



ONCE A JIHADIST, ALWAYS A JIHADIST?

A Deradicalization Program
Seen from the Inside

Marc HECKER

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Focus stratégique

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Abstract

France has traditionally taken a security-based approach to the fight against terror. It was a latecomer to the field of radicalization prevention and the establishment of disengagement programs aimed at jihadists. It only started to think seriously about the issue in 2013 and its first attempts involved certain irregularities. For that reason, deradicalization suffers from a persistent bad reputation in France. The disengagement and reintegration programs established since 2016—RIVE from 2016 until 2018 and PAIRS, which started in 2018 and is still running—have operated behind closed doors. Discreetness was preferred to overcommunication. This study—the result of a long-term field survey of the staff, participants, and partners of PAIRS—opens the black box of disengagement methods. It offers a nuanced assessment of these initiatives, which, after four years of operations, have produced reassuring results: among the dozens of terrorist offenders who have participated in RIVE and PAIRS in open custody, none have reoffended.

Résumé

La France a traditionnellement une approche sécuritaire de la lutte contre le terrorisme. Elle s'est engagée tardivement dans la prévention de la radicalisation et la mise en place de programmes de désengagement dédiés aux djihadistes. La réflexion n'a véritablement commencé qu'en 2013 et les premières expériences ont conduit à certaines dérives. Ainsi, la déradicalisation pâtit dans ce pays d'une mauvaise réputation tenace. Les programmes de désengagement et de réinsertion mis en œuvre depuis 2016 – RIVE jusqu'en 2018 puis PAIRS jusqu'à présent – se sont déroulés à l'abri des regards. Le travail discret a été préféré à la communication à outrance. Cette étude – fruit d'une longue enquête de terrain auprès des équipes, bénéficiaires et partenaires de PAIRS – ouvre la boîte noire des méthodes de désengagement. Elle dresse un bilan nuancé de ces dispositifs qui, après quatre ans d'expérimentation, affichent un résultat rassurant : parmi les dizaines de condamnés pour faits de terrorisme suivis par RIVE et PAIRS en milieu ouvert, aucun n'a récidivé.

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Introduction

“Once a jihadist, always a jihadist!”¹ was how one counterterrorism police officer reacted to the mention of deradicalization programs. Skepticism toward such programs is widespread in the key ministries of state. A senior official in the Ministry of the Interior in Paris told me, “I do not believe in deradicalization”, and described disengagement initiatives as a waste of public money.²

Many researchers and journalists working in the field are also wary of such initiatives. In his book *Le jihadisme français*, for example, Hugo Micheron talks about “the pipe dream of targeted ‘deradicalization’ methods”.³ David Thomson, author of two acclaimed books on French jihadists in Syria,⁴ has used the same term: in an interview with *Le Figaro*, he claimed that “institutional deradicalization is a pipe dream. [...] There is no such thing as state deradicalization. Many people have pretended otherwise for political or mercenary reasons. Hundreds of thousands of euros of public subsidies have been poured in secret into the pockets of out-and-out swindlers”.⁵

I will come back later to the scandals that have dogged the establishment of a deradicalization—or more precisely disengagement—policy in France. In any case, the authorities have decided that individual instances of wrongdoing should not be used to tarnish the practice of disengagement itself. The Plan national de prévention de la radicalisation (PNPR, National Plan to Prevent Radicalization) of February 2018 confirms the government’s desire to increase the number of “centers for the individualized handling of radicalized persons or those in the process of

1. Informal conversation with a counterterrorism police officer, November 2017.

2. Informal conversation with a senior official at the Ministry of the Interior, June 2019.

3. H. Micheron, *Le jihadisme français. Quartiers, Syrie, prisons*, Paris: Gallimard, 2020, p. 373. Translator’s note: Our translation. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of cited foreign language material in this report are our own.

4. D. Thomson, *Les Français jihadistes*, Paris: Les Arènes, 2014 and *The Returned: They Left to Wage Jihad, Now They’re Back*, trans. G. Flanders, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018 (originally published in French as *Les Revenants: Ils étaient partis faire le jihad, ils sont de retour en France*, Paris: Seuil/Les Jours, 2016).

5. A. Devecchio, “David Thomson: ‘Il est impossible de s’assurer de la sincérité du repentir d’un djihadiste’”, *Le Figaro*, January 25, 2018.

becoming radicalized”.⁶ At the time the plan was published, a trial center had been operating in Paris for a year and a half: the Recherche et Intervention sur les Violences Extrémistes (RIVE, Research and Intervention on Violent Extremism) initiative.

In summer 2018, the public contract for the establishment of this initiative was reopened with new specifications. Groupe SOS won all four lots and opened the “Programme d’Accompagnement Individualisé et de Réaffiliation Sociale” (PAIRS, Individualized Support and Social Reaffiliation Programs) in Paris, Marseille, Lyon, and Lille between October 2018 and October 2019. The new public contract included a provision requiring independent evaluation. The Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri, French Institute of International Relations) was appointed to perform the evaluation, which took place from August 2019 to October 2020.

The evaluation involved several stages. First, I carried out a literature review with a focus on studies of disengagement programs, evaluations of similar initiatives, and research into the problem of terrorist recidivism. Next, exploratory interviews were held with terrorism experts and researchers in other countries who had conducted similar evaluations. These conversations did not fill me with optimism: the interviewees emphasized the multiple obstacles to accurate measurement of the impact of disengagement initiatives (including problems accessing the data, not enough time having elapsed to be able to make an informed assessment, the absence of a “control group”, and so on). As one Dutch evaluator said, “How can you measure the efficacy of deradicalization programs? It’s a never-ending debate. We can never know what would have happened if the individuals had not participated in the program”.⁷ A German researcher stressed that “evaluating the impact is very difficult, if not impossible”,⁸ and advised me to limit my study to an evaluation of the process. The differences between these types of evaluation will be discussed in more detail further on.

Finally, around sixty interviews were conducted with stakeholders in PAIRS: directors, employees, participants, institutional partners, and so on. I also carried out observations in order to better understand the support

6. Measure 58 of the Plan national de prévention de la radicalisation issued on February 23, 2018. Translator’s note: English wording sourced from the English version of this document, available at: www.cipdr.gouv.fr.

7. Telephone interview with the evaluator of a Dutch disengagement program, September 19, 2019.

8. Telephone interview with the evaluator of a German radicalization prevention program, September 27, 2019.

offered to people under judicial control.⁹ Moreover, I was able to consult various internal documents. Broadly speaking, Groupe SOS and the national prison administration were very cooperative.

My fieldwork was affected by exceptional circumstances. First, the strikes at the end of 2019 disrupted the program's work and made arranging interviews more complicated. Second, the lockdown measures put in place to try to curb the COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancelation of a research trip. The interviews due to take place on that trip were conducted by telephone. In the end, I was only able to visit three of the four centers.

The aim of this study is above all to open the black box of disengagement programs. These sorts of initiative are poorly understood, and their bad reputation may be due in part to the halo of secrecy that surrounds them. The professionals I met did not claim to have a miracle cure for radicalization. On the whole, they were modest and dedicated to their work. They trusted me, sharing their doubts and struggles. I am deeply grateful to them and, in return, I will respect the only condition they imposed upon me: their anonymity.

9. Translator's note: Here and throughout the text, "under judicial control" is our translation of the French phrase "placées sous main de justice", which applies to individuals who, while not currently in prison, are subject to judicial supervision.

Review of the literature on deradicalization and disengagement

The volume of research into radicalization increased enormously after the attacks in London in 2005, and again in 2014, the year in which ISIS announced the “restoration of the caliphate” and the first attack was carried out in a Western country by one of its members.¹⁰ The explosion of publications was driven by researchers from all over the world and specialists of numerous disciplines. Judging by the number of doctoral dissertations currently being written about the topic, the trend is still going strong.¹¹ Several reviews of the literature on radicalization,¹² counter-radicalization,¹³ and the evaluation of the results of deradicalization programs¹⁴ have already been published. Bibliographies comprising dozens of pages have been compiled.¹⁵ The goal here is not to present an exhaustive overview of this mass of publications, but to point out some that proved particularly useful when preparing this study of the PAIRS initiative.

10. X. Crettiez, “Penser la radicalisation. Une sociologie processuelle des variables de l’engagement violent”, *Revue française de science politique*, Vol. 66, No. 5, 2016, pp. 709-727.

11. For France, the national register of doctoral dissertations can be viewed at www.theses.fr. Searching for “radicalisation” in the site’s search function produces a list of all completed and ongoing dissertations on the subject.

12. See for example R. Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories”, *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2011, pp. 7-36; N. Campelo *et. al.*, “Who Are The European Youths Willing to Engage in Radicalisation? A Multidisciplinary Review of Their Psychological and Social Profiles”, *European Psychiatry*, Vol. 52, 2018, pp. 1-14.

13. See for example W. Stephens, S. Sieckelink and H. Boutellier, “Preventing Violent Extremism: A Review of the Literature”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, January 2019; S. Windish *et al.*, “Disengagement from Ideologically-Based and Violent Organizations. A Systematic Review of the Literature”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, Vol. 9, Winter 2015-2016.

14. A. R. Feddes and M. Gallucci, “A Literature Review on Methodology used in Evaluating Effects of Preventive and De-radicalisation Interventions”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, Vol. 5, Winter 2015-2016.

15. See for example J. Tinnes, “Bibliography: Root Causes of Terrorism”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2017; E. Huet *et al.*, “Bibliographie ‘radicalisation’ et ‘terrorisme’”, 2018, available at: <https://radical.hypotheses.org>.

Different understandings of radicalization processes

In France, much ink has been spilled on the question of what causes radicalization, and specialists are still divided. The most well-known disagreement, between Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy, can be summarized as “radicalization of Islam” versus “Islamization of radicalism”. For Gilles Kepel, the growth of fundamentalist Islamic movements like quietist Salafism provided fertile ground for the development of jihadism. In contrast, Olivier Roy minimizes the significance of the religious element. In his view, young people drawn to radicalism turn to whatever form is most appealing at the time—currently ISIS or al-Qaeda—just as they joined far-left terrorist groups during the Cold War.

Other researchers have put forward alternative analyses of the process of radicalization. François Burgat emphasizes the postcolonial resentment of many French young people of North African background, some of whom become radicalized because of their opposition to French interference in the Muslim world or to the “stigmatization” of Muslims in France. Farhad Khosrokhavar showed that certain individuals struggle to integrate into society and develop a desire to become “negative heroes”. Scott Atran focuses on the contrast between ISIS’s revolutionary image and the pervading atmosphere of gloom in certain Western countries. Asiem El Difraoui stresses the “cool factor” of jihadists, who attract young people using the codes of pop culture. Fethi Benslama—who organized the first “psy general assembly on radicalization” in 2018—has put forward the theory of the “super-Muslim”. Dounia Bouzar—a controversial figure whose work is indispensable to the discussion of deradicalization in France—interprets radicalization as a form of sectarian indoctrination.

Although many authors have pointed out that there is no typical profile of a radicalized individual, some specialists have tried to identify certain traits shared by different types of radicalized people. Among the most notable typologies put forward in recent years is that of H el ene Bazex, Michel B en ezech, and Jean-Yves Mensat, who studied the profiles of 112 individuals under judicial control, some of whom had been convicted of terrorist acts or the glorification of terrorism.¹⁶ They identified four profiles: the “ambitious delinquent”, the “networked criminal proselyte”, the “person in precarious circumstances”, and the “person with severe mental illness”. Several people within the prison administration confirmed that some

16. H. Bazex, M. B en ezech and J.-Y. Mensat, “Le miroir de la haine’. La prise en charge p enitentiaire de la radicalisation: analyse clinique et criminologique de 112 personnes plac ees sous main de justice”, *Annales M edico-Psychologiques*, Vol. 175, 2017, pp. 276-282.

detainees identified as having been radicalized do have a mental illness. Nevertheless, only a fraction of those imprisoned for terrorist acts or the glorification of terrorism have a severe psychiatric disorder. As H el ene Bazex and Jean-Yves Mensat observe in a different article, however, less serious conditions like “personality disorders or psychopathological traits” are regularly found among detainees labeled as radicals.¹⁷ Hence the frequent presence of psychologists in the multidisciplinary teams involved in disengagement or deradicalization programs.

Dounia Bouzar and Marie Martin have put forward a different typology based on a study of “809 young people undergoing disaffiliation”.¹⁸ They were specifically interested in what drove these young women (60 percent of the sample) and men (40 percent) to commit to jihadism. They identify seven “commitment myths”: for the young women, the most common are “Daeshland” (the desire to join a utopian Islamic society), “Mother Teresa” (a humanitarian ideal), and “Sleeping Beauty” (the search for the perfect husband). For the young men, they are the “savior myth” (the opportunity to win redemption for loved ones by dying as a martyr), the “Lancelot myth” (the desire to fight for the oppressed), the “Zeus myth” (the desire to impose sharia law), and the “fortress myth” (the use of jihad to control deviant urges). Both authors stress that understanding the reasons people commit to jihad is essential in order to be able to develop “personalized pathways out of radicalization, because the individualized nature of radicalization requires an individualized deradicalization process”.¹⁹

What is deradicalization?

The vast body of literature on deradicalization provokes a mixed response. The first impression one gets is of incompleteness, with many authors observing that researchers have been unable to identify an efficient, scientifically proven method of deradicalization.²⁰

It also has a disorienting effect because of its indiscriminate mixing of varied case studies. It is not uncommon for a single publication to contain references to deradicalization programs operating in very different cultural

17. H. Bazex and J.-Y. Mensat, “Qui sont les djihadistes franais? Analyse de 12 cas pour contribuer   l’elaboration de profils et   l’evaluation du risque de passage   l’acte”, *Annales M dico-Psychologiques*, Vol. 174, 2016, pp. 257-265.

18. D. Bouzar and M. Martin, “Pour quels motifs les jeunes s’engagent-ils dans le djihad?”, *Neuropsychiatrie de l’enfance et de l’adolescence*, Vol. 64, 2016, pp. 353-359.

19. D. Bouzar and M. Martin, “ Pour quels motifs les jeunes s’engagent-ils dans le djihad?”, *op. cit.*

20. See for example J. Horgan and K. Braddock, “Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 22, 2010, pp. 267-291.

universes (Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Indonesia, Denmark, and so on).²¹ For a reader seeking information that might be useful for implementing a program in a Western European country, the tangle of case studies can be bewildering. Even within Europe, there are significant differences between countries that can limit the relevance of comparisons or the possibility of transferring “best practice”.

