Chapter 1
Theoretical Background of Violent Radicalisation. Research and Interventions from Different Perspectives

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Abstract This chapter will show a systematic review of the literature about radicalisation. The most of scientific literature and of experimented practices are *security-oriented*, where psychological contribution only appears as a support in the deradicalisation processes or as a search for indicators able to detect signs for future deviance and radicalisation. The innovation of the present contribution, which tries to fill this gap, is its psychosocial perspective, focusing on social inclusion and on a proactive approach, and exploring topics concerning group processes and dynamics, social identities, and theories on relative deprivation. Authors coming from both European and other international contexts are analysed and discussed, paying particular attention to the suggestions of the theoretical perspectives for implementing good practices. The contribution of the Council of Europe in promoting competences for democratic culture has been underlined. The most promising indications have been the reference framework of the PROVA project.

Keywords Radicalisation process · Relative deprivation · Securitarian approaches · Social identity · Preventive approach · PROVA project

1.1 Meanings of Radicalisation in Social Psychology

Radicalisation is nowadays a term which refers to extreme attitudes and violent behaviours, but this phenomenon has a wider meaning, well-known in social psychology studies, without a particular label of socially undesirable attitudes. In social groups, aspects related to radicalisation concern effects such as polarisation, which leads members to choose different—and often diverging—positions in group discussions.

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In a review, Isenberg (1986) explored mechanisms thought to underlie group polarisation, which are social comparison and persuasive argumentation processes. Generally, these two are combined to produce polarisation, although the persuasive argumentation effects tend to be wider. Twenty years later, Hogg and Reid (2006) addressed this problem from the point of view of the construction of social identity, and, particularly, how this attempt is related to the distinction between in-group (*our* groups) and out-group (the *others*), a difference assumed as necessary for building a sound social identity and setting the suitable norms for achieve it. From this perspective:

> Out-group norms can have a significant impact on how we construct in-group norms, particularly in the absence of clear in-group normative information. Specifically, we construct an in-group norm that is *polarized away* from the out-group and then conform to our in-group norm via self-categorization–based depersonalization, thus producing group polarization […] or an apparent *counterconformity* to wider societal out-group norms. (Hogg and Reid 2006, p. 13)

A large body of findings demonstrated that group discussion produces a final group position that is more extreme than the average of the initial members' positions in the more different direction than the out-group. The polarisation appears even more extreme when members identify more strongly with their group (Abrams and Hogg 1990; Turner and Oakes 1989). Hogg and Reid (2006, pp. 14–17) moreover stated that there is a significant link between polarisation and communication, not yet sufficiently explored, particularly analysing how communication within groups produces a polarised norm or, more generally, how communication actually integrates diverse views within a decision-making group into a group norm. These aspects may become crucial also for understanding how and when language and communication may direct and sustain group schisms and subsequent radicalisation in their beliefs and norms.

Such specification is important—at the beginning of our work—because the "radicalisation" discourse (see Neumann 2008) over the last ten years has changed the meaning of the term, which has turned from indicating a polarised and even extreme position to labelling a deviant and dangerous attitude, with the risk of creating an undifferentiated outgroup, including a too large set of individuals and groups, ranging from people who disagree to violent radicalised people and terrorists. For this reason, we have chosen to use the term "violent radicalisation" both for a theoretical purpose (avoiding inaccurate constructs) and for the need for planning *inclusive* interventions (avoiding the labelling of specific target groups prior to prevention of unsuitable and antisocial behaviours).

In this regard, Peter Neumann, one of the founders of the "new radicalisation discourse", in 2008 observed:

> Following the attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001, it suddenly became very difficult to talk about the 'roots of terrorism' […] and so experts and officials started referring to the idea of 'radicalisation' whenever they wanted to talk about 'what goes on before the bomb goes off.' (Neumann 2008; in Kundnani 2012, pp. 4–6)

After an analysis of peer-reviewed journals from 1990 to 2011, using full-text searches on journal publisher websites and on the EBSCO website, Kundnani (2012,

p. 7) showed that there is a huge increase in articles mentioning radicalisation from 2004, underlining the upsurge of academic interest in radicalisation, even if such issue is far from being adequately explored.

As Mark Sedgwick (2010) argued, the concept of radicalisation emphasises the individual, the ideology and the group, and de-emphasises the wider circumstances, the root causes.

Kundnani also observed that

> whereas, before 2001, the term 'radicalisation' had been used informally in academic literature to refer to a shift towards more radical politics (usually not referring to Muslims), by 2004 the term had acquired its new meaning of a psychological or theological process by which Muslims move towards extremist views (Kundnani 2012, p. 7).

