

# Does “Terrorism” make sense? A case study

*O “Terrorismo” faz sentido?  
Um estudo de caso*

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## Abstract

This paper approaches political (de)radicalization from the conflict transformation lenses<sup>1</sup> to analyze the data collected in a case study, which was conducted in Lebanon in 2017 and 2018. This study includes seven semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven ex-combatants and one set of focus group discussions with twenty ex-combatants. The analysis of the generated data aims to understand the radicalization and de-radicalization processes and to identify the driving factors of twenty-three ex-combatants. Besides the important role of various common driving factors that scholars, in general, reached a consensus about, the conflict transformation perspectives on (de)-radicalization uncovers two new mechanisms. The first one is the “I did not know – I did not trust” and the second one is “Normality of Violence”. These two mechanisms were fundamental driving factors in the (de)radicalization processes of the participants in this case study. Likewise, the results of this case study supported the opinion suggesting a minimal role of ideology in (de)radicalization processes and political violence.

**Keywords:** Radicalization. De-radicalization. Conflict transformation. Terrorism. Peace building. Ideology. Lebanon.

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<sup>1</sup> LEDERACH, J. P., Little Book of Conflict Transformation.

## Resumo

Este artigo aborda a (des)radicalização política através das lentes de transformação de conflitos,<sup>2</sup> para analisar os dados concebidos num estudo de caso, realizado no Líbano entre 2017 e 2018. Este estudo inclui sete entrevistas semiestruturadas em profundidade com sete ex-combatentes e um conjunto de entrevistas em grupos focais de vinte ex-combatentes. A análise dos dados produzidos tem como objetivo compreender os processos de radicalização e desradicalização, identificando os fatores determinantes desses vinte e três ex-combatentes. Para além do papel importante de vários fatores comuns determinantes, sobre os quais os investigadores, no geral, chegaram a um consenso, as perspectivas de transformação de conflitos na (des)radicalização descobrem dois novos mecanismos. O primeiro é o “eu não sabia – não confiava” e o segundo é a “Normalidade da Violência”. Estes dois mecanismos foram fatores determinantes fundamentais para compreender os processos de (des)radicalização dos participantes neste estudo de caso. Da mesma forma, os resultados deste estudo de caso apoiaram esta opinião, sugerindo um papel mínimo da ideologia nos processos de (des)radicalização e violência política.

**Palavras-chave:** Radicalização. Desradicalização. Transformação de Conflitos. Terrorismo. Construção para a Paz. Ideologia. Líbano.

## Introduction

This paper approaches terrorism through the conflict transformation lenses,<sup>3</sup> and uses the twelve mechanisms of political radicalization<sup>4</sup> and the (de)radicalization model of Doosje, Moghaddam, Kruglanski, de Wolf, Mann and Feddes<sup>5</sup> as basis for comparison and confirmation. The case study aims to understand how individuals adopt or abandon political violence, and to identify the root and motivational factors of these processes. It explores, in total, the experiences of twenty-three individuals, through seven personal interviews, and

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<sup>2</sup> LEDERACH, J. P., Little Book of Conflict Transformation.

<sup>3</sup> LEDERACH, J. P., Little Book of Conflict Transformation.

<sup>4</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Mechanisms of Political Radicalization; MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction; MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction (Revised and expanded edition).

<sup>5</sup> DOOSJE, B. et al., Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization, p. 79-84.

a focus group discussions with twenty participants (four interviewees also participated in the focus group). In the past, the correspondents had engaged in political violence, extremism, and/or terrorism, but are currently living their “civil life” away from physical, political violence; some of them are even now engaged in peace building and a part of interreligious initiatives.

“Does it make sense?” is a controversial question when it comes to terrorism. It is crucial to address such a question because political violence is one of the most pressing issues of our time. In this paper, we wish to explore political violence, including violent extremism and terrorism, which we see as possible results of a radicalization process. In addition, we also aim to study de-radicalization, the reverse process of radicalization, as the objective of our research is to advance knowledge in how to prevent and mitigate political violence.

## 1. Conceptual Framework

Political language is not neutral; it influences the perception of both sympathizers and antagonists, and the meaning of any term can change to fit the political context. Therefore, “what one calls ‘things’ matter” and “concepts follow politics”.<sup>6</sup> This also accounts for the definition of terms used by scholars, especially when they are based on ordinary language and its value judgments<sup>7</sup> or when they serve as a tool for political systems.<sup>8</sup> In the radicalization discourse, greater attention is needed on the importance of the effect of political language<sup>9</sup> because of its impact on the lives of many around the globe, and its threat to open societies.<sup>10</sup>

As a result, an important challenge for researchers on (de)radicalization is, to a certain extent, a definitional one.<sup>11</sup> What is terrorism? What is extremism? What is radicalization? These questions are unlikely to have answers that are generally agreed upon.<sup>12</sup> Alex Peter Schmid explained, “The correct definition would be the one which is constantly used by all users”.<sup>13</sup> In

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<sup>6</sup> CRENSHAW, M., Thoughts on relating terrorism to historical contexts, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> CRENSHAW, M., Thoughts on relating terrorism to historical contexts, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> SAID, E., Orientalism, p. 18-42.

<sup>9</sup> CRENSHAW, M., Thoughts on relating terrorism to historical contexts, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> “Indirectly, the induction of fear can have further deleterious effects increasing polarization along ethnic, religious and national lines, promoting conflict among different segments of society” (DOOSJE, B. et al., Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization, p. 79).

<sup>11</sup> POWERS, S. M., Conceptualizing radicalization in a market for loyalties, p. 234.

<sup>12</sup> SHAFRITZ, J. M.; GIBBONS, E. F.; SCOTT, G. E., Almanac of modern terrorism, p. 260.

<sup>13</sup> SCHMID, A. P. *apud* GROB-FITZGIBBON, B., What is Terrorism?, p. 234.

this field, however, there is no agreement on any definition,<sup>14</sup> due to their political meaning.<sup>15</sup> For the purpose of this paper, we are not going to repeat the extensive political and academic debate about the definitions, which is at a general level, “familiar to the point of tedium”.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, most of the radicalization discourse, especially after the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks, was bound by the needs of governments’ security establishments aiming to create immediate solutions for counter-terrorism policymakers, and to find a clear profile of the terrorist.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, terrorism, or more precisely, private or non-state actors’ terrorism, became the center of the discussion about (de)radicalization in most of the literature.<sup>18</sup>

On the one hand, the academic discourse of terrorism included problematic “conceptual, rather than empirical” oversimplifications of the complex realities;<sup>19</sup> and on the other hand, researchers have depoliticized radicalization and terrorism’s driving factors and presented them as isolated individual phenomena, neglecting the role of the contexts and the emerging conflicts.<sup>20</sup> This oversimplification and de-politicization has led, for example, to a problematic presentation of Islamic ideology as an essential cause or driver of terrorism, for which Crenshaw<sup>21</sup> has coined the term “drama of terrorism”. Thus, the focus in most of the research has been on them – the Muslims, the terrorists, the radicals, the crazy, immoral, evil ones etc., rather than on the situations that these people were or are actually living in, or that they perceive themselves to be in.<sup>22</sup>

In this paper, we aim to balance the focus between “them and us” – and to study the dynamics in between, i.e. the conflict, since radicalization works not only on radicals and terrorists (i.e. them), but also on those who react to radicals and terrorists (i.e. us), because “[t]he friction of conflict heats both sides”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> GROB-FITZGIBBON, B., What is Terrorism?, p. 234.

<sup>15</sup> CRENSHAW, M., Thoughts on relating terrorism to historical contexts, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> FREEDMAN, L., The coming war on terrorism, p. 46.

<sup>17</sup> DOOSJE, B. et al., Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization, p. 79; HAFEZ, M.; MULLINS, C., The Radicalization Puzzle, p. 960; KUNDNANI, A., Radicalisation, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> FITZ-GIBBON, A., Talking to Terrorists, Non-Violence, and Counter-Terrorism, p. 15-29.

<sup>19</sup> BORUM, R., Radicalization into Violent Extremism II, p. 37-39.

<sup>20</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> CRENSHAW, M., Thoughts on relating terrorism to historical contexts, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction, p. 223.

