoAreTheEuropeanJihadis-Midterm-Report.pdf.

[21]   **Marsden** 2017, p. 50.

[22]   Interview with an expert from **Finland**.

people mainly need support in taking the first steps; giving them positive feedback fosters the development of a new identity that is different from that of a fighter or an Islamic radical.

4.2.2. Establishing New Contacts and Networks

D. A. Andrews and J. Bonta have pointed out that negative social capital as a consequence of belonging to a criminal network will only increase the risk of falling back into radicalism.[23] The adoption of radical views and affiliations as well as criminal convictions have significant negative effects on personal networks because Islamic radicals often push people away or become withdrawn themselves.[24] What is more, in the course of de-radicalisation people are often prohibited from communicating with at least some of their former contacts.

The establishment of new contacts is essential for reintegration; however, it can prove to be extremely difficult. Islamic radicals often need to obtain permission from the police or their probation officer to associate with their new acquaintances. According to Marsden, former radicals are often fearful of establishing new friendships, believing that since they themselves are being monitored, it might put their new friends at risk as well.[25] That may be one of the main reasons why people are not very proactive in establishing new contacts.

Mentors can advise radicals to engage in recreational activities in order to come into contact with new people and environments. According to a German expert, arts and sports offer an excellent outlet for self-expression, leaving people feeling that they are in control of something in their lives. These activities also provide positive feedback and offer a chance to collaborate with other people.[26] Ultimately, such collaboration facilitates interpersonal relations and enables radicals to show another side of themselves.

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[23] **Andrews, Bonta** 2003, p. 245.

[24] **Weggemans, D.; de Graaf, B**. 2017. Reintegrating Jihadist Extremist Detainees: Helping Extremist Offenders Back Into Society (Routledge Contemporary Terrorism Studies). Roudledge, p. 19. [**Weggemans, de Graaf** 2017]

[25] **Marsden** 2017, p. 58.

[26] Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

4.2.3. Education

Social and economic support plays an important role when deciding to continue studies or embark on new educational pursuits. According to a German expert, this is an area where it is essential to offer support, especially in ascertaining the person's needs: whether they need secondary education, vocational training or a university degree, etc.

> *Whatever they are interested in should be supported and cultivated through acquiring knowledge that will make their worldview more multifaceted, introducing shades of grey that will pave the way for shifting radical views.*[27]

In the case of Islamic radicals, people's world views are often very closed-off, revolving only around one central truth. Acquiring knowledge will offer different perspectives, not to mention factual knowledge and development of logical thinking, ultimately leading to a better understanding of different perspectives that enhances personal empathy.

The socio-economic needs of people seeking to de-radicalise and/or disengage from radical organisations are very different. For reformed radicals, having a criminal record can make subsequent reintegration even more difficult. There is a large number of people among Islamic radicals who have served time in prison and who do not have the skills, knowledge and networks needed for life outside the prison. This is where mentors or probation officers can offer support in helping people with finding work or with educational pursuits, fostering a more positive attitude towards the state and subsequent contacts with the public sector.

Research conducted in the Netherlands indicates that most people who took part in such programmes felt that this kind of practical help for "getting their life back on track" was extremely useful.[28]

4.3. Psychological Counselling

It must be borne in mind that Islamic radicals may have been exposed to violence and cruelty. Psychological counselling offers a way to support people in coping with such experiences.[29] Interviews conducted in the Netherlands with people who had engaged in terrorism indicated that in addition to

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[27] Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

[28] **Weggemans, de Graaf** 2017, p. 138.

[29] Interview with an expert from **Ireland**.

adjustment difficulties those people also often suffer from long-term depression and panic attacks.[30]

Although psychological counselling was mentioned as a method in several expert interviews, not all organisations provide this service themselves and people are often sent to a psychologist separately. According to a German researcher, Islamic radicals often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of what they have gone through or due to previous traumas, such as violence experienced in childhood, their parents divorcing or sexual abuse. In such cases, working with a therapist can help people cope with trauma and overcome what has happened in a radicalised environment.[31] The United Kingdom has recently developed ethical guidelines for psychologists working in the areas of violent extremism and terrorism, offering guidance on providing assistance to Islamic radicals and how to help them rethink their relationship with the state, social norms and their radical views.[32]

Overall, psychological counselling seems to be an instrument that very few organisations can offer to radicals, mainly due to a lack of professionals and resources, or because they focus on other methods in their practice. This is a problematic issue, especially considering that the provision of mental health care as well as analysis of attitudes and experiences is an essential part in the process of de-radicalisation and reintegration, raising the question of how people are supposed to deal with all of that by themselves or without the help of a mentor with relevant training.