Nevertheless, the debate about the different perceptions of the threat posed by citizens belonging to ethnic minorities, and particularly by Muslims, is still heated. A US organisation focused on law and policies, the Brennan Center for Justice (2019), has underlined the concern for overbroad surveillance and *securitarian* policies, observing that counter-terrorism risks to be based on prejudices rather than on real threats. And, in particular, they pointed out that the policies held should not violate constitutional values of fairness, equality and freedom of religion.

1.2 The Theoretical Origin of the *Securitarian* Approach to Radicalisation

Radicalisation theorists have comprised a large range of approaches, from studies focused on religious ideology to more complex models of radicalisation that see an interactive process between ideologies and socio-psychological aspects. Rather than religious beliefs by themselves driving individuals to violence, the picture is one in which ideology becomes more extreme in response to a 'cognitive opening', an 'identity crisis' or a 'group bonding' process. This implies a more sophisticated counter-radicalisation practice that addresses the interdependence of theology with emotions, identity and group dynamics (Kundnani 2012, p. 14).

Sageman (2004, 2008) attempted to develop a comprehensive theory of radicalisation. He was a psychiatrist, and an adviser to the New York Police Department (NYPD). Sageman rejected accounts that considered economic or political conditions as significant, on the grounds that these factors affect millions of people, whereas only a small number of them become terrorists, avoiding the consideration of religious ideology as the sole cause: "These perspectives imply an overly passive view of terrorists, who are the recipients of social forces or slaves to appealing ideas" (Sageman 2008, p. 23). Instead, he stated that we need to ask how terrorists interpret their structural conditions of life and how they attempt to respond with a common struggle. In his studies, he analysed a database of around five hundred people who were supposed to be 'linked' to the 9/11 attackers (e.g. friends), concluding that there are two major pathways into terrorism: the 'bunch of guys' who collectively decide to join a terrorist

organisation, and those willing to join a childhood friend who is already a terrorist. Social bonds, therefore, "come before any ideological commitment" (Sageman 2008, p. 70). He identified four aspects favouring this process:

> […] first, a sense of moral outrage about a perceived injustice in the world; second, 'an enabling interpretation', such as that there is a war on Islam, which places this outrage in the wider context of a moral conflict; third, personal experiences, such as of discrimination, which become 'another manifestation of the war on Islam'; and, fourth, mobilising networks. (Sageman, 2008, p. 75)

Sageman thought that only people sharing their beliefs and experiences, but who are further along the path to violence or who are willing to explore it with them, can help them in crossing the line from anger to terrorism. Thus, it is the embedding of theological radicalism within a group dynamic that appears to be the root cause of radicalisation. Sageman's work had, therefore, some influence on how law enforcement agencies understood radicalisation.

Wiktorowicz (2005) proposed a quite similar combined theological and socio-psychological model of radicalisation. He attempted to explain how it was possible for people (as two British citizens who, in 2003, carried out a suicide attack at the Mike's Place bar in Tel Aviv) to be willing to carry out such an act of violence. Anyway the people he studied, through interviews and participant observation, were radical activists, not terrorists, a distinction that made a great impact on his attempt to construct a model of 'radicalisation'. Like other radicalisation scholars, Wiktorowicz argued that, by themselves, political and economic circumstances are insufficient to account for radical activism.

New York Police Department published a study entitled *Radicalization in the West: the homegrown threat* (Silber et al. 2007), which outlined a political version of this model of radicalisation. The report identified 'jihadist' ideology as the key driver of radicalisation, suggesting four phases by which an individual becomes a person who is 'quite likely to be involved in the planning or implementation of a terrorist act', a 'funnel' through which ordinary persons become terrorists, as their religious beliefs become progressively more radical:

> *pre-radicalisation* (before exposure to jihadi-Salafi ideology);
> *self-identification* (beginning to explore jihadi-Salafi ideology as a result of a cognitive opening that leads to the breakdown of an existing identity and association with like-minded others);
> *indoctrination* (progressive intensification of beliefs, leading to complete adoption of the ideology, as a result of group socialisation); and
> *jihadisation* (acceptance of an individual duty to participate in jihad) (Silber et al. 2007, p. 19)

The NYPD study argued that each of these four stages of radicalisation has its distinct set of indicators that allow predictions to be made about future terrorist risk (even if religious indicators—they said—cannot be used for purposes of surveillance). For example, stage two of the radicalisation process has "typical signatures" that include: "joining or forming a group of like-minded individuals, giving up

cigarettes, drinking, gambling and urban hip-hop gangster clothes, wearing tradi-tional Islamic clothing, growing a beard" and, finally, "becoming involved in social activism and community issues" (Silber et al. 2007, p. 31).