## 2. Radicalization and Terrorism

Radicalization and terrorism are inseparable,<sup>24</sup> the latter is one of the many results of the former.<sup>25</sup> To avoid any ambiguity, by radicalization we mean a non-linear process of “development of beliefs, feelings, and actions in support of any group or cause in conflict”,<sup>26</sup> with increased motivation “to use violent means against members of an out-group or symbolic targets”.<sup>27</sup>

Radicalization can be identified in non-state groups, as well as in governments and/or state-sponsored agents,<sup>28</sup> although many governments and agents are reluctant to admit it.<sup>29</sup> The only ostensible difference is that governments have agents with a specific uniform and insignia.<sup>30</sup> Democratic and developed states are also not immune; radicalization can be demonstrated, for example, by resorting to the practice of torture, which does not conform to international human rights standards.<sup>31</sup> This could be reached by hardening foreign policies and, for example, having more conservative borders policy. Moreover, by de-radicalization, we mean the reverse process of radicalization, i.e. “the process of becoming less radical”,<sup>32</sup> thus, less violent.

Based on Peace and Conflict studies, radicalization is the escalation of conflict towards violence and de-radicalization is the de-escalation of conflict from violence. Although Friedrich Glasl<sup>33</sup> did not present his Conflict Escalation Model as a direct explanation of (de)radicalization, we believe that this model can be applied to better understand the complexity of (de)radicalization in the framework on conflict. Glasl presented the conflict escalation as a downward movement, where conflict parties are pulled into a negative spiral of competition. In a series of stairs and falls, parties (individuals or groups) increase their competition through nine stages, which are in turn divided into three levels, i.e. *win-win*, *win-lose*, and *lose-lose*. These escalations are neither linear nor one-way travelled; conflict parties may pass through these

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<sup>24</sup> VELDHUIS, T.; BAKKER, E., Causale factoren van radicalisering en hun onderlinge samenhang, p. 454.

<sup>25</sup> SCHMID, A. P., Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> DOOSJE, B. et al., Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction, p. 223.

<sup>29</sup> FITZ-GIBBON, A., Talking to Terrorists, Non-Violence, and Counter-Terrorism, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> FITZ-GIBBON, A., Talking to Terrorists, Non-Violence, and Counter-Terrorism, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> SCHMID, A. P., Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation, p. 37-38.

<sup>32</sup> Demant, F.; Slooman, M.; Buijs, F.; Tillie, J., Decline and Disengagement, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> GLASL, F., Konfliktmanagement.

stages either in an upward direction or in a downward one. These movements are dependent on conflict dynamics. Glasl<sup>34</sup> also provided strategies for de-escalation, which also could represent the de-radicalization process.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Every phenomenon can be studied from different perspectives, and the immensely diverse body of literature around (de)radicalization is proving this.<sup>35</sup> The current (de)radicalization discourse can be criticized for the fact that the majority of scholars have ignored the peace and conflict studies perspective, while focusing mainly on security, legal, and psychological aspects. Therefore, we chose to study the (de)radicalization phenomena, using the peace and conflict studies perspective and, in particular, through the conflict transformation lenses;<sup>36</sup> studying radicalization as a conflict. Slavoj Žižek argued there are not only wrong answers but also most crucial wrong questions, because the way the problem is perceived is part of the problem.<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, the multidisciplinary approach of the conflict transformation lenses provides an inclusive understanding of the problem, avoiding narrow and wrong questions. On the other hand, it results in a variety of prerequisite steps<sup>38</sup> to describe the processes of (de)radicalization and to understand why it happens.

The conflict transformation lenses are based on a fundamental element: i.e. every social conflict should “make-sense”.<sup>39</sup> This element is a revelation of a key aspect in the understanding of radicalization: although it might not be comforting for some, radicalization and its results, including violence, extremism, and terrorism should make sense. Thus, radicalization can occur for either good or bad causes and is not about being right or wrong.<sup>40</sup> Hence, moral outrage can be a driving factor for violence; therefore, terrorists can also be fighting for social justice, at least from their “perceived” reality.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the philosopher Karl Popper wrote, “All things living are in search of a better

<sup>34</sup> GLASL, F., *Konfliktmanagement*.

<sup>35</sup> LUITEN, H.; DE GRAAF, S., *Begrijp jij het Midden-Oosten nog?*, p. 131; YOUNG, H. F.; ROOZE, M.; HOLSAPPEL, J., *Translating conceptualizations into practical suggestions*, p. 213.

<sup>36</sup> LEDERACH, J. P., *Little Book of Conflict Transformation*.

<sup>37</sup> ŽIZEK, S., *There are not only wrong answers, but also wrong questions* *Philosopher Slavoj Žižek on the importance of asking the right questions*.

<sup>38</sup> LEDERACH, J. P., *Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, p. 7-11.

<sup>39</sup> LEDERACH, J. P., *Conflict Transformation*.

<sup>40</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., *Friction*, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> HAFEZ, M.; MULLINS, C., *The Radicalization Puzzle*, p. 965.

world. Men, animals, plants, even unicellular organisms are constantly active”.<sup>42</sup> The former undercover CIA officer Amaryllis Fox, who worked on counter-terrorism for almost ten years, described it as well by arguing that “we all think that we are the good guys”.<sup>43</sup>

Making sense does not mean excusing, accepting, or justifying in any way the use of violence by any party, but only means understanding the root causes behind the violent behavior. These violent acts were, are, and will always be considered horrific and amoral; familiarity with them does not make them any more acceptable or justifiable,<sup>44</sup> “it just makes them more (psycho-) logical”,<sup>45</sup> because normalizing violence hurts everyone.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, making sense of radicalization also means the application of another fundamental element in conflict transformation, which is the re-humanization of the enemy by differentiating between the evil and the evildoers.<sup>47</sup> “Put simply, something you’ve done doesn’t have to constitute the sum of who you are”.<sup>48</sup>

The re-humanization process breaks the monster myth by realizing that these evildoers also have personal and positive human needs, because, “how will we understand what it is in human societies that produces violence if we refuse to recognize the humanity of those who commit it?”.<sup>49</sup> To prevent, discourage, and stop people from turning to violence, we first have to understand why they are doing it; otherwise, it is impossible to mitigate its effects, which will most likely always tend to become more violent.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, acknowledging the survival goal of the extremist and terrorist (groups) by not limiting their goals into fighting states and terrorizing their citizens is another important step after the re-humanization element. Extremist and terrorist organizations, like any other organizations, have further goals, such as consensus building and recruitment.<sup>51</sup> This step further helps to understand the problem of radicalization; thus, providing the opportunity to create the means to deal with it.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>42</sup> POPPER, K., *In Search of a Better World*, p. vii.

<sup>43</sup> FOX, A., *Former Undercover CIA Officer Talks War and Peace*.

<sup>44</sup> POWELL, J., *Talking to terrorists*, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> DOOSJE, B. et al., *Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization*, p. 82.

<sup>46</sup> FAHS, H., *على مسؤوليتي*, p. 53.

<sup>47</sup> FAHS, H., *على مسؤوليتي*, p. 53.

<sup>48</sup> ELVA, T., *Thordis Elva and Tom Stranger*.

<sup>49</sup> ELVA, T., *Thordis Elva and Tom Stranger*.

<sup>50</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., *Friction*, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> DELLA PORTA, D., *Left-wing terrorism in Italy*, p. 126.

<sup>52</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., *Friction*, p. 4.

#### 4. Methodology

This paper aims to find a way of identifying mechanisms of de-radicalization by understanding political violence from peace and conflict studies perspectives. The empirical data that inform this paper are drawn from a case study that examined the radicalization and de-radicalization processes of 23 ex-combatants from Lebanon. The participants are 19 males and 4 females from diverse religious, sectarian, social, economic, regional, and educational backgrounds; self-selecting as ex-combatants, who were (partly) involved in the so called Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and its preceding and subsequent related fightings, and who are currently living “civil lives” as relatively integrated members of their society. It should be noted that all names have been changed to protect their identities.

The case study was conducted end of spring 2017 till fall 2018, in person through seven in-depth, semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussions (FGD) with 20 participants. The data were collected and analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method.

During the personal interviews, participants had the opportunity and time to tell their stories, and to disclose more sensitive and intimate information. The focus group discussions, moreover, offered a platform for attendees to discuss their experiences, to form a dialogue about issues important to them, and to challenge each other’s opinions. Nevertheless, the participants encouraged each other, directly and indirectly, to share more personal, specific stories, just as focus group discussions are intended to, by offering “an opportunity to observe the process of collective sense-making”.<sup>53</sup>

The framework for the data collection was the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The participants were chosen using a purposive sampling (not randomized), where a small number of participants were chosen precisely because of their experiences.<sup>54</sup> Initially, contact was established with individuals who had previously published about or publicly shared their (de)radicalization stories, while later on, a few civil society and non-governmental organizations working on de-radicalization, reconciliation and dialogue, and peace building in Lebanon were also contacted. Potential interviewees were listed, and five pilot meetings were conducted.