The concept of deradicalization itself has faced heavy criticism for several reasons: its inability to “deprogram” an individual; the impossibility of “verifying” whether someone has genuinely been deradicalized or is pretending; the tolerance of radical opinions as long as they do not lead to illegal acts, and so on. It has sometimes been rejected in favor of alternative terms, including disengagement, disaffiliation, deprogramming, demobilization, rehabilitation, or reintegration.²² This lexical proliferation cuts both ways: while it enables a move away from the contested concept of deradicalization, it also tends to blur the boundaries between distinct objects of study. It might be interesting to compare a deradicalization program aimed at a terrorist organization with a Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program aimed at an armed group in a civil war, but such an undertaking would require considerable methodological care and the results would necessarily be subject to caution.

In the same vein, many works deal indiscriminately with studies of terrorists who are inspired by a variety of ideologies, and sometimes even studies with different timescales.²³ Moreover, sample sizes are often too small to enable authors to make meaningful comparisons between ideologies. For example, although the “Pro-Integration Model”²⁴ of disengagement developed by one researcher certainly contains some interesting insights, the fact that it was based on interviews with just twenty-two former extremists should invite caution. The heterogeneity of the sample only increases the need for prudence: it comprised fourteen individuals from violent groups and eight from non-violent groups with connections to the far right, jihadism, and the Tamil separatist movement.

21. See for example A. Rabasa *et al.*, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010.

22. For a discussion of the definition of these terms see the report produced by the working group “Prise en charge des personnes radicalisées”, *Rapport d'étape de la Miviludes*, May 2017.

23. See for example M. B. Altier *et al.*, “Why They Leave: An Analysis of Terrorist Disengagement Events from Eighty-seven Autobiographical Accounts”, *Security Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 2017, pp. 305-332.

24. K. Barrelle, “Pro-integration: Disengagement from and Life after Extremism”, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2015, pp. 129-142.

Bearing these limitations in mind, it is still possible to draw some useful lessons from a careful reading of the international literature on deradicalization.

First, many individuals renounce radicalism without going through a deradicalization or disengagement program.²⁵ Such cases are known as voluntary or natural disengagement. This fact significantly complicates the evaluation of deradicalization programs because, in the absence of a control group, it is impossible to be sure that someone deemed to have been deradicalized after completing a program would not have become deradicalized anyway even if they had not participated in it.

Second, there seems to be a mixture of push and pull factors driving people to leave a radical group and question its ideology.²⁶ In other words, negative factors (the gap between propaganda and reality, misconduct by leaders, excessive violence, traumatic experiences, and so on) can push someone to leave a radical group at the same time as the positive aspects of “normal” life start to seem more and more attractive. Several authors clarify that a person’s future behavior cannot be predicted based on the presence of specific push or pull factors.

Some studies try to organize push and pull factors into a hierarchy. Disillusionment regarding a group’s strategy, leaders, or members emerges as a key push factor, while the positive influence of a radicalized individual’s friends and relatives seems to be a particularly important pull factor. Starting a family, finding a job, or studying are also frequently cited reasons.

Third, deradicalization is not a sine qua non of disengagement: individuals can maintain a radical worldview but still decide to leave a violent group. This phenomenon has been observed both in France²⁷ and elsewhere:²⁸ leaving ISIS does not necessarily mean renouncing the jihadist ideology.

25. T. Bjørgo, *Strategies for Preventing Terrorism*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 86-94.

26. T. Bjørgo and J. Horgan (eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, London: Routledge, 2009. See also A. Baudon, *Les enjeux du désengagement des djihadistes*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2020.

27. D. Thomson, *The Returned: They Left to Wage Jihad, Now They’re Back*, *op. cit.*

28. A. Speckhard and A. S. Yayla, “Eyewitness Accounts from Recent Defectors from Islamic State: Why They Joined, What They Saw, Why They Quit”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No. 6, December 2015, pp. 95-118.

Fourth, the literature on radicalization and deradicalization often refers to three different levels.²⁹ The micro level corresponds to the individual, the meso level involves the individual's direct social environment, and the macro level deals with the wider context. At each of these levels, there are numerous factors that can make an individual more or less vulnerable or resilient.

Fifth, the fact that deradicalization programs often have similar features could be the consequence of the sharing of "best practice" through international organizations or transnational networks.³⁰ The general acceptance of the need for a multidisciplinary approach and the widespread use of mentoring are examples of this process. Deradicalization programs often include psychologists, who take a therapeutic approach, social workers, who help participants with social reintegration, and specialists who can deconstruct the radical ideology in question. For that reason, programs aimed at former members of jihadist groups often include imams or Islamic scholars. Some studies also mention the positive role that can be played by "reformed" individuals.

Protecting society

Deradicalization and disengagement programs are aimed at people classed as radicals. This truism creates a problem: the category "radical individuals" is not easy to define and encompasses a wide range of different situations.³¹ It is crucial to distinguish between people who have already acted on their radical beliefs and those who are seen as liable to do so. For the first group, the principal goal of a deradicalization initiative is to prevent recidivism. For the second, the aim is rather to stop the progression from radical idea to violent act.

The literature on recidivism and the assessment of dangerousness is also plentiful. For the purpose of this article, I will do no more than point out certain general trends that it would be useful to bear in mind. In theory, the prison system has several functions: to punish those who commit crimes, to protect society by temporarily excluding potentially dangerous people,

29. B. Doosje *et al.*, "Terrorism, Radicalization and De-radicalization", *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Vol. 11, 2016, pp. 79-84; A. P. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, ICCT Research Paper, March 2013.

30. *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. EXIT strategies*, RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices, 2018; P. R. Neumann, *Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region*, OSCE and ICSR, September 2017.

31. C. de Galembert, "Le 'radical', une nouvelle figure de dangerosité carcérale aux contours flous", *Critique internationale*, Vol. 3, 2016, pp. 53-71.

and to put people who have broken the law back on the “right track.” Article 130-1 of the French Criminal Code clearly states: “In order to ensure the protection of society, prevent the commission of further crimes, and restore social equilibrium, while respecting the interests of the victim, the function of sentencing is: 1) to punish the perpetrator; 2) to enable the reform, integration, or reintegration of the perpetrator”.

Nevertheless, in many countries, including France, numerous authors have observed that practice diverges significantly from theory. The prison system seems increasingly unable to bring about a positive transformation in individuals. “The collective goal of protecting society and preventing recidivism, in other words, managing the short-term risk of recidivism”, tends to take precedence over all else.³² High recidivism rates demonstrate that this goal is far from having been achieved. In France, the recidivism rate—calculated by combining the rate of *récidive légale* and the five-year rate of *réitération*³³—is around 40 percent.³⁴ It is much lower for serious crimes (*crimes*) than for minor crimes (*délits*), however. In the United States, two thirds of former prisoners are rearrested within three years of their release, rising to almost 80 percent within six years.³⁵

As a result, various measures have been adopted to try to protect society more effectively. Two trends come to the forefront in the literature: first, the desire to incarcerate offenders more consistently and for longer periods³⁶—which would exacerbate the problem of prison overpopulation unless new prisons are constructed; second, the need for improved assessments of the risk of recidivism.³⁷ In recidivism risk assessment, many authors use the term “actuarial justice” to refer to the use of statistical techniques from the insurance industry to calculate the probability of a risk. Proponents of this approach claim that it is a much more reliable scientific method than relying on the “unstructured professional judgment”³⁸ of probation officers.

32. E. Dubourg, “Les instruments d’évaluation des risques de récidive, du jugement professionnel non structuré aux outils actuariels”, *Criminocorpus. Revue d’Histoire de la justice, des crimes et des peines*, March 2016.

33. *Récidive légale* is defined as the commission of an identical or similar crime within five years of an initial conviction. *Réitération* is the commission of a different crime to the one that led to the initial conviction.

34. C. Chambaz (ed.), *Les chiffres-clés de la Justice 2018*, Paris: Ministère de la Justice, 2018.

35. M. Alper and J. Markman, “2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-up Period (2005-2014)”, U.S. Department of Justice, May 2018.

36. M. Löwenbrück, “L’évolution des peines d’emprisonnement de 2004 à 2016”, *Bulletin d’information statistique*, No. 156, December 2017.

37. M. Vacheret and M.-M. Cousineau, “L’évaluation du risque de récidive au sein du système correctionnel canadien: regards sur les limites d’un système”, *Déviance et société*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2005, pp. 379-397.

38. V. Gautron and E. Dubourg, “La rationalisation des outils et méthodes d’évaluation: de l’approche clinique au jugement actuariel”, *Criminocorpus. Revue d’Histoire de la justice, des crimes et des peines*, January 2015.

Moreover, it dovetails with the current managerial trend of rationalizing public services. According to some, actuarial evaluation tools are becoming increasingly effective as time goes on.³⁹

However, skeptics cast doubt on the scientific foundation of actuarial tools, in part because they are based on non-representative samples that may suffer from selection bias. Moreover, prison administration employees often struggle to use such tools properly in practice. Finally, critics of the approach argue that actuarial logic leads to a lack of accountability: any mistakes can be blamed on a fault in the actuarial tool rather than an error of judgment on the part of an evaluator.

Evaluating the risk of terrorist recidivism

In public debate, prisons are often depicted as terrorist incubators. The problem is not just that prison can make individuals convicted of terrorism even more radical, but also that it gives them an opportunity to form connections with criminal networks and to radicalize other inmates. This view is sometimes exaggerated but is not entirely unfounded. In France, the prison administration distinguishes between two categories: “terroristes islamistes” (TIS, Islamist terrorists) and “détenus de droit commun susceptibles de radicalisation” (DCSR, ordinary detainees suspected of being radicalized), i.e., individuals who have not been convicted of terrorist acts but who are classed as radicals (the abbreviation RAD is sometimes used instead of DCSR). There were around 500 TISs and 700 DCSRs in French prisons in mid-2020.

When the Plan d'action contre le terrorisme (Action Plan Against Terrorism) was launched in July 2018, it was announced that 80 percent of France's 143 convicted TISs would be due for release by 2022.⁴⁰ In June 2020, Yaël Braun-Pivet, a member of parliament who was drafting a bill to impose security measures on terrorists coming to the end of their sentence, provided an updated figure: “Between 2020 and 2022, 153 individuals convicted of serious or minor terrorist acts will be released from prison”.⁴¹ The associated risk of recidivism is concerning.

39. J. Bonta and D. A. Andrews, “Risk-Need-Responsivity Model for Offender Assessment and Rehabilitation 2007-06”, Ottawa: Public Safety Canada, 2007.

40. “Plan d'action contre le terrorisme”, Prime Minister of France, July 13, 2018, p. 21.

41. Assemblée nationale, N° 3116 *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission des lois constitutionnelles, de la législation et de l'administration générale de la République après engagement de la procédure accélérée, sur la proposition de loi instaurant des mesures de sûreté à l'encontre des auteurs d'infractions terroristes à l'issue de leur peine* (Rapporteur : Ms. Y. Braun-Pivet), June 17, 2020.

The international literature on terrorist recidivism has produced widely divergent results. A study published in 2019 on the situation in the United States came to a remarkably positive conclusion: of the 247 people convicted of acts of terrorism (of any ideology) since 9/11, and released having served their sentence, only 4 have been rearrested and reincarcerated.⁴² On that basis, the author calculates the terrorist recidivism rate in the United States to be 1.6 percent. This result is especially surprising given that the study looked at recidivism in the broad sense (reoffending involving any kind of crime) rather than specifically at the commission of further terrorist offenses. The four individuals who did reoffend were arrested for crimes unrelated to terrorism. Another study in the United States focused specifically on jihadists and concluded that the terrorist recidivism rate was 6.5 percent.⁴³ Neither of the studies included inmates from the Guantanamo Bay detention camp; according to a report from the Director of National Intelligence, camp detainees have a “reengagement” rate of around 30 percent.⁴⁴

A study carried out in the Netherlands in 2013 and 2014 followed five radicalized individuals who were participating in a reintegration program.⁴⁵ The program failed to have any kind of positive effect on two jihadists, who managed to escape and return to Syria. Two of the others complied with the requirements of their judicial supervision but continued to show signs of radicalization. The fifth individual turned out to be less radical than expected and therefore received less intensive monitoring. The authors were wary about drawing conclusions given the small sample size, but they hypothesized that the terrorist recidivism rate might be similar to the general recidivism rate. In the Netherlands, that is around 50 percent within two years of release. Another study based on an international sample of eighty-five terrorists—who belonged to a range of different movements and had been active at different times—also came up with a high “reengagement” rate (around 60 percent).⁴⁶ Among other conclusions, this study emphasized that things like getting a job or starting a family do not necessarily prevent recidivism.

42. O. Hodwitz, “The Terrorism Recidivism Study (TRS): Examining Recidivism Rates for Post-9/11 Offenders”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 13, No. 2, April 2019.

43. C. Wright, “An Examination of Jihadi Recidivism Rates in the United States”, *CTC Sentinel*, November 2019.

44. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Summary of the Reengagement of Detainees Formerly Held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba” June 3, 2019, available at: www.dni.gov.

45. B. Schuurman and E. Bakker, “Reintegrating Jihadist Extremists: Evaluating a Dutch Initiative, 2013–2014”, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2016, pp. 66-85.

46. M. B. Altier, E. Leonard and J. G. Horgan, “Returning to the Fight: An Empirical Analysis of Terrorist Reengagement and Recidivism”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, November 2019.

The Dutch study discussed above was updated in 2018.⁴⁷ Between 2012 and 2018, 189 people participated in the disengagement program, of whom 8 reoffended. Nevertheless, the authors make an important clarification: the study only counted crimes committed while participants were still in the program. There is no information about whether they reoffended after completing the program. Another Dutch study looked at a sample of ten jihadists who had completed a prison sentence, including some in a dedicated institution, the Terrorist Detention Facility in Vught.⁴⁸ Half of the individuals had been able to resume an almost normal life. The other half had had a more difficult time: some were depressed, others had been unable to reintegrate into society and had decided to leave the country. One jihadist had managed to return to Syria.

In Belgium, a study of 557 individuals (472 men and 85 women) convicted for jihadist terrorist acts between January 1, 1990, and December 31, 2019, calculated the recidivism rate at 2.3 percent and the combined recidivism and reengagement rate at 4.8 percent.⁴⁹ The author pointed out that these results are corroborated by recent assessments by the Organe de coordination pour l'analyse de la menace (Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis), according to which 84 percent of men and 95 percent of women returning from Syria show signs of disengagement.