Such model of radicalisation became one of the antecedents of the *securitarian approach* in the USA with a massive surveillance of suspected groups of people, first of all Muslims. The FBI gave more weight to local community partnerships in countering the radicalisation process, believing that this approach could prevent extremism (Kundnani 2011).

Anyway the scientific literature, especially coming from USA, doesn't provide a causal relationship between religious beliefs and violence, and the concept of radical-isation as propensity to violence risks to be confused with radical ideas. This perspec-tive had implied—as said before—an approach to counter-radicalisation solely based on the containment and the eradication of the phenomenon, without analysing the social root of anger and violence. Different approaches—as we can see below—could also include political engagement of Muslim communities by means of demo-cratic actions, or promotion of empowerment (starting from young people and from educational activities) or counter-narratives, as different visions of their situation.

1.3 Towards a Comprehensive Model of Radicalisation and De-radicalisation

Kruglanski et al. (2014) designed a model of radicalisation and de-radicalisation based on the idea that personal significance may constitute the main motivation pushing individuals towards violent extremism. Radicalisation is defined as "the process of supporting or engaging in activities deemed (by others) as in violation of important social norms (e.g. the killing of civilians)" (Kruglansky et al. 2014, p. 69). Radicalisation is therefore a matter of *degree* (in which mere attitudinal support for violence reflects a lower degree of radicalisation than actual engagement in violence) and represents "a subjective judgment proffered by those for whom the violated norms seem important but not by those who have devalued or suppressed the norms in question" (Kruglansky et al. 2014, p. 69).

Their model included three components: the *motivation*, which is the quest for personal significance; the *ideology*, which justifies the use of violence for the intended goals; the *social process of networking and group dynamics* by which individuals share with the reference group the justification for violence and implement it for achieving significance.

Such model (Krugkansly et al. 2014, p. 72), defined as the *counterfinality model* of radicalism (CFMR), explains—from the authors' perspective—the process of radicalism and the radicalisation *degrees*. In particular: a given means, "means A" serves the "focal goal" (i.e. the main purpose) named "F", and it is *counterfinal* in that it undermines other goals (e.g. goals C and D). We may, therefore, not only compare the relation between a goal and the means to achieve it, but also explain *different*

radicalisation degrees. Specifically, for a *less* radicalised individual, the other goals—C and D, which are *not focal*—remain important and are unlikely to be devalued. Instead, for a *highly* radicalised individual the focal goal is more dominant, and the alternative goals are devalued, suggesting a higher degree of imbalance between the focal and the alternative goals, and therefore a greater risk of involvement in radicalised actions. In such a way Kruglansky distinguished among the different *degrees* of radicalisation, referring to the *extent of imbalance* between the focal goal (and the related extreme behaviours) and the other goals.

The *counterfinality* model may solve the difficulty in agreeing on whether a given behaviour is or is not radical (see also Schmid et al. 1988): the difference between a radicalised person and a non-radicalised person is the priority given by the radicalised one to some essential purposes, which may include the adoption of extreme means (e.g. violence against human beings) that the non-radicalised people consider irrational and unacceptable.

In this perspective, the so-called road to radicalisation begins with the attention paid to the significance of a goal, or an issue, and the possible means to achieve the requested outcome. If the individuals' vision identifies violence as a "justifiable" means to significance, aggressive behaviours may be undertaken. Individuals may follow different pathways, and a violent ideology may firstly appear salient for a personal significance; in other cases, instead, their first experience may be the contact with a radicalised social network (Moghaddam and Eubank 2006; Weinberg and Eubank 2006), and then their beliefs—including the violent ones—may come from the members of the new reference group.

Kruglanski and colleagues (2014, p. 82) underlined that:

> Self-identification as a member of a social group larger than oneself can have a buffering effect against life's failures and increase one's sense of personal power and significance. Consistent with this notion is the considerable evidence that activating or making salient one's collective identity reduces one's *fear of death* […].

Following this approach, the de-radicalisation included a restoration of commitment to alternative goals and values, and a reduction of the commitment to the focal and ideological goal or to the means for achieving it (Kruglanski et al. 2014, p. 84). Their conclusion was that radicalisation is not a mysterious or incomprehensible matter, but rather an interactive process where personality, culture or situational aspects impact as *contributing factors* (Kruglanski and Fishman 2006) that make violence and terrorism more likely. It may represent the convergence of three elements: the *goal*, the ideology supporting the violent *means* as the path to significance, and the social process of networking and group dynamics through which adoption of the goal and the means is carried out (Kruglanski et al. 2014, p. 89).