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<sup>53</sup> WILKINSON, S., Focus group methodology, p. 193.

<sup>54</sup> REID, K.; FLOWERS, P.; LARKIN, M., Exploring lived experience, p. 20-23.



Interviews were held at any location chosen by the participants. The Lebanese dialect of Arabic was always used. The interview times ranged between one and four hours, while the focus group time was four hours, with a break in between.

The participants lived in a society that had experienced vast political upheaval and violence. Simply put, several different crises and wars had occurred during and after the Lebanese independence from the French colonization 1943-1946. The peak period was between 1975 and 1990, which is known as the Lebanese Civil War. Besides this war, which welcomed a lot of (inter)national and regional interference, as well as local and foreign fighters, new crises continued to emerge parallel to the old, unresolved ones. During their lifetimes, from around the 1950s, the interviewees faced a variety of political, cultural, religious, and social issues, not very different from what the region and the world are facing today. This made them feel the need to adopt violence for different reasons and causes; be it political, social, economic, and/or existential, and to join or establish military groups that appealed to their call. One participant, at the young age of seven, was receiving his first military training at school, while yet another joined a militia at twenty-two years old. Their average age of being involved in political violence was around sixteen years old.

The collected raw data consisted of the transcribed data from the interviews and focus group discussion in the Lebanese dialect of Arabic. Back in 2017, qualitative analysis computer programs did not support a user-friendly Arabic language analysis; therefore, the analysis of the collected data was conducted manually. Complete translation and later data entry would make the analysis even more complicated.

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)<sup>55</sup> approach was chosen for this case study because it focuses on the meaning-making<sup>56</sup> activity and helps the researchers “to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world”,<sup>57</sup> as they are the experts of their world’s perspectives.<sup>58</sup>

IPA requires a two-stage interpretation process for the meaning-making activity, where “the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of

<sup>55</sup> SMITH, J. A.; OSBORN, M., Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, p. 53-80.

<sup>56</sup> The meaning-making activity is “the process of how individuals make sense of knowledge, experience, relationships, and the self” (IGNELZI, M., Meaning-Making in the Learning and Teaching Process, p. 5).

<sup>57</sup> IGNELZI, M., Meaning-Making in the Learning and Teaching Process, p. 53.

<sup>58</sup> GILBERT, K. R., Taking a Narrative Approach to Grief Research, p. 232.

their world”.<sup>59</sup> The interpretation phase by the researchers of this study began by re-writing the interpretation of each participant, of the interviews and the focus group discussions, as a personal story. In the second phase, each story was divided into two stories – the radicalization process and the de-radicalization process, taking into consideration some overlapping pieces.

In the third phase, conflict analysis tools were used to categorize each sub-story into themes and sub-themes. In the fourth phase, themes and sub-themes were analyzed. In the fifth stage, sub-stories were compared with each other's and crosscutting elements were highlighted. The results of the analysis were translated into English by the authors using the free-translation method and following an Arabic linguistic concept called “Bitassaruf” – (بتصرف) where the translation and the structure are made upon the translators' understanding of the original texts.

## 5. Validity and Reliability

Every study is impeded by various limitations caused by the chosen methods of research. Besides the critiques of the interrelated issues of methodological rigor and the researchers' subjectivity, single-case studies, using mainly qualitative methodologies, are often questionable when it comes to reliability and validity, both internal and external. On one hand, the subjective nature of qualitative studies often makes reliability difficult,<sup>60</sup> while on the other hand, Lincoln and Guba<sup>61</sup> argue that the replicability criterion is a naïve concept, especially when studying complex phenomena. The authors sought to increase the reliability of this study through conceptualizing the main concepts and terms, both theoretically and in the field, and by applying Creswell's<sup>62</sup> criteria of creating, following, and disclosing the framework of procedures for the field study and analysis. Hence, the resulting clear definitions, methods, and contexts would enable a second researcher to understand and apply a similar strategy. The internal validity of this study, which concerns the relationship of causes and effects of (de)radicalization, is maintained by accurately reflecting upon “the social world of those participating in the study”,<sup>63</sup> through building the analysis

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<sup>59</sup> SMITH, J. A.; OSBORN, M., Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, p. 53.

<sup>60</sup> DAYMON, C.; HOLLOWAY, I., Qualitative research methods in public relations and marketing communications, p. 90.

<sup>61</sup> LINCOLN, Y. S.; GUBA, E. G., Naturalistic inquiry, p. 293.

<sup>62</sup> CRESWELL, J. W., Research design.

<sup>63</sup> DAYMON, C.; HOLLOWAY, I. Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications, p. 79.

on the personal words and perceptions of interviewees, not only on the interpretations of the authors. The external validity, i.e. generalizability, determines whether the results and findings are socially representative and academically relevant.<sup>64</sup> Even though the interviewees come from a relatively wide variety of backgrounds, to verify if the results of this research have a strong external validity, inside or outside Lebanon, can only be done through further comparative research. However, the results of the discussions with the participants about the generalizability of their experiences by comparing their cases with other previous or current “extremists or terrorists”, inside or outside Lebanon, increased the possibility of generalization.

## 6. Analysis

With the help of various conflict analyses tools, we categorized and analyzed our data. Using the *Conflict Tree tool* (Figure 1), we visualized the relationships between radicalization, its causes, and its effects. By causes, we mean both the root causes and the context causes (normality) of political violence, and by effects, we mean the political violence itself.

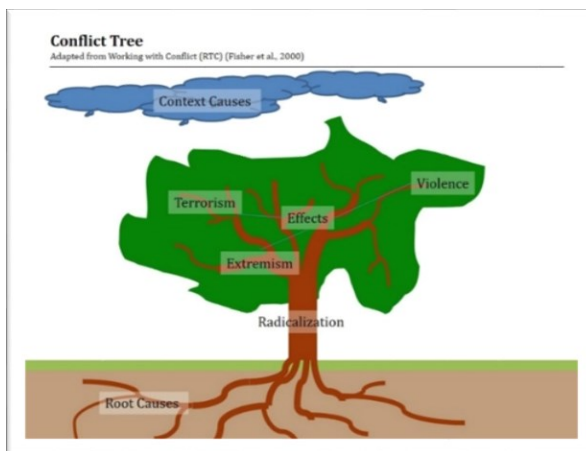


Figure 1: Conflict Tree of Radicalization (adapted from Working with Conflict (RTC)).<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> DAYMON, C.; HOLLOWAY, I., Qualitative research methods in public relations and marketing communications, p. 91.

<sup>65</sup> FISHER, S. et al., Working with Conflict.

The *Sources and Pillars tool* (Figure 2) was used to visualize differences within the root causes, dividing them into underlying sources (driving factors) of the radicalization and the pillars (advantages and disadvantages of political violence) that hold radicalization and its effects in place.

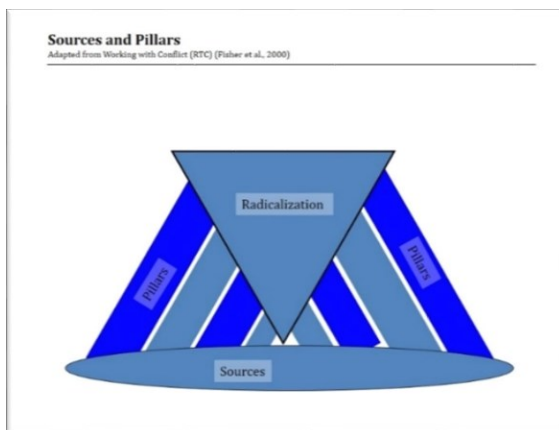


Figure 2: Sources and Pillars of Radicalization (adapted from Working with Conflict (RTC)).<sup>66</sup>

The *Force-Field Analysis tool* (Figure 3) helped us visualize the important difference between helping forces (supporting de-radicalization, i.e. disadvantages of political violence), and hindering forces (supporting radicalization, i.e. advantages of political violence). Identifying the advantages of political violence did not aim to show the *goodness* of violence, but to stress on the reality of people who used it and the advantages that they got, shedding light on the complex mixture between the absurd and the reasonable aspects of violence. Actually, this theme could help Fighter for Peace (FfP<sup>67</sup>), and other organizations, to know what to tackle, when they are approaching new generations.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> FISHER, S. et al., Working with Conflict.

<sup>67</sup> Fighters for Peace (FfP) is an organization in the Middle East that brings ex-fighters and ex-combatants from different backgrounds together, to support them to become fighters for peace (<http://fightersforpeace.org/>).

