**ANNEX IV: Framing analysis**

**Introduction**

As part of the CONRAD research project, funded by BELSPO, the Institute for Media Studies (KU Leuven) performed a study on the framing of radicalization, and more specifically to identify opportunities that could be helpful to broaden the communication on this term. Radicalization is part of a lively debate in Belgium, following the terrorist attacks of November 13, 2015 in Paris and of March 22, 2016 in Brussels, as well as the issue of departing Syria fighters. The debate on radicalization is part of a broader polarizing climate, that influences the stability in the Belgian society.

A frame can be seen as a perspective or a prism from which it is possible to perceive radicalization. Depending on that perspective, the issue looks different: as a spreading illness, or as an empowering force, for example. This study thus wants to gain insight in the meaning of radicalization, by mapping *all* frames that are prevalent in Belgium. To widen the look on the issue, counter-frames are developed. Counter-frames result in a *non-*problematizing look on radicalization in Belgium. This results in the following research questions:

**RQ1**: What are the (problematizing) frames in the social debate on radicalization in Belgium?
**RQ2**: What are possible (deproblematizing) counter-frames in the communication on radicalization in Belgium?

Radicalization is a special topic on which to perform a framing analysis, since there is no consensus on the existence of such a phenomenon as radicalization. Some consider the term 'useless', and state that it describes *normal* events, while others see the term radicalization as *stigmatizing* and *counterproductive*. In other words, the ambiguity of the term makes it confusing rather than clarifying.

The term radicalization was originally raised within European police and intelligence circles shortly after the 9/11 attacks, simply meaning 'anger' (Coolsaet, 2016, p. 3). Following the attacks in Madrid and London by homegrown terrorists in 2004-2005, the term suddenly became widespread; equally in policy documents (Kundnani, 2012) and in the media (Hörnqvist & Flyghad, 2012). Radicalization soon became a 'container concept', used to refer to "everything that happens before the bomb goes off" (Neumann, 2008, p. 4).

Today, the word 'radicalization' entails a negative connotation, whereas before the term was more neutral and therefore less emotionally charged. In its unbiased sense, to be radical means, "to be extreme relative to something that is defined or accepted as normative, traditional, or valued as the status quo" (Mandel, 2009, p. 105). In general, radicalization is understood as a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly more extreme political, social or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2009).

Over the years, the meaning of the term narrowed into "a new lens through which to view Muslim minorities" (Kundnani, 2012, p. 3) and even into "Muslim-danger" (Fadil, 2017, p. 9). Since there is no consensus on the definition of radicalization, the meaning varies along with the spokesperson.

In chapter 2, the conceptual substructure of this research is explained. In chapter 3, an overview of the reconstructed frames and counter-frames is given. Each frame is elaborately

described and illustrated. Chapter 4 offers a conclusion and some tips and tricks on how to work with this overview.

**Results**

The inductive framing analysis procedure resulted in an overview of four frames that see radicalization as a problem. These four frames offer different causes, consequences and solutions, as described in chapter 2. Next, the researchers looked for starting points in the material to formulate counter-frames, which offer a deproblematizing view on radicalization. The frames and counter-frames were validated by interviews and workshops (see method section).

Table 1 shows an overview of the four frames and eight counter-frames. In appendix A and B, a framematrix is presented (A shows the four frames, B the eight counter-frames). The matrix shows the internal logic of each frame, indicating the *reasoning devices*. In the last column, examples of *framing devices* are presented. In the following paragraph, every (counter-)frame will be discussed at length, supported by examples from the analysis material. In some cases, the frames reflect the perspective of a radicalized person, or the viewpoint of a bystander.

Table 1 presents the main characteristics of each frame and counter-frame, as well as the analysis level on which it is focused. One frame focusses on the micro-level, namely *A criminal career*. It refers to the different steps a radicalized individual undertakes to climb the criminal stairs. Four counter-frames also focus on the radicalized individual: *Puberty, Meaningfulness, Penance* and *The freedom fighter.* Respectively, they see what other label as 'radicalization' as respectively youth sins, a purpose in life, looking for forgiveness and heroism. They all offer some understanding or explanation of *why* someone would 'radicalize'.

Two counter-frames look at the meso-level, thus radicalized individuals and persons in their surroundings or external people: *Resilience* and *Embrace the threat. Embrace the threat* deals with the presence of challenging ideas and evil in a society, which should be an opportunity to learn to interact with something or someone who is perceived as 'evil'. Further, *Mutiny* and *Virus* are placed at this level. *Mutiny* defines the power of frustrations of minority groups as the base for radicalization, where *Virus* defines indoctrination and an ideology playing a bigger role.

On a macro-level, *Two roosters in one cage, The continuum* and *A catalyst* are situated at a societal level. *Two roosters in one cage* is the viewpoint of bystanders who look at society from a distance. They see a continuing battle between two incompatible cultures (water and fire). *A catalyst* believes in the power of society, the ability to go forward, and where radical elements trigger progress or the necessary change.

| Frame | Cultural theme | Definition of radicalization | Cause (why is it a problem?) | Consequences | Moral values involved | Possible solutions/actions | Link with extremism and terrorism | Metaphors, choice of vocabulary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 A criminal career | From petty thief to gangster | Step-by-step one shows more criminal behavior and thus becomes more radical | Fast money or time in prison turns young thieves into the ultimate criminal | Gangsters are collecting fame and status while creating a dangerous society | People consciously choose for evil | The police and justice department have to track down potential criminals and lock them up | Radicalism grows into extremism and ultimately terrorism | Terrorist elite school, training center for jihad's, prison as university of radicalization |
| 2 Virus | A life-threatening, contagious disease | Radicalization is an evil, spreading ideology | Poisonous radical ideas are transmitted to vulnerable individuals | The society panics and activates disaster plans | The battle against evil and the victory of the right | The government needs to isolate and try to cure contaminated individuals | Radicalization without treatment leads to violence | Positive medicines, feverish behavior, antivirusprogram, deradicalization clinic |
| 3 Mutiny | Resistance against the authorities | Radicalization is the sudden uproar against the authorities | Perceived discrimination and injustice lead to buildup frustrations | There is insubordination in society and a disruption of the balance | Peace is disturbed and should be restored | The priority is to restore political stability: address frustrations or suppress the uproar | Some insurgents take up the arms | Intifada, distrust the government, resentment against the white elite |
| 4 Two roosters in one cage | Only one rooster can lead the henhouse | Continuous challenges by 'the other' leads to aggressive behavior | Two macho cultures clash and feed the anger in each other | Society polarizes and segregates, everyone is forced to choose sides | The incompatibility of two dominant elements | One of the two cultures needs to win to restore peace and stability | A minority takes up arms to win the battle | Kulturkampf, clash of civilizations, superiority, being repressed in my own city |