Ten years later, Kruglanski et al. (2019) reaffirmed the *three pillars* of radicalisation in *Needs*, *Narratives* (which guides members in their *quest for significance*) and *Networks*, and examined the issues in de-radicalisation and recidivism, analysing also the policies upheld by different countries, their attitudes towards the problem and their way to counteract the threat of violence.

1.4 Radicalisation and Social Identity: The Staircase by Moghaddam

The most famous model that included radicalisation in the complex issue related to achieving social identity was the "staircase" by Moghaddam (2005).

He drew the pathway towards violent actions using the metaphor of a staircase, leading to increasingly higher floors, and—what is important for possible prevention—stated that an individual can stop climbing and it "depends on the doors and spaces" (p. 161).

In his analysis, the *Ground Floor* (p. 162) referred to the *Psychological Interpretation of Material Conditions*, where there is the majority of people, who perceives injustice and inequalities, together with feelings of frustration and shame for their marginalised condition. Such psychological perceptions may be decisive because only poverty and low educational level are not sufficient to explain the starting of extreme actions.

The *First Floor* was related to *Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment*: individuals who suffer for an unjust situation try "different doors" (p. 163) searching for solutions. Moghaddam indicated two psychological factors impacting on such choice, as a possibility for social mobility and perceptions of procedural justice (Tyler 1994), which become "doors that could be opened" (Moghaddam 2005, p. 163) if individuals are motivated to change and have the possibility to participate in decision-making. About perceived injustice, Moghaddam stated, according to Tyler and Huo (2002), that:

> […] independent of *distributive justice*—the outcomes of justice processes—and *interactional justice*—the explanations that authorities provide for their decisions and the considerations they show to the recipients of decisions—the key factor in perceived legitimacy and willingness to abide by government regulations is *procedural justice*—how fair people see the decision-making process to be. (Moghaddam 2005, p. 164)

The *Second Floor* has been indicated as the scene where the *Displacement of Aggression* occurs. A well-known mechanism in psychology, such displacement appears depending on several and different reasons, like authoritarian educational systems—furthering ingroup against outgroup thinking—and fundamentalist movements, fostering strong social minority identities, often opposed to the majority supposed as the cause of the injustices. Individuals may become willing to climb other steps in the staircase, undertaking violent behaviours against the perceived enemy.

The *Third Floor* described the *Moral Engagement*, a sort of parallel morality that justifies any possible means for achieving the goals of the reference group. Terrorists, indicated as morally disengaged, "from the perspective of the morality that exists within terrorist organizations, are morally engaged in the way morality is constructed by the terrorist organization" (Moghaddam 2005, p. 165). Although the debate about the "correct" interpretation of Islam, including the ideology of martyrdom, is now open within Muslim and the whole social context.

In the *Fourth Floor*, *Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization*, the model has placed the ultimate entry of an individual in the terrorist organisation, generally becoming part of small cells, where he/she gets attention and is trained in psychological and operational ways. Social categorisation is strengthened and ingroup favouritism/outgroup discrimination and even aggression are legitimated. It is just this "categorical us-versus-them view of the world" (Moghaddam 2005, p. 165) that represents the features of terrorist organisations, and is attractive for the new-recruited, searching for a more powerful social identity than his/her previous marginalised experiences.

Finally, the *Fifth Floor*: *The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms*. In this step, the question posed by Moghaddam concerned the way to manage inhibitory mechanism towards violence, especially when actions involve civilians. As in similar soldiers' training, not only in terrorist groups, but also in "regular" armies, a possible answer lies in psychological processes related to intergroup dynamics, like the social categorisation of civilians/citizens as part of the outgroup (and so enemies), and the creation of psychological distance from them, enhancing the differences between ingroup and outgroup up to the dehumanisation of the other part of society. Such factors can prevent inhibitory mechanisms due to the (often) very close proximity to their targets, who—moreover—are generally unaware of the danger, and so are unable, psychologically and materially, to induce inhibition of violence.

The interest aroused by this contribution has been founded firstly on its social psychology grounds, which turn the origin of violent radicalisation not merely into an ideological adhesion but rather into a complex and interlaced situation of marginality and poor social identity, and, above all, into the implication for policies, best practices and prevention of the phenomenon.

The first indicated "long-term solution" to terrorism (Moghaddam 2015, pp. 167–168) was its prevention, integrating educational and healthcare systems; the second recommendation referred to paying attention to the construction of procedural justice, able to give voice to and influence the perception of minorities and genders, including them in the decision-making processes. Then, surely, the role of education, especially against categorical "us-versus-them thinking", which is a dangerous temptation in any society, also in the Western ones, for ensuring conformity to the attitudes and conventional behaviours, so as to protect the social (and political) majority from deviance.