4.4. Religious Counselling

Religious counselling is another widely used method for supporting Islamic radicals in the process of de-radicalisation. This section focuses on the practical methods used for people who have sought religious counselling, as well as the role played by the local clerics and the community.

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[30] **Weggemans, de Graaf** 2017, pp. 93–94.

[31] Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

[32] **Al-Attar, Z.; Bates-Gaston, J.; Dean, Chr., Lloyd, M**. 2018. Ethical Guidelines for Applied Psychological Practice in the Field of Extremism, Violent Extremism and Terrorism. The British Psychological Society (Division of Forensic Psychology), September. https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/ethical-guidelines-applied-psychological-practice-field-extremism-violent-extremism.

4.4.1. Collaboration with Local Clerics and Religious Community

Religious counselling can be provided by the local clergy, who can welcome and introduce the newcomer to the congregation, discuss theological issues and share information about learning opportunities. For example, in the Swedish town of Malmö, the social workers have developed a close partnership with the local imam.

> *Islamic radicals are often interested in discussing religion, and the local imam offers a place for former radicals to consult with more moderate religious leaders who can offer people alternative perspectives (incl. Quran discussion groups); unfortunately we don't have anything similar to offer for right-wing extremists.*[33]

However, this type of religious counselling provided by the clergy and the congregation is not available everywhere. For example, in the Netherlands, official places of worship are fearful of working with former radicals because the police keep a keen eye on mosques. The provision of religious counselling also depends on the capabilities of the clergy. According to a Dutch expert, we should not overestimate the clergy because often they are

> *old men with outdated views who come from small villages in Morocco. They are not particularly inspiring and as a result, they are unable to establish a meaningful rapport with Islamic radicals.*[34]

Although at first glance it may seem that in the case of de-radicalisation and disengagement the greatest effort should be made by local clerics and their congregations, the reality is actually far more complex. If they want and are able to, the local clergy and the community can prove to be invaluable in the process of reintegrating radicals; however, it must be borne in mind that if the clergy and the community are not particularly inspiring or open to collaboration, one cannot rely on them for religious counselling.

4.4.2. Religious Discussions with a Mentor or other Secular Experts

Islamic radicals often discuss religious issues with their mentors or some other secular expert. Usually, these discussions take place in the course of

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[33]   Interview with an expert from **Sweden.**

[34]   Interview with an expert from **the Netherlands**.

other activities and are not planned as such. According to an Austrian expert, mentors often discuss religious topics with their mentees, although they do not have the relevant training. Some of them are Muslims themselves, while others have undergone additional training on Islam and religion.[35] Religious discussions with mentors are more likely to happen if the mentor is also of the same religious affiliation. Such interactions reveal personal views and enable people to talk about their individual perspectives.

In addition to a shared religion, the same origin and the place of residence can also serve as shared points of contact. The Unity Initiative, launched by Usman Raja and Angela Misra, is a UK-based British-Muslim intervention consultancy that focuses on rehabilitating individuals convicted of terrorist offenses. The couple behind the organisation are British-Pakistani, Muslims, East Londoners and one of them left behind a hyper masculine career as a cage-fighter, which has made them more approachable to many Islamic radicals who share a similar background. Owing to all that, they are better able and equipped to engage in preventive work and interact with prisoners or those that have been released from prison (incl. discussing the meanings and linguistic differences in the Quran in the modern world vs when it was written and about the meaning of different hadiths). This popular and extremely influential organisation, which offers one-on-one counselling has successfully managed to blend cage-fighting, community work and extremism, offering its clients an inspirational role model that is easy for them to identify with.[36]

In the Netherlands, many mentors are people with religious status or who are well-versed in Islam, enabling radicals to engage in serious discussion on theological issues.[37] In the case of secular mentors, the bonus for Islamic radicals in discussing theological issues is the fact that their discussion partner does not have extensive prior knowledge in that area. There is an example from the UK, where a probation officer and an Islamic radical started to read the Quran together and began delving deeper into the issues with the help of expert commentaries, resulting in the Islamic radical realising that he had previously misinterpreted several hadiths.[38]

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[35] Interview with an expert from **Austria**.

[36] **Cruickshank, P**. 2015. An Interview with: Usman Raja. – CTC Sentinel, Vol. 8, Issue 7, July. Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at U.S. Military Academy West Point. https://ctc.usma.edu/an-interview-with-usman-raja/ (14.10.2018).

[37] Interview with an expert from **the Netherlands**.