## A criminal career

| The path from petty thief to gangster |
|---|
| Key message: Radicalization is the step-by-step process where one shows more and more criminal behavior. People are driven by adventure, fast money and are stimulated by spending time in prison. Gangsters collect fame and status in criminal circles while creating a dangerous society. It is up to the police and justice department to track down potential criminals and lock them up. |

The first frame, *A criminal career,* starts from the idea that criminality is a slippery slope. People who start of as a petty thief, are inclined to be attracted to further criminal activity. The radical individuals started off as "small criminals and drug addicts"[1] (Bultinck, 2017).

Viewed from this frame, radicalization is a criminal process, leading to the ultimate criminal: a terrorist. It builds further on the idea of intertwinement between criminal and terrorist groups. Different from earlier departures of radicalized people to fight in foreign wars, ideology is not an important factor here:

"There is a big difference between the current Syria fighters, and the men who fought in Afghanistan, and the hijackers of 9/11: in many cases, they had studied Islam, often at universities. The Syria fighters of today are no scribes. Religion is barely a factor here, but is often referred to later, to legitimize their acts. I come in families where one brother has left, and the other has not. This is the same as in criminality: two people grow up in the same circumstances by the same parents. One becomes a policeman, the other a drugs dealer" (Marion Van San [researcher] in Pardoen, 2017).

People "enter prison as a drugs dealer or car thief and leave as terrorists" (Hussey [historian] in Arijs, 2017). The "young people who are tired of their miserable lives as young delinquents get excited by the prospect of adventure and violence" (de Kerchove [European coordinator

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[1] For the whole of the report, the fragments out of the dataset are own translations of the researchers.

for counterterrorism] in "Invloedrijke Belg", 2017). They show "deviant behavior" (Zuallaert & Van Humbeeck, 2016), maybe based on a "surplus of testosterone?" ("Invloedrijke Belg", 2017). As shown in figure 1, radicalization is seen as part of a career. The man on the left says "Impressive resume. Cum Laude in Leuven Central [prison]".

**Figure 1: Lectrr (i.e. cartoonist Steven Degryse) – Cartoon in newspaper De Standaard, May 30 2018**



Prison is seen as "universities of radicalization" (Alde'emeh, 2015). This process leads to the fact that "on short term, young crooks turn into blinded murdering machines" (Vranckx, 2017) and commence a "criminal jihad" ("Eén op vijf moslims heeft begrip voor IS", 2016). In essence, the radicalized people are seen as "sadists" (Alde'emeh, 2015) and "corrupt people who kill" (Lippens & Alde'emeh, 2017b). Faith or ideology are "added later to legitimize the acts" (Van San [researcher] in Pardoen, 2017). People consciously choose for evil, and thus, seen from this frame, since radicalization is a "criminal phenomenon, we need to battle it with the means of democracy and state of law" (Van Leeuw [federal attorney] in Mulders, 2016). An idea is to "inventories everyone who is on the list of OCAD. It will surprise us, because it will turn out that our police knew these people from a young age. The assistance for young people with a migration background is failing, and the youth law is way too soft" ("Kanaalplan mag niet", 2017). It is suggested that society needs to respond in an earlier stage of the radicalization process, in order to prevent the emergence of terrorists.

*A criminal career* also assumes that, "when Islamic State would ever seize to exist, most will continue their criminal career on the spot by trading drugs or weapons" (Zuallaert & Van Humbeeck, 2016).

Virus

| A life-threatening, contagious disease |
|---|
| <u>Key message:</u> Radicalization is a vicious ideology that is rapidly spreading in society. Radical ideas are poisonous, and are being transmitted to vulnerable individuals. It is urgent to isolate the infected individuals and to try and cure the contaminated areas. Disaster plans are activated. Radical people that are not being treated, are on the way towards the use of violence. |

The *Virus* frame builds on feelings of fear for an approaching disaster. From the viewpoint of *Virus,* radicalization is an illness that society is "being exposed to" (Bilal, 2015). The disease is a metaphor for an evil ideology, "contagious, poisonous ideas" (Damen [lawyer] in Van Gestel, 2017). The origin of the problem lies with this ideology, that is being spread by "recruiters who are indoctrinating our children" (Mother of radicalized person in Carpentier, 2018). By putting emphasis on 'our children', it is also shown that the Belgian society needs to be protected from this external threat. In the time period studied in this research, the main focus of most documents was on 'Muslim radicalization', connected to the 'creation' of the Islamic State, the departure of Syria fighters from Belgium, as well as the terrorist attacks in Europe. This is reflected in the concrete descriptions of this evil ideology: it is "an epidemic of Muslim terror" (Schoofs & Dijkstra, 2017) or "some places in Brussels that have been hit strongest by islamization" ("Wilders vergelijkt", 2017), it is even called "the new Nazism" (Loobuyck, 2017). The moral base of this frame is the continuing fight from good against evil, in order for a healthy community to be established. A thought-through protection of the young people and children is essential.

