

# ***PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM: EXPERIENCES ON THE FIELD***

**Stresa, 27 novembre 2019**

**Cristina Caparesi**

**UAM**  
Universidad Autónoma  
de Madrid

**Ψ** Facultad de  
Psicología

  
Ordine degli Psicologi  
del Friuli Venezia Giulia

  
ANPE

  
**RAN**   
EXIT



# PREMISE

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION

# PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT RADICALIZATION

- Psychology in Italy is a profession that is ruled and protected by the State Order through the Law 56/89.
- It is a science that studies human behavior, considered as a set of mental, affective and relational processes of the person with the aim of promoting the improvement of the quality of life. Psychology bases its results on scientific research.
- *L.56 / 89 Article 1. Definition of the profession of psychologist*  
*1. The profession of psychologist includes the use of cognitive and interventional tools for prevention, diagnosis, habilitation-rehabilitation activities and psychological support aimed at the person, the group, social organizations and communities. It also includes experimentation, research and teaching activities in this area*



# PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT RADICALIZATION

- The role of the psychologist is to facilitate change, strengthening individual or collective resources, supporting people, couples, families and organizations in the various phases of development and well-being.
- Recalling the definition of C. Allen Charles E. Allen, that has been adopted in the meeting, which defines radicalization as "the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change", a psychologist, who has developed specific skills, is qualified to act professionally when a change in the subject's behavior is required (which is usually called disempowering) and / or understand the behavior of the radicalized subject, as a result from mental, affective and relational processes, to facilitate disengagement.



# PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT RADICALIZATION

- In case of a mental disorder that directly or indirectly contributes to the mobilization of the subject towards a violent radicalization, a psychiatrist or neuropsychiatrist (and not the psychologist only) would be better fit because in these cases it is necessary to prescribe drugs to rebalance the chemical imbalances that were created in the brain of the suffering person. The psychiatrist takes on an asymmetrical behavior typical of the doctor-patient.
- The psychologist does not prescribe drugs, but uses interview, test, empathic support, psychoeducational activities as tools with the aim of reactivating the resources, the ability to choose, the positive emotions of the patient.
- Professional interventions that involve changing the behavior of a subject (anyone can in fact be the agent / driver of change even in a non-specific and non-professional sense) are specific responsibility of the psychologist.



# PSYCHOLOGY AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT RADICALIZATION

- In collaboration with professionals from other disciplines, the psychologist exercises full professional autonomy in respect of other people's skills. In collaboration with other professionals, therefore, the psychologist safeguards his autonomy in the choice of methods, techniques and psychological tools, as well as their use; it is therefore responsible for their application and use, for the results, for the evaluations and for the interpretations that it derives (Ethical Code, art. 6).
- With reference to the prevention of violent radicalization, the psychologist does not have the exclusive right to intervene, as other professional figures may be necessary (eg. Social worker, educator, teacher, religious figures in the case of jihadist radicalization) but the psychologist is one of those professional figures with a specific responsibility given by the Italian Law regarding the activation of change processes.





# INTRODUCTION

THE FIL ROUGE OF COERCIVE PERSUASION

# THE FIL ROUGE ON COERCION PERSUASION

- My academic and professional life has been spent in the study of coercive persuasion operated by groups of various types (also known as psychological group abuse). With such a term we mean those strategies used to control and ensure loyalty and group dependency by the members of a group. It can also be understood as a continued interaction associated with recruiting and maintaining followers (Langone & Chambers, 1991).
- This process involves a series of behaviors that combine typical forms of social influence and persuasion and those of the field of aggression (from undue influence, to interpersonal control, up to coercion and abuse).





# THE FIL ROUGE ON COERCION PERSUASION

Among the areas of my experience:

- New Religious Movements (particularly those of Christian origin and human potential, and partly of magical-esoteric type)
- Conflict resolution
- Joining and leaving ideological-political-religious groups
- Strategies of coercive persuasion

I am a psychologist and a doctor in Education and I consider myself a frontier figure between theory and professional practice with a specific choice of field: psychosocial well-being and the protection of vulnerable sections of the population (eg minors, people with specific disabilities, adults in particular moments of transition).