In France, a non-exhaustive analysis was carried out based on a sample of 137 individuals convicted of terrorism between 2004 and 2017.⁵⁰ At least 22 of them had reoffended in one of five ways: committing attacks on national territory, preparing attacks, leaving to carry out jihad abroad, attempting to murder prison wardens, and glorifying terrorism. The two most well-known individuals were Chérif Kouachi, one of the two perpetrators of the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, and Larossi Abballa, who murdered a police officer and his wife in Magnanville in 2016. Chérif Kouachi's case demonstrates the need to think long-term: arrested in 2005, ten years before the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, he was remanded in custody until October 2006. At his trial in 2008, he was sentenced to three years in prison, half of which was suspended.

47. L. van der Heide and B. Schuurman, "Reintegrating Terrorists in the Netherlands: Evaluating the Dutch Approach", *Journal for Deradicalization*, Vol. 17, Winter 2018-2019, pp. 196-239.

48. D. Weggemans and B. de Graaf, *Reintegrating Jihadist Extremist Detainees: Helping Extremist Offenders Back into Society*, London: Routledge, 2017.

49. T. Renard, "Overblown: Exploring the Gap Between the Fear of Terrorist Recidivism and the Evidence", *CTC Sentinel*, April 2020.

50. M. Hecker, "Terrorisme: quel risque de récidive?", *The Conversation*, June 2, 2019.

Tools have been developed to try to evaluate the risk of terrorist acts or recidivism. The two most frequently cited tools are ERG 22+ and the successive versions of VERA.⁵¹ The VERA (Violent Extremism Risk Assessment) method was developed at the end of the 2000s by Elaine Pressman.⁵² It is used in the Canadian prison system. The ERG 22+ (Extremism Risk Guidelines) method was created around the same time by psychologists commissioned by the British prison administration.⁵³ Both tools identify a list of factors that make it easier to determine an individual's risk. VERA relies more on ideological factors, while ERG 22+ tends to focus on identity. Although they are not predictive tools, they are designed to help those working in the field formulate “structured professional judgements”.⁵⁴ The French prison administration has considered adopting VERA, but according to several people at various levels within the administration, negotiations with Elaine Pressman have been inconclusive.

How can a deradicalization program be evaluated?

A priori, the answer to the question “How can a deradicalization program be evaluated?” is simple: a deradicalization program works if the individuals that complete the program renounce radicalism and do not reoffend. Evaluation specialists give more nuanced responses, however, with several different types of evaluation:⁵⁵

- ▀ Impact evaluation tries to determine whether an intervention has the desired result. In medicine, for example, it might assess whether a specific medication can cure patients. To prove that the medication is the cause of the cure, a placebo is also given to a control group.
- ▀ Pragmatic evaluation involves finding out whether the program meets the expectations of its various stakeholders.
- ▀ Theory-driven evaluation “structures evaluation around a theory that can describe how the program achieves the desired or observed results

51. S. Mullins, “Rehabilitation of Islamist terrorists: Lessons from criminology”, *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2010, pp. 162-193.

52. E. Pressman, “Risk Assessment Decisions for Violent Political Extremism”, Ottawa: Public Safety Canada, 2009.

53. R. A. Knudsen, “Measuring Radicalisation: Risk Assessment Conceptualisations and Practice in England and Wales”, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, August 2018.

54. M. Herzog-Evans, “A Comparison of Two Structured Professional Judgement Tools for Violent Extremism and Their Relevance in the French Context”, *European Journal of Probation*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2018, pp. 3-27.

55. A.-J. Gielen, “Countering Violent Extremism: A Realist Review for Assessing What Works, for Whom, in What Circumstances, and How?”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, May 2017.

and represents this information in the form of a logic model, diagram, or flowchart”.⁵⁶

- Process evaluation aims to account for the gap between the planning and execution of a program.
- Realistic evaluation “aims to use empirical observation to understand an intervention, focusing specifically on the underlying mechanisms of the intervention and the influence of context”.⁵⁷

No matter which of these categories a study fits into, if it extends over a period of time and tracks ongoing development, it is known as a longitudinal evaluation.

Some evaluation tools presented in the scientific literature seemed too complicated to be used in the context of this study, which was conducted by a single researcher and looks at the implementation of a program in four cities.⁵⁸ My approach, as presented in the introduction, was inspired instead by two types of document.

The first is case studies from other countries in Western Europe. Evaluations of counter-radicalization programs in the United Kingdom,⁵⁹ the Netherlands,⁶⁰ and Germany⁶¹ were carried out using traditional methods from the social sciences. The researchers in these studies conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals participating in a program, as well as their relatives, frontline professionals, and/or other stakeholders. In the United Kingdom, for example, Douglas Weeks’s evaluation was based on interviews with around twenty frontline professionals and half a dozen individuals leaving prison. When I talked to the authors of some of these studies, they stressed the difficulty of defining and measuring “success” in counter-radicalization. For that reason, their results are nuanced and presented with caution.

56. A. Devaux-Spatarakis, “L’évaluation ‘basée sur la théorie’, entre rigueur scientifique et contexte politique”, *Politiques et management public*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2014, pp. 51-68.

57. E. Robert and V. Ridde, “L’approche réaliste pour l’évaluation de programmes et la revue systématique: de la théorie à la pratique”, *Mesure et évaluation en éducation*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2013, pp. 79-108.

58. B. Baruch *et al.*, “Evaluation in an Emerging Field: Developing a Measurement Framework for the Field of Counter-Violent-Extremism”, *Evaluation*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2018, pp. 475-495; J. Horgan and K. Braddock, “Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs”, *op. cit.*

59. D. Weeks, “Doing Derad: An Analysis of the UK System”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 41, No. 7, 2018, pp. 523-540.

60. B. Schuurman and E. Bakker, “Reintegrating Jihadist Extremists: Evaluating a Dutch Initiative, 2013–2014”, *op. cit.* See also L. van der Heide and B. Schuurman, “Reintegrating Terrorists in the Netherlands: Evaluating the Dutch Approach”, *op. cit.*

61. M. Uhlmann, “Evaluation of the Advice Centre on Radicalisation. Final Report”, Nuremberg: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2017.

The second type of document that inspired my approach is practical guides. For example, the Radicalisation Awareness Network, which was set up on the initiative of the European Commission, has published a report titled “Guideline Evaluation of PCVE Programmes and Interventions” that summarizes the most important points in a checklist.⁶² RAND Europe has published another, longer guide.⁶³ It is divided into around twenty chapters presenting different techniques that can be used for evaluation (interviews, focus groups, network analysis, etc.). It also includes an electronic “toolkit”.⁶⁴

This review of the literature provides an overview of the numerous publications on the subject of deradicalization and disengagement. Before looking at the PAIRS initiative in more detail, I will first examine the origins of the program and then present a broad outline of the development of French counterterrorism policy.

62. M. Molenkamp, L. Wouterse and A.-J. Gielen, “Guideline Evaluation of PCVE Programmes and Interventions”, Radicalisation Awareness Network, July 2018.

63. J. Hofman and A. Sutherland, “Evaluating Interventions that Prevent or Counter Violent Extremism. A Practical Guide”, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018.

64. “About the project”, IMPACT Europe, available at: <http://impacteurope.eu>.

Brief history of the fight against radicalization in France

The French authorities were late to show an interest in the prevention of radicalization, whether primary, secondary, or tertiary. The sociologist Romain Sèze defines these three types of prevention as follows: “Primary prevention refers to initiatives that aim to reduce the social vulnerabilities thought to foster radicalism; secondary prevention refers to interventions aimed at individuals identified as being in the process of radicalization; tertiary prevention refers to initiatives intended to prevent recidivism”.⁶⁵

In October 2013, when programs to combat radicalization had already been running for several years in other countries,⁶⁶ Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault announced the launch of a “review of radicalization prevention”. The prefect Yann Jounot, director of state protection and security at the Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale (Secretariat-General for National Defense and Security), produced a report titled *Prévention de la radicalisation*. This classified document was eventually leaked to the press. Its author suggested several general policies: “to adopt a non-stigmatizing approach” that tackled the causes of radicalization; to bring together “security and non-security actors”; “to include an international dimension”; to operate over the long term; and to bring together “state and non-state actors” while publicly taking responsibility for the approach.⁶⁷

In April 2014, the Minister of the Interior Bernard Cazeneuve presented a “plan to fight violent radicalization and terrorist networks”. One of the central features of this plan was the launch of a toll-free number that could be used by anyone to report possible cases of radicalization. The Centre national d’assistance et de prévention de la radicalisation (CNAPR, National Center for Assistance and the Prevention of Radicalization) was set up to handle these alerts. Between April 2014 and the end of 2018, the CNAPR

65. R. Sèze, *Prévenir la violence djihadiste. Les paradoxes d’un modèle sécuritaire*, Paris: Seuil, 2019, p. 8.

66. See for example A. Rabasa *et al.*, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*, *op. cit.*

67. Y. Jounot, *Prévention de la radicalisation*, Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale, October 30, 2013, p. 9.

received more than sixty thousand calls.⁶⁸ In March 2015, the Fichier des signalements pour la prévention de la radicalisation à caractère terroriste (FSPRT, Database for the Processing of Alerts to Prevent Terrorist Radicalization) was officially created.⁶⁹ This database records relevant alerts submitted to the CNAPR as well as information from prefectural security teams and the intelligence services. By the middle of 2019, it contained more than twenty-one thousand entries, around eight thousand of which were labeled as closed or on hold.⁷⁰

The FSPRT includes individuals at different stages of radicalization with varying levels of dangerousness. The government talks about a “spectrum” of radicalization: the closer an individual is to the top of the spectrum, the more he or she needs to be monitored by the security forces. In contrast, individuals at the middle or lower end of the spectrum can be handled by “non-security actors,” to borrow the term used in the Jounot report.

Inconclusive experiments

To deal with these individuals, partnerships were formed with private organizations, generally associations. The government made no secret of the difficulty of finding reliable representatives. For example, Muriel Domenach—then secretary general of the Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation (CIPDR, Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalization)—said in 2017, “We are trying, we are feeling our way, we are adapting”, and then announced an ambition to move away from “self-proclaimed gurus” of deradicalization and work instead with “mainstream social service providers”.⁷¹ This declaration came in the wake of several momentous incidents: the conviction of the former head of a “deradicalization cell” for the misappropriation of public funds;⁷² the open conflict between Senator Nathalie Goulet and the director of the Centre de prévention des dérives

68. Assemblée nationale, N° 2082 *Rapport d'information sur les services publics face à la radicalisation* (Rapporteurs : Mr. É. Diard and Mr. É. Poulliat), June 27, 2019, p. 23.

69. Hearing of Olivier de Mazières, head of the État-major opérationnel de prévention du terrorisme (EMOPT, terrorism prevention operations team), Assemblée nationale, May 23, 2016. See Assemblée nationale, No. 3922 *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission d'enquête relative aux moyens mis en œuvre par l'État pour lutter contre le terrorisme depuis le 7 janvier 2015* (Rapporteurs : Mr. G. Fenech and Mr. S. Pietrasanta), July 5, 2016, pp. 798-812.

70. Assemblée nationale, No. 2082 *Rapport d'information sur les services publics face à la radicalisation*, *op. cit.*

71. Presentation by Muriel Domenach at the Euro-Mediterranean conference “Réunir société civile, praticiens et chercheurs pour prévenir la radicalisation,” organized by Unismed, Marseille, July 4, 2017.

72. J. Revial, *Cellule de déradicalisation. Chronique d'une désillusion*, Paris: Michalon, 2016.

sectaires liées à l'islam (Center for the Prevention of Sectarian Abuses Related to Islam);⁷³ the indictment on multiple counts of rape of a psychoanalyst involved in counter-radicalization initiatives;⁷⁴ widespread criticism of the “deradicalization industry” in the media;⁷⁵ and so on.

Several days after Domenach's announcement, Senators Esther Benbassa and Catherine Troendlé published a report “on the deprogramming, disaffiliation, and reintegration of jihadists in France and Europe.” This report described the regional network of services in place to support families dealing with radicalization and to supervise radicalized individuals. Appended to the report was a list of dozens of associations working alongside public authorities at the departmental level. Both senators expressed the opinion that “the number of radicalized individuals does not warrant the intervention of so many associations”.⁷⁶ They recommended “opting for quality over quantity”.

Benbassa and Troendlé reserved their most scathing criticism for a particular initiative: the Centre de prévention, d'insertion et de citoyenneté (CPIC, Center for Prevention, Integration, and Citizenship). This experimental program is sometimes referred to in the media as the Pontourny deradicalization center, after its location in the Château de Pontourny in the municipality of Beaumont-en-Véron, Indre-et-Loire. The opening of the center was one of the measures announced as part of the Plan d'action contre la radicalisation et le terrorisme (PART, Action Plan Against Radicalization and Terrorism) put forward by Manuel Valls in May 2016. The PART anticipated the establishment of a CPIC in every region before the end of 2017.

In fact, the Pontourny experiment ended early. When Benbassa and Troendlé visited the center in February 2017, it had just one participant. Despite being designed to accommodate twenty-five individuals, at its peak it housed a grand total of nine. The only participant was sentenced to prison a few days later and the CPIC was left without a single resident. With twenty-seven employees, its annual operating costs amounted to almost 2.5 million euros. The two senators denounced the center's “total lack of results” and called for its closure. On July 28, 2017, Minister of the Interior Gérard Collomb announced that the CPIC was coming to an end: “The trial run of

73. F. Teicher, *Approches et pratiques de la prévention de la radicalisation en France*, study commissioned by the Centre français des fonds et fondations and by the Fonds du 11 janvier, 2019, p. 16.

74. “Nice: le psy du djihad mis en examen pour viols et écroué,” *L'Obs* with AFP, April 28, 2017.