To reach that goal, society needs to "keep a finger on the pulse" and "learn to recognize signals" (Van Quickenborne [mayor of Kortrijk] in "Als burgemeester kan ik", 2018), and, "depending on the stage of indoctrination" (Bilal, 2015), "isolate" (Van Poecke [director of Brussels prisons] in Justaert & Eeckhaut, 2017) the radicalized individuals and "make young people less vulnerable" (European Commission, 2016). Seen from this frame, it is important to "fight the epidemic" (Ferguson, 2017), because it is the first step towards extremism and terrorism. However, fighting only radicalization "is like giving paracetamol against a fever: you might feel better for a while, but the fever will come back as long as the cause is not handled" (Zuallaert & Van Humbeeck, 2016). The cause here refers to the poisonous ideology. Politicians are blamed for "doing symptom control" (Benhaddou, 2016). "A remedy" (GO!, 2015) and an "antidote" (Vranckx, 2015) should "prevent relapses" (Vanhecke & Bergmans, 2017). Seen from this frame, "prevention is the most effective anti-terror measure", "individual prevention, like the one we offer to drugs addicts or people with suicidal tendencies" (Zuallaert & Van Humbeeck, 2016). Some people believe "we can not save everyone" (Zuallaert & Van Humbeeck, 2016), where others say "that hopeless cases do not exist" (Struys, 2017a).

The frame *Virus* can easily be recognized by words or metaphors that refer to a disease, such as "curing those ideas" (Verberckmoes, 2017); "symptoms of radicalization" (Demeurisse, 2018) or "a cancer that is difficult to treat" (Jambon [former Belgian Minister of Internal Affairs] in "Jambon geeft tekst en uitleg", 2016).

## Mutiny

| Resistance against the authorities |
| --- |
| Key message: Radicalization is a sudden uproar against the establishment. A minority group in society feels perceived discrimination and injustice, which leads to strong frustrations. They act out of build-up anger, in an effort to overthrow the authorities. This insubordination results in a disruption of balance, hence it is the priority to restore political stability by suppressing the uproar or handling the frustrations. |

The third frame was identified as *Mutiny*. Mutiny is defined as the resistance of someone lower in rank against someone higher in the hierarchy. This metaphor thus looks at radicalization as a sudden revolt against the authorities by a group that feels "excluded and neglected by society" (Hussey [historian] in Arijs, 2017). People who radicalize, act out of frustrations about previous experiences in Belgian society, and the lack of future prospects. Since "Belgium has nothing to offer them. There is discrimination, racism and no respect for a young Muslim migrant" (AlDe'emeh [researcher] in Rotthier, 2017), frustrations continue to build up, and eventually result in the need for an "exhaust valve" (Vidal, 2018). The "economic stagnation is the mold of terrorism" ("La stagnation économique", 2015). Young people with a migration background feel as if "integration has failed, and they are no complete part of Belgian society" (Alde'emeh [researcher] in Rotthier, 2017). They "do not know how to articulate that anger and frustration. They can not express themselves, since they do not have the vocabulary for it. So sometimes, they express all this anger and frustrations in a violent way" (El Bachiri, 2017). This is an "explosive mix of resentment and Muslim fundamentalism" aimed against a "white elite" (Bultinck, 2017). This "action of fanatic young people is the avatar of an explosion in the suburban areas" ("La stagnation économique", 2015).

The "lack of prospects by the bad socio-economic situation" (Idrissi [politician] in "Oproep Yamila Idrissi", 2017) makes them feel "unwelcome and as if the whole society is against them" (Vanderstichele, 2017). The *Mutiny* frame looks further than the individual level – the focus of *A criminal career* – by taking the broad society into account. The importance of the societal context and underlying frustrations is reflected in the following statement:

"I like to compare it with the approach of the terrorist attacks in Northern Ireland: when the Brits were still performing anti-terror operations against the IRA, not one British agent tried to talk to an IRA member to convince him of the wrong of his ideology" (Zuallaert & Van Humbeeck, 2016)

This citation shows the relevance of looking at the demands of the minority group. The solution can thus be twofold, according to *Mutiny*: either to listen to the frustrations and try to change the circumstances, or by suppressing the uproar and silence the minority group.

Viewed from this frame "radicalization is a way of revenge" (Van Malderen, 2017). Someone testifies that "if I did not learn to deal my anger and frustration, did not learn to create a time period between emotion and act, I would not have turned out this good" (Kuppens, 2016).

## Two roosters in one cage

| Only one rooster can lead the henhouse |
| --- |
| Key message: Radicalization is the aggressive behavior one expresses after constant provocations by 'the other'. In society, two macho cultures are clashing, which feed the anger and fear towards each other. As a result, society polarizes and segregates, and everyone is forced to choose sides. In the end, one of the two camps has to win in order to restore stability. |

Different than the previous three frames, *Two roosters in one cage* is a frame from the viewpoint of a bystander who is looking at society from a distance. The saying 'two roosters

in one cage' refers to the fact that only one rooster can be the leader of the henhouse. From this perspective, radicalization is seen as the aggressive behavior one shows after being challenged by 'the Other'. In the dataset, 'the Other' represents the clash between Islam and the West. The presence of "an Islamic ideology that is hostile towards western and democratic values" (Belgian State Security, 2018), this "new enemy" (Attention aux", 2015) has turned Belgium into, according to this frame, "a repressive warfront, followed by fear and polarization" (Ben Allal [journalist] in Vidal, 2018). Now, "two groups are facing each other with drawn knives" (Benhaddou [imam], 2016), a fight from "good against evil" (De Sutter [political psychologist], 2015). The underlying idea is that these are two incompatible worldviews, who will continue to fight until one is dominant. In essence, Belgium "is an apartheid-state" (Lippens & Alde'emeh, 2017a). The "Brussel-Charleroi canal is a gap between two separate worlds" (Raspoet, 2017). Molenbeek is then "like Raqqa, only it has not been freed yet" ("Wilders vergelijkt", 2017).