Finally, the promotion of "interobjectivity and justice": Moghaddam hypothesised—even in front of tragic events—a care not only for the victims but also for those who are still in the first steps or willing to exit from the staircase (as individuals and as groups), because "greater international dialogue and improved intercultural understanding must come about as part of a long-term solution (p. 168). Psychologists may have a crucial role in influencing interobjectivity, which is an understanding shared within and between cultures.

The staircase of terrorism—and the subsequent work by Moghaddam, related to the mutual radicalisation—largely influenced European theorists and European policies, for his proactive vision and prevention-oriented indications.

1.4.1 *A More Recent Contribution by Moghaddam, the* Mutual *Radicalisation*

The *mutual* radicalisation, as described by Moghaddam (2018, p. 4) occurs:

> when two groups take increasingly extreme positions opposing one another, reacting against real or imagined threats, moving further and further apart in points of view, mobilising their resources to launch attacks and finally attempting to weaken and destroy each other. A key feature of mutual radicalisation is that it is a process that can only emerge through interactions *between* groups and nations.

Its properties can be understood only examining the relations between the groups, rather than the features of each of them.

Moghaddam (2018, p. 5) stated that there is a "normal" level of tensions or even conflicts between groups, which indicate a baseline—a sort of point of departure—for the process of mutual radicalisation. The latter was designed by the author as a *dynamic model* of mutual radicalisation, composed of three main stages: group mobilisation, extreme ingroup cohesion, and antagonistic identity transformation, which have been applied in exploring different actual conflicts (Islamic radicalisation and the Western countries, nation-states on the road to possible mutual radicalisation, and "domestic" mutual radicalisation processes within political contrasts).

Generally, the groups are involved in a *symmetric* mutual radicalisation, where they both radicalise and a radical move by one group is followed by a radical response from the second group, and so on—in an escalation—up to a stalemate condition. Groups may be engaged also in an *asymmetric* mutual radicalisation, where group 1 takes radical positions, pulling group 2 towards itself, which encourages the first group to radicalise even further, and so on. The two groups influence each other, but they are moving in the same direction, with the first group taking up more and more extreme positions (as happens in political conflicts within a country).

Talking about symmetric and asymmetric, mutual radicalisation may contribute to explain also terms like radicalisation and extremism, because each group may define the other's position as extreme.

In the model proposed by Moghaddam, reference groups—because of their social power and access to resources—have a great chance to influence the way of thinking this issue, nevertheless "ordinary people" (p. 8) and common citizens also play central roles and are responsible for emerging biases perceptions and discriminating actions.

Mutual radicalisation is a combination of psychological and material factors, which are strictly interlaced. Moghaddam (2018, p. 9) gave the example of the town of Jerusalem:

> Jerusalem has high material value, in that land Jerusalem has a very high price on the open market. However, beyond the material value, Jerusalem is of great symbolic value, particularly for practicing Christians, Jews and Muslims. Disentangling the material value from the symbolic value of Jerusalem becomes difficult and impractical.

Such described process is dynamic and mutual, because an increase in radicalisation in one group affects other groups, with an escalation to further radicalised

attitudes and behaviours. The collective changes have an influence also on each group member, who—even reluctantly—can adopt extreme positions along with the whole group.

The term *causal plasticity* has been used in the case studies explored by Moghaddam to indicate the causes of the conflicts as interpreted by the two sides, which means what each of them says for "the conflict is about". Perceived and described causes can change over time, and often really change. Recognising that is important in order to understand the conflicts and attempt to find possible solutions. Causes have generally been seen in a simplified and static way, without considering the "*constructions* of conflict, as reflected in the narratives of those involved" (Moghaddam 2018, p. 13). In this psychological process, *cultural carriers* are built and become the means for spreading the culture of a group over time (Moghaddam 2002), as collective identity and memory.

1.5 Radicalisation in a Social Context. European Contributions

Van den Bos has given a great contribution in the topic of radicalisation. In his article about unfairness and radicalisation (2019), he presented a review about people's perceptions of unfairness and their tendencies to commit to radicalised behaviours. In such way, he based his psychological research on the key aspects of perceived unfairness. This approach referred to psychological studies centred on the experience of group deprivation and relative deprivation, which is a phenomenon well analysed in social psychology (Brown and Pehrson 2019, pp. 228–230). Deprivation was defined by Berkowitz (1972) as the subjective perception to be deprived, in those conditions that hinder individuals' expectations. Gurr (1970) systematised the Relative Deprivation Theory, explaining social violence and anger as depending on a discrepancy between what one individual wants to have in relation to how little one has.