75. E. Guéguen, “Déradicalisation: un business pas très sérieux,” *France Inter*, November 10, 2016.

76. Sénat, N° 633 *Rapport final de la mission d'information sur le désendoctrinement, le désenbrigadement et la réinsertion des djihadistes en France et en Europe* (Rapporteurs: Ms. E. Benbassa and Ms. C. Troendlé), July 12, 2017, p. 23.

an open center based on voluntary attendance has turned out to have limited potential”.⁷⁷

Several academics involved in the experiment took a more nuanced view of its outcome. The sociologist Gérald Bronner, for example, acknowledged “the CPIC’s flawed recruitment strategy”—i.e., the problems associated with selecting participants on a voluntary basis—but defended the method it used to help the participants move forward.⁷⁸ In his book *Déchéance de rationalité*, he described the “rationalism” classes he taught at Pontourny to develop the critical faculties of young people who were susceptible to conspiracy theories and jihadist beliefs. Some participants did seem to make progress in their thinking, but the sociologist remains cautious: he did not have the necessary resources for conducting psychometric tests that would have enabled him to measure their cognitive development scientifically.⁷⁹

Thierry Lamote, assistant professor in clinical psychology, also takes a balanced view of the CPIC and laments that the experiment ended prematurely “because of the difficulty of recruiting new participants, itself due to the overly strict selection criteria”.⁸⁰ Out of the fifty-nine potential participants identified by the relevant prefectures, only seventeen were willing to join the program.⁸¹ It was not until after this preselection process that the Unité de coordination de la lutte anti-terroriste (UCLAT, Counterterrorism Coordination Unit) expressed an unfavorable opinion about six of the individuals. Moreover, two individuals withdrew from the program before it began, and there was no way to force the other participants to stay until the end.

77. “Fermeture du premier centre de prévention, d’insertion et de citoyenneté”, statement by the Minister of the Interior, July 28, 2017.

78. G. Bronner, *Déchéance de rationalité. Les tribulations d’un homme de progrès dans un monde devenu fou*, Paris: Grasset, 2019, p. 215.

79. G. Bronner, *Déchéance de rationalité. Les tribulations d’un homme de progrès dans un monde devenu fou*, *op. cit.* pp. 80-81.

80. T. Lamote, “Leçons du dispositif de Pontourny. Retour sur l’expérimentation menée au CPIC 37”, in F. Benslama (ed.), *États de la radicalisation*, Paris: Seuil, 2019, pp. 16-69.

81. Sénat, No. 633 *Rapport final de la mission d’information sur le désendoctrinement, le désembrigadement et la réinsertion des djihadistes en France et en Europe*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

The RIVE program

The RIVE initiative is sometimes portrayed as the successor to Pontourny. This misconception is due to the fact that the program's existence was only revealed after the closure of the CPIC.⁸² In reality, both initiatives were in operation at the same time but were targeted at different groups. RIVE was aimed at *personnes placées sous main de justice* (PPSMJ, people under judicial control). Thanks to a change in the law on June 3, 2016, it was possible to make it compulsory. The law strengthening the fight against organized crime, terrorism, and their financing, and improving the efficiency and guarantees of criminal procedure modified articles 132-45 and 138 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The change made it possible to oblige a PPSMJ, before or after trial, to “comply with the conditions of a healthcare, social, educational, or psychological program designed to teach civic values and help the individual reintegrate into society”. The law specified that “this program may, if need be, take place within a suitable host institution where the individual must reside”.

The call for tenders for the establishment of RIVE was issued by the Minister of Justice on August 9, 2016. At that time, there were 352 radicalized PPSMJs in open custody: 70 had been prosecuted or convicted for terrorist acts, while 282 had been reported as having been radicalized while on remand following ordinary crimes. In July 2016, a man accused of terrorist acts, who was on pre-trial judicial control, detained under house arrest, and fitted with an electronic monitoring bracelet, managed to carry out an attack in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray. According to the former director of the RIVE program, the attack showed that the supervision provided by the Services pénitentiaires d'insertion et de probation (SPIP, Prison Integration and Probation Services) was insufficient and that a “more intensive approach” was needed.⁸³ The RIVE contract was awarded to the only organization to reply to the call for tenders: the Association de politique criminelle appliquée et de réinsertion sociale (APCARS, Association for Applied Criminal Policy and Social Reintegration).

The special technical specifications defined the details of how the program would work: the establishment of a multidisciplinary team including social workers, experts in radical Islam, a psychiatrist, and a psychologist; a mentoring program comprising six hours of support per

82. See the interview with Samantha Enderlin, director of the RIVE initiative, in *Dalloz Actualité*: M. Babonneau, “Déradicalisation: ‘La réussite est que la personne parvienne à être actrice de sa propre vie’”, *Dalloz Actualité*, March 30, 2018, available at: www.dalloz-actualite.fr.

83. S. Enderlin, presentation at the conference “L’adaptation de la réponse pénale aux formes extrêmes de la criminalité”, 22nd meeting of the Institut de sciences criminelles at the University of Poitiers, October 12 and 13, 2018.

week for an indefinite period; expansion of capacity to treat twenty-five PPSMJs after six months and fifty after twelve months; the use of certain tools (the “Risk-Need-Responsivity [RNR] model” and motivational interviewing techniques); and so on.

In fact, only twenty-two PPSMJs took part in the RIVE program throughout the entire duration of the contract, from October 2016 to September 2018. The participants were divided as follows:⁸⁴

- Twelve men and ten women
- Thirteen awaiting trial (ten of whom had been remanded in custody) and nine after trial (five of whom had been incarcerated)
- Eighteen individuals prosecuted for criminal conspiracy in connection with a terrorist enterprise, two for the preparation of terrorist acts in connection with an individual terrorist enterprise,⁸⁵ one for the glorification of terrorism, and one “ordinary detainee at risk of radicalization”
- The average age was around twenty-five years old.

In contrast to the Pontourny initiative, participants in the RIVE program were not kept in a separate location away from their family and social environment. Individual meetings took place at the program premises in Paris, in a public place, or in the participants’ homes. Each PPSMJ had three advisors: social, religious, and psychological. Although the former director refers to “team mentoring”,⁸⁶ participants spent most of their time with educators simply because of the breakdown of professionals in the program (four educators, one Muslim chaplain, two part-time psychologists, one psychiatrist working as an independent contractor, one project leader, and one assistant). The overall aim was to enable participants to reintegrate into society by helping them become more independent in their daily life and thought processes. This would be achieved by gradually decreasing the amount of contact. In the long term, the goal was to reduce the risk of recidivism by building social and psychological stability and encouraging a more peaceful understanding of religion.

The difficulty of evaluating the participants was already being discussed when the call for tenders was issued. The specifications for the contract mentioned the need to carry out an initial (diagnostic) evaluation of the participants and then to continue to assess them throughout the program in

84. Interview with the former director of RIVE on October 30, 2019.

85. This crime was created by the law strengthening the fight against terrorism of November 13, 2014.

86. Interview with the former director of RIVE on October 30, 2019.

order to keep track of their progress, or regression as the case may be—the deradicalization process is not always linear. APCARS took this problem seriously and commissioned a group of researchers coordinated by a university professor to draw up documents relating to the handling and evaluation of the PPSMJs. This multidisciplinary team—which was familiar with the international literature on violent extremism, the main criminological models, and risk evaluation tools—had high scientific ambitions for the RIVE program.⁸⁷ It defined the intermediate goals that would contribute to the end goal of reducing terrorist engagement. It recommended specific methods and evaluation tools, such as LS-CMI (Level of Service – Case Management Inventory) and VERA (Violent Extremism Risk Assessment). In practice, however, it turned out to be difficult to act on the research team’s recommendations.

The coordinator of the research team is blunt about the “failure in the implementation of the program” and the evaluation of participants.⁸⁸ She identifies several reasons for this failure, including the more prominent role given to social workers than psychologists, a lack of criminological expertise among the staff, and a lack of ongoing training that led to errors in the scoring system. Nevertheless, it is important not to read too much into the word “failure”: as she used it, it means the program did not achieve the level of scientific rigor the researchers had hoped for and that it was not possible to measure the participants’ progress scientifically. It does not mean that the program itself was a failure. To date, there have been no cases of recidivism reported among its participants.⁸⁹

The program was evaluated by an independent consultant with a doctorate in social psychology. This evaluator describes having been confronted by “structural obstacles” that reduced her ability to measure the impact of the RIVE initiative.⁹⁰ For example, she explains that she was not given access to the individualized support plans that would have allowed her to measure individuals’ progress in relation to personalized objectives. Unable to carry out a proper impact assessment, she ultimately performed a “process evaluation” that showed that APCARS had generally complied with

87. M. Herzog-Evans *et al.*, “Traitement d’auteurs d’infractions en lien avec le terrorisme: un programme fondé sur les données acquises par la science”, *Cahiers de la sécurité et de la justice*, Vol. 46, 2019, pp. 72-82.

88. M. Herzog-Evans, “Implémentation d’un programme structuré et fondé sur les données acquises de la science en France: difficultés et recommandations”, *Cahiers de la sécurité et de la justice*, Vol. 46, 2019, pp. 83-93.

89. Sénat, No. 146 *Avis présenté au nom de la Commission des lois constitutionnelles, de législation, du suffrage universel, du Règlement et d’administration générale sur le projet de loi de finances adopté par l’Assemblée nationale pour 2020* (Rapporteur : A. Marc), November 21, 2019.

90. Interview with the evaluator of the RIVE program, November 20, 2019.

the contract specifications and that RIVE could be described a “serious initiative” by international standards.⁹¹

The end of the RIVE program

The public authorities had a sufficiently favorable view of RIVE to decide to extend it, as announced in the National Plan to Prevent Radicalization of February 2018. At that time, there seemed to be an urgent need to open new centers because of the rapid growth in the number of radicalized PPSMJs in open custody. By then, there were 635 such individuals (135 who had committed terrorist acts and 500 who had committed ordinary crimes): almost twice as many as in mid-2016. At the end of May 2018, the Minister of Justice spoke at a conference about “the role of local and regional governments in the prevention of recidivism and radicalization” at the Hauts-de-France Regional Council. She portrayed RIVE as a “real success” and confirmed the government’s plan to open other centers around France.⁹²

Despite this positive reception, the public contract for the establishment of RIVE was not renewed and a new call for tenders was issued. Services that had not featured in the first contract—particularly in relation to the provision of accommodation—were added. The tender was won by the Solidarity arm of Groupe SOS and the NGO Artemis, initially for Paris and Marseille and then for Lyon and Lille as well. The change in provider did not pass without comment: several articles in the press implied that the awarding of the contract had been influenced by the ties between Jean-Marc Borello, president of Groupe SOS, and Emmanuel Macron.⁹³ Nevertheless, the prison administration denied any kind of favoritism and insisted that the dossier submitted by Groupe SOS and Artemis was the best, pointing out that it was also cheaper than APCARS’s bid.

Moreover, certain institutional partners of the RIVE program seem to have felt that the relationships between some of the supervisors and participants had become too close. The RIVE team responded to this criticism by explaining that the mentoring program was explicitly intended to create a relationship of empathy and trust with participants. It is interesting to note that the term “mentoring” does not appear in the special technical specifications of the 2018 contract, in contrast to the 2016 one.

91. Interview with the evaluator of the RIVE program, November 20, 2019.

92. “Récidive et radicalisation: Nicole Belloubet souhaite renforcer les partenariats avec les collectivités”, *Localtis* with AEP and AFP, June 1, 2018.

93. “L’entreprise d’un proche d’Emmanuel Macron reprend le programme de déradicalisation du gouvernement”, *France Inter*, September 11, 2018.

The transition from RIVE to the new initiative—PAIRS—was not entirely smooth. The RIVE team had not expected their program to end so quickly. As one of them said, “We found out we were going to lose the contract, and a month later it was all over. [...] It was traumatic for the team”.⁹⁴ The participants did not expect it either and some of them struggled to deal with the sudden separation from their advisors. In a few cases, informal relationships continued after the contract ended. The APCARS employees involved in the program were let go.

The handover of information between APCARS and Groupe SOS was also not optimal. A final report on the status of each PPSMJ was hurriedly drafted by the RIVE team and sent to the SPIP. As a former APCARS executive emphasized, it was not legally possible to transfer personal data directly to Groupe SOS. In any event, I discovered that a year after the launch of PAIRS, those running the program had still not received the RIVE evaluation reports, which would surely have been useful for them to read.

These transition difficulties should provoke reflection about the workings of public procurement contracts in a field as sensitive as that of the fight against radicalization and terrorism. The Ministry of Justice must, of course, comply with the Code of Public Procurement, but when a program dealing with terrorists—particularly one providing psychological support—is suddenly interrupted because of a change in provider, questions must at least be asked.

94. Interview with a former APCARS employee, fall 2019.

The PAIRS initiative

The PAIRS initiative was created jointly by the NGO Artemis and the Solidarity arm of Groupe SOS. Artemis was not new to the fight against radicalization. It grew out of Unismed, an NGO founded in 2005 by Alain Ruffion that specialized in social and intercultural mediation. In 2014, Unismed became involved with the prevention of radicalization in three key areas: education, handling radicalized individuals, and counter-narrative. A paper presented at a conference organized by Unismed in July 2017 stated that it had “helped to train around ten thousand people in the prevention of radicalization between 2014 and 2017 in France”,⁹⁵ It also concluded agreements for handling radicalized individuals with four prefectures; the first, with Alpes-Maritimes, was signed in July 2014.

In May 2016, Ruffion’s association joined Groupe SOS, and in September of that year it was one of the two organizations to win the national contract for “mobile intervention teams”. This initiative, originally managed by Dounia Bouzar and her team, was set up by the Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalization to support prefectures in France and its overseas territories. Unismed thus became responsible for sixty individuals under agreements made directly with prefectures and seventeen under the national contract.⁹⁶ The national contract was terminated early, however, because there were many fewer referrals than expected.

Between those two dates, Ruffion was criticized in the press for marketing misrepresentation.⁹⁷ Groupe SOS distanced themselves from him and changed the name of the organization from Unismed to Artemis, an acronym for Atelier de Recherche, Traitement et Médiation Interculturelle et Sociale (Workshop for Research, Treatment, and Intercultural and Social Mediation).⁹⁸ In the fall of 2016, Jules Boyadjian left his role as advisor to Bernard Cazeneuve at the Ministry of the Interior and joined Groupe SOS as president of Artemis. In December 2016, he was recalled by the former

95. “Colloque euro-méditerranéen: réunir société civile, praticiens et chercheurs pour prévenir la radicalisation”, organized by Unismed, July 3-5, 2017, Marseille.