On both sides of the battle, there is suspicion towards each other. For example, young people with a migration background "feel like they are confronted with untrustworthy people, hypocrites. Even people who show interest in their religion, and ask questions about it. Youngsters think: do they really care, or do they want to catch us on some mistakes?" (Rotthier, 2017).

Some civilians fear that "a civil war will break out in Flanders. These tensions with Muslims are insufferable" (Renson & Kets, 2017). As this person explains the clash in society more elaborately:

"Either you are a Muslim hater, or a Muslim hugger. One sees a complot of Muslims against our society. This idea is supported by every terrorist attack, every Mosque that is being built. Elderly people ask me: "will our grandchildren have to speak Arabic?" The other mainly sees a complot of society against Muslims: they are being discriminated, soon they will not be allowed to practice the religious slaughter of animals." (Renson & Kets, 2017)

As seen from 'inside the frame', the opposed groups make statements as "Within ten years this will be Eurabia. They make more children than we do, they will be the majority and you naive Belgians will finally wake up" (Anonymous reaction on Het Laatste Nieuws article about radicalization of young children, 2017) or "All those racist Belgians, you do not mention those! All those white children name-calling Moroccan children! Hypocrits!" (Anonymous reaction on Het Laatste Nieuws article about radicalization of young children, 2017). The constant challenging and provocations of both sides, leads to cumulating aggressive behavior. From both perspectives, one could say: "suffered enough, time to respond!" (Vlaams Belang, 2017). In order to protect the Western freedom, "Islam needs to be restricted" (Van Grieken [politician] in Brinckman, 2017) and can not be part of Belgian society. Concrete suggestions for this mission are "the closing of all mosques, the closing of borders for immigration, and a loyalty statement signed by all Muslims living in Belgium where they underwrite the western values. If not, they will have to leave the territory" (Van Grieken [politician] in Brinckman, 2017).

Alternative views on radicalization: the counter-frames.

| Frame | Cultural theme | Definition of radicalization | Cause | Consequences | Moral values involved | Possible solutions/actions | Link with extremism and terrorism | Metaphors, choice of vocabulary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Puberty | The phase of becoming an adult | Radicalization is actually a phase of identity searching | A psychological phase leads to experimenting with extreme ideologies | Young people are testing boundaries and provoking on purpose | It is a part of life and a part of growing up | Society needs to stop dramatizing and see the natural process for what it is | In exceptional cases, the young people remain on the extreme path | Wandering young people, brats, sleeper, typical for their age, do not overreact |
| 2 Meaningfulness | Giving purpose to life | Radicalization is actually an intense experience of ideology in a rational world | The fading of religion in the West creates a need for alternatives | Someone chooses to try and live their ideology or religion to the fullest | People have a need for spirituality | People have the right to believe and society needs to accept this fact | This severe lifestyle is aimed at inner experience and not violence | A pure living of religion, trying to lead a good life, Amish, Jehovah's, vegans, all radical |
| 3 Penance | Righting wrongs made in the past | Radicalization is a rebirth, a way to find forgiveness | Missteps fulfill the sinner with guilt and the urge to right these wrongs | A clear black and white interpretation shows the way to living a good life | The importance of taking responsibility and acknowledging mistakes | It is up to the sinner to give the best of himself in order to obtain forgiveness | The ultimate way to be forgiven by God is to die in His name | My sins will be forgiven, one act can erase all sins, martyrdom |
| 4 The freedom fighter | Fighting for the freedom of a country or a people | Radicalization is a sign of courage since someone dares to stand up for the weak | The worldwide geopolitical injustice forces someone to activism | A hero rises that battles for the good cause | Always pursue the good | A strong signal of the international community to help the oppressed and weak | Terrorism is actually a battle for freedom | Shortcut to heroism, idealists, stand up for your rights |

## Puberty

| The phase of becoming an adult |
|---|
| <u>Key message:</u> Radicalization is actually a phase of identity searching, where young people are experimenting with extreme ideologies. They oppose and provoke authority. This is however a normal phase in life, and should not be dramatized. It is part of growing up. |

The first counter-frame is focused on the individual level, just as *A criminal career*. *Puberty* refers to the rebellious phase in life where young people provoke authority. Consequently, *Puberty* results in a definition of radicalization as a temporary stage of identity confusion and psychological search.

Being radical is "a search for identity" (Lesaffer, 2018), "typical for youngsters in their puberty. They are searching" (Rotthier, 2017). They have "the age of looking for a strong engagement" (Van Leeuw [federal attorney] in Mulders, 2016). On top of that, this counter-frame refers to some biological factors as arguments for their perspective:

Radicalization mainly takes place in the developmental phase where young people between approximately 14 to 23 years are forming their identity. Due to brain development and body changes, during this phase in life, young people are struggling to make thought-through choices, they make risky choices, might be emotionally unreasonable and they rapidly feel as if they are being attacked. (GO!, 2015)

It is then the "typical fuckyouism of adolescents, like the punks in the seventies were wearing swastikas, as a provocation" (Hussey [historian] in Arijs, 2017). These young radicalized people are "whipsters that have made a wrong choice" (Justaert, 2017). Radicalistation is seen as a hype, temporary and soon to be forgotten. As figure 2 says: 'Pokémon Go: the new radicalization? "They change jihad as they change shirt"'.

People who think out of the *Puberty* frame, often reflect on their own experiences as a teenager. They say "as a teenager I was just as convinced as they are" (KifKif, 2017); "probably, it is not much more than puberal behavior, similar to how we showed our middle-finger in the seventies" (Vanderstichele, 2017). Hence, as shown in figure 3, it is not necessary to see radicalization as a new or extraordinary phenomenon, but rather as a normal phase in life.