## STUDY CENTER

- I am the Italian correspondent for the *International Cultic Studies Association*, ex American Family Foundation, international organization that since 40 years develops studies and professional practice on cultic issues for 1st and 2° generations (and over)

<https://www.icsahome.com/>

- In Europe I am part of the RAN-EXIT group of the Radicalisation Awareness Network , since 2012. RAN is a strategy of the European Commission and is committed to interventions and exit strategies from extremist groups.

[https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/about-ran/ran-exit\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-exit_en)



# MY PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

- Psychosocial research: *Group Psychological Abuse applied to violent and non violent Islamist groups*, PhD in Clinical and Health Psychology, Autonomous University of Madrid
- *The research objectives are:*
  - 1) *Recruitment in the Islamist radicalization make use of psychological abuse strategies to create group dependency.*
  - 2) *Identify group psychological strategies that guide radicalization during the phases of pre-radicalization, recruitment, involvement (Horgan, 2009).*
  - 3) *Confirm that group psychological abuse strategies will hinder the process of detachment of the member from the group and affect his/her psychological well-being.*
  - 4) *Propose an early approach to hinder the process of recruitment*



# METHODOLOGY: CONSTANT COMPARATIVE METHOD

- Sampling:

13 people with much knowledge of the radical islamist realities from different perspectives: 10 cases of former members of Islamist Sunni radical violent/non-violent groups with maximum diversity of origins such as age, sex and social condition + 3 exceptional cases

- Instrument of research

1. Semi-structured interviews, taped and transcribed through the norms of transcription laid down by Jefferson (1984)
2. Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis Melisaratos, 1983; De Leo, Frisoni, Rozzini, Trabucchi, 1993).
3. Psychological abuse scale applied to groups (Almendros, C., Gámez-Guadix, M., Carrobbles, J.A., & Rodríguez-Carballeira, A.) (2011).

Data analysis

NVIVO 12 Plus





# FACILITATING EXITING FROM GROUPS THAT USE COERCIVE PERSUASION

The experience in Friuli Venezia Giulia (northern-East Italy)

## A HELPDESK AGAINST COERCIVE CONTROL

To support the rights of people vulnerable to coercive persuasion, with others I have funded the following working groups.

- In 2004 SOS Abusi Psicologici charity association that since its start has been handling an helping center for victims of extremist groups (religious and non religious) in Udine. The center provides free psychological, psychiatric and legal counseling to families and former members of New Religious Movements. Since 2018 the association handles a Center to prevent harassment at work in Gorizia <http://www.sosabusipsicologici.it/>.
- In 2012, thanks to the solicitation to politics made primarily by our center, the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region issued the Regional Law 11/2012 (RULES FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE RIGHTS OF THE PERSON AND THE FULL INTELLECTUAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MORAL FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL) which supports activities aimed at the recovery of people who declare they have been victims of coercive persuasion by groups. The Center of Udine is one of the few existing in Italy where it is possible to find specialized professional help of this kind free of charge.

## MORE HELPDESKS

- In 2009 we funded the association Educaforum aps that since 2017 handles a Center to prevent harassment at work in Udine <https://www.educaforum.biz/> .
- In 2011, we created the social cooperative EXIT SCS <https://exitscs.it/> that we used to handle the Center to prevent harassment at work in Udine from 2011 to 2017. The cooperative is also part of the RAN-EXIT since 2012 as a good Italian practice for leaving extremist groups.

See the following [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/node/7414\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/node/7414_en)



## SUPPORT TO FAMILIES

- The requests that families bring are connected with different problems, mostly families ask:
  - ❑ How to take a loved one out of a group (mostly NRMs);
  - ❑ What to do in cases of litigation for the custody or the education of their children;
  - ❑ Being informed if the NRM is a cult
  - ❑ What to do with a loved one in a NMR/cult.
- The regional law 11/2012 also provides free legal or psychotherapeutic assistance for the victim of a cult, but requires compliance with certain criteria, including a favorable opinion of the Center.