Smith and Pettigrew (2015, p. 2), in a review, have defined Relative Deprivation (RD) as

> a judgment that one or one's ingroup is disadvantaged compared to a relevant referent, and that this judgment invokes feelings of anger, resentment and entitlement. In addition to the fundamental feature that the concept refers to *individuals and their reference groups,* note that there are four basic components of this definition.

Smith et al. (2012) indicated the four requirements for RD: individuals firstly make cognitive comparisons, then cognitive appraisals that they or their ingroup are disadvantaged, perceive these disadvantages as unfair and finally resent these unfair and undeserved disadvantages. We may add—in this regard—that nowadays the rise of social inequalities negatively impact on the whole system of social protection, which was based on the assumption of a moderate but steady growth in wealth for the whole population, therefore, it is often difficult to deal with the scaling of

available resources and the spread of marginal situations, so relative deprivation can only increase (Meringolo and Volpi 2016, p. 111).

Back to the review by Van den Bos, core theories of the radicalisation process have been examined, starting from those that situate such topic in a broader context: the *Staircase approach* (Moghaddam 2005); the *Trigger approach* (Feddes et al. 2015); the *Goal-Achievement Approach* (Kruglanski et al. 2014); the *Individual, Group, and Mass approaches* (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008); and the *Individual and Socialization approaches* (Kepel and Rougier 2016).

We have already talked about some of these theorists. It is anyway important to underline the Feddes's approach, because he considered the radicalisation a nonlinear process, which—as Van den Bos observed—may have more or less time length, and not necessarily each involved individual will radicalise.

Feddes (Feddes et al. 2015; see also Doosje et al. 2016a) identified four stages in the process: (a) become sensitive to radicalisation, (b) orient themselves in a particular type of radicalisation, (c) become members of a radicalised group, (d) undertake extremist actions. In the third of them, the vision of violence may increase as possible and permissible. In each stage, there are specific *trigger factors*, which may have a direct effect or a moderation effect, and may be *root factors* (long-term conditions, like perception of unfairness and injustice) or personal factors (like people's identity, perceived relative deprivation, or experiences with discrimination).

The importance of Feddes's approach lies in his multifaceted and multifactorial model, where radicalisation is not based on a chain cause–effect and is not seen as a direct and inevitable consequence of being exposed to violent networks, but rather as a complex interaction among individuals' perceptions, reference groups and—not least—the context problems, which may give rise to deprivation (and relative deprivation) , unfairness and even human rights violation.

McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) particularly explored the different levels at which processes of radicalisation take place: at individual level, people may feel themselves as personal victims; at group level intergroup (and also within-group) competitions may be observed, especially in discussing political opinions and adequate means for reaching collective goals; at mass level attitudes and behaviours may become more and more extreme, particularly when the conflict with the "enemy" involves prolonged violence, so as to dehumanise outgroup members.

Kepel and Rougier (2016) focused their studies on socialisation dynamics of jihadist terrorism, remarking that committed individuals are often resourceful and well integrated in their communities, even though they can be frustrated about important events in their lives or disillusioned for insufficient or negative outcomes of their emancipation. When such situation is coupled with a history of delinquency or other personal difficulties, the engagement in paths of radicalisation and ultimately in militancy and terrorism becomes more likely. Symbols of injustice, the legitimisation of revolutionary thought and the experience of unfair treatment can also increase radicalisation.
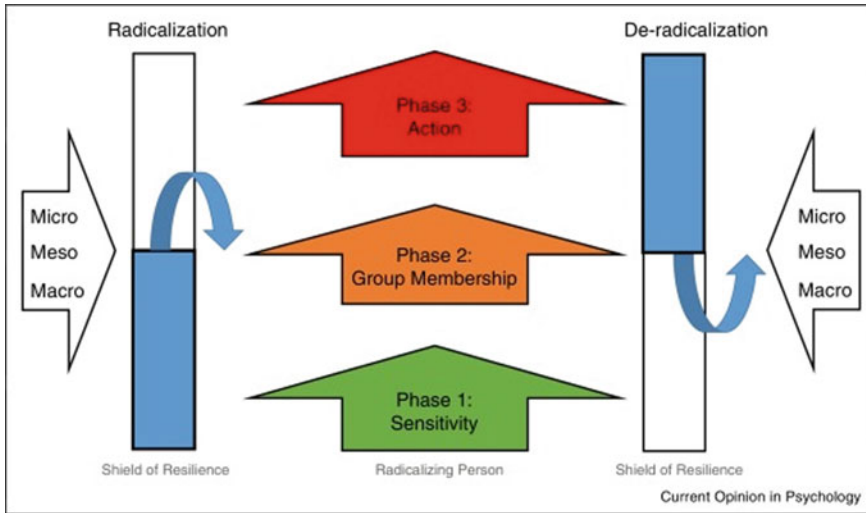
Fig. 1.1 Model of radicalisation (and de-radicalisation). (*Source* Reprinted from Doosje et al. 2016a, p. 80, Copyright (2016), with permission from Elsevier)