[38] Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

Based on literature and the interviews, it can be surmised that religious counselling generally plays a critical role in the process of de-radicalisation and disengagement. Often it is thought that the increase in the number of radical Islamists is a problem that only concerns Muslims and the Islamic clergy, however that is not actually the case. The local clergy and community can play a critical role in the process of reintegrating Islamic radicals, particularly by offering a forum to learn about and discuss religious issues. However, it is also important to note that if the local clergy and the community are not attractive or cooperative, they will not be able to get through to the target group. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the people engaged in such counselling would be able to achieve a personal connection and establish mutual trust with Islamic radicals.

At the same time, other mentors or organisations can also have a significant impact, especially if they share an Islamic and/or similar background to the person in question, because it is easier to discuss theological issues if the relationship is based on personal identification and mutual trust.

In addition, throughout this process, it is also important to keep in mind the personal motivating factors for each person in question. For example, if the reasons behind a particular person's radicalisation are not related to religious views, then discussing theological issues will not play a particularly important role in the de-radicalisation process either. In such instances, the local clergy and community will not have a significant role to play; whereas in cases where religion has been the underlying factor behind radicalisation, the clergy, community and mentors can offer invaluable support to former radicals in acquiring new knowledge and perspectives.

5. Criticism and Analysis of Commonly Used Methods

The expert interviews indicated that the main methods used to support de-radicalisation and disengagement are linked to the creation of a strong mentor-mentee relationship, the provision of socio-economic support, as well as psychological and religious counselling. In general, the focus is on specific methods and one organisation does not provide all of the services described in the previous section. For example, there are organisations that are able to engage specialists on the basis of the specific needs of particular persons, e.g. if a person wants, they can consult with a psychologist or the clergy, but these are often not part of the official programme.

German de-radicalisation expert D. Koehler[39] pointed out in his interview that interventions relying only on one or two methods are too simplistic. Radicalisation is an individual process that is influenced by a number of factors, and therefore people need assistance from different sectors in order to change their mind-sets and reintegrate into society. According to Koehler, successful de-radicalisation or disengagement requires a holistic approach, covering the following five areas:

(1) **Theological or ideological debate**, i.e. scholars, clergy and other experts, such as former radicals, offering an opportunity to discuss theological or ideological issues;
(2) **Social work**, i.e. social workers, mentors and other sponsors help people get involved in community activities that will help them pursue their interests in a non-violent manner;
(3) **Psychological counselling**, i.e. psychological assistance offered to support people coping with disorders and trauma (e.g. sexual abuse, violent childhood, etc.);
(4) **Education**, i.e. supporting people's educational pursuits, either vocational or academic;
(5) **Fine Arts & Sport**s, i.e. engagement in creative activities and sports enables people to come into contact with others and establish new relationships.

Koehler asserts that a personalized plan should be prepared for each person, covering all the above mentioned five areas and tailored to the person's specific needs. This type of holistic approach is also recommended by an UK expert who stresses the importance of covering all areas of life, because otherwise it will be very difficult to disengage from existing relationships.[40] Based on this model, we would ideally need five different experts working in concert with one individual, because developments in one area are closely intertwined with others. Koehler maintains that a person's mood and needs can change significantly over the course of just one day, and therefore, we need a programme based on their specific needs, at least five mentors (i.e. one for each area), and one more person to oversee the big picture and

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[39]   Interview with an expert from **Germany**.
[40]   Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

coordinate their activities by devising a strategy and an action plan while also monitoring the efficiency of applied methods.[41]

However, this multi-faceted approach is very expensive. This is especially relevant considering that many activities are project-based and are often not eligible for support. What is more, there is also a lack of people equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge. Interviews conducted with experts indicated that in Germany and other European countries, all five approaches are often mentioned but usually only one or two are actually used due to insufficient capabilities or resources. Furthermore, organisations currently lack the ability to assess the impact of their activities. As a result, they are often unable to indicate what types of activities need to be added or how to modify existing ones. What they need, in addition to supplementary funding, is more people who have been trained to deal with these specific issues and more time spent per individual.

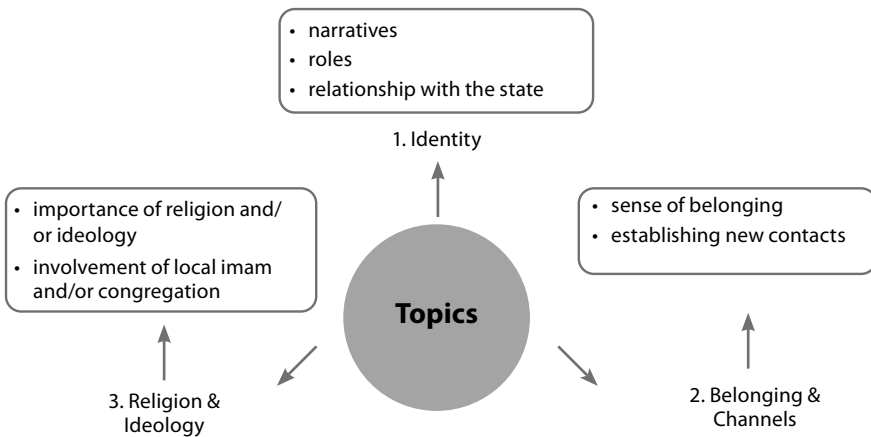## 5.1. Topics of Conversation to Support De-radicalisation and/or Disengagement