**Figure 3: Visual on the website Herinneringseducatie.be (an initiative of Bijzonder Comité voor Herinneringseducatie, Mechelen)**
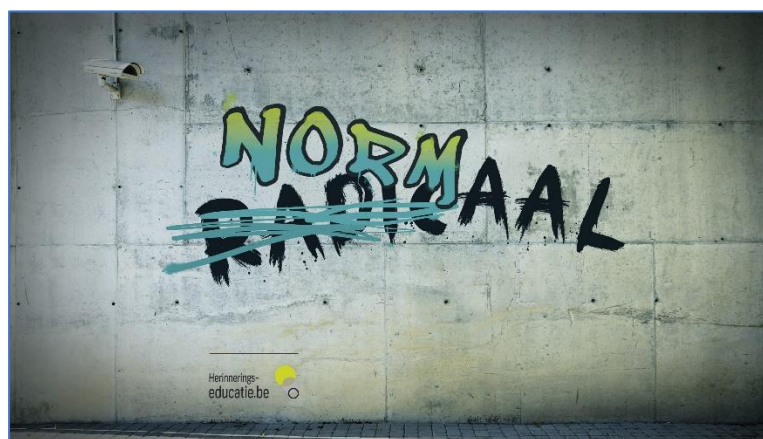


"Extreme ideas, not only based on religion, are part of a learning process that every child goes through" (Benhaddou, 2016), it is based on a "fuck it, why not" feeling (Bilal, 2015). Therefore, seen from the *Puberty* perspective, society needs to de-dramatize and realize that radicalization is temporarily, because "political and religious currents always get a subcultural character on that age, but they also blow over after some time" (Bilal, 2015). Belgian society should just "let them be radical" ("Eén op vijf", 2016).

Meaningfulness

| Giving purpose to life |
| --- |
| <u>Key message:</u> Radicalization is actually an intense experience of ideology, religion or spirituality in a rational world. Western society has banished religion which creates a need for alternatives. A so-called radicalized person is trying to give meaning to live by living an ideology to the fullest. People have the right to experience spirituality, and society needs to accept that. |

Just as *Puberty, Meaningfulness* focuses on the micro-level and takes a closer look at the individual. Also similar to *Puberty, Meaningfulness* believes the word radicalization is used to describe a known and normal process. However, people who think out of the counter-frame *Meaningfulness,* believe that the word radicalization itself has little value, and strive to not use it anymore. Hence, in the frame-matrix, the definition of radicalization starts with: radicalization is *actually*, referring to the true meaning of the process.

From the viewpoint of *Meaningfulness*, radicalization is thus the intense experience of an ideology in a society "where religion is something inherently problematic" (Slaats, 2017) and where "people feel uncomfortable when young Muslims look for their religious roots" (Demir [professor sociology] in Geeraert, 2017). Historically seen, according to this counter-frame, Western societies have lost religion as an explanatory need, but at the same time lost the spiritual dimension of it as well. Considering that an ideology or a religion answers the question "how do I live a good and pure life?" (Deprez, 2017), it is then "warm under the dome of the Koran. As soon as you leave that dome, you enter an empty and cold universe full of doubt" (Lippens & Alde'emeh, 2017a). One "belongs to a club" (Bilal, 2015), and having some simple rules to follow offers some tools to look at life. For example, there are different lectures on "how to be a good Muslim, from cradle to grave" (Safai, 2017), a way to follow a "pure way of life" (Deprez, 2017). Figure 4 for example shows that, to live a different life, aimed towards God, one needs to think in a radically different way.

**Figure 4: Tweet from 'Levenslicht' (@levenslicht), organization aimed at spreading the word of Jesus, on January 22, 2019**

Spirituality can not only be found in religion. In modern Belgian society, for example, veganism can be a source of inspiration to people as well. Giving purpose to life, and trying to better ones life to a higher goal, is not limited to a religious interpretation.

These interpretations "offer a survival kit for postmodern times" (Benzine [political scientist] in Struys, 2017b). According to *Meaningfulness,* 'radicalization' should then not be seen as something threatening, but as a purpose in life. This quote from the material illustrates this further:

Two years ago, I switched schools because I put on a veil. And then, in the new school, a teacher put pressure on me because I started wearing a longer jellabiya, even though I was allowed to do so. I stopped going to school for a year. Psychologically, it was difficult for me. I had to stay in a separate room, so the school administration could check if I was radicalized. This was ridiculous – these were people that have known me all my life! (Young girl from Molenbeek in EIP, 2017)

It is up to society to learn to accept this spiritual part of life, without judgement or fear.

## Penance

| Righting wrongs made in the past |
|---|
| Key message: Radicalization is a rebirth. It is a form of forgiveness for mistakes made in the past. A radicalized person is a sinner, who is fulfilled with guilt and wants to make things right. A clear black and white interpretation helps to stay on the right path. The sinner needs to give the best of himself in order to receive forgiveness. |

The counter-frame *Penance* looks at the individual level as well, but incorporates the viewpoint of a radical individual. *Penance* stands for the effort to make up for past mistakes by undergoing a punishment. In a way, it is trying to find forgiveness with God by atoning. So, looking at radicalization from this perspective, it is "a form of cleansing, saying that 'people with the worst pasts sometimes have the most beautiful futures'" (Hamid, 2017). Past mistakes such as drugs, theft or even murder are a burden of guilt for the individual, who has gained insight in the wrong of his deeds. "Many youngsters who feel regret for having left the right path, are now turning away more and more from society" (El Bachiri, 2017). The solution seems easy: "you are saved from a dip and you have the promise of a sunny adventure" (Lagast, 2017).

An urge to be forgiven drives these persons and so they get involved in a very pure lifestyle in order to set things right. Many "radicalized people are criminals who sought a quick absolution for their sins" (Meeus, 2017). This clear black and white interpretation of religion offers a hold in life and shows which path to follow. For individuals who have slipped of the 'right path' before, these guidelines of religion can be a source of comfort and certainty in a seducing world. Following the thinking pattern of *Penance*, being devoted to religion, is pushing oneself to the extreme to receive this forgiveness. "A fear for the Last Judgement" also plays a role: "to erase these mistakes, we need to give our lives to God" (Lippens & Alde'emeh, 2017a). Hence, radicalization should be seen as something positive, as a guidance for people who have made mistakes before. However, in extremis, radicalized

people can see an act of terrorism as the ultimate way of finding forgiveness with God: "with one act, every sin can be erased" (Vanderstichele, 2017).