# THE BENEFIT OF THE REGIONAL LAW IN HELPING EXITING GROUPS/CULTS

- The silent abuses that are sometimes committed in some NRMs, subdued and hardly visible by the external society and often not even recognized by the people who have undergone them if not after some time, have generally been excluded from a specific protection (only in 2006 in Italy it was constituted the Anticult Squad that depends from the Interior Ministry and deals with the repression of the phenomenon).
- The various legislative bills that have been proposed since 2011 have been an attempt to fill the legislative gap left by the abrogation of the *mind control crime* by the Constitutional Court in 1981 (known as brainwashing disputes). None of these have succeeded with a legislation action against group psychological abuse that is in fact experienced by individuals who sometimes live in conditions of slavery, particularly serious if they are minors or individuals in critical situations.
- The L.R. 11/2012 of FVG, aiming at preventing group psychological abuse, has given dignity to the victim, pending greater political will and clearer definitions of the phenomenon

# DEPROGRAMMING FROM CULTS AND DERADICALIZATION: WHAT HAVE IN COMMON

- Between the 1970s and 1980s in the United States, as a reaction to the phenomenon of snapping (from one day to another, young people were leaving their homes to join eastern or alternative groups), some parents commissioned deprogrammers to take their own children by force, bring them to secret places, and subject them to a “re-brainwashing” that, besides not producing always the desired results, was definitely illegal. In Italy perhaps we are aware of a case. The method was replaced by *exit counseling*.
- It is absolutely inappropriate to compare the deprogramming in cults with deradicalization because deprogramming, which has not been done in Western democracies for years, is illegal in that could involve kidnapping and other possible crimes.
- Deradicalization, a term with different meanings, is the attempt to promote an ideological and / or behavioral change, but it does not imply violence.



Cristina Caparesi, 27 novembre 2019



## MY EXPERIENCE WITH CASES OF DERADICALIZATION IN ITALY

# MY EXPERIENCE OF DERADICALIZATION WITH SOME COURTS

- In the case of radicalization in violent extremist groups, the danger of the mobilization of a minor, involves the application of different preventive measures.

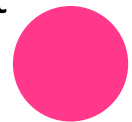
In the case I describe in this article "An innovative methodology for the de-radicalization in the juvenile penal process: the experience of Trieste" that can be read below at the link, a re-educational program was requested during the preliminary investigation phase:

<https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Gnosis-1-2019-Caparesi-Tamborini.pdf>



# MY EXPERIENCE OF DERADICALIZATION WITH SOME COURTS

- In this case of a minor accused of incitement to commit a crime for spreading Jihadi information (Caparesi, 2019), the Prosecution required the realization of a re-educational program to be implemented in the immediate at the light of the personality and psychological and cultural conditions of the minor; the identification of the causes; the level of commitment of the extremist ideology.
- The targeted intervention tailored on the individual, was possible after evaluating all the areas involved (that is not only his ideology, but also psychosocial, relational, individual, motivational, ideological, behavioral elements) included risk and protective factors, and obstacles to the process. Only after an overall evaluation of the results obtained was possible to tailor a program for the minor.
- As can be easily understood, this is a professional intervention of the psychologist who will decide in full autonomy, but in agreement with the Public Prosecutor's Office, which other professional figures to insert (in this specific case, another psychotherapist colleague and an Islamic mentor). In the event of a trial, the course continued in the manner prescribed by law.



## CASE SUPERVISION

- In other cases, there has been a request for supervision by public and private bodies to plan interventions that could facilitate preventive measures in subjects that had showed typical characteristics of radicalization in the face of specific critical issues (for example in cases of mental disorder or conditions of other vulnerabilities, such as assisted domestic violence).
- The EXIT SCS working group has collaborated with these organizations with specialist support aimed at providing guidance to the actors involved in daily action through psychological, pedagogical and psychiatric counseling.