Figure 2. Topics of Conversation to Support De-radicalisation and/or Disengagement.

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[41] Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

5.2. Identity

Mohammed Elshimi, a researcher from the United Kingdom, has stated that social identity is at the heart of neo-jihadism. Specifically, there are communities around the world that feel besieged by others. Violent extremists do not consider themselves to be terrorists, instead they see themselves as soldiers and warriors.[42] When asked to comment on this statement, the experts interviewed in the context of this study agreed with that statement without hesitation. Several experts pointed out that in the early stages of radicalisation, people have a tendency to want to acquire a specific identity and later, make every effort to attain it, and therefore, the recruiters must offer an inspiring outlook.[43] In addition, there are also experts who say that people need to be offered alternatives in the form of a new identity; whereas others insist that the de-radicalisation programme must be responsible for supporting individuals in moving towards a new identity. How can that be achieved and what issues are chosen for discussion in that context?

5.2.1. Narratives

Narratives are stories that give shape to perceived aspects, thoughts and emotions, as well as events and experiences.[44] Furthermore, narratives change over time and are dependent on the perspective shed on the past at the time of retelling. In addition to relying the experience, it also indicates how the event and activity have been stored in memory.[45] The shape that a narrative lends to events, thoughts and experiences is subjective – in the case of radicals, it can help justify certain life events – and affects the development of identity, because over time, certain events and stories become part of personal memory and thereby affect the way that person perceives the world around them. As was pointed out by an expert from the UK, some people exhibit signs of mourning or feelings of abandonment in connection with certain life events or regarding the way their life has unfolded in general. In such cases,

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[42] **Elshimi** 2017, p. 193.

[43] Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

[44] **Andrews, M.; Squire, C.; Tamboukou, M**. 2008. Doing Narrative Research. SAGE Publications, p. 8.

[45] **Throop, C. J**. 2003. Articulating Experience. – Anthropological Theory, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 222–223. DOI https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499603003002006.

an ideology-based narrative can provide justification for how they are feeling and for the violent acts they have committed.[46]

The Austrian Strategy for the prevention and countering of violent extremism and de-radicalisation recognises that discussions regarding identity must include solutions for challenges that are related to social inequalities, barriers, and discrimination and opportunities for social, economic and political engagement.[47] The highlighted themes were related to narratives that support radicalisation, often coupled with religious and political views. According to a Muslim de-radicalisation expert, some narratives facilitating the emergence of Islamic radicalism in Europe, are the following: 'Muslims are being persecuted'; 'The West hates Muslims!'; and 'There is a war against Islam, initiated by the Shia, Western policies or islamophobia'.[48]

Although such ideas may seem like unfounded slogans, instead of a coherent worldview, some second or third generation migrant youths who are struggling to find a place in society may find it difficult to dismiss them. For example, according to the same Muslim expert, those narratives have been composed deliberately by focusing on individual views or events, and not based on a comprehensive analysis of all the facts. These are then used for the purposes of motivating vulnerable young people to take action against all this injustice (through an organisation or movement).[49]

There is also a strong link between identity and narratives – the former develops on the basis of the narratives that explain why the world around us is the way it is. However, it is possible to change those narratives, and consequently also identities, but the person must want it themselves. In the case of groups and movements, leaders can be the initiators and supporters of bringing about such changes in attitudes.

In the process of facilitating de-radicalisation and disengagement, it is essential to analyse the individual's personal narrative and to look for negative patterns in order to deconstruct them. Recognising underlying narratives, talking about them and picking apart harmful stereotypes constitute an important part of the work done by mentors and other sponsors.

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[46] Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

[47] **Austrian Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation** 2018. Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), National Network for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation (BNED), Vienna, p 17. https://www.beratungsstelleextremismus.at/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2241.pdf.