An example of *Penance,* outside of the Islamic framework, is the catholic annual ritual of carrying a cross in order for sins to be forgiven.

## The freedom fighter

| Fighting for the freedom of a country or a people |
| --- |
| Key message: Radicalization is a sign of courage, when someone dares to stand up for the weak. The global geopolitical reality shows an unfair treatment of minorities, which invokes feelings of injustice and drives someone to activism. A radicalized person is a hero, and the international community should follow the lead to help the oppressed. |

*The freedom fighter* is the last counter-frame that looks at the micro-level. It is generally juxtaposed with 'the terrorist'. Depending on which side one is on, one is either terrorist or freedom fighter. In the last sense, the person is fighting for freedom for his or her country or people. *The freedom fighter* thus takes into account the broader geopolitical context:

Through Al Jazeera, they are confronted with the war in Gaza on a daily basis. A lot of young Muslims feel more connected to suffering fellow believers than to non-Muslims in Belgium. They want to do something! (Stevens, 2016)

The sister of a radicalized Syria-fighter explains her brothers departure as this: "I think he saw Muslim children die all over the world and wanted revenge. He saw the American bombings in Syria, and he wanted revenge" (Abedi [sister of a terrorist] in De Coninck, 2017). People who leave want to "help brothers and sisters in Syria" (Mazouz [mother of a jihadi] in Carpentier, 2018). Western interventions are viewed, in this counter-frame, as a form of terrorism. These young people "feel more connected to their suffering fellow believers in Syria and Palestine than to non-Muslims in Belgium" (Stevens, 2016); they are "empathic with the targeted people" (Vranckx, 2017). They were leaving to "fight against president Assad. Some left out of displeasure: the West did not give enough support to the Syrian Spring" (de Kerchove [European coordinator for counterterrorism] in "Invloedrijke Belg", 2017). This is not only applied to radicalized people who leave to fight in foreign wars, but also for ones who remain in Belgium. For example: "When Salah Abdeslam is being held in Molenbeek, and stones are being thrown at the police, that does not mean that the entire area is Salafi and shares the ideology, but it is a matter of self-defense" (Mulders, 2016).

Fighting is encouraged and "obituaries of killed jihadi in Syria take the form of propaganda and hymns" (Alde'emeh, 2015). Currently, young people are "assured that the time has come to take up the arms and free Palestine, since Jerusalem is destined to be the new Mecca" ("L'apocalypse", 2015).

A strong and coherent condemnation by the international community of oppression of people and violation of human rights, independent of who the perpetrator is, could, in the long term, reinforce the trust in the Western societies.

## Resilience

| The ability to retake the former shape after being stretched |
| --- |

Key message: Radicalization is the sudden outburst of built-up tension in society and individual. Global, rapid changes put pressure on both individuals and society at large, which results in tensions and stress. The outburst of energy can bring society into a new, more positive place than before. It is important to stimulate mutual rapprochement and flexibility in the search for stability.

The next counter-frame, *Resilience,* aims its lens towards the meso-level, looking at midfield organizations, society and individual at the same time. *Resilience* refers to the ability of retaking the old shape after being stretched or pushed. Seen from this perspective, radicalization is the unexpected, temporary discharge of built-up energy and tensions by equally society and individual. So radicalization is then the outburst of energy, after which society can re-evaluate and retake the old shape.

A unique characteristic of the *Resilience* counter-frame, is that it focuses on two levels: the individual and the societal level. These built-up tensions can thus be present on the micro-level, and consequently have as a result the outburst of energy on an individual level, however, according to *Resilience*, society as well is radicalizing.

*Resilience* emphasizes the fact that "this could be a ticking bomb, but it is not. It does not explode" (Renson, 2017), meaning that internal tensions are being absorbed. People who look at radicalization from this perspective, believe that "they want to look at how they can take these young people seriously in their involvement and indignation, and in the same time help to transform their (self)destructive polarization to a power to change" (Motief, 2017). Hence, "constructive radicalism can then be used to keep the debate sharp" (Benhaddou, 2016). Figure 5 shows a visualization of this idea, announcing an international meeting of radicalization experts on the topic of "resilience tools".

**Figure 5: Tweet from BeSafe (@BeSafeBEL), General Directorate Security & Prevention, Federal Public Service Home Affairs, 2018, March 13**
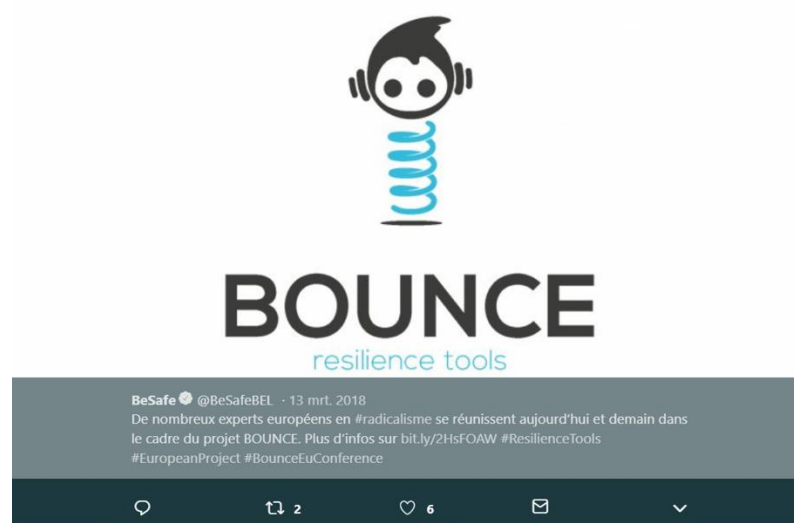
It is a challenge for both society and the individual to overcome struggles and find a way to stimulate mutual rapprochement. In order to achieve this aim, applied to the concrete discussion, "the Islamic identity needs to take shape in harmony with society, and not as a counter-reaction" (Demirkoparan [researcher] in Zuallaert, 2017). Therefore, it would be good that "politicians would unequivocally declare that Islam is part of Belgian society" (Neefs, 2017). A colliding of different lifeworlds is the result.