<sup>68</sup> Although all the participants accepted to disclose their real names and identities, we decided to follow the recommendation of L. CORTI, A. DAY, and G. BACKHOUSE (Confidentiality and Informed Consent, para. 21), who suggested replacing identifying details, i.e. interviewees' names, with pseudonyms. In this way, the data is anonymized but remain authentic (CORTI, L.; DAY, A.; BACKHOUSE, G., Confidentiality and Informed Consent, para. 21). Therefore, the analyzed data is

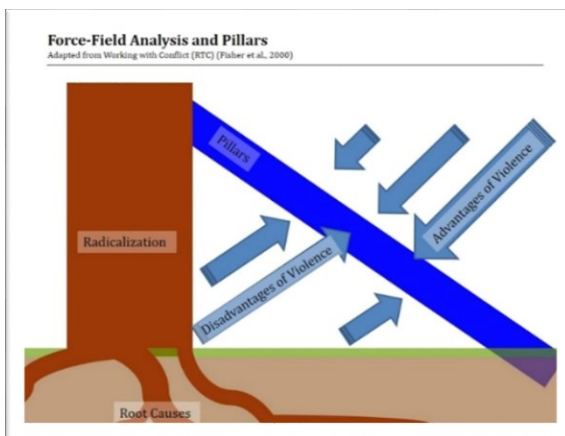


Figure 3: Force-Filed Analysis and Pillars of Radicalization (adapted from Working with Conflict (RTC)).<sup>69</sup>

Finally, the combination of Conflict Tree and Sources and Pillars (Figure 4) provided the complete visualization of radicalization analyzed as a conflict.

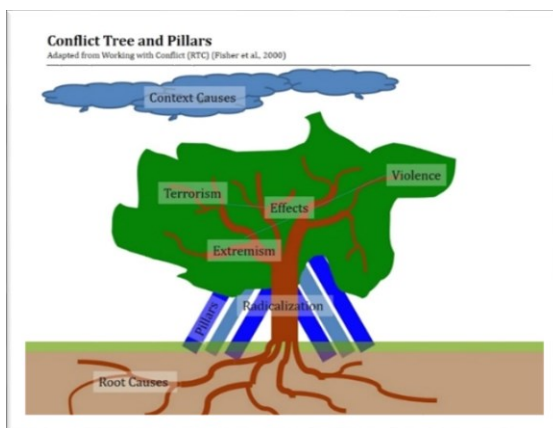


Figure 4: The Combination of Conflict Tree and Pillars of Radicalization (adapted from Working with Conflict (RTC)).<sup>70</sup>

referred to, using the following codes: focus group discussions with the ex-fighters (FGD, Date); personal interview with an ex-fighter (PI, Alias, Date), and all the twenty-three participants (FGD and PIs).

<sup>69</sup> FISHER, S. et al., Working with Conflict.

<sup>70</sup> FISHER, S. et al., Working with Conflict.

## 7. Concepts and Terms

Since the main concepts of this paper have political connotations, we also discussed the meaning of (de)radicalization, extremism, and terrorism with the participants from a humanitarian point of view. The discussions pointed out that violence is the common ground of these terms, as radicalization, terrorism, and extremism are problematic due to the violence that they might produce.<sup>71</sup> Participants agreed that differences between the terms are very blurred and precarious because they are highly politically oriented,<sup>72</sup> “The most powerful party always determines the meaning of the terms”.<sup>73</sup> (De)radicalization, extremism, and terrorism are relative to time, place, and context.<sup>74</sup> From now on, we will use the term *Normality of Violence* to refer to this relativity, which is crucial in understanding the studied cases, as this relativity played a major role in the studied (de)radicalization processes.

To explain the *Normality of Violence*, it is important to explain what is meant by violence. For the purpose of this study, the definition of violence was based on the understanding of the participants from their own contexts. The participants<sup>75</sup> defined violence as a variety of verbal, physical, social, psychological, structural, and cultural behaviors or attitudes. One participant explained, “When dialogue stops, violence starts”, another elaborated, “Violence is when we don’t dialogue about our daily life’s problems and conflicts”, a third clarified, “Violence is the culture of ‘me or no one else’” Other participants gave more specific examples, “Any practice of obedience or giving orders is violence, especially when it disrespects and blocks the development of other human beings and their innovative life”. Power, force, authority, preached hatred, enforcement of behavior or attitude, inequality, infringement, injustice, deprivation, and humiliation of human dignity were central in their definitions of violence. For example, making change by power or force; stealing other’s decision, life, material, or spiritual properties; and using any means against others obliging them to behave, believe, or adopt one’s own truth, values, and views, “Violence is any coercion or murder, and everything in between”.

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<sup>71</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>72</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>73</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>74</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>75</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

*Normality*, the first part of the term, represents what the society considered, from the above definitions of violence, to be *Normal*, and what rewards are offered for committing any of them. In other words, the *Normality of Violence* is the combination of what, in a society, is considered to be violent and what is not. *Plus*, how the society would appeal to the person who takes or doesn't take violent actions. For example, society might categorize killing as violence but might treat the killer as a hero in specific situations. Tim<sup>76</sup> explained, "In the war, social pressure played a big role in me choosing between being either a coward [i.e. not fighting] or a hero [i.e. killing the enemy]". Therefore, what is normal is shaped by context, time, and place, i.e., what is normal in wartime is different during ceasefires, partially clarifying why wartime or political instability catalyzes and initiates more radicalization processes. Nowadays, the influence of instability is not limited to the local (unstable) society, but has a worldwide influence due to globalization, as discussed by Hafez and Mullins.<sup>77</sup> A *Lower Normality of Violence*<sup>78</sup> means that fewer actions are considered violent with promised positive rewards – i.e. relatively easier radicalization path. A *Higher Normality of Violence* means more actions are categorized as violent with negative rewards for the perpetrators – i.e. relatively harder radicalization path.

## 8. Non-controversial Mechanisms of Radicalization<sup>79</sup>

"I wanted to fight and kill the entire universe", is how one participant in the Focus Group Discussion<sup>80</sup> expressed the effect that social and economic marginalization had on his life.<sup>81</sup> He explained that the difficulty he faced in

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<sup>76</sup> PI, Tim, 1 June 2017.

<sup>77</sup> HAFEZ, M.; MULLINS, C.; *The Radicalization Puzzle*, p. 959.

<sup>78</sup> The utilization of comparative adjectives aims to stress on the relative nature of status of the Normality of Violence. It is always a comparative status, compared to Normality of Violence in different time, place and/or contexts.

<sup>79</sup> By non-controversial mechanisms, we mean the already extensively discussed mechanisms (personal, group, or mass; macro, micro or miso), which are common among various literature. We linked the mechanisms found in our studied cases to already existing models of radicalization presented by C. R. McCauley and S. Moskalenko (MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., *Mechanisms of Political Radicalization*; MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., *Friction*) and Doosje et al. (DOOSJE, B. et al., *Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization*). Among many others, these two models were chosen as they took into consideration the complexity of the conflictual situation a radical consider themselves in.

<sup>80</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>81</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

adapting to a new life after migrating from the village to the city, made him feel socially marginalized and ostracized by society. Similarly, other men and women in the FGD pointed out different kinds of grievances as driving factors for their radicalization, such as social persecution and discrimination, poverty and deprivation, social and economic inequality, occupation and wars, and social and structural injustice. One woman explained, “I used violence as a reaction to greater violence”. Another man added, “Victims of various forms of violence enter the spiral of violence by seeking revenge”. An overwhelming academic consensus exists around these driving factors, which McCauley and Moskalenko<sup>82</sup> framed as *Personal Grievances*.

Luca’s<sup>83</sup> *slippery slope to violence*<sup>84</sup> started from dividing football teams; Christians vs. Muslims, and ended up with dividing societies. It took Daniel<sup>85</sup> many steps before he was actually able to kill with his own hands, triggered by a driving factor which Doosje et al<sup>86</sup> call “*gaining loyalty*” from his comrades.<sup>87</sup> Elena<sup>88</sup> started with disobeying her parents, then, after joining the party and serving in “women’s jobs”, finally ended up fighting herself.

*The love mechanism*<sup>89</sup> was crucial in Tim’s life.<sup>90</sup> He accepted to join military training due to the social influence of his brother.<sup>91</sup> One FGD participant explained, “I was 12 years old when my father told me that there are no other ways to survive other than militant training and by keeping our fingers on the trigger... Instead of teaching me mathematics they taught me how to use a Kalashnikov”.<sup>92</sup> Actually, all the participants underscored the role of the *love mechanism*<sup>93</sup> within their in-group, where their in-group ties, cohesion, commitment, and loyalty to other in-group members drove their radicalization even further.