[48] Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

[49] *Ibid.*

A Dutch expert, engaged in the activities of the European Commission's Radicalisation Awareness Network, highlighted the following with regard to working on narratives:

> *Although it might seem reasonable for a person to find a logical cause-and-effect relationship between dropping out of school, being kicked out of their apartment and heading to Syria to fight with ISIS, it may not actually always be the case. Instead, those questions should be addressed in the process of supporting de-radicalisation and disengagement by inquiring why a certain decision was made, what the motivation was behind the decision and how best to proceed. Perhaps the unfortunate events that unfolded had nothing to do with persecution of Muslims, perhaps it was due to personal challenges in dealing with difficult situations.*[50]

The de-radicalisation process must support the acceptance of an alternative identity or the development of a completely new one. Working with narratives and stereotypes supports the emergence of new perspectives and changes of view, which allows a person to rethink the principles that they have valued in the past. Sponsors can help break down harmful stereotypes by sharing their personal opinions and as a result, the person may develop commonalities with people they used to eschew. Ultimately, this type of work with personal narratives may result in significant changes in worldview and perceptions as well as the perceived causal relationships between different events. However, it is important to stress that a fruitful discussion of narratives entails the establishment of a relationship based on mutual trust and the initiative for change must come from the person themselves.

What is more, social realities play an important part in the work with narratives and the development of new ones. According to a UK expert:

> *It varies from country to country but in France, for example, young second and third generation migrants from North Africa face serious challenges. Living in the suburbs of Paris, completely cut off from the rest of society, there's little hope for finding work, at least the type they would prefer. The deeper the socio-economic divide between different social groups, the less potential there is for a change of perspective that would allow the person to feel that they have a place in this world and that the world is a fair place to live. It is extremely difficult to force a person who comes from an impoverished background as a result of social inequalities to change their narrative if they feel that they have no place in life.*[51]

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[50]   Interview with an expert from **the European Union**.
[51]   Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

These abovementioned examples illustrate the difficulties encountered in this line of work, trying to bring about changes. In this context, mentors and other sponsors can lead by personal example, i.e. sharing their own stories, experiences and their personal world view, while also pointing out educational opportunities that would help cultivate new perspectives, develop empathy and discernment, thereby reducing susceptibility to propaganda.

5.2.2. Roles

The roles that people decide to take on or perform constitute an essential part of a person's identity. These roles can become a substantive part of their identity, because they serve as the foundation for a person's perception of themselves and the world around them, as well as their behavioural models. This section focuses on the examination of the role of victim, the impact of polarisation, and the ways to support the acceptance of different roles.

A Finnish expert pointed out that a significant part of the work with identity is linked to the victim role. For example, many young Muslims living in Finland feel very vulnerable as a result of what is going on in Syria or Palestine:

> *Such identification with people and victims in conflict zones, in turn, affects the way people see themselves as part of the society they live in, i.e. as victims and they feel the urge to fight back. My experience shows that terrorist organisations often ground their propaganda in victimization and that tactic seems to work particularly well on young and vulnerable people.*[52]

In addition, the victim role may also elicit feelings of helplessness – feeling that the whole system is rigged against them and there is nothing they can do about it. Thus, once a person has assumed the role of a victim, they are ripe for the picking for violent extremist organisations that through their ideology, provide a means for fighting back and also a reason for justifying their actions.

The acceptance of different roles is also affected by overall social polarisation. The belief that a person can have only one narrative and role might prove to be problematic. According to an UK expert, we all assume different roles depending on the context, whether it be at work, at home, spending time with friends or elsewhere. The tendency to see oneself as having just one

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[52] Interview with an expert from **Finland**.

role, for example, only as a father or as a fighter, is devoid of nuance and the acknowledgement of the different sides we all have.

> *Islamic radicals are often performing only one specific role that is attributed with certain characteristics or activities. For example, fighters perceive themselves as extremely violent and they see themselves that way in all contexts. While it may seem that performing a role may help people to reinvent and reframe themselves, in reality it only serves to break them down as an individual.*[53]

The polarisation of roles has a significant effect on people. According to the UK expert referenced above,

> *the current political landscape in the UK indicates that there seem to be only two options: a person is either a right-wing Brexit supporter or a liberal EU fanatic, a so-called snowflake. This type of thinking both here and in other areas of life is extremely harmful because real life is much more complex.*[54]

Thus, activities geared toward supporting de-radicalisation and disengagement should help people realise that they can have several different roles at once, i.e. parent, colleague, sports buddy, spouse, patriot, and EU supporter. In this context, it is important to help people realise that people carry many different roles and that the choice of a role and the ensuing behaviour and world view depend on the context.