### Embrace the threat

| To be open for the unknown |
| --- |
| Key message: Radicalization is no longer a threat when one realizes that the evil is only in the mind. Negative thoughts and emotions feed the gap between people, so it is necessary to be open to what invokes fear, in order to let it vanish from society. Everyone acts out of the idea of doing good. |

*Embrace the threat* is another counter-frame that looks at the meso-level. It is also a more thought-provoking counter-frame. *Embrace the threat* stands for the idea of opening your mind for things unknown, things that invoke fear. The basic idea is that things that feel unfamiliar and strange to someone, naturally call for feelings of distrust. This is, however, a normal and natural response. *Embrace the threat* sees these feelings of fear, just as the origins of these feelings – even evil – as part of society. It is thus not the aim to fight against these events, but rather to find a way to accept them and approach the other. People who look through this perspective, feel that, by thinking negatively, and having those thoughts stimulated by a dominant security discourse, the negative spiral continues. The things unknown are a source of fear. When learning how to overcome this natural reaction, and look beyond, fear no longer controls society.

Someone even describes the purest form of being a jihadi as embracing the other:

"A real jihadi is someone who can control his anger in every situation. He does whatever he can to meet the other, even if they are not open to it. Anyone who wants to be closer to God, needs to set a step in the direction of the other" (El Bachiri, 2017).

An example here is "to be able to have mutual understanding for the other persons ideas" (Vergauwen, 2017). This counter-frame dares to look at provoking suggestions: if they want to become a foreign fighter, "what is important is that the reason for their departure is noble" (Van Maele, 2017). It is possible that these ideas call for feelings of resentment in the broader society. However, the perspective of *Embrace the threat* believes that "a condition to be able to live together in a healthy way, is to be able to look each other in the face" (Renson & Kets, 2017). The counter-frame recognizes that it is "a societal challenge to reach the hand to someone who rejects everything you stand for" (Heremans [director of high school in Antwerp] in "Het gaat echt om een gestuurde operatie", 2016). The core idea, and the greatest challenge, of this counterframe is that "terrorists are also people" (van Dongen, 2017).

| Frame | Cultural theme | Definition of radicalization | Cause | Consequences | Moral values involved | Possible solutions/actions | Link with extremism and terrorism | Metaphors, choice of vocabulary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 Resilience | The ability to retake the former shape after being stretched | Radicalization is the sudden outburst of built-up tension in society and individual | The rapid, far-reaching changes pressure society and people | The society and the individual look for a new balance | The belief in the flexibility of society | Stimulating mutual rapprochement and flexibility support the search for balance | The high tensions can give a sudden outburst to violence | We need to be stretchable and resilient, one of the most flexible communities |
| 6 Embrace the threat | To be open for the unknown | Radicalization is no longer a threat when one realizes that the evil is only in the mind | Negative thoughts and emotions feed the gap between people | Being open to the unknown vanishes fear from society | Yin and Yang | People should learn that everyone acts out of the idea of 'doing good' | Evil can also be terrorism, but that as well is part of reality | They are part of us, need to step towards them, they are always reachable |
| 7 The continuum | A continuous collective of values | Radicalization is actually a small part of a variety of ideological interpretations | The extreme ends demand and receive too much attention | Society confuses an ideology or religion with one particular interpretation | More attention should be given to personal interpretations | Other perspectives should dare to demand attention, people should keep an open mind | Violence occurs only very limited in the extreme interpretations | A religious conviction like any other, extreme interpretation of Islam |
| 8 A catalyst | An element that accelerates or starts a process | Radical ideas are fundamentally different than the mainstream view on society | Challenging thoughts thrive a democracy | An in depth discussion on society challenges the current regime | The necessity of contradiction | A democracy needs to give space to radical thoughts to keep the debate alive | If there is no room for debate, violent outliers are possible | Constructively radical, plea for radicalization, radical enlightenment |

## The continuum

> A continuous collective of values
>
> Key message: Radicalization is actually a small part of a variety of ideological interpretations. The extreme ends demand and receive too much attention. Society confuses an ideology or religion with one particular interpretation. More attention should be given to personal interpretations.

The first counter-frame that is situated at macro-level, is labeled *The continuum*. Similar to *Meaningfulness,* the definition of *The continuum* holds the word "actually", stressing the fact that radicalization is the wrong term to use it is a normal and known event.

A continuum stands for a continuous collection of all possibilities or values, with at each end the endpoints or 'extremes'. As seen from this frame, applied to the dataset, "the Islam is not a problem, but the Islam has a problem: Islamism" ("La France d'après", 2015). The Islamism here is then one of the extremes of the continuum. This idea is not restricted to the religion Islam, but is true for other religions or ideologies as well. This citation illustrates this further:

Jihadi-Salafism relates to traditional Salafism just as violent white 'supremacists' like Anders Breivik relate to the classical extreme right or ultra-nationalist ideas of some political parties and anti-Muslim groups in Western European countries (Bilal, 2015, p. 46).