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<sup>82</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction.

<sup>83</sup> PI, Luca, 24 May 2017.

<sup>84</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction.

<sup>85</sup> PI, Daniel, 25 May 2017.

<sup>86</sup> DOOSJE, B. et al., Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization.

<sup>87</sup> PI, Daniel 25 May 2017.

<sup>88</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>89</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction.

<sup>90</sup> PI, Tim, 1 June 2017.

<sup>91</sup> PI, Tim, 1 June 2017.

<sup>92</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>93</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction.



Being alone and seeking revenge, known as *the unfreezing mechanism*<sup>94</sup> played a key role in Julian's radicalization.<sup>95</sup> Being separated from his family, which was under siege, Julian found himself alone seeking support to help his family. The only opportunity he found was to join a militia, which promised to free the under siege area, where his family was stuck. Likewise, Stefan's new life of misery affected his social life, which one militant group, filled.<sup>96</sup> The military group offered Stefan a sense of belonging and a platform of growth.

In the personal interview with Julian,<sup>97</sup> he kept stressing on his high status during the war, and how easy it was for him to "attract women". He also emphasized his attraction to thrill seeking and risky situations, fitting *the risk and status mechanism*.<sup>98</sup> Elena<sup>99</sup> also strived to better her position always outstanding and attempting to attract the highest in command, for "it was not possible to marry a normal fighter; I wanted to marry a high ranking leader". Stefan<sup>100</sup> was frank about his intention to wear the uniform to attract the girls at his school. Luca's Friends<sup>101</sup> saw him as a strong and muscular young man, and he did not want to disappoint them. Various Lebanese militias used the status attraction as a reward for joining the political violence.<sup>102</sup> One participant explained, "They gave me 'military' training in school when I was twelve years old. As a daily reward, they gave us a Kalashnikov, emptied from bullets, to hold and sleep with at night, honestly, because we perceived the weapon as our own beautiful and sexy woman".

The group mechanisms of *group polarization, group competition, and group isolation*,<sup>103</sup> were largely present as driving factors in all of the cases.<sup>104</sup> On the one hand, a good number of participants believed that they adopted violence because it was the decision of the group to do so. Luca<sup>105</sup> and Elena<sup>106</sup> were clear examples of this. On the other hand, two male participants in the

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<sup>94</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction.

<sup>95</sup> PI, Julian, 11 June 2017.

<sup>96</sup> PI, Stefan, 28 May 2017.

<sup>97</sup> PI, Julian, 11 June 2017.

<sup>98</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction.

<sup>99</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>100</sup> PI, Stefan, 28 May 2017.

<sup>101</sup> PI, Luca, 24 May 2017.

<sup>102</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>103</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction.

<sup>104</sup> FGD and PIs.

<sup>105</sup> PI, Luca, 24 May 2017.

<sup>106</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

focus group disagreed, stressing that it was their own decision, “I went out myself and searched for a party, where I could use violence to achieve my goals”.<sup>107</sup> Another participant explained, “I belonged to a political group which did not want to join in the war back then, so I went to another ally group, which was fighting, wanting to join them. They did not take me, but instead told me to go back to my group because they would soon be joining the war, which is exactly what happened. So, I was already looking for violence, and I did not join the war because of the party’s orders”. One participant added that he was influenced by the discussions in his society and his in-group, which supported violence as the ultimate means to an end.

All the respondents identified *society’s role* as an indispensable element. One FGD participant divided this role into four levels: 1) family/parents/friends, 2) schools/teachers/classmates, 3) social and cultural contexts, and 4) political context and vision.<sup>108</sup> The participants claimed that the culture around them prepared them physically and mentally to be ready to fight, and under certain circumstances, even pushed them fight because it was the moral, normal, and necessary choice. A female participant clarified, “We inherited a culture of power and patriarchy, the culture of ‘you are a man’. Our parents, religion, political parties, and society all gave us violent role models, such as Salah Eddine, Hercules, St. Georges, Aantar Eben Shadad, Fakher Eddine, and other historic and/or legendary heroes”.

Another contributor added:

The culture of bourgeoisie kills natural human development. It shapes individuals according to old traditions, where people learn to distinguish themselves and segregate society according to classes. As a result of this culture, you understand power and authority as your servant, and therefore, you empower it blindly as long as the authority is maintaining the old system that suits you.<sup>109</sup>

Moreover, one participant stressed how “the traditional education that we received, along with the ignorance of the others exaggerated the cultural differences that we were living in. When the media came in, these differences became a bigger problem”.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>108</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>109</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>110</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

Likewise, various respondents named *hatred* and *martyrdom*<sup>111</sup> as very influential mechanisms.<sup>112</sup>

The culture of fear, created by religious and political leaders and empowered by the media, made us ready to use violence whenever it was possible or needed, especially because we were almost ignorant of our enemy, whom we feared. We only knew that the enemy hated us and their only objective was to kill us.<sup>113</sup>

These results align with the driving factors of the social environment, propaganda, and confrontation with death and violence. The *Jujitsu politics* mass mechanism that McCauley and Moskalenko<sup>114</sup> described, influenced Elena's<sup>115</sup> and Stefan's<sup>116</sup> thinking. They sympathized with the Palestinian cause and channeled their hatred against the Lebanese Authorities due to its tough reactions and treatment of the Palestinians.

## 9. Controversial Mechanisms of Radicalization<sup>117</sup>

### 9.1. I did not know – I did not trust

Various participants<sup>118</sup> identified one element, which we refer to as *I did not know – I did not trust*, although weak in the literature, as a driving factor in their radicalization processes. “I did not know that there is an alternative to violence. Today, after I joined Fighter for Peace (FfP), I have learned about a variety of non-violent approaches... I wish, I knew these means before, so that maybe I would not have joined the war”.<sup>119</sup> One respondent explained, “I was ignorant about conflict transformation approaches and the nonviolent and peaceful culture. Our parents, schools, and society did not teach us because, maybe, violence was an international culture and approach; they were unaware

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<sup>111</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction.

<sup>112</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>113</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>114</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction.

<sup>115</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>116</sup> PI, Stefan, 30 May 2017.

<sup>117</sup> By controversial mechanisms, we mean mechanisms, which are usually very weak in the literature and or scholars are not on consensus of their role in the radicalization process.

<sup>118</sup> FGD and PIs.

<sup>119</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

of an effective alternative”. Another added, “We were children, they [parents, social environment, political and religious leaders] taught us to use violence. I believed and I was totally convinced that violence is the only means and way of protecting our existence and identity in order to make a good change”.

One participant pointed out that it is not only the absence of nonviolent means, but also the lack of effectiveness of and the lack of trust in those means, “we did not trust the non-violent or peaceful means, or believe in the effectiveness of any alternative means other than violence. Because you could use nonviolent means for seven hundred thousand years, but the occupation would still remain”. Finally, one participant added, “it was not only about learning alternative means to violence, but it was also about how we perceived violence and the double standards that might overcome our rationality... I used to think that our revolutionary violence was good, but their reactionary and traditional violence was bad”.

## 9.2. Ideology

*Ideology* is often considered in various academic debates to be a major driver and/or motive for political radicalization and violence. It is important to mention that most of the academic discussions have been on foreign fighters, the home-grown terrorist phenomenon, or terrorists attacking the Western world.<sup>120</sup> In this same way, some of the participants of the study did consider ideology as a driving factor for their radicalization.<sup>121</sup> A deeper analysis of Luca’s, Daniel’s, and Elena’s processes supports the role of ideology in the rationalization and justification of their decision to join the violence, as described by McCauley and Moskalenko.<sup>122</sup> In other words, ideology is the tool which activates the meaning-making process; it is the umbrella under which a new violent life gains its sense. Luca, Daniel, and Elena, similarly to all the other participants,<sup>123</sup> claimed that their very existence and survival were important factors in their radicalization process, and their decision to join the war. This analysis is not limited to the Lebanese case study; Christian Picciolini, a former extremist, shares a similar opinion, “I think ultimately people become extremists not necessarily because of the ideology. I think that ideology is simply a vehicle to be violent. I believe that people become

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<sup>120</sup> HAFEZ, M.; MULLINS, C. The Radicalization Puzzle.

<sup>121</sup> PI, Luca, 24 May 2017; PI, Daniel, 25 May 2017; and PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>122</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction, p. 220.