96. Association Artemis, *Bilan des interventions (2015–2017)*, October 2017, available at: www.association-artemis.com.

97. E. Guéguen, “Déradicalisation: un business pas très sérieux”, *op. cit.*

98. The change of name was announced at the Préfecture de police in Paris on April 12, 2018. See Annonce No. 1276 in the *Journal officiel de la République française*, July 14, 2018.

minister, now head of government, who offered him a position in his cabinet. He took unpaid leave to take up the position and then rejoined Groupe SOS at the end of François Hollande's term in 2017. Until summer 2019, Boyadjian was supported by a director seconded from the Ministry of the Interior, where she had worked on issues related to Islam at the Bureau central des cultes (Central Bureau of Worship). The presence of these two figures from one of the key ministries of state was sufficient to reassure the public authorities when, in June 2018, the prison administration published a call for expressions of interest in managing a program to "handle radicalized persons or those in the process of becoming radicalized".

Despite Artemis's showcasing of its expertise in the prevention of radicalization, at that time it seemed like rather a small organization to manage such a substantial project. A cooperation was thus launched with the Solidarity arm of Groupe SOS, which had no experience in the fight against radicalization but did have significant clout in the social sector. Groupe SOS had eighteen thousand employees working across 550 institutions and services with a total turnover of almost a billion euros, making it "the foremost European social enterprise".⁹⁹ The Solidarity arm alone employed two thousand people and managed 227 institutions and services in various sectors (addictions, healthcare with temporary housing, disabilities, housing and social action, and so on) throughout France.

Its work is based on a specific approach, known as "recovery", which one of the Groupe SOS directors described as a model that emphasizes individuals' strengths and abilities and focuses on empowerment.¹⁰⁰ This model, which originated in the mental health sector¹⁰¹ before being adopted more widely, encourages professionals to shift their understanding of treatment away from vertical supervision and toward a more horizontal approach. In other words, to quote the Groupe SOS director, "top-down teaching and mentoring" is replaced by a form of support that leaves more room for the participant's own desires and plans.

More specifically, treatment should no longer "start by listing individuals' problems" but rather emphasize their strong points. When applied to the highly sensitive field of the prevention of terrorist recidivism, this approach was initially met with doubt by some of PAIRS's institutional partners, who were more used to the RNR model with its focus on addressing

99. *Une société pour tous, une place pour chacun*, Groupe SOS Solidarités, Annual Report, 2018.

100. Interview with a Groupe SOS director, October 31, 2019.

101. E. Jouet, "L'approche fondée sur le rétablissement: éducation diffuse et santé mentale", *Le Télémaque*, Vol. 1, 2016, pp. 111-24.

“criminogenic needs.”¹⁰² It is worth mentioning that the specifications in the 2016 call for tenders for the establishment of RIVE included the requirement to use the RNR method to carry out a diagnostic evaluation of participants. This requirement was omitted from the 2018 call for tenders won by Artemis and the Solidarity arm of Groupe SOS.

The legal and institutional framework of PAIRS

The objective set by the public authorities for the provider responsible for running PAIRS is defined in the special technical specifications of the 2018 call for tenders: “to achieve disengagement from violent radicalization and prevent the risk of violence while encouraging social reintegration”. A ministerial circular cosigned by the director of criminal matters and pardons and the director of the prison administration on March 29, 2019, stated that “the goal of the centers for handling radicalized individuals is to work toward disengagement from violent radicalization and prevent the risk of progressing to violence while encouraging social reintegration and instilling civic values”.

This circular defined the legal and institutional framework of the program, which was aimed at PPSMJJs, including both TISs and DCSRs, whether before or after trial. In line with the provisions added to the Code of Criminal Procedure by the law strengthening the fight against organized crime, terrorism, and their financing of June 3, 2016, individuals can be assigned to the program by a judge. In such cases, participants who do not comply with the requirements of the program risk having the measure revoked and being placed in custody. As a counterterrorism judge explains, “the aim is to use legal force to make people reintegrate. Judges only trust people who fulfill their obligations”.¹⁰³

Among the individuals subject to such orders I met, some participated actively in the program while others rejected it. This latter group attended meetings under duress but maintained an indifferent, not to say hostile, attitude throughout. As several professionals involved with PAIRS emphasized, it takes a long time to win participants’ trust and acceptance. For example, I observed a group activity where one young man seemed particularly engaged and friendly.¹⁰⁴ The staff involved said that the man—a

102. J. Bonta and D. A. Andrews, “Risk-Need-Responsivity Model for Offender Assessment and Rehabilitation 2007-06”, *op. cit.*

103. Interview with a counterterrorism judge, Tribunal de Paris, June 30, 2020.

104. Group activity organized by the Paris PAIRS team, November 2019.

“returnee” from Syria—had at first completely refused to talk and that it had taken several months for him to open up.

Not all PAIRS participants are subject to a legal obligation. Some people under judicial control choose to take part in the program voluntarily, but they are a small and rapidly decreasing minority. An example of this category might be someone who has been convicted and to whom PAIRS was suggested as a form of post-sentence follow-up. Judges responsible for executing sentences at the Parquet national antiterroriste (PNAT, National Counterterrorism Prosecutor’s Office) told me that they regularly try to convince convicted individuals to join PAIRS because they believe that social support is preferable to a “*sortie sèche*”, i.e., an abrupt release from prison with no follow-up.¹⁰⁵ The SPIP can also suggest PAIRS to convicted individuals, for example in exchange for a sentence reduction. Such cases must be approved by a judge responsible for enforcing sentences.

In general, voluntary participants willingly follow the program and see it as helpful: one interviewee used the phrase “a lifeline”. Nevertheless, some of them make the most of the help offered to find accommodation or a job while avoiding close relationships with staff members who handle the psychological or ideological aspects. One program employee used the phrase “PAIRS à la carte” to describe this attitude; he lamented the lack of room for maneuver in terms of putting pressure on voluntary participants, who can decide to leave the program at any point. The ministerial circular of March 29, 2019, emphasized that for voluntary participants, “failure to adhere to the program is not subject to legal sanctions”.

During my interviews with PAIRS staff, it was clear that this legal framework is seen as complicated. Employees sometimes struggled to explain why a particular participant was taking part in the program on a voluntary basis while another was obliged to do so. I also met several judges and directeurs de probation et d’insertion pénitentiaire (DPIP, prison integration and probation directors) who thought that PAIRS staff should be more familiar with the Code of Criminal Procedure. One judge, who clearly preferred the RIVE initiative, pointed out that the director of RIVE held a doctorate in private law and criminal sciences and that there was nobody equally qualified on the PAIRS team. Groupe SOS, aware of this criticism, chose a lawyer to replace the director of the Paris center when the latter left in September 2020.

105. Interviews carried out at the Parquet national antiterroriste on June 19, 2020.

Selection criteria for the PAIRS initiative

In the two years between the opening of the Paris center in October 2018 and the end of September 2020, PAIRS had a total of 120 participants (92 TISs and 28 DCSRs). The numbers vary widely from city to city: 63 in Paris (57 TISs and 6 DCSRs), 32 in Marseille (18 TISs and 14 DCSRs), 14 in Lyon (13 TISs and 1 DCSR), and 11 in Lille (4 TISs and 7 DCSRs). Of these 120 individuals, 26 were awaiting trial and 94 had already been convicted. In response to the steady increase in the rate of prison releases during this period, Groupe SOS and the prison administration signed a contract amendment in 2019 enabling the capacity of the centers to be expanded (from a potential maximum of 35 to 50 in Paris, and from 15 to 25 in each of the other cities). Although these numbers are considerable, they represent only a fraction of the TISs and DCSRs in open custody at any given time. In October 2019, there were 227 TISs and 502 DCSRs in open custody in France.¹⁰⁶ The question thus arises of what criteria are used to assign participants to the program. I attempted to shed more light on this question but received inconsistent answers, particularly in relation to the dangerousness of the PPSMJJs.

At the beginning of my research, I was told that PAIRS was not intended to handle individuals classed as being at the “upper end of the spectrum”. The concept of a “threat spectrum” has been widely used in the key ministries of state since the 2015 attacks, but it should be treated with caution, both in theory and in practice. In theory, the criteria used to place an individual on the spectrum are not entirely clear. Although the practice of performing evaluations—including of some of the PPSMJJs later assigned to PAIRS—in special quarters d'évaluation de la radicalisation (QER, radicalization assessment areas) within prisons improved the accuracy of dangerousness assessments, a diagnosis made over a two-month period can never be infallible. I have had the opportunity to visit several QERs over the last few years. On one of these visits, a member of staff described the evaluation methods used but emphasized that there was always an element of doubt, and then exclaimed, “We can't carry out a search inside someone's brain!”¹⁰⁷

In practice, some individuals who were thought by security services to be at the lower end or middle of the spectrum have gone on to commit terrorist acts. For example, the knife attack in Paris's Opéra district in May 2018 was carried out by a man who had been placed at the lower end of the

106. At that time, there were 512 TISs and 849 DCSRs in closed custody. See also interview at the prison administration directorate, October 16, 2019.

107. Visit to a radicalization assessment area, February 6, 2020.

spectrum. Another example is the attempted murder in September 2016 of a guard in a “dedicated unit” for radicalized detainees (these units were succeeded by QERs) in Osny prison. One of the staff members working in this prison at that time is now a member of the PAIRS team. When I asked him about the attack in Osny, he said that he had not expected it. Until then, the perpetrator had seemed respectful and interested in the activities provided in the unit and had not shown any sign of his intentions. When asked what lessons could be learned from the incident, he replied with one word: “caution”. This should be understood in two ways: caution so as not to put oneself at risk in relationships with participants, and caution when assessing dangerousness because an error of judgment could have tragic consequences.

While I was conducting this study, there seemed to be a change of direction. At the beginning of 2020, during an interview with the directors of the prison administration, I was told that individuals “at the very top of the spectrum who are held in solitary confinement while in prison” would not be assigned to PAIRS, but that the program could handle individuals at the “upper end of the ideological spectrum”, in other words those who adhere to jihadist principles but have not, so far, committed significant physical violence.¹⁰⁸

To try to get a more concrete answer, I talked to several people from the Ministry of Justice about two TISs—well-known among jihadism specialists—who had recently been released from prison. For geographical reasons, neither of the men was assigned to PAIRS: they lived in a sort of “dead zone” that was not covered by the program. I asked whether these individuals would have been assigned to the program if they had lived in a region covered by PAIRS. I received contradictory answers. Among the various opinions expressed, one in particular, that of a prison manager, is worth quoting here: “I don’t think in terms of the top or bottom of the spectrum at all. There are all types of individual in PAIRS. Someone at the top of the spectrum might need PAIRS, or they might not”.¹⁰⁹

This manager added that decisions on whether to assign “released prisoners” to the program are taken after consulting various actors about the prisoners’ profiles: the SPIP, support pairs consisting of two radicalization specialists (a psychologist and an educator), the prison intelligence service, and so on. These professionals must judge, on a case by case basis, whether PAIRS offers added value in comparison to more conventional supervision by a conseiller pénitentiaire d’insertion et de probation (CPIP, prison

108. Interview at the prison administration directorate, February 28, 2020.

109. Interview with a manager at an interregional directorate of prison services, February 21, 2020.

counselor for integration and probation). One of the key criteria concerns the PPSMJ's level of indoctrination and the need for a religious mediator. As the same manager told us, "there has to be a religious dimension for someone to be assigned to PAIRS".

In the event of doubt about whether assignment to the program is appropriate, PAIRS can be asked to carry out an assessment. This is a new development that was not provided for in the initial public contract and was added at the SPIP's request. At first sight, this practice may seem surprising given that Groupe SOS has a pecuniary interest in recommending that individuals are assigned to its own program. In fact, several of the people I interviewed praised the assessments for their fairness and the fact that they "don't try to push a sale", to borrow a colloquial expression used during an informal conversation.

It is worth noting that this assignment system allows for local flexibility. In one case, the Direction interrégionale des services pénitentiaires (DISP, Interregional Directorate of Prison Services) and the SPIP in one of the provincial cities were reproached by the central prison administration for having assigned some individuals to PAIRS who were too "high on the spectrum", and others whose psychological or psychiatric disorders were too severe.¹¹⁰ The local PAIRS directors agreed with the DISP and the SPIP and thought the program was capable of handling the individuals in question as long as the "psychiatric cases" were stable.¹¹¹ In another provincial city, the local program directors commented that they had been assigned "upper spectrum" individuals but that their most difficult participant so far had been classed as being at the "lower end of the spectrum".

More generally, the professionals I met emphasized that the most difficult cases were not necessarily those who had made the most progress with their terrorist plans. "Returnees" from Syria and Iraq are often described as easier to support than *velléitaires* (those who have attempted to go Syria or Iraq but have been unable to reach their final destination) or DCSRs who have a long history of crime. Finally, on several occasions I heard Groupe SOS employees express doubts about the suitability of particular assignments. These doubts were phrased in comments like: "Mr. X should be in a psychiatric hospital instead of with us", or "Mr. Y is a Salafist but he does not believe in jihadism. There's no reason for him to be in our program".

110. Interview with the DISP and SPIP in a provincial city, December 19, 2019.

111. Interview with the PAIRS directors in a provincial city, December 17, 2019.

PAIRS participants

I had the chance to meet about ten participants in the course of my research, either in face-to-face interviews or during group activities, which I will discuss in more detail further on. The aim of the interviews was to hear participants' opinions about the nature and value of their participation in the program. I did not intend to question them about their life stories or crimes, which would undoubtedly have led to mistrust. The group activities were primarily useful in giving me an opportunity to observe the interactions between staff and participants. Although the goal of these observations was not explicitly to find out more about the participants, some details did occasionally come to light this way. For example, I learned during informal conversations that one DCSR had murdered his violent stepfather, who regularly beat his mother, and that another had probably been raped as a child and had struggled with psychological problems ever since.

In both interviews and informal conversations, PAIRS staff emphasized the frequency among participants of disrupted life trajectories, complex family circumstances, psychological or psychiatric disorders, or addiction. These comments reminded me of the work of the journalist David Thomson, whose book on returnees describes how French nationals in Syria or Iraq are aware of their own shortcomings, often exchanging insults such as “welfare baby” or “special-needs kid”.¹¹²

I encountered some curious individuals during my fieldwork, including a volatile man with bipolar disorder who had been a neo-Nazi before converting to Islam and becoming a jihadist. The day I met him, he made several far-right statements and even described Muslims as “savages” in front of two female participants who were wearing hijabs.¹¹³ I also met a female TIS from an East African country who had converted to Islam and claimed to have Jewish ancestors. During a group activity, she explained that one of her ancestors had been raped by a colonist and given birth to a “bastard” whom she had hidden in order to avoid disgrace.