## SECONDARY PREVENTION AND THE TERRITORY

- Secondary prevention that is carried out in these cases requires a common language. This is why we had the idea of forming local operators (teachers, social workers, psychologists, educators) for developing specific skills.
- After all it appears much more sustainable, from an economic point of view, to provide skills to professionals already included in the health, social assistance or justice system.
- Without of course neglecting primary prevention, specific knowledge for teacher and other educational agencies to improve cooperation in cases of early interventions.



Cristina Caparesi, 27 novembre 2019



# BEST PRACTICES

## TRAINING TEACHERS



## TRAINING TEACHERS

- In the last 2 years we have therefore promoted a 24-hours first level course entitled “A didactics for preventing violent radicalization” for teachers, school administrators, teachers for adults in collaboration with Regional Scholastic Offices, involving more than 300 teachers.
- The course was developed around three specific themes:
  - ✓ Recruitment in violent extremism from a psychosocial perspective;
  - ✓ Violent radicalization models and the identification of soft signals;
  - ✓ The management of polarizations in the classroom
- The methodology alternated frontal teaching, role playing and case studies in order to create a shared common language.



## IN-DEPHTS REQUESTS

- We have collected over 300 questionnaires in which teachers have not only self-assessed their own learning, but have also expressed an evaluation on the course. Analyzing the questionnaires, we gathered more needs expressed by the teachers.
- We have designed the 2<sup>nd</sup> level, a new 24 hrs course, on the base of the needs expressed by the teachers. The new course deals with the development of operational guidelines, specific prevention activities, online radicalization prevention kit, etc.



## PLATFORM SOFIA

At the moment the following courses have been added to the Platform Sofia (MIUR- Direttiva Ministeriale 170/2016), and are waiting for evaluation:

- A didactics for preventing violent radicalisation- 1st level
- A didactics for preventing violent radicalisation- 2nd level
- Interventions to prevent violent radicalization for teachers employed in literacy courses to foreigners
- Guidelines for the management of violent radicalization prevention programs at school (School directors, etc.)



# PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Know VERLT and the ways of prevention programs activated in Europe
- Know the online and offline (grooming) recruitment mechanisms
- Recognize the risk and protective factors of vulnerable individuals
- Knowing how to identify the role of radical narratives
- Knowing how to handle sensitive and polarizing topics in the classroom
- Know the risk indicators and how these can impact on mobilization towards violent radicalization
- Know the impact of specific vulnerabilities to mobilization in violent radicalization



## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Know the multidisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approach and the guidelines for intervention.
- Know how to intervene in early approaches through shared guidelines
- Know the programs of prevention and fight against violent radicalization evaluated by the scientific literature as effective and sustainable
- Acquire skills for the development of preventive activities
- Acquire useful tools for planning interventions and preventive programs
- Know the international literature, recommendations and best practices in the preventive field
- Acquire useful tools for assessing the effectiveness of preventive interventions at school





# BEST PRACTICES

TRAINING IN A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ENVIRONMENT

# TRAINING IN A MULTIACTORIAL PERSPECTIV: THE CRAGIPPE PROJECT

- The annual program for Immigration in 2017 (DGR n. 1391 del 0.07.2017) in Region Friuli Venezia Giulia, through action 16, “Intercultural projects”, which took place in 2018, included among the three diverse lines of the public tender **information on the phenomenon of radicalization and the development of intercultural dialogue**

- <https://www.cragippe.it/>

Progetto realizzato con il contributo di

REGIONE AUTONOMA  
FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA

SNS  
SISTEMI  
SOLUZIONI

EDUCA  
FORUM

**“ PROGETTO CRAGIPPE:  
LA PAROLA  
AI PROTAGONISTI ”**

# crag ppe

**SABATO 13 OTTOBRE 2018**  
Presso Sala Pasolini Via Sabbadini 31, Udine

**8.45 - 9.00** Registrazione  
Modera Avv. Teresa DENNETTA

**9.00 - 9.30** Saluti istituzionali  
Assessore Pierpaolo ROBERTI, Assessore alle autonomie locali, sicurezza, immigrazione, politiche comunitarie e corregionali all'estero, Regione FVG  
Questore di Udine dott. Claudio CRACOVIA