<sup>123</sup> FGD and PIs.

radicalized, or extremist because they're searching for three very fundamental human needs: identity, community and a sense of purpose".<sup>124</sup>

Nevertheless, three crucial questions arise here:

1) Is ideology only a justification for the past or also for current actions/behavior, which aim to fulfill certain human needs, or can it also trigger people to behave violently in the future? The case study findings revealed that ideologies also offer dreams for a better future, where the underlying problems of the previous unfulfilled needs are perceptively solved. As Daniel elaborated:

What drove me to violence was fear and self-defense as defensive mechanisms, as well as the goal of building a Christian nationalist nation as an offensive mechanism. The Christian nation as a political ambition is offensive because the idea is not only to protect ourselves, but also to annihilate the other. We wanted to have power and to purify the land.<sup>125</sup>

But one woman added, "If it is possible to fulfil the needs of the youth and provide them with alternative non-violent possibilities to achieve what they think might gain in the war, then ultimately, they will not be violent anymore".<sup>126</sup> Another participant added, "Violence is usually perceived to be used as a defensive means, but it ends being an offensive one geared at achieving different interests". This understanding fits Glasl's<sup>127</sup> *conflict escalation model*, where ideologies start to play a role in the middle of the escalation, i.e. at the fifth stage: "Loss of Face", in which parties lose their moral credibility, and the conflict moves to the win-lose situation. Hannah Arendt explained, from a philosophical perspective, "The need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning".<sup>128</sup>

2) How much do ideologies influence actions? There is consensus in the political discourse that separates between beliefs and actions.<sup>129</sup> Equally, overwhelming evidence in social psychology confirms that beliefs alone are weak predictors of actions. Ideology and actions are only sometimes connected, but not always,<sup>130</sup> because a very small number of people, who follow a specific

<sup>124</sup> WILLIAMS, J.; SMITH, S., A Reformed White Nationalist Speaks Out On Charlottesville.

<sup>125</sup> PI, Daniel, 25 May 2017.

<sup>126</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>127</sup> GLASL, F., Konfliktmanagement.

<sup>128</sup> ARENDT, H., The Life of the Mind, p. 15.

<sup>129</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction, p. 220.

<sup>130</sup> BORUM, R., Radicalization into Violent Extremism I, p. 9.

violent ideology, move all the way to violence, extremism, and/or terrorism.<sup>131</sup> McCauley and Moskalenko<sup>132</sup> argue that ideology is too simple and too broad a mechanism to be considered in understanding radicalization. They purport that many radicalization pathways to extremism do not involve ideology, similar to the cases of Stefan,<sup>133</sup> Tim,<sup>134</sup> and Julian.<sup>135</sup>

*Dissonance Theory* supports this argument, proposing that humans tend to change their opinions to fit their behavior to reduce the inconsistency between their desired positive self-image and their perceived bad behavior.<sup>136</sup> People come up with reasons to justify or excuse their bad behavior because it is easier than acting only according to what is reasonable; according to their ideology.<sup>137</sup>

3) If it is true that ideology is only a rationalization/justification, how should de-radicalization programs or authorities deal with it? A study by Norman and Mikhael<sup>138</sup> stressed that policymakers should not focus on “the intricacies or appeal of the ideology itself”, but on the process of radicalization, especially because similarities can be found in a variety of “radicalization processes across different ideologies and contexts”.

The discussion above suggests that the only way to overcome ideologies is through actions, which, in turn, can create a counter-reality to overcome ideologies. Therefore, identifying ideology as a mechanism of radicalization is a deviation from the focus and the goal, because understanding radicalization from the lenses of ideology creates opposite ideologies. These are, in turn, a wrong perception of reality, for even though they address real problems, they end up mystifying the solutions.<sup>139</sup> Simply put, the importance and ranking of ideology in the (de)radicalization studies should neither be exaggerated nor reduced, but instead taken seriously.

## 10. Advantages of Political Violence

The goal of discussing the advantages of violence is to point out what issues are to be addressed in any de-radicalization program. It clarifies what is

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<sup>131</sup> DOOSJE, B. et al., Terrorism, radicalization and de-radicalization, p. 79.

<sup>132</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., Friction, p. 5, 219-220.

<sup>133</sup> PI, Stefan, 28 May 2017.

<sup>134</sup> PI, Tim, 1 June 2017.

<sup>135</sup> PI, Julian, 11 June 2017.

<sup>136</sup> FESTINGER, L., A theory of cognitive dissonance.

<sup>137</sup> FESTINGER, L., A theory of cognitive dissonance.

<sup>138</sup> NORMAN, J.; MIKHAEL, D., Youth radicalization is on the rise.

<sup>139</sup> ZIZEK, S., The Spectre of Ideology, p. 1-33.

to be done to create alternative paths for individuals to dismiss violence and to instead use alternative non-violent means, when they are trying to realize their motives and interests. Although one participant<sup>140</sup> claimed at first that, “It is not easy to find them”, the group discussed a variety of benefits, advantages, and gains, which the authors then ordered into five categories of advantages: 1) existential, survival, and becoming; 2) skills and competencies; 3) belonging and intimate relationships; 4) status, power, and fame; and 5) political, social and cultural.

1) “Political violence saved my existence”, claimed one participant.<sup>141</sup> Another added, “the war created a valuable goal worth living and fighting for. It makes you feel proud and strong”. Many participants affirmed that the war gave meaning to their life, and a perceived change to become a better person. Daniel<sup>142</sup> and Elena<sup>143</sup> elaborated on the meaning of life that the war gave them, and stressed the importance of the combatants’ reintegration when they drop their weapons, since “After the war, many fighters committed suicide because they lost their life’s meaning. The only thing that they knew was fighting”.<sup>144</sup>

2) FGD participants’ talked about various skills and competencies that they gained during their participation in political violence.<sup>145</sup> They claim to have learned about such life and survival skills as how to communicate, how to convince, how to survive, and how to manage. They were also empowered in other skills and competencies such as leadership, adaptability, cultural awareness, among other personal and public skills.

3) Belonging and establishment of intimate relationships are two main advantages of radicalization. The participants<sup>146</sup> affirmed the deep and close relationships and friendships, within their closed social environment, that the war offered them, “My relations with my comrades were stronger than my relationship with my family”.<sup>147</sup> This spirit of identity and belonging, coupled with high levels of trust, honesty, cooperation, and love permeated the relationships among the comrades, “There is no better name than comrade”. The isolation that they had experienced due to political violence provided the fighters with an alternative family, where they had the chance to meet with

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<sup>140</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>141</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>142</sup> PI, Daniel, 25 May 2017.

<sup>143</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017

<sup>144</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>145</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>146</sup> FGD and PIs.

<sup>147</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

different people “with whom we shared the same goals and objectives, and a similar understanding of life”. Political violence also offered a lot of sexual benefits and intimate relationships. Elena explained:

In wartime, love relationships follow more of a survivor approach because sex means creation and war means death. You compensate your need for life through sex, especially because the social boundaries are completely broken; thus, casual sex becomes easier and more meaningful. Sex becomes the opposite of death.<sup>148</sup>

Thus, women had more relationships with men, and vice-versa.<sup>149</sup>

4) Status, power, and fame, combined with the advantages of the relationship made political violence very attractive,<sup>150</sup> “I had the feeling that I was ‘the man’”.<sup>151</sup> The feeling and practice of power, higher self-confidence, independence, respect, pride, and the sense of being needed and useful were the main outcomes of the status, power, and fame level, where “You feel you are strong and that people have to respect you and ask your help; you feel needed”. One participant called these advantages “social and political capital”. “I had a lot of social capital; I was accepted and respected because I defended our group and killed the enemy, and did what had to be done”.

5) On the political, social, and cultural level, violence offered the fighters opportunities to make social, political, and economic changes to suit their interests. If the change was not possible or easy to make, violence at least empowered their political presence and status, making them a strong party in the conflict. In addition, one woman argued that the war proved the capability of women, enabling them to participate and lead in politics. Some kind of gender equality or at least a better gender balance was created. Moreover, one participant claimed, “in the war, the level of higher education among the poor was raised [through the financial support and scholarships offered by the empathizers and allies, mainly the Soviet Union]”. However, one participant objected, because he believed these things were done for political interests and not for the sake of the poor, “you pay more martyrs, you get more scholarships”, reminding everybody that political violence can only provide temporary perceived advantages. One woman concluded, “When you meet people’s needs and tackle the reasons which

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<sup>148</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>149</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017

<sup>150</sup> FGD and PIs.

<sup>151</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.



drive people to behave violently, then the violence will stop. If what we got as advantages from our engagement in the war can be provided for new generations by non-violent means, then, no one will adopt violence”.