The overall impression of this accumulation of individual stories was one of confusion: there was no big picture. A social worker attempted a summary: “The fifteen people we’ve seen all have a common denominator: some kind of rupture in their life. We have not had a single Bac+5 [graduate student] with their head on their shoulders or any fully committed ideologues [...]. Psychological problems are another common denominator. Mr. Z is probably the only one who doesn’t have some kind of disability,

112. D. Thomson, *The Returned: They Left to Wage Jihad, Now They're Back*, op. cit.

113. Observation on November 27, 2019.

trauma, or mental disorder”.¹¹⁴ Some of his colleagues disputed this observation, however, and it was difficult to reach a final conclusion. The program directors did not have an overall record of information about the profiles of all participants. A local director justified this lack on the basis of the program’s *individualized* approach: what matters most, he explained, are the individual needs of each participant; a macro view would risk reducing individuals to statistics.

Nevertheless, I still think it would be useful to be able to see the bigger picture, if only in order to be able to gauge how well the professional skills of the program’s employees suit the needs of participants. For example, the program’s psychologists would need to work more hours if 80 percent of participants had some kind of psychological disorder than if only 40 percent did.

To try to get a better understanding of the profile of the typical PAIRS participant, therefore, I created a chart featuring around fifty criteria and sent it to the program directors. They forwarded it to the directors of the four centers, who in turn gave it to the frontline professionals with instructions to fill in the sections corresponding to their area of expertise. Although this document was careful to preserve the anonymity of participants, it caused quite a controversy. Some employees thought it was too intrusive or worried that their answers would be used for political ends, particularly in relation to questions about participants’ ethnic background or religious practice. I therefore had to make several changes to the document. Despite these amendments, I received only partial responses: the chart had been filled in patchily for around thirty PPSMJs. A vocational counselor also sent me her chart, which tracked twenty-five other PPSMJs, but with only the education and employment sections filled in. Nevertheless, although caution is essential given the poor sample, it is possible to identify certain patterns.

The vast majority of participants are French nationals. Homegrown jihadism seems to be the norm. I did, however, hear indirectly about at least three exceptions during my interviews. First, a Belgian TIS whose participation in the program ended at short notice when he was expelled from French territory. Second, a woman who was originally from Morocco but who had been living in France for a long time and whose children had been born in France. Finally, an Iraqi refugee. I did not receive any information about people with dual nationality.

Another striking point in common is the participants’ low level of education. Out of the twenty-five individuals who feature in the chart sent by the vocational counselor, ten had left the education system at the end of middle school or the beginning of high school. Six had enrolled in high school

114. Interview with a social worker, December 18, 2019.

classes leading to a *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (certificate of professional competence) but not all had actually obtained the diploma. Six participants had completed the baccalaureate (i.e., graduated high school); some of these had gone on to higher education but failed to complete their *brevet de technicien supérieur* (advanced technical certificate) or their university studies. Of the thirty or so individuals in the other, more general chart, two stand out: one with a master's degree and one with a bachelor's degree. Corroborating theories about the reproduction of elites, these individuals' parents were, respectively, managers and doctors. The other participants come from more modest family backgrounds, some in relatively precarious circumstances. Several of them said their parents were unemployed. There was also a noticeable pattern of large families: out of thirty PPSMJs, twenty-four were from families with three or more children. In contrast, only four PPSMJs had more than three children of their own. Twenty-two of the participants were single, of whom nineteen had no children. The average age of the participants was between twenty-five and thirty.

This low educational attainment had made it difficult for the participants to find jobs. I obtained information about the employment situation of twenty-seven individuals. Thirteen of them had been unemployed before committing their offenses. At the time of my study, i.e., when they were in the PAIRS program, eighteen were unemployed, often after a prison sentence that had made their search for a job even harder. Only one, a woman, was employed with a permanent contract. A vocational counselor pointed out that many of the PPSMJs have been deeply affected, including psychologically, by their turbulent lives and are not in a position to apply for a job right away. In fact, she explained that her mission was more about “remobilizing them for employment than helping them to find a job”.¹¹⁵

Another trait: sixteen of the thirty individuals had been prosecuted for terrorist criminal conspiracy (four “returnees” from Syria, seven *vellétaires*, five with plans to carry out attacks in France); seven had been prosecuted for the glorification of terrorism; and the rest for other crimes. Fourteen of the thirty had spent at least three years in prison.

Addiction is relatively common among participants, affecting around a third of the thirty participants. About a quarter of the individuals have some kind of mental illness. This proportion corresponds to the statement of a former PAIRS psychologist, who discussed cases that do not feature in the chart: “There are a lot of psychotic individuals in PAIRS. [...] Many of the

115. Interview with a vocational counselor, January 3, 2020.

participants have decompensated and experienced delusions. Almost ten out of forty”.¹¹⁶

As for religious practice, seven of the thirty individuals were born into Christian families; the rest come from Muslim families, mostly described as “traditionalist” by the professionals who filled out the chart. I only received eighteen responses to the question “Has the PPSMJ ever belonged to a fundamentalist movement (Tabligh, Salafism, Muslim Brotherhood)? If yes, which?” Four of the answers, dealing mostly with those who had converted to Islam via Salafism, were affirmative. I carried out interviews with five religious mediators. They all agreed that the PAIRS participants were not well informed about religious matters. There did seem to be some exceptions, but none of the mediators were impressed with the religious knowledge of any of the participants. One staff member, who also worked in a prison, said that in the course of his other job he had spoken to several ideologues with expertise in a wide range of Islamic texts, but that none of them had yet been assigned to PAIRS.

The PAIRS staff

Before the public contract for the establishment of PAIRS was issued, Artemis had sponsored a study into the “psychological and social profiles” of radicalized young people.¹¹⁷ The study concluded that susceptibility to radicalization could be explained by a variety of risk factors: individual (particularly psychological problems), micro-environmental (like a dysfunctional family environment), and macro-environmental (“religiosity” or geopolitics). Although it was not the main goal of the study, this finding suggests that programs dealing with radicalized individuals or those in the process of radicalization should attempt to address these three types of risk, and should, therefore, include psychologists, social workers, and religious experts.

The prison administration professionals who drafted the 2018 public contract reached the same conclusion as the authors of that study. This is hardly surprising: the need to address psychological, social, and religious aspects is broadly in line with international standards for disengagement

116. Interview with a former PAIRS employee, February 2020.

117. This study was published in French online at the beginning of 2018 on the Artemis website. See N. Campelo *et al.*, “Qui sont les jeunes Européens prêts à s’engager dans la radicalisation? Revue multidisciplinaire de leurs profils psychologiques et sociaux”, Artemis, 2018, available at: www.association-artemis.com. The English version was published later in a scientific journal: “Who Are the European Youths Willing to Engage in Radicalization? A Multidisciplinary Review of their Psychological and Social Profiles”, *European Psychiatry*, Vol. 52, 2020, pp. 1-14.

programs.¹¹⁸ The overall composition of the teams in each PAIRS center is thus predetermined by the special technical specifications. The public contract stipulates a multidisciplinary team comprising the management and three other arms. The largest arm is the social one, including educators, social workers, and vocational counselors. The next largest is the psychological arm, including clinical psychologists and a psychiatrist working as an independent contractor. Finally, the third arm handles religious and cultural mediation and consists of “specialists in contemporary Islam”. The special technical specifications stipulate that “the team may be supported, for example, by a CPIP, a geopolitics expert, or academics who can work with individuals in the program to develop critical faculties and encourage disengagement from violent radicalization”.

Organizations that submitted bids for the public contract had to include the résumés of the people who would form the future team handling the PPSMJs. The difficulty created by this type of situation—which is a fundamental issue with public contracts generally—is that other than the institution that had previously held the contract in Paris, the candidates’ teams were provisional: they would only have the resources to hire the prospective staff if they won the contract. Of course, the professionals in question might no longer be available by the time the contract was awarded. In this particular case, the last two lots were not awarded until more than six months after the call for tenders was issued. A prison administration manager told me that “in some locations, only 30 percent of the people initially presented were actually hired”.¹¹⁹ It is worth noting that all appointments of PAIRS employees are supposed to be approved by the central administration after being screened by the security services.

After having successively won all four lots, Groupe SOS had to work quickly to put together the teams. In Paris, several former APCARS employees who had worked on the RIVE initiative applied. The salaries offered by Groupe SOS were significantly lower, however. The PAIRS directors gave two reasons to explain this difference.¹²⁰ First, an existing collective agreement and Groupe SOS’s pay scale meant it was impossible to match the salaries offered by APCARS. Second, the RIVE staff had received a risk bonus of 500 euros,¹²¹ but the PAIRS directors did not believe such a bonus was justified.

118. See for example *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Exit strategies*, Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019.

119. Interview at the prison administration directorate, October 16, 2019.

120. Interview with the PAIRS directors, September 6, 2019.

121. Interview with a former APCARS employee, February 19, 2020.

The same argument was repeated by several managers throughout this research: working for PAIRS is less dangerous, on a day-to-day basis, than working in institutions dealing with addicts or homeless people. A director of one of the provincial centers, who had worked for several years with addicts, pointed out that “with addiction, the question of risk is important. There were real issues with violence. In my previous job, I once had to lock the team in an office while we waited for the gendarmerie to arrive. [...] At PAIRS, I know that if there is a problem, the police will arrive quickly. With addicts, on the other hand, violence is so common that sometimes the police don’t even intervene”. Clearly, however, not all employees will react the same way to risk. I will come back to this point.

Money was not the only reason so few former APCARS employees were hired by Groupe SOS. From the prison administration’s perspective, the change in provider needed to be reflected by partial changes in the team itself. It did try to facilitate the transition of a few employees from RIVE to PAIRS so that there was at least some continuity, but the PAIRS directors felt there were flaws in the method used by RIVE and as such had no desire to recruit employees who were accustomed to a mentoring system. In the end, only two RIVE employees went on to join PAIRS: the religious mediator, who had an excellent reputation within the prison administration, and a social worker who decided to leave during his trial period.

To put together the teams for the PAIRS centers, Groupe SOS turned to two different sources. First, internal: employees currently working in the group’s other institutions were offered a position on PAIRS. For example, a role was offered to a psychologist specializing in addiction who worked in an overseas *département* and wanted to come back to France.¹²² Second, external: several employees were hired after responding to a job advertisement that, for security reasons, did not specify the type of individual the program would be dealing with. Some people with experience working with radicalized PPSMJJs applied after hearing about the position through word of mouth, however. This was the case, for example, for former members of support pairs (*binômes de soutien*) who had been hired as contract workers by the prison administration. An educator and a psychologist who had previously worked at La Santé prison and Fleury-Mérogis prison, respectively, were recruited in this way. Nevertheless, most of the professionals working at the four PAIRS centers had no previous experience with radicalization.

122. Telephone interview with a PAIRS psychologist, March 23, 2020.

The PAIRS directors defend this choice. The national director explained that “it’s a good idea to have a wide range of profiles who are not all focused on jihadism. We need people who offer a breath of fresh air, a new perspective”.¹²³ A local director who had previously worked with refugees and addicts used himself as an example: “At the beginning, I accepted that I didn’t know very much about radicalization. My job was to run the center. I had to manage expenses, human resources, health and safety, and so on”.¹²⁴ He went on to discuss the employees in his center. His experience with radicalization specialists has left him skeptical: “At first, we hired several radicalization specialists, but it didn’t work out. They were a bit arrogant. We let some of them go and kept some of them”. He also mentioned an “expert” whose “analysis was pertinent but who was harmful to the group dynamic”.

I interviewed the same director a second time almost a year later, when he was preparing to leave his job. His opinion had not changed: “Other than for cultural and religious mediation, there is no need for specific expertise in radicalization. Some basic knowledge of radicalization is needed for psychological work, but other aspects are more important”.¹²⁵

The prison administration did not completely share this point of view and expressed doubts about the lack of expertise among the people hired by Groupe SOS. The PAIRS directors tried to assuage these doubts by asking an Artemis employee who had studied jihadism for several years to train the PAIRS staff. I was also told that in Paris, every new staff member begins with a two-week period observing the other professionals, including two days with the cultural and religious mediators. Despite these training initiatives, I was surprised by the discrepancies in how much the PAIRS staff know about radicalization and jihadism. Some employees are aware of the gaps in their knowledge and request more training. Some “experts”, meanwhile, say their colleagues come to them too often for help and that they do not have enough time to share their expertise.

The problem of turnover

Training became more problematic as the program went on because of the high rate of staff turnover, which meant there were regularly new arrivals needing training. In Paris, almost the entire team was replaced during the first two years of the program’s existence, the only exceptions being the cultural and religious mediators. In contrast, it was the position of mediator

123. Interview with the national PAIRS director, September 6, 2019.

124. Interview with a local PAIRS director, October 8, 2019.

125. Interview with a local PAIRS director, August 28, 2020.

that caused the most difficulties in the provincial centers. In both Marseille and Lyon, no less than four different mediators succeeded each other in the program's first year. The local directors explained that this instability was due in part to the newness of the mediator role, which was still in the process of being defined, and in part to the fact that many imams or Islamic scholars are not used to working in this sort of multidisciplinary professional setting, with a chain of command and specific targets to achieve.

Turnover seems to be a significant problem with the potential to jeopardize the progress of the PPSMJs, particularly because building a relationship of trust between a professional and a participant can take a long time. Moreover, as a psychologist who decided to leave PAIRS pointed out, "disruption to psychological care can be very violent".¹²⁶ To try to understand the reason for these departures, I interviewed some former employees.

Several factors were suggested to explain the frequency of staff turnover. One that came up repeatedly was financial. The salaries offered by Groupe SOS were low and the working hours were inconvenient: employees often finished work late and sometimes had to work on Saturdays. Some of the managers were required to be on stand-by and, in rare emergencies, had to work at night or on Sundays. The teams were also sometimes required to make lengthy journeys, which over a long period of time leads to burnout. For example, I accompanied a social worker from the Marseille center to an appointment with a participant near Avignon,¹²⁷ a journey of an hour and twenty minutes each way. The maximum range as stipulated in the public contract is one hundred kilometers or an hour and a half's travel. The participant was taking an agricultural training course and was not available during the daytime. He had to check in at the gendarmerie at six o'clock every evening. As he did not have a driving license, he was driven to the gendarme station by his mother. While he was checking in, the social worker talked to his mother about his progress and their family environment. When he had finished, they decided to carry out the interview on the terrace of a café in the center of town. After the interview, the social worker drove the participant back to his home before returning to Marseille. By that time, it was almost 10 p.m., and she still had to park the company car in the designated parking lot before taking public transport to go home.