According to *The continuum,* these extreme interpretations demand (and receive) a lot of attention but are no representation for the entire ideology or religion, since "someone who shouts very loudly in an otherwise quiet mass will always get attention" (Debusschere & Delputte, 2017). This perspective raises the question "Are we really going to allow the overmediatization of a phenomenon that only concerns a very small minority of young people?" ("Radicalisme violent", 2015). People should learn to see this divergence:

"I live in Brussels, I have Islamic neighbors. I will not start to look at them differently, now that some crazy people have decided to blow themselves up at an airport or a metro station?" (Mulders, 2016)

The fear of this radical interpretation, which might be connected to the use of violence, and the reaction to generalize this trend, is a natural reaction:

"One falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest. The problem is that, in the past few years, many trees have fallen … And every fallen tree, augments the fear in society. That in the same time the forest keeps growing, remains unnoticed" (Mahdi [politician], 2017)

The "pluralistic Islam" (Justaert, 2017) knows a lot of variation, where the "average Muslim is not interested in implementing Sharia law" (Zuallaert, 2017). Thus, Belgium "needs to make room for the normal Muslim" (Yüksel, 2017). Therefore, society needs to realize that "it is not necessary to be afraid of a Salafist who is being pious in a mosque the entire day and then quietly goes home. You do not need to go fishing in an ocean" (Schoofs & Dijkstra, 2017).

### A catalyst

| An element that accelerates or starts a process |
|---|
| Key message: Radicalization and radical ideas are fundamentally different than the mainstream view on how society should be structured. It is challenging thoughts that make a democracy thrive, so an in depth discussion on society challenges the current regime. There needs to be space for radical thoughts to keep the debate alive. |

A next alternative view on radicalization was labeled *A catalyst*. A catalyst is known to accelerate or put things into motion. Defined from that perspective, radicalization is the expression of fundamentally alternative ideas about society that have the potential to alter that society to its core. Seen from this perspective, "these radical thoughts are necessary in a dynamic democracy in order to evolve. Radicalization is having a clearly different opinion about the way society should be managed" (Interviewee, radicalization expert, 2017). Hence, some people are having a "plea for radicalization" (Jahjah, 2016). To "re-radicalise is then better than to de-radicalize" (Stevens, 2016).

According to this counter-frame, radicalization can be seen in line of extremism and terrorism, as illustrated by figure 6. Radicalization is the phase in which people want to alter society to a sort of utopia, but do not support violence, and are open to debate. Radicalization turns into extremism when there is no dialogue possible, and compromises are off the table. The individual turns into a terrorist when violence appears. So, "in itself, there is nothing wrong with radicalism. Vegans are radical in their life choices. If people do not want to go to a place that serves alcohol and has music, we can call it radical, but it is not forbidden" (Van Den Broeck, 2017).

It is the character of "a democracy to be stretchable enough to cope with ideas that challenge the mainstream opinions" (Benhaddou, 2016). As this person puts it:

I also want to emphasize that radicalism in itself is no societal problem. Belgium was founded by a group of radicalized lawyers of Brussels and Liège. Vegetarians, protestants and human rights activists are all civilians that have been radicalized in some way. Society needs more of those radicals. (Zuallaert & Van Humbeeck, 2016)

Hence, "renewal is always a question of individuals who take the lead, and people who are searching that use these new voices as a compass. We can not let that disappear" ("Oproep Yamila Idrissi", 2017). In order not to let radicalism turn into extremism and terrorism, it

remains necessary to give room to these voices, because "if Salafism or extreme-right are the only alternatives for the status quo, you chase people into extremism" (Jahjah in "Huis van Hiele", 2107). After all, "radicalism, extremism and violent extremism are of all time, and are present in almost every religion and political ideology" (Bilal, 2015).

**Figure 6: "Radicalist, extremist, terrorist" in the file "What is radicalization" retrieved on the website of Klasse, an education magazine (www.klasse.be)**



**Radicalist**
wil wereld
veranderen

compromisbereid

open voor nuance

**Extremist**
wil wereld
veranderen

niet
compromisbereid

geen dialoog

**Terrorist**
wil wereld
veranderen

niet
compromisbereid

gewelddadig

**Conclusion**

The overview of frames and counter-frames offer an opportunity for self-assessment, to reflect on one's own framing preferences, as well as making an honest contemplation of what frame(s) lie(s) closest to one's own definition of radicalization. Gaining insight in one's own framing, and of other stakeholders, creates a space for mutual understanding. The overview shows the reasoning behind a frame, which can make it easier to show empathy for other perspectives.

The choice for a certain frame in a societal sensitive matter such as radicalization, entails an ideological component. As Entman (1991) put forward, a frame makes certain aspects more or less salient. Attention is given to selected parts of reality. The authors recommend using the frames and counter-frames *in combination*. The frames can draw attention to the issue of radicalization, whereas the counter-frames offer an alternative perspective. In this overview, certain counter-frames are more dedramatizing than deproblematizing. By putting radicalization in a larger context, they want to show that panic (for example, in the *Virus* frame) is uncalled for. *Puberty* is one of those counter-frames. Radicalization is still seen as a difficult episode in life, but still a phase that will pass. *The continuum* is somewhat different. Here, radicalization is seen as a problem, as an unwanted part of religion or ideology, however as one small minority and not a dominant group.

The radicalization debate is polarized and emotional, as a consequence of the terrorist attacks in Brussels (2016) and Paris (2015). Together with the departed Syria fighters, these events have left wounds in the collective society. Discussions on the topic soon lead to emotional reactions. A way to address this issue, is to make use of the suggested combination of frames and counter-frames as mentioned above. Fear and anger are part of the social reality, by ignoring these feelings and focusing solely on deproblematizing counter-frames, one might quickly lose their conversation partner.

Besides this emotionality, the radicalization debate is intertwined with broader discussion on multicultural society in Belgium. The question on the role of religion in a secular environment, or the discrimination of people with a migration background all influence the social construction of radicalization.

To identify *all* frames and counter-frames turned out to be a challenging exercise. Considering the lack of consensus on the one hand, if radicalization is a real phenomenon, and on the other hand, if it is indeed reality, then what *is* radicalization? The presented disentanglement of these definitions can be used as a tool towards better communication on radicalization.