### 10.1. Violence: the Means of Achieving Peace

The relationship between political violence and its advantages shifted the FGD towards a central question: does political violence ultimately aim to achieve peace? Although most of the ex-fighters did not think a lot about their highest goals during the daily fighting, “I used to live day by day, trying to perform my duties, and my only concern was to survive and help my group to conquer”. All of them agreed that at some point during their fighting, they took peace for granted as the ultimate objective of the political violence that they were engaged in. “Everything we were doing was, supposedly, leading to peace... Our party’s slogan, which we repeated almost every day, was ‘Free Nation – Happy People’, and we thought that we were fighting to achieve this slogan”.<sup>152</sup> Their end goal of peace seemed to justify their violent means, “Through the violence, I was building peace for my people and my society”. Moreover, their missions of building peace were organically dependent on and affiliated with those who held authority and power. Thus, they considered peace as the ultimate result of the victory, “By conquering, you think you are building peace, because you believe that if you rule, peace and love will also rule naturally”.<sup>153</sup>

In addition, security, protection, and liberation were considered as the major steps in their pursuit of peace. For example, one participant explained, “When you conquer a region or you protect your people, this is also partly building peace, despite using through violence”. Another added, “By freeing my country from the occupier and conquering my enemies, for sure I was building peace”, and a third elaborated, “The occupation was the reason for people’s problems. When you free the people from the occupation, then peace will come back accordingly”.<sup>154</sup>

The discussion developed further and one participant asked, “are violence and war indispensable for the development of humanity?” All participants agreed that violence always leads to destruction, but only a few believed that nothing should justify it. The majority argued, “The only occasion in which you can use violence is when you are defending yourself”. The idea of self-defense was

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<sup>152</sup> FGD, 28 May, 2017.

<sup>153</sup> FGD, 28 May, 2017.

<sup>154</sup> FGD, 28 May, 2017.

expanded to include achieving political goals, “I built my peace by achieving my goals”. As a reaction, a participant speculated, “Every ideology aims ultimately to achieve peace, at least this is the belief of the ideology’s followers. Violence is only a temporary means, and sometimes it is indispensable”, while a second elaborated, “We believed that we had the perfect project and solution, you can call it Ideology. We thought if through violence we can achieve it, so let it be; because only through our project peace will be possible”.<sup>155</sup>

Some participants meant that violence was indispensable. One ex-fighter stressed, “Violence is the only means of preserving your existence if you are threatened, and existence is a part of peace”. A second person added, “How do you fight an occupation- with flowers? No- with a gun, with explosives, with any power that you have”, and a third quoted a famous line of Renatus, “If you want peace, prepare for war”, and continued, “Peace can only be protected or achieved through war. Power should be faced with power. Violence should be faced with greater violence”. One participant concluded, “Listening to the opinion of different ex-fighters on the relationship between violence and peace gives us an understanding of how radical groups recruit new members. Then, we [FFP] have to see how we can counter these narratives”.<sup>156</sup>

## 11. Mechanisms of De-radicalization

The identified mechanisms, on the personal and context levels, were interdependent and highly interconnected. Although there was no one factor more important than the other and every participant had his/her own process, the context mechanisms were more prominent than the personal ones.

### 11.1. Personal Mechanisms

On the personal level, the following mechanisms were identified and will be described in more detail below.

**Contact Mechanism.** On the personal level, contact with the different other was the main driving factor of de-radicalization. Contact happened for a variety of reasons. With some participants, it was obligatory due to their social or economic situation, especially after the end of the war. For others, it happened accidentally, or by the opportunity having been offered to them by an

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<sup>155</sup> FGD, 28 May, 2017.

<sup>156</sup> FGD, 28 May, 2017.

organization (i.e. Daniel and Stefan). *The contact mechanism of de-radicalization* fits within the Intergroup Contact Theory developed by Allport.<sup>157</sup> In addition, the required criteria for positive contact<sup>158</sup> were also crucial in the process of the participants. Daniel<sup>159</sup> explained, “The oasis that ‘Initiative of Change’<sup>160</sup> offered me, where I had the chance to discover my enemy, worked because we both perceived it as a safe and free haven. We were treated equally, and we had the chance to interact on a personal level”. Actually, contact with the perceived enemy was a de-radicalization mechanism because it offered the participants three major opportunities: 1) breaking stereotypes, 2) re-humanization, and 3) comparing realities.

1) Daniel clarified:

When you have the chance to meet with the different other, you actually break and retune a variety of stereotypes and prejudices, which shape your reality. For example, I used to believe that Muslims always have many children but, after I met many Muslims, I discovered, first, that this is a stereotype and generalization. Second, even in cases where it was true and they had a high reproduction rate, I discovered that they were not doing it against me personally or against my identity as a Christian, but they were doing it, probably, for a variety of cultural and economic purposes or whatsoever.<sup>161</sup>

2) Contact did not only break stereotypes but also broke the isolation, which, in turn, broke the *us vs. them* perception.<sup>162</sup> It created opportunities to once again rediscover the dignity, not only within the enemy in front of them, but also within themselves,<sup>163</sup> to become aware of the prejudgments and ideologies that held them victim. Isolation dissolved their personal identities in the *in-group identity*, but contact restored it.<sup>164</sup> An FGD participant explained, “Having the chance to meet the other helped me to discover that he/she is not a

<sup>157</sup> ALLPORT, G.W.; CLARK, K.; PETTIGREW, T., *The Nature of Prejudice*.

<sup>158</sup> ALLPORT, G.W.; CLARK, K.; PETTIGREW, T., *The Nature of Prejudice*.

<sup>159</sup> PI, Daniel, 25 May 2017.

<sup>160</sup> Initiatives of Change (IofC) is a worldwide movement of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds, who are committed to the transformation of society through changes in human motives and behaviour, starting with their own (<https://www.iofc.org/>).

<sup>161</sup> PI, Daniel, 25 May 2017.

<sup>162</sup> FGD and PIs.

<sup>163</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>164</sup> PI, Tim, 1 June 2017.

monster but a human being like me”.<sup>165</sup> Restoring the personal identity shed light on possibilities for various life-meanings, which were not related to the in-group.<sup>166</sup> New life-meanings, in turn, formed a de-radicalization mechanism, which the authors will discuss later on in this section.

3) Contact between enemies enabled them to compare their realities, to discover common interests or goals, and to widen their information resources. Discovering common goals or the possibility to work on something common was essential in the de-radicalization processes of Luca,<sup>167</sup> Jan,<sup>168</sup> and Tim.<sup>169</sup> Although Elena<sup>170</sup> did not accept, in the beginning, that she shared common interests with the perceived enemy, her acceptance of the common reality empowered her de-radicalization process further, started a series of reflections and realizations. In the FGD, participants talked a lot about the role of their reflections and realizations in their own de-radicalization processes.<sup>171</sup> They reevaluated their once perfect perception of the in-group and realized just how imperfect it actually was. They were able to take account of their current realities by admitting their failures of achieving their goals for a supposed better change, and realizing the lies and hypocrisy they were once living. One participant explained, “By breaking the lived hypocrisy and putting yourself in the shoes of the others, you ask yourself- if I do not accept being treated violently, why do I accept that this should happen to others?” Tim elaborated, “I don’t want people to suffer the same way anymore. I reviewed the high costs of the violence; I became aware of the big losses. I saw how bad the results of violence were, not only on the others but also on me. All of this with no big change, as, for example, corruption is still there and it became even bigger”.<sup>172</sup> Another participant added, “I realized the impossibility and in fact the unnecessary of changing the entire world... What we did – did not help to make any positive changes, but instead, negative ones”.<sup>173</sup> The comparison of realities also helped the participants to make a variety of other discoveries, which could be divided into two categories. On the one hand, there were discoveries related to their in-group imperfections and deviations, i.e. corruption, independent

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<sup>165</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>166</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>167</sup> PI, Luca, 24 May 2017.

<sup>168</sup> PI, Jan, 30 May 2017.

<sup>169</sup> PI, Tim, 1 June 2017.

<sup>170</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>171</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>172</sup> PI, Tim, 1 June 2017.

<sup>173</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

personal agendas of other in-group members or leaders that fed their personal benefits and power. One participant elaborated, “I used to judge my enemy for being tools in the hands of imperialism. Today, I believe that I was exactly the same as how I judged my enemy. I was a tool”.<sup>174</sup> Another added, “At one point, I discovered that everything I am drawn to is actually politics, and politics is very dirty”. On the other hand, Elena<sup>175</sup> and other FGD participants<sup>176</sup> discovered from new, alternative sources of information, non-violent approaches to deal with their issues.