**9.30 - 10.00** Il progetto CRAGIPPE in breve  
Cristina Caparesi, coordinatrice

**10.00 - 11.00** L'approccio alla deradicalizzazione (traduzione dall'inglese)  
Demar MULBOCUS, coordinatore programma Prevent, Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, Home Office interventionist provider

**11.00 - 11.20** Coffee break presso Bar Ka'tor

**11.20 - 12.40** Formare al riconoscimento dei segnali:  
i corsi “Prevenire e contrastare la radicalizzazione estremista violenta” I e II  
Cristina CAPARESI, psicologa e pedagoga

La prevenzione inizia da piccoli. Esperienze di life skills  
Marzia RIONDATO, educatrice

Il protagonismo dei pre-adolescenti: a scuola di empowerment  
Federica RIZZI e Elia PERESSINI, educatori

Donne ed empowerment  
Federica RIZZI, educatrice

La prevenzione secondaria per adolescenti e giovani  
Cristina CAPARESI, e Elisa MATTIUSI, psichiatra

**12.40 - 12.50** Testimonianze dei partecipanti

**12.50 - 13.00** Conclusioni  
Teresa DENNETTA, avvocato

Si rilascia attestato di partecipazione  
Capienza: 55 persone.  
In considerazione dei posti limitati, si prega di confermare la propria presenza scrivendo una mail a: [amministrazione@educforum.biz](mailto:amministrazione@educforum.biz)

[www.cragippe.it](http://www.cragippe.it)

Cristina Caparesi, 27 novembre 2019

## ACTION 2

### PUBLIC INFORMATION ON VIOLENT RADICALISATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Two 26-hour courses were provided from 7 February to 23 June 2018, entitled "Preventing and combating violent extremist radicalization" and concluded with a final evaluation . The courses were attended by 80 professionals: social workers, psychologists, educators, law enforcement officers (Police, Carabinieri), lawyers. The course was accredited by the Social Workers Professional Association of FVG.





## MORE ACTIONS

- The project included more actions, such as:
  - Course on Life Skills realized at Punto Luce in rete (Tiepolo School) for a total of 15 hrs for 25 minors
  - An empowerment training for 35 pre-adolescents
  - An empowerment training for 15 women
  - An empowerment training for 30 youngsters in cooperation with one of the Muslim communities in Udine

The courses were attended by a mixed group of 2nd generation immigrants and autochthonous young people that cooperated to the video «*Progetto Cragippe: la parola ai protagonisti*».





## PROJECTS ABOUT TO START

## DECRETO 2964/AAL DEL 2/10/2019

- In the framework of the 2019 annual immigration program, the Regional Administration of the FVG has started intervention 1.1: "Contrast of the phenomenon of radicalization in FVG" with the following objectives:
  - ❑ In the short term: identify and fund pilot projects to implement training courses in the penitentiary, education, for public administration operators;
  - ❑ In the long run: the creation of an inter-institutional table to define a single regional strategy aimed at clearly identifying the political objectives and the concrete measures to achieve them.



## DECRETO 2964/AAL DEL 2/10/2019

The directives pursued by the call were:

- The promotion of knowledge and information exchange;
- Networking to facilitate information exchange;
- The specific training (to provide operators with tools for professionals, to know how to collect correct observations and signs of radicalization)
- Preparation for specific web pages



# PRICEV PROJECT- AN INTEGRATED PROJECT AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN FVG

The project which is about to start was presented by SOS Psychological Abuses, in collaboration with other partners, came first in the rank. The following activities are about to start:

5 basic 24-hour courses, one of which is specific for schools

a 2nd level course for the students of the Cragippe project

2 courses of 20 hours for operators that work in asylum seekers premises

2 primary prevention projects for children aged 11-14 years and 15-26 attending communities with high migratory density

1 training course for parents

6 networking meetings

The Municipality and the Udine Police Headquarters have already joined the project, 2 Comprehensive Institutes, and other institutions.