Van den Bos also examined core moderators, which are uncertainty and insufficient self-correction, and mediators, like externally oriented emotions, in the relationship between perceived unfairness and components of radicalisation (e.g. rigidity of thoughts, defence of cultural worldviews and violent denial of democratic principles).

What about the exit from radicalisation? Doosje and colleagues (Doosje et al. 2016a; see also, for the model, Doosje et al. 2016) suggested that radicalised individuals and groups have a sort of "shield" of *resilience*, so as to be less permeable to anti-radical messages. Similarly, there is the possibility to de-radicalise, rejecting the previous ideology up to a further disengagement, as shown in Fig. 1.1.

The process indicated by Doosje comprises *three phases*: the *sensitivity* towards the issue, the *group membership* (where the world view is shared with significant others), and finally the *action*, with the undertaking of violent behaviours. Such a process may take place at micro-, meso- and macro-levels (according to the definition by Bronfenbrenner 1979), and exit strategies may occur for individual relational events, or for intellectual doubts or for intra-group conflicts. The groups themselves, moreover, can disintegrate, or change political strategies.

Research has shown, besides, that interventions based on the construct of resilience, which means the capability to hope with successful adaptation despite risk and adversity (Masten 1994; see also Meringolo et al. 2016), may successfully increase both self-confidence and empathy, so as to work towards the de-radicalisation (Feddes et al. 2013).

1.6 The European Proactive Approach

A sensible difference emerges between North Americans and European studies. Similar dissimilarities may be observed in the socio-political attitudes to face such an issue. European policies have been more centred on a proactive approach, rather than a reactive one, to deal with this serious problem.

In the European Union, the work carried out by the RAN—Radicalisation Awareness Network (2014; 2016) is remarkable. It is a "*network of networks*", set up in order to facilitate the exchange of experiences and knowledge among the key social actors involved in the fight against radicalisation throughout the European Union, such as social workers, religious ministers, NGOs, law enforcement agencies, policy-makers.

The RAN is an EU-wide umbrella network with a section focused on educational interventions for young people. The proposed activities are:

– *Training* for professionals involved with vulnerable individuals or groups at risk of radicalisation.
– *Exit strategies*, as de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes (during and after detention).
– *Community engagement and empowerment*, for building trustful relationships with authorities and public bodies.
– *Educational intervention*, addressed to young people, about citizenship, tolerance, non-prejudicial thinking and democratic values.
– *Family support*, both for vulnerable and radicalised individuals.
– *Proposal of alternative narratives*, providing a different point of view online and offline.
– *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)*, institutional measures to ensure support to individuals at risk at an early stage (RAN 2016).

A crucial aspect, included in one of the RAN activities, is related to the prevention of violent radicalisation in prisons, specifically in juvenile jails.

RAN talks also about "counter-narratives", or "counter-arguments" or "alternative narratives" as powerful instruments for providing youth—and particularly Muslim adolescents—with a different point of view on conflicts, minorities issues and stereotypes.

Counter-narratives are important to build a new image of personal and collective history, oriented attitudes and social behaviours. We may have a good example of alternative narratives, based on visual methods, in a US media production, *Average Mohammed* (Mohammed Amin Ahmed, 2017). Ahmed, Muslim, immigrant from Africa and—in his words—"proud citizen of the USA and living in Minnesota over twenty years", had the idea to use popular, cultural and media tools for producing videos exposing the core mission of the organisation, for online campaigns, focused on counter-narratives, countering the violent extremism. His videos include topics as "*We have stories to tell*" about different identities in Islam, or "*A Muslim in the west*"

especially addressed to the different generations of migrants, or "*Be like Aisha*" on the female condition, or—specifically addressed against violence and the recruitment of fighters—"*The bullet and the ballot*", "because we are Muslims and we have a choice".