**New Life-Meaning Mechanism.** As mentioned above, a *new life - meaning* was also a mechanism of de-radicalization.<sup>177</sup> It occurred through contact, or due to other situations that emerged, for example, a newborn in case of Elena<sup>178</sup> and Jan,<sup>179</sup> or the natural loss of a loved one in the case of Stefan.<sup>180</sup> For some participants, growing old gave them more experience, thus, more attempts, failures, and successes, and consequently, more diverse life-meanings. “Through time, at one point, I realized that nothing is worth it. Nothing is worth dying or sacrificing yourself for”.<sup>181</sup> The ex-white-extremist Christian Picciolini describes this mechanism nicely, “The only way to show them that there is nothing to hate, is to show them that there is something to love”.<sup>182</sup>

**New Treatment Mechanism.** A third main mechanism of the political de-radicalization of the participants is *the New Treatment*, which is also related to the contact and life-meaning mechanisms. Through Contact, participants had the opportunity to be treated in a good and respectful manner. Moreover, the new treatment mechanism had an extra strong effect when it came from an out-group member or a neutral person. The treatment that Daniel and Stefan got from Initiative of Change, which was blended with the contact mechanism, further catalyzed their de-radicalization processes. Maajid Nawaz, a British ex-extremist, shared a similar experience, where the solidarity that he received

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<sup>174</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>175</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>176</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>177</sup> FGD and PIs.

<sup>178</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>179</sup> PI, Jan, 30 May 2017.

<sup>180</sup> PI, Stefan, 28 May 2017.

<sup>181</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>182</sup> PICCIOLINI, C., This reformed white supremacist believes racism is learned – and it can be unlearned.

from a member of Amnesty International during his prison time in Egypt, initiated his de-radicalization process.<sup>183</sup>

**Love Mechanism.** While *love*<sup>184</sup> is a mechanism of radicalization, it is also, in turn, a mechanism of de-radicalization for the participants.<sup>185</sup> Many FGD participants stressed that the de-radicalization of other comrades was a major factor driving their own de-radicalization processes, “I was highly encouraged to move further in rejecting and abandoning violence due to many friends that I met here at FfP”.<sup>186</sup> Successful de-radicalization processes by others encouraged the ex-fighters to move ahead in their de-radicalization processes.

**Nonviolent Means Mechanism.** Finally and in contrast to the *I did not know – I did not trust* mechanism of radicalization, the availability of effective nonviolent means played a definitive role in the de-radicalization processes of the twenty-three partakers. One FGD participant explained, “I am totally aware now of the importance of peace and non-violent means, and that is why I reject violence and I try to help others to do so as well through my commitment to FfP”.

## 11.2. Context mechanisms

As was discussed at the beginning of this section, while the personal mechanisms were important, the context mechanisms were more influential in the case of the study’s twenty-three respondents.<sup>187</sup>

**Conflict Regulator Mechanism.** The main context mechanism was the conflict regulator, which included conquering (i.e. Jan and Tim) or being defeated (Daniel, Elena, Stefan, and Julian), changes in the power balance between the conflict parties (Elena and Stefan), new rules or regulations of the situation (Daniel, Luca, and Julian), and a shift in enemies or allies (Stefan). This finding positively correlates with the general conflict model designed by Ulrich Wagner (2005),<sup>188</sup> which states that rules and norms can moderate conflictual interactions.

**Higher Normality of Violence Mechanism.** The *Normality of Violence* is an influential context mechanism of political (de)radicalization. Although Julian kept his weapon after the end of the war, he never used it again due to the

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<sup>183</sup> NAWAZ, M., *Radical*, p. 284-291.

<sup>184</sup> MCCAULEY, C. R.; MOSKALENKO, S., *Friction*.

<sup>185</sup> FGD and PIs.

<sup>186</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

<sup>187</sup> FGD and PIs.

<sup>188</sup> WAGNER, U., *Konfliktforschung und Friedenssicherung*.

Higher Normality of Violence.<sup>189</sup> Similarly, Luca<sup>190</sup> and Tim<sup>191</sup> obeyed to their parties' new decision in joining civilian life, despite the fact that they were not convinced to do so. Elena<sup>192</sup> expressed, "Back then, I did not see myself as an extremist, but as a responsible person. However, if I were to judge myself today, I could clearly say I was an extremist". Moreover, in the case of Daniel,<sup>193</sup> the society was accepting and welcoming violence against the enemy, making the development of his radicalization towards violence 'the normal' due to the *Lower Normality of Violence*. The Normality of Violence is highly influenced by practices of dehumanization, as described in more details by Daniel Bar-Tal and Phillip Hammack.<sup>194</sup> Many participants explained that what they did during the war was normal; however, they judged themselves in the discussions, as extremists or ex-terrorists. An important issue emerges here: the perceived reality of the participants is crucial for their decisions and for their judgments of their decisions (this is not limited to the participants, but to every person).

Actually, the *Normality of Violence* led to another effective context mechanism, which worked best on the group level. Groups changed their attitudes and shifted towards rejecting violence. An FGD participant explained that some leaders had high social senses, in which they could sense the level of fatigue of violence in their societies, and decide accordingly whether to adopt or abandon violence.<sup>195</sup> Another added that high pressure to end the war supported by an international climate affected his group decision to accept the end of the war. A female participant also explained that, in her case, a highly respected political leader went through a long personal process of de-radicalization, which led him to adopt nonviolent approaches, and in turn, influenced many members of the party.

## Conclusion

The findings of the case study point out clearly that, although the main factors that initiate or serve as a catalyst in the (de)radicalization processes might be common between different individuals, the (de)radicalization process of each

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<sup>189</sup> PI, Julian, 11 June 2017.

<sup>190</sup> PI, Luca, 24 May 2017.

<sup>191</sup> PI, Tim, 1 June 2017.

<sup>192</sup> PI, Elena, 27 May 2017.

<sup>193</sup> PI, Daniel, 25 May 2017.

<sup>194</sup> BAR-TAL, D.; HAMMACK, P. L., Conflict, delegitimization, and violence.

<sup>195</sup> FGD, 28 May 2017.

individual is unique, personal, and nonlinear. Moreover, the participants perceived the adoption and the use of violent means, including terrorism and violent extremism measures, as a normal, natural, and an essential decision taken within their context. Nevertheless, the role of the group was indispensable and fundamental in the (de)radicalization processes of the twenty-three participants.

Studying (de)radicalization from the peace and conflict perspectives uncovers two new mechanisms, *I did not know – I did not trust* and the *Normality of Violence* mechanisms, which are fundamental driving factors in the (de)radicalization processes. Likewise, the results of this case study support the opinion that suggests minimal role of ideology in (de)radicalization processes and political violence. Similarly, seven mechanisms of de-radicalization were identified; *Contact Mechanism*, *New Life-Meaning Mechanism*, *New Treatment Mechanism*, *Love Mechanism*, *Non-Violent Mean Mechanism*, *Conflict Regulator Mechanism*, and *Higher Normality of Violence Mechanism*.

It is strategical to mention that participants adopted ideologies, which fulfilled their need to justify their radicalization and their decision to adopt and join violence. Ideology is the tool, which activates the meaning-making process guiding the participants in their choice for justifying their seeking to their very fundamental human needs including identity, community and a sense of purpose.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, this paper conclude that Ideology should not be considered as a main mechanism of (de)radicalization.

The results of this case study also showcase that, besides the non-controversial mechanisms and root causes of radicalization, extremism and terrorism, the *I did not know – I did not trust* mechanism, i.e. the lack of familiarity and/or trust in “nonviolent” means, is a fundamental mechanism for radicalization processes. Similarly, familiarity and trust in “non-violent” means are fundamental mechanisms of (de)radicalization.

Furthermore, the political context provided opportunities for the normalization of violent or nonviolent behavior and attitudes. The personal, the group, and the mass levels of the participants were interdependent and their connections were multi-layered. Based on the results of this study, we conclude that any preventive or interceptive program, which aim at de-radicalization or are part of PVE or CVE programs, must, and for most, focus of creating a *Higher Normality of Violence*; i.e. to categorize more actions as violent and to reduce the rewards of violent actions. Working on the *Normality of Violence* would for sure be more effective than working on ideology or counter

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<sup>196</sup> WILLIAMS, J.; SMITH, S., A Reformed White Nationalist Speaks Out On Charlottesville.



narratives. Creating a *Higher Normality of Violence* means sustainable improvement of society's resilience to political violence, radicalization, extremism and terrorism, leading to de-radicalization and allowing to take preventive measures toward a real understanding and reduction of the root causes of structural and cultural violence. It is essential to further advance knowledge on how to manage the *Normality of Violence*.

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