Mentoring also plays an extremely important role in facilitating the perception of the self in multiple roles. Many radicalised young men aspire to be heroes and warriors, striving to make the world a better place through their actions. Therefore, it is beneficial to use mentors who are professionally accomplished and contribute to society, e.g. fire fighters, paramedics, or people who serve in the special forces. By coming into contact with such people, radicals get a better sense of true everyday heroism, providing fertile ground for cultivating a mutually respectful and trusting connection.

These examples illustrate that through a personal example it is possible to demonstrate multiple ways of being a courageous and respected person – a personal goal of many people at risk of radicalisation. In this context it is important to highlight that it is not necessary to enlist in Syrian forces to change the world for the better, there are also other options (e.g. volunteering). Whatever one chooses, it is important to show that it is possible to

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[53]   Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

[54]   *Ibid.*

fight for justice using non-violent means and that people can have several roles that have different aims.

5.2.3. Relationship with the State and Foreign Policy

When it comes to identity, a person's relationship with the state and its institutions as well as its foreign policy also plays an important role. A person's relationship with the larger society can often serve as a conducive factor in terms of radicalisation or a hindering factor in the process of de-radicalisation. According to experts, in such cases people often feel disconnected or alienated from the rest of society. Furthermore, attitudes towards national foreign policy also impact the narratives and roles that underlie a person's identity.

A social entrepreneur, engaged in international youth projects pointed out that the feeling of being a part of the larger society plays an essential part in this problem.[55] This is often due to the fact that the state and its institutions are often perceived as penalizing entities, and there is also a lack of trust. According to Marsden's analysis, radicals often do not believe that the state is able do something to improve their situation.[56] Taking into consideration that radicals are unable to forge a meaningful connection with the state, it is important to bear in mind that it would be better if such services would be provided by non-governmental organisations. A social worker at a German youth prison pointed out that people convicted of violent terrorism had told them that they had gone to Syria because they expected to find a better society. For some, German society was not sufficiently Islamic, and that's why they opted to immigrate to a predominantly Islamic state.[57]

Several interviewed experts highlighted that is very positive when people themselves want to discuss current foreign policy issues because they offer fertile material for enhancing their world view. Therefore, in discussions about foreign policy, the aim should be on introducing shades of grey into a traditionally black-and-white view of the world by asserting, for example, that they personally do not harbour negative feelings towards Palestine or that they condemn the UK's drone attacks in Yemen.[58]

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[55] Interview with an expert from **Sweden**.

[56] **Marsden** 2017, p. 101.

[57] Interview with an expert from **Germany**.

[58] Interview with an expert from **Austria**.

According to experts, it is perfectly natural that people think about their homeland or conflict zones that they feel a special connection to. A Finnish youth worker offered the following insight to illustrate this tendency: "Our clients from Somalia and other Middle Eastern countries have told us that even if people have lived in Finland for a very long time, they still want to keep in touch with their homeland."[59] Talking about events that are taking place back home, especially when it comes to conflict zones, allows people to open up, and establish a stronger relationship with their mentors, but also to share their thoughts. These issues are difficult to discuss because often there are no clear right or wrong answers.

What is more, foreign policy decisions may often seem unreasonable and sometimes even hypocritical. One expert shared the following:

> *The UK's foreign policy is one of the main reasons why many people decide to rebel against the system and become radicalised. It's not really a question of Western vs Islamist values. There are, for example, people who feel that the UK still considers itself a colonial empire and acts as if it was, which many people find unacceptable.*[60]

The same expert also stressed that it is important for people to understand that sometimes practical considerations are more important than ideology. In such circumstances, it is very problematic if people have an extremely narrow and unrefined world view, especially if it is grounded in poor knowledge of factual circumstances and inadequate perception of context. Analysing foreign policy is one way to develop a person's critical thinking (incl. source evaluation and a more nuanced view of the world) as a transferable skill that can have a positive effect on a radical's world view and their attitude toward society.

5.3. Sense of Belonging and Establishing New Channels

The expert interviews highlighted the sense of belonging as one of the drivers behind joining radical groups. Young people especially are often motivated by this feeling of belonging and the desire to make a difference. This section focuses on de-radicalisation of people whose affiliation with a radical group was mainly motivated by wanting to belong somewhere and outlines ways to prevent or even resolve the issue of the need for belonging and resorting

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[59] Interview with an expert from **Finland**.
[60] Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

to violent actions by supporting these people in finding new social networks and helping them find positive, non-violent outlets.

The motivating factors behind joining terrorist organisations are often social and linked to relationships, sometimes even outweighing ideological and religious reasons, because these organisations offer an opportunity to make new connections and acquire a sense of belonging. One way to counter this trend is to help people find new social networks. The UK expert pointed out that their experience has shown that "in the initial phases, people need help in finding already existing communities – be it computer games, basketball or other sports – where they could integrate and build positive relationships."[61] What is more, this is considerably easier if a person is able to join an already existing network and does not need to build it from scratch.