1.7 The PROVA Project (2016-2018): Assumptions and Core Ideas

When the PROVA (2016-2018) Project was proposed, answering to a European call, our perspectives and directions had been clearly stated:

– the founding values, that are inclusion, civic engagement and mutual respect among all the individuals and the social groups;
– the interventions addressed to different people: professionals and educators, minors in jail or under judicial proceedings, university students, policy-makers, citizens committed in inclusion;
– in particular, the interventions planned and implemented with youth (young offenders and involved university students) were based on two pillars: *peer-to-peer relationships* for "learning by doing", cultural competences and positive behaviours in groups experiences; *space re-imagination* for learning the sense of belonging to local communities. In our opinion, such goals can be reached by caring for the environment and through proposals for turning urban spaces—even if marginalised—into spaces for socialisation.

The stated assumptions were, therefore, the importance of avoiding positions, theories or methods that *stigmatise*[1] any migrant—especially the Islamic ones—as possible terrorists, or redefine migrant communities as *suspect* communities; and of avoiding the use of psychological sciences as a means to *detect* potentially dangerous individual tendencies.

Stigma is, in fact, a powerful instrument of exclusion, able to thwart any project, although well-structured, limiting the activities to a merely buffering action.

This community-based approach has definitely situated PROVA far from the *securitarian* perspective, and—instead—in line with the proactive and educational approach fostered by the European RAN.

Methods of interventions, monitoring and evaluation, consequently, have been *participatory*, making room for creative experiences, like theatre, narrative and visual methodologies.

The European Union is engaged in preventing violent extremism and radicalisation mainly by means of a widespread education in democracy (Barrett et al. 2016). The Council of Europe, for this purpose, has built the *Reference Framework*

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[1]A wide and deep historical discussion of the topic "stigma" will be found in the Chap. 2 of this book, which explores the complexity of such an issue and the links between stigma and deviant careers.

of Competences for Democratic Culture—CDC (Council of Europe 2018), which specifies "the tools and critical understanding that learners at all levels of education should acquire in order to feel a sense of belonging and make their own positive contributions to the democratic societies in which we live" (Council of Europe 2018, vol. I, p. 5). The conceptual model comprises twenty competences, divided in Values, Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge and critical understanding.

PROVA Project was strictly involved in such educational vision; thus, we have tried to compare our work to the model proposed by the reference framework. In Fig. 1.2, we can see some examples, coming from our activities, and referred to values (where we have included *trust* as social orientation, *accountability* of local representatives and *inclusion*), attitudes (in particular *identification* in the social groups and in the community), skills (like *democratic models in organisations*, *commitment*, specific *skills for professionals* of the Juvenile Justice system) and critical knowledge (that is a critical reflection on *ethical issues*, going beyond the individual ethics towards *ethics in interventions*).

Building a democratic society, leading educational work and promoting civic engagement turned out to be a credible and sustainable way to prevent violent radicalisation and aggressive behaviours.
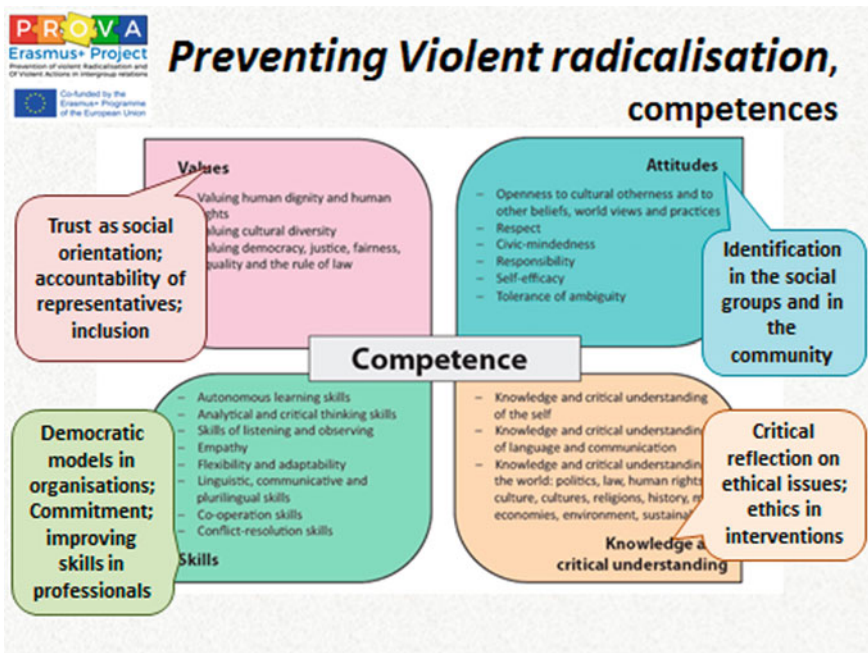

Fig. 1.2 PROVA Project in the Model of CDC. (*Source* Meringolo 2019, inspired by *Reference Framework of CDC*, vol. I, p. 38 and adapted by Patrizia Meringolo)

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