The PAIRS initiative's economic model was also mentioned numerous times by employees as a source of stress and "loss of meaning". When the RIVE program was running, APCARS received a fixed amount of money from the prison administration: a flat fee was paid for each PPSMJ on the

126. Interview with a former Groupe SOS employee, February 4, 2020.

127. Observation on December 18, 2019.

program. As time went on, the administration became concerned that the system was open to abuse and felt that an arrangement giving it more control of its budget would be preferable. Accordingly, a new system was put in place when the new contract was awarded in 2018: the flat fee was replaced by payment by the hour. In practice, this means that Groupe SOS submits a monthly record of hours spent with the participants and receives the corresponding funds. At first, the total hours did not include time spent traveling, in meetings with institutional partners, or writing reports.

It quickly became clear that the model was not economically sustainable. The four centers went into deficit and the employees felt under pressure. Several current or former PAIRS staff members mentioned ominous remarks by directors: “If you don’t work enough hours, we might have to close down”. The employees I spoke to gave several examples of the negative consequences of the hourly payment system. On one occasion, a PAIRS employee wanted to improve his training level by attending a day-long conference on radicalization. The local director refused, arguing that the loss of earnings while at the conference would be too great.

The director explained, “Our financial goal is to break even. Employees have targets they must reach in terms of hours worked. If they work thirty-nine hours a week, we need them to spend twenty-three hours working directly with the participants in order to break even”.¹²⁸ In the first three months of its existence, his center had fourteen full-time workers for seventeen participants, which led to a deficit of 78,000 euros. In September 2020, the ratio had changed to nineteen full-time workers for forty participants, which meant the center could balance the books. The improved financial situation is partly also the result of amendments to the contract between Groupe SOS and the prison administration to the effect that time spent on long journeys and in meetings with institutional partners is now payable.

The pressure caused by the need to “do the hours” became particularly intense in December 2019, when public transport in France was paralyzed by strikes. As a former employee said, “the strike brought the whole thing crashing down. The fee-for-service model doesn’t work when the subway stops running and you can’t get to your meetings. [...] One colleague even crossed a highway on foot while trying to get to an interview on time”. This “senseless risk-taking” was the last straw for the staff member concerned, who decided to leave the program.

128. Interview with a local director on August 28, 2020.

A few months later, the COVID-19 crisis began. Lockdown made physical meetings impossible. By mutual agreement with the prison administration, all contact with the participants was moved to telephone or video calls, which relieved some of the pressure on the Groupe SOS employees. Several participants praised the PAIRS teams for remaining available during such a difficult time. For example, one TIS told me that he had not been able to get in touch with his CPIP or the center in charge of his electronic monitoring bracelet. He added that “without PAIRS, I wouldn’t have had any support, I would have been abandoned”.¹²⁹

Some current or former employees suggested another reason to explain the high turnover: the sense of danger. These employees were in the minority; the vast majority of staff I met seemed relaxed, aware of the risks of their job but refusing to give in to fear. While I was carrying out this study, however, there was a case of terrorist recidivism in the United Kingdom: a man on parole killed two people who worked for a reintegration program for individuals being released from prison. This event, which received a certain amount of media attention in France,¹³⁰ did not cause panic among the PAIRS staff.

Nevertheless, safety-related criticisms were mentioned multiple times during interviews and discussions. For obvious confidentiality reasons, they are not described in detail here. In one case, a DCSR told PAIRS staff about a vague plan to attack the police. The Groupe SOS employees are clear with the participants that such incidents must be reported up the hierarchy to the SPIP, which will in turn notify the Parquet (public prosecutor’s office). In that particular case, the reporting of the incident was effective. The man was quickly arrested and brought before a judge. The staff members believed they had simply done their duty. They may, however, ask themselves whether the man—who was ultimately convicted and then released after around a year in prison—might not want to take revenge for the denunciation.

Again, criticisms related to security problems were far from being unanimous among the people I spoke to. Several employees emphasized that social support necessarily involves a degree of proximity to participants and so a moderate amount of risk. This attitude is perfectly captured in the words of one manager: “Social workers do not barricade themselves away”.¹³¹

129. Interview with a PAIRS participant, July 9, 2020.

130. See for example “Attaque de Londres: l’assaillant, déjà condamné pour terrorisme, était en liberté conditionnelle,” *Le Parisien* and AFP, November 30, 2019.

131. Interview on November 29, 2019.

The high staff turnover can thus be explained by a combination of various factors, some of which are easier to control than others. Increasing salaries would undoubtedly partially solve the problem. The 500-euro risk bonus paid by the RIVE program certainly contributed toward the stability of its staff, in contrast to the instability of the PAIRS workforce. Nevertheless, the PAIRS directors argue that this instability should be qualified in light of two considerations.

First, in comparative terms the staff turnover in PAIRS is equal to or lower than the turnover in other social organizations or even the SPIPs. At the end of 2019, Groupe SOS hired a manager who had previously worked as a contractor for several SPIPs. This person—who, incidentally, quit less than a year later—told me that turnover and absenteeism were actually higher in the SPIPs where she had worked. This statement seems to be corroborated in several official reports dealing with the SPIPs or the prison administration as a whole.¹³² As these reports show, the problem is far from a new one: the “despondency” and high rate of absenteeism among prison staff were already being discussed in a Senate report in 2000.¹³³ The second consideration is managerial, with directors portraying staff turnover as a positive thing that brings in new blood and fresh perspectives. One local director summarized this attitude succinctly: “We’ve had the departures we wanted and the arrivals we wanted”.¹³⁴

Starting the program

Now that I have discussed the legal framework of PAIRS and the characteristics of its participants and staff, I will move on to describing the content of the program itself. Initial contact between participants and PAIRS staff can take place in one of three ways. The first involves assessment while in custody. In this case, PAIRS staff will travel to the prison to meet the potential participant. According to the director of the Lille branch of the program, each staff member must spend at least four hours interviewing the PPSMJ, leading to a total of around twenty-five hours of interviews. Based on this assessment—which is not compulsory—the prison administration decides whether to assign the PPSMJ to PAIRS.

The second way is more common. If participation in PAIRS has been mandated by a court order, or if the SPIP wants to assign an individual to the program without prior assessment, a three-way meeting to explain how

132. See for example S. Lacoche, *et al.*, *Les services pénitentiaires d’insertion et de probation*, Inspection générale des finances and Inspection générale des services judiciaires, July 2011, p. 19.

133. Sénat, No. 449 *Les conditions de détention dans les établissements pénitentiaires en France*, Commission d’enquête (Rapporteurs: Mr. J.-J. Hyest and Mr. G.-P. Cabanel), June 29, 2000.

134. Interview on October 8, 2019.

the program works is arranged between the SPIP, PAIRS, and the participant. Participants are asked to sign a “document individuel de prise en charge” (DIPC, Individual Treatment Document), which is presented as a contract defining the conditions of participation. The document clearly states that “any failure to comply (failure to attend a meeting, unjustified absence, and so on) will be immediately reported to the relevant SPIP and the judicial authorities”. Before this initial meeting, the local PAIRS directors are supposed to receive a *fiche-navette* (response form) containing information about the PPSMJ’s history (more or less precise depending on who compiled the form).

In the third way, the initial meeting takes place at the moment of the detainee’s release. This happened several times when individuals leaving prison did not have anywhere to live. In such cases, the individual is picked up from prison by a PAIRS support pair and taken to temporary accommodation. The ability to provide transitional accommodation is a major addition to PAIRS in comparison to RIVE. Accommodation was included in PAIRS because it was discovered that some individuals involved in terrorism cases were ending up homeless after being released, a situation that unequivocally increases the risk of recidivism and makes monitoring more difficult.

The ministerial circular of March 29, 2019, stipulates that participants must always be housed separately in order to avoid a concentration of radicalized individuals or proselytizers. Several people I questioned during this study, including a counterterrorism investigating judge, said that the circular was too inflexible on this point: some PPSMJs are not independent or psychologically stable enough to be able to live alone. It would, therefore, be desirable to give the PAIRS team a bit of room for maneuver to allow some PPSMJs to be housed in centers specializing in support for dependent adults.

In practice, decisions about accommodation are made by the prison administration. There are three key criteria involved. The first is social: it is out of the question for a destitute individual who has been convicted for terrorist acts to have to sleep on the streets after leaving prison. Having somewhere to live is seen as the first prerequisite for the reintegration process. Moreover, providing accommodation also has security advantages. From the point of view of the Minister of the Interior, it is better to know where people classed as “at risk” are living. For that reason, individuals registered in the Fichier des auteurs d’infractions terroristes (FIJAIT, National Database for Terrorist Offenders) must declare their place of residence every three months.

The second criterion involves court injunctions that prevent individuals from returning to the same accommodation they were in before being imprisoned. For example, a PPSMJ may be prohibited from going to the place where his or her crime was committed. If the former accommodation is within the banned area, the individual cannot return to it.

The third criterion relates to the family environment: it is not a good idea for prison leavers to return to a radical family. The provision of accommodation may also be recommended if the family environment is considered “toxic” in other ways, for example because of abuse. In the first few months of PAIRS, only a handful of participants were housed in accommodation provided by the program. Demand increased significantly over time, however, and by September 2020, eighteen of the forty participants in Paris were living in provided accommodation.¹³⁵

I was able to carry out several interviews with PAIRS’s institutional partners, all of whom emphasized the program’s efficiency when it comes to accommodation. Groupe SOS employees are able to find suitable accommodation in just a few hours. A Groupe SOS director told me that the PPSMJs in PAIRS do not receive preferential access to the emergency accommodation facilities managed by the group.¹³⁶ However, the group’s expertise and relationships with private landlords and social housing authorities mean it can rapidly find suitable accommodation in the rental market. If there is no accommodation immediately available, PPSMJs are sometimes housed temporarily in a hotel.

The fact that people convicted of terrorist acts are given accommodation in this way has provoked criticism, including within the prison administration. Probation counselors working with PAIRS told me that colleagues working with “ordinary prisoners” had complained that it was unfair that terrorists and radicalized individuals received special treatment and were housed at the taxpayer’s expense. The probation counselors had replied that such measures were necessary given the sensitivity of the subject, and that the accommodation provided was only temporary. The goal is to help the PPSMJs become independent and able to pay for their own accommodation.

Besides accommodation, PAIRS has another significant innovation compared to RIVE: the number of hours a participant spends in program-related activities. The RIVE contract specifications stipulated that the program would require six hours per week. In reality, it was more flexible, as a former APCARS employee explained: “The average was five hours per

135. Interview with a local director, August 28, 2020.

136. Interview with a Groupe SOS director, October 31, 2019.

week. It might be more at the beginning of the program, but then gradually decreased because the goal was to help the person become independent. Sometimes participants needed a break, particularly if they had to attend other meetings or when they returned to work. In that case, program hours might be much lower for a while and then pick up again a bit later”.¹³⁷

The contract specifications for PAIRS stipulated three different supervision levels: three, ten, or twenty hours per week. The level was decided by the SPIP and was regularly reassessed as the PPSMJ progressed. Again, the system was more flexible in practice, particularly for the highest level. A former Groupe SOS employee explained that “luckily, the rule was relaxed, because in some cases we weren’t sure how to fill the twenty hours, and overly intense supervision can backfire as it makes some participants feel harassed”.¹³⁸ Another employee described such intense supervision as “necessary for some people but infantilizing, invasive, and counter-productive for others”.¹³⁹ These comments recall the “loss of meaning” discussed in the section dealing with staff turnover. Occasionally, the program hours were used for activities described by the staff as “recreational”. Broadly speaking, however, activities are designed with reintegration in mind, although at first glance some may seem surprising or prompt skeptics to compare the program to a “summer camp”.¹⁴⁰

The program begins with a series of interviews in which staff assess the participant’s current status and learn more about his or her needs and long-term reintegration plans. These interviews can take place on the PAIRS premises or elsewhere, for example in a café. The general rule imposed by the PAIRS directors is that the interviews must be conducted by two staff members working as a pair, for three reasons: to ensure genuinely multidisciplinary work; to avoid an overly strong bond in which the professional acts like a “mentor”; and to be able to intervene quickly in the event of an incident. Staff feelings about this rule are mixed. Some see it in entirely positive terms, while others find it more difficult. A psychologist, who is used to more traditional consultations, told me that she struggles to work effectively when not in a face-to-face context. A religious mediator described feeling irritated when his social worker colleagues spoke about religious matters during joint interviews. In fact, the rule of working in pairs has also been relaxed. It is now possible for one staff member to hold a face-to-face interview with a PPSMJ. In such cases, a colleague is supposed to wait in an adjoining room for security reasons.

137. Interview with a former APCARS employee, October 30, 2019.

138. Interview with a former Groupe SOS employee, February 2, 2020.

139. Telephone interview with a Groupe SOS employee, March 23, 2020.

140. Interview with a director at the prison integration and probation service, October 18, 2019.

Support for participants

Some participants may struggle to open up in an interview or are bored of repeating their story to strangers after a long journey through the courts and sometimes a prison sentence. A psychologist remarked that one PPSMJ had seen half a dozen other psychologists or psychiatrists before meeting her. Sometimes an interview was held solely for the purpose of a short expert assessment, but the PPSMJ still had to tell her whole story again.

If necessary, PAIRS staff can conduct interviews in different places in order to facilitate conversation. They may suggest various activities: sports sessions, trips to the countryside or the seaside, a visit to a museum, and so on. They may also visit the participants' homes to meet them in their family environment. A director summarized this approach by saying, "Reintegrating individuals sometimes means going off the beaten path".¹⁴¹

"Breaking the ice" or "getting the conversation flowing" is often just one of the aims of these trips. In several cases, it worked. For example, a psychologist took a TIS to see an exhibition about colonization. The young man, who had never talked about his family history in conventional interviews, opened up during the visit and expressed his shame at being descended from *harkis* (Algerian Muslims who fought for France in the Algerian War of Independence).¹⁴² An educator in another city described a similar incident: "I went to see an exhibition about prisons, 'Au-delà des murs' (Beyond the Walls), three times with three different participants. It was a powerful experience for one of them. The young man absorbed the exhibition and shared a lot of information. I was there with a psychologist colleague—that was essential. The advantage of PAIRS is working as a pair, in a multidisciplinary way".¹⁴³

It is also worth hearing what participants think about these activities. One TIS, who was helped by PAIRS to achieve a "childhood dream" of learning to ride a horse, said, "It helps you get to know each other in a relaxed setting. I feel at ease with them [the PAIRS staff]. I open up like I would never have done sitting in front of a desk".¹⁴⁴ He also explains that PAIRS paid for his first two riding lessons but that he had to pay for the rest, which motivated him to find a job as a sales clerk in a phone store.