## IN CONCLUSION

- Radicalization, in the form specified by the meeting, VERLT (Violent Extremism Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism), shows deviant traits that may require specific educational, rehabilitative, re-socializing or therapeutic measures.
- It is essential that professionals involved in implementing these measures and operating in the social, health, education, justice systems, are trained to recognize this specific form of deviance and are able to draw on personal resources , socio-cultural, operational, guidelines, to favor the re-socialization of the subject.
- Italy, despite the fact of lagging behind other European countries and not having a national strategy on VERLT, is called to reflect on the ways to bridge the gap and put social actors in a position to know how to act.



## IN CONCLUSION

- In this regard it seems very useful that meetings like the one in Stresa may in the future involve professional associations that must be sensitized to the phenomenon, in order to recognize it in their daily practice. If we want to push the reflection beyond the mere declarations, we cannot exclude the professionals who are in fact already engaged in promoting the re-education and socialization of deviant subjects (eg social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, pedagogists, educators).
- Professional organization must promote training among their members, enabling them to operate. Only by reflecting in the practical level good practices could emerge in the hope that they will eventually become daily practices for everyone.



## PUBLICATIONS

- Caparesi C. (2000). *Educazione e socializzazione in the Family*, tesi di laurea in metodologia della ricerca pedagogica, Università degli Studi di Trieste, Scienze dell'Educazione.
- Caparesi C., Di Fiorino M., e Kent A.S. (2002). *Costretti ad amare. Saggi sui Bambini di Dio/The Family*. Forte dei Marmi: Centro Studi Psichiatria e Territorio.
- Caparesi, C. (2007). *Forme di violenza nella setta Orizzonti Nuovi: una ricerca sulle fonti interne*. Studi su Aggressività e Suicidio. 9, 26-36.
- Caparesi, C. (2009). *Le terapie energetiche in provincia di Udine: tra spiritualità e ricerca di benessere*. Tesi del corso di alta formazione in Sociologia della salute e medicine non convenzionali, Università degli studi di Bologna, Dipartimento di Sociologia.





## PUBLICATIONS

- Caparesi C. (2010). *Il controllo mentale nella sindrome di alienazione parentale*, tesi di Master in mediazione familiare, Università degli studi di Verona, Scienze della Formazione.
- Caparesi C. (2012). *Relazioni amorose: tra manipolazione e narcisismo* in De Nardi F., Scardigno R. (a cura di) "L'io, l'altro, Dio. Religiosità e narcisismo". Roma: Aracne Editrice, 2012.
- Caparesi C. (2016). *La valutazione dell'abuso psicologico in ex membri di gruppi manipolativi*, tesi di Laurea Magistrale in Psicologia, metodologia della ricerca psicosociale, Università degli studi di Trieste.
- Millar P., Caparesi, C.(2017). *Conflict resolution for families in distress* in Goldberg, L., Goldberg, W., Henri, R., Langone, M. (2017) "Cult recovery: a clinician guide", ICSA, Florida.



## PUBLICATIONS

- Caparesi, C. (2018). “Proposte per interventi mirati alla deradicalizzazione” in Gnosis, Rivista Italiana di Intelligence “Deradicalizzazione”, Roma.
- Caparesi, C., Tamborini, L. (2019). “Una metodologia innovativa per la deradicalizzazione nel processo penale minorile: l’esperienza di Trieste” in Gnosis, Rivista Italiana di Intelligence, Roma.
- Caparesi C. (2019). “Prevenzione ai radicalismi: tra prospettive e buone pratiche” in M.Bombardieri, M.C.Giorda, S.Hejazi “Capire l’Islam, mito o realtà”, Scholé, Morcelliana, Brescia.