Any programmes or activities must be geared towards helping people find the most suitable organisations and tools in order to channel their ambitions and energy into more positive outlets. The results of a Norwegian research project on preventing radicalisation in Scandinavia showed that the majority of extremists returning from Syria and serving time in prison indicated that when they thought about conflict situations they felt the need to take action against the troubling situation.[62] Several interviewees pointed out as well that, as a general rule, the people who have radicalised or joined such organisations are very idealistic by nature and want to accomplish something. According to the UK researcher, it is very difficult to think of ISIS-supporters as people who want do something magnanimous, but that is true within their own cognitive framework, in their own utopian community.[63]

A member of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), who joined the organisation at the age of 15, also indicated the desire to do something worthwhile as the prime motivator and that he joined the terrorist organisation mainly because the circumstances were favourable, and he did not manage to find other more suitable outlets for his desire to improve the situation.[64] All this raises the question: how could we best support a person's desire to make the

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[61]   Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

[62]   **Bazilchuk, Nancy** 2018. In conversation with Norway's home-grown extremists. – Science Norway, October 17. https://sciencenorway.no/extremists-forskningno-norway/in-conversation-with-norways-home-grown-extremists/1459326.

[63]   Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

[64]   **Horgan, J**. 2009. Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements (Routledge Political Violence). New York: Routledge, p. 79. [**Horgan** 2009]

world a better place while at the same time preventing them from joining radical groups for that purpose?

The principle of non-violence was one of the main points that came across in all interviews regarding potential activities geared towards de-radicalising Islamists. All experts interviewed emphasized the importance of getting across the idea that one can dislike or even hate certain people, but one must not be party to any kind of violence against them. As specified by a British expert, Islamist radicals often hate white, English-speaking Christians and perceive them as enemies, because of the narrative that they are against true Muslims – and that is where the attitude of non-violence comes into play[65]. This approach enables people to maintain their freedom of religion and thought, but it comes with a strict obligation to remain non-violent. However, according to the same expert, this is becoming more and more difficult, because of increasing segregation and resulting social inequalities between different social groups.

Previous sections have highlighted the importance of different narratives, roles and social engagement in the process of radicalisation, and they are consequently also applied in the case of de-radicalisation. People tend to compare themselves and the group they belong to with others and are sometimes left feeling that they are not being treated properly. Based on the theory of relative deprivation, people may feel discriminated against, deprived of something or disproportionately hurt in the case of conflict zones. The perception of injustice in relation to oneself or one's group can serve as a powerful driver behind radicalisation and joining a terrorist organisation.[66]

Often, people don't know how to channel their emotions into more positive outlets, and instead resort to violence. Therefore, it is important to facilitate the channelling of people's energy and can-do attitudes into positive outlets by offering non-violent solutions. According to a Finnish expert,

> *people who are worried about Syrians or Somalis often say that what they are witnessing is a holy war and they feel compelled to intervene. In such cases it is important to point out alternative ways to help these people, such as the Red Cross, and remind them that compassion for other people and providing aid is not dependent only on religion and nationality or ethnicity, but it can be done and actually is done by people coming from very different backgrounds.*[67]

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[65] Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

[66] **Weggemans, de Graaf** 2017, p. 29.

[67] Interview with an expert from **Finland**.

In this context, it is important to stress that peoples' feelings associated with the situation in the Gaza Strip, Iraq, Syria or other conflict zones will not disappear in the process of de-radicalisation and disengagement. Many radicalised people share the desire to be a part of a group and contribute to making the world a better place. Therefore, it is necessary to offer guidance with regard to how they could best help in a given situation, so that people would feel they are contributing to solving the problem in a positive and non-violent manner.

5.4. Religion and Ideology

On the one hand, the issue of Islamic radicalism falls under the topic of religious freedom, but when these religious beliefs result in violent acts, they become the subject of national penal law. For outsiders, the violence perpetrated by Islamist radicals may seem to be related only to religion and therefore it plays a very important role in both radicalisation and de-radicalisation. This section focuses on the actual role of religion and ideology in the process of de-radicalisation and disengagement of Islamic radicals.

According to leaked classified research conducted in the UK by MI5, a large number of those involved in Islamist terrorism do not practise their faith regularly, and/or even lack religious literacy. "They are mostly British nationals, not illegal immigrants and, far from being Islamist fundamentalists, most are religious novices."[68] Thus it can be surmised that extensive knowledge and a well-established religious identity actually seems to protect against violent radicalisation because it diminishes susceptibility to manipulation and outside influence.

When asked about the importance of religion and ideology, the interviewees' responses varied widely. They all reiterated that the importance of religion or ideology depends on the person in question, i.e. there are people for whom religion is the main reason for joining a terrorist organisation and they warrant in-depth theological discussions. However, there are also those for whom religion is less important because they are motivated by other factors (e.g. social factors and personal relationships, feelings of excitement and a sense of belonging, materialism or identity).[69]

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[68] **MI5 report challenges views on terrorism in Britain**. 2008. – The Guardian, August 20. https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/aug/20/uksecurity.terrorism1 (27.10.2018).

[69] Interview with an expert from **the United Kingdom**.

Other experts were even more adamant against putting everything on religion. According to an Irish terrorism researcher, it is dangerous to assume that all people who engage in terrorism are doing it for religious reasons. What is more, there can be a wide variety of attitudes towards ideology even within one group or movement. The Irish expert specified:

> *I have experience with two brothers who went to Syria to join the fight. For one of them, religion and the organisation's ideology were the main drivers, whereas the younger brother just followed the older one because he did not want to get left behind.*[70]

According to a German expert, anyone who maintains that religion plays an important role in the process of radicalisation and that those topics need to be covered, or conversely, that religion is not that important to the process, do not really know what they are talking about. "In Europe, there are people who are highly motivated by religion and ideology, but there are also those very high in the hierarchy who are not concerned by those issues at all."[71]

According to radical Islamic cleric Omar Bakri Mohammed, who does not deem himself a terrorist but was nevertheless exiled from the UK, the ideological or religious world view of Islamic radicals is closely connected with the feeling of being persecuted.

> *A lot of it* (i.e. showing off by extremists) *is childish, but we must stop giving it fuel because it will only get worse. When they feel oppressed, other people start to sympathise with them. Don't oppress them by saying stop* dawa*, let's be moderate because it will only make them more radical.*[72]

As long as it is not ascertained why a certain person feels persecuted, it is not reasonable to focus on changing their personal beliefs regarding religion and ideology, because it will only lead to the person feeling even more distressed.

At the start of this research, the main aim was to ascertain which religious topics and principles are discussed in the framework of de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes, but unfortunately this question cannot be answered. Motivational differences in issues related to religion and ideology make it difficult to identify specific issues and to posit that they hold a special place in the process of de-radicalisation and disengagement. Some experts warn that it is actually misleading to make such claims. With regard to the

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[70] Interview with an expert from **Ireland**.
[71] Interview with an expert from **Germany**.
[72] **Horgan** 2009, p. 137.

question about the role of religion and ideology in the process of radicalisation, or what types of issues are discussed with mentors, one can only reply that everything depends on the specific person in question, their motivations and the personal importance they give to these issues. For example, there are people who discuss differences between sharia law and the constitution of their host country, but at the same time, there also plenty of those for whom these things are not important.

6. Conclusion

This article sought to determine which methods and issues are used to support de-radicalisation and disengagement work with Islamic radicals. The analysis is based on interviews conducted by the author with experts from six European countries – Austria, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom – and two experts from institutions of the European Union.

Overall, the methods chosen to support de-radicalisation and disengagement will depend on the individual needs of the specific person in question. The more common methods are: mentoring (i.e. personally assigned mentors who support the person throughout the entire process of de-radicalisation and disengagement); social and economic support (incl. re-entering the labour market, establishing new contacts and educational pursuits); and psychological and religious counselling. With regard to these results, it was surprising that religious counselling is not a mandatory part of the process, but depends in most cases on individual preference (i.e. if a person is not interested in religious counselling, then generally it is not forced upon them). What is more, the current methods are not sufficiently holistic in taking into account the different needs people have, and thus, would need modification which is difficult to arrange in the prevailing circumstances of limited capacities and resources and the project-based setup of these programmes, but it is nevertheless necessary.

The topics addressed in discussions between Islamist radicals and their mentors mainly cover the topics of identity and religious affiliation. Interestingly, for many radicals, religion is often not the primary issue and they do not see the need to talk about it. On issues of identity, radicals and mentors usually discuss the intersections of narratives, roles, foreign policy and relationship with the state. Such discussions enable the mentor to support the emergence of new perspectives, which, in turn, will help establish a new

non-violent identity, for example, by helping radicals see themselves in some other role, pointing out organisations that enable non-violent contributions, and discussing foreign policy issues to support the development of a more nuanced world view.

Acknowledgments

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HEIDI MAIBERG, M.A.
Specialist at the University of Tartu, Asia Centre and
Centre of Educational Innovation, and
PhD Student at the Royal Holloway University of London.