I told another TIS that critics of PAIRS sometimes portray the program's activities as being like a summer camp. This man, who had spent six years in prison after returning from Syria, reacted strongly: "It doesn't

141. Telephone interview with a local PAIRS director, March 17, 2020.

142. Interview with a PAIRS psychologist, July 8, 2020.

143. Telephone interview with a PAIRS educator, March 26, 2020.

144. Interview with a TIS in the PAIRS program, July 8, 2020.

feel like a vacation to me! It's a return to life! When you've been locked up for years, you get taught not to want anything. PAIRS manages to make you want things. I know that when I start working again, I'll treat myself to trips to museums, to the zoo, and so on. Life is more than just commute-work-sleep. It's not about saying, 'Hey, let's go on a trip.' The aim is to start enjoying life again. When you're enjoying life, you don't have time to think about getting involved in crime".¹⁴⁵

I asked several Groupe SOS employees to describe the sorts of activities the participants do and the purpose of each one. Their responses varied depending on their specialisms. The psychological arm of the program is still based on interviews, but psychologists also plan trips alongside their colleagues from the social or religious arms. I was given several examples, including a visit to the Centre National de la Mer (National Sea Center) with a TIS who had to wear an electronic monitoring bracelet. A psychologist told me that the outing was co-planned with an educator. The participant was worried that his bracelet would prevent him from going on the trip. In fact, the day went without a hitch. The psychologist added that "the interesting thing is what happened next. He went to see the sea, splashed water on his face. A lot was going on but it's difficult to explain. He was able to reconnect with some part of himself".¹⁴⁶

In the social arm, the beginning of the program is dedicated to sorting out participants' administrative affairs. Some of them no longer have a Carte Vitale (national health insurance card), bank account, or even access to the Revenu de solidarité active (income support benefit). The PAIRS staff explain to the participants that they have duties toward society but also rights, particularly social rights. Some of them, especially those who have spent several years in prison, must also relearn the skills of daily life: taking public transport, shopping, cooking, managing a budget, and so on. During an informal conversation, I was told about a DCSR who had spent a dozen years in prison. In the first few weeks on the program, he would instinctively wait in front of doors until someone else opened them, as he had had to in prison. He also found it hard to orient himself in open spaces and seemed to struggle to readjust to urban life.

The process of relearning daily living skills and sorting out their administrative affairs also teaches participants that they can return to some sort of normality. The returnee from Syria who spent six years in prison expresses this clearly: "Beyond the administrative procedures, what really struck me was that I never felt judged by them, not even once. [...] I never

145. Interview with a different TIS in the PAIRS program, July 8, 2020.

146. Interview with a PAIRS psychologist, July 8, 2020.

once felt like a terrorist while in PAIRS. It was the first time in six years that people had spoken to me like a normal person. When they speak to me, I feel like I am somebody. [...] Now, I have just as much chance to succeed as anyone else. I want to believe it”.¹⁴⁷ After my interview with this man, I accompanied him, alongside an educator and a psychologist, to a training session at Emmaüs Connect. This association aims to reduce the digital divide and to use the internet as a means to social reintegration. The participant explained that the computer workshop would be particularly useful for finding a job.

Finding a job is, rightly, one of the pillars of the social arm. More specifically, it is the responsibility of vocational counselors. It involves conventional activities like visiting *missions locales* (access points for employment and social services), accompanying participants to Pôle Emploi (government job center), researching training options, drafting a résumé, preparing for job interviews, and so on. It also sometimes involves more innovative activities. For example, a participant in northern France was accompanied to the Paris International Agricultural Show to find out about careers in agriculture. According to him, the trip helped him realize “the richness of French heritage, the quality of farms, but also the difficulty of the work”.¹⁴⁸

Employees in the social arm repeatedly mentioned how lonely participants are. Activities to help them rebuild their social life include volunteer work (distributing food to vulnerable people, for example), professional training, or group activities. Participants may join an external group for an activity (e.g., to play sport), or a group of them may engage in an activity together. When I carried out my interviews and observations, only the Paris branch of the program organized this kind of group activity involving several participants. The other teams did not feel ready for them to meet each other, and some of the participants themselves were openly hostile to the idea. A woman who had returned from Syria several years before and changed a lot since then explained: “There were other French women in Manbij. I don’t want to run into them again. The thought makes me nervous. [...] I don’t want to have anything to do with those people. I know their mentality”.¹⁴⁹

This reluctance appears to be the exception, however. In general, the participants seem to enjoy being able to meet others going through the program. I had the chance to attend a writing workshop where two women

147. Interview with a PAIRS participant, July 8, 2020.

148. Interview with a PAIRS participant, July 8, 2020.

149. Interview with a PAIRS participant, December 17, 2019.

convicted for terrorist acts were writing comedy sketches about their experience with the justice system.

I was also able to join five participants (two women and three men; two DCSRs and three TISs) on a visit to the Louvre accompanied by four staff members.¹⁵⁰ This museum contains items with the potential to spark discussions about a variety of subjects that might be of interest to radicalized individuals: the relationship to Islamic art, Assyrian art (including winged human-headed bulls similar to those destroyed by ISIS in Syria and Iraq), Persian art, Christian iconography, nude statues, paintings depicting French history (*Liberty Leading the People* by Eugène Delacroix), and so on. I was thus expecting a guided tour designed to stimulate conversations about certain specific works or topics.

In fact, the PAIRS staff opted to let the participants decide where they wanted to go. Of the five participants, only one young woman had previously been to the Louvre. She had visited for the first time with her religious mediator and had gone on her own twice after that. The others had never been and had no particular expectations, other than a young man who had done some research on the internet beforehand and wanted to see the *Mona Lisa* and the Passemant astronomical clock. Before going to see these works, the group unanimously decided to visit the Islamic art section.

The participants made some interesting observations that could have led to in-depth discussions. For example, one young woman asked why Islamic artworks were exhibited in a French museum and not in the country they came from. But the staff were more concerned with observing than educating. They wanted to see how the participants would behave in the new environment and how the group dynamic would develop. For example, they noted—very carefully—that a young female TIS was trying to get closer to a male DCSR. The young woman even asked a female educator to give her the man’s cellphone number. The educator refused, of course. She discussed the situation with her colleagues and, on the following day, with the entire team during a debrief meeting.

Another example of interaction noted by the professionals was when a male DCSR said he was shocked by the clothing of some female tourists and claimed that “if a woman wearing a miniskirt gets raped, it’s her fault.” A female TIS wearing a *jilbab* explained clearly and calmly that his comments were unacceptable. The professionals said she would never have been able to react with such self-control a few months earlier.

150. Visit to the Louvre, November 27, 2019.

I will give three examples from among the other group activities mentioned during my interviews. First, a project to produce news reports in collaboration with a specialist association. The aim was twofold: to give the participants an understanding of how professional journalists work (gathering information, combating fake news, and so on) and “to change their perception of ordinary French people”,¹⁵¹ who they had to interview on the street.

Second, a cosmetics creation workshop with the young women. The educator running the session explained that it had three objectives: to help the women accept their femininity; to show them that they are capable of achieving something (“It was a positive experience. These are people who have failed dramatically. Some smiled for the first time in a long time when they realized they were able to create a day cream”¹⁵²); and to teach them responsibility by making them manage the budget of the workshop.

Finally, an interreligious debate with the religious mediators, but also a priest, a rabbi, and so on. The main goal was to learn to respect other people’s points of view and that there is not just one correct interpretation of Islam. The question of female imams was a particular focus of one of these debates.

The religious and cultural mediation arm also offers a diverse range of activities. The core of its work consists of theological discussions that involve the study of sacred texts, the identification of weak hadiths used by jihadists, or historical contextualization. The aim is not to deny the existence of violent passages in the sacred texts, but to consider them in the context of their time, to compare them to other sources, and to help participants understand that there is no place for violence in modern society.

The mediators can also accompany the participants on trips to various places, for example to Islamic libraries, mosques, or other religious or cultural destinations (the Arab World Institute in Paris, the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations in Marseille, and so on). They can also visit the participants at home. A female mediator told me that these home visits can be very revealing. While in a male participant’s home, she asked to use the bathroom but the man refused, saying that a woman could not sit on the same toilet as him.¹⁵³

As the “occupation” of religious and cultural mediator is relatively new, there are no common standards defining how mediators should deal with participants. Different mediators may approach the job in different ways,

151. Interview with an educator in the PAIRS program, November 28, 2019.

152. Interview with an educator in the PAIRS program, November 28, 2019.

153. Interview with a cultural and religious mediator, December 18, 2019.

although discussions between colleagues may encourage a degree of convergence. The most in-depth consideration of the problem I heard was from a mediator in Paris, who presented a five-stage method. First, evaluate the PPSMJ's basic knowledge. Second, draw up an indisputable shared corpus (Quran, fundamental tenets). Third, point out the contradictions in radical ideology. This stage can cause some participants a "sort of intellectual distress". Fourth, contextualize, ban ahistorical interpretations. Fifth, "never leave a participant's questions unanswered, but if you don't know, you must acknowledge it and not lie". To be precise: "You must be kind, remember that the goal is not to make the person less Muslim but to help him or her become more intellectually independent. Once the first domino falls, the others follow. It's a huge step forward when someone asks, 'Why did they lie to us?'"¹⁵⁴

Assessing the participants' progress

The mediator's comments mentioned above raise two fundamental questions: How can the participants' progress be measured, and how can the risk of recidivism be assessed? Groupe SOS must keep the prison administration informed about developments in this area. Every three months, a multidisciplinary report on each participant must be sent to the SPIP. For individuals who are legally obliged to participate in PAIRS, the SPIP is also supposed to send this report on to the relevant judge. Nevertheless, several people I met complained about the "lack of flow" in the transmission chain. A prosecutor from the PNAT exclaimed, "We had to chase up the reports!"¹⁵⁵ Moreover, during the first few months of the program the SPIP would sometimes rewrite the reports or only send the judges certain extracts. This practice seems to have stopped following objections from the PAIRS directors and some judges.

At the beginning of my study, I heard several different people within the Ministry of Justice criticizing the low quality of these reports. These criticisms were sometimes contradictory: some people wanted longer documents, while others demanded more conciseness. The PAIRS staff often complained of not having enough time to write the reports. The program directors, meanwhile, blamed a lack of skill among some Groupe SOS employees, who were more comfortable dealing with participants than providing feedback or written analysis. The possibility of developing training courses for analytical writing was discussed. I was unable to find out whether these courses were ever run. However, the judges and the SPIP

154. Interview with a cultural and religious mediator, November 26, 2019.

155. Interview with judges at the Parquet national antiterroriste, June 19, 2020.

acknowledged that the quality of the documents produced by the PAIRS teams had generally improved over time.

Moreover, I was struck by the absence of methodological tools that would enable objective evaluation. Groupe SOS did submit a grid analysis as part of its bid for the public contract, but it was quickly dismissed as unusable by the program staff. When I asked about the tools used in other countries for assessing the risk of recidivism among radicalized individuals (like VERA 2R or ERG 22+), the employees responded in one of two ways. Some had never heard of such tools, while others had come across them in previous roles (former members of support pairs in the prison administration, former APCARS employees) but were skeptical about them.

Although several managers within the prison administration share this skepticism, they still find it problematic that PAIRS does not use any indicators that would enable objective evaluation. One DPIP spoke vehemently about the issue: “Sometimes, I think to myself that I don’t have enough evidence that what they say is true. [...] There is nothing in their reports to make an opinion objective”.¹⁵⁶ Most of the PAIRS staff are aware of this problem and refer to a “lack of common standards”,¹⁵⁷ with each staff member carrying out assessments according to his or her own experience. Nevertheless, some of them go even further, like an employee who describes herself as powerless: “I don’t have the necessary tools to detect taqiya. [...] I don’t have the tools to diagnose”.¹⁵⁸ I will come back to the topic of taqiya—dissimulation—but first I would like to take a more in-depth look at evaluation tools in general. Several professionals mentioned their fear of “being trapped in grids and tables”¹⁵⁹ and stressed the importance of “impressions” when “working with people”.¹⁶⁰ One director argued, “We have always worked based on our impressions. It’s not just guesswork. It’s empirical. [...] The new generation were trained using new tools but I’m not sure the result would be very different. The judicial authorities don’t like subjectivity but we’re not wide of the mark. We need to use indicators to communicate our impressions more effectively”.¹⁶¹

The PAIRS directors took the prison administration’s complaints seriously and tried to create a set of common standards that would enable greater consistency between the assessments carried out by different PAIRS teams. The first version of these standards was drawn up by the Lyon

156. Interview with a DPIP, October 18, 2019.

157. Interview with a Groupe SOS employee, November 28, 2019.

158. Interview with a Groupe SOS employee, December 17, 2019.

159. Interview with a local PAIRS director, December 17, 2019.

160. Interview with a Groupe SOS employee, November 28, 2019.

161. Interview with a local PAIRS director, December 19, 2019.

employees. A manager in the Lyon branch explained: “In March [2020] we started using a macro monitoring tool with twenty-six indicators in order to measure individuals’ progress more accurately. The aim was to objectivize the evaluation process”.¹⁶² This tool—which consists of a table with spaces to fill in for the social, psychological, and religious arms—is not intended to be a “restrictive grid”, and even less an actuarial tool. It aims, more modestly, to provide a framework around which the staff members can plan “semi-structured interviews”.

I had the opportunity to consult some of the evaluation reports. Although some attempt at harmonization has been made, the objectivization only goes so far. Some forms of “progress” are easy to substantiate: looking for a job, finding accommodation, or family stabilization. In other areas, however, the objective criteria are much harder to capture. In particular, how can disengagement or deradicalization be objectively verified? When I posed this question to the religious and cultural mediators, some of them instantly brought up the problem of lying, or *taqiya*.

One staff member—who, incidentally, handed in his notice a few months after I interviewed him—said that he had little confidence in his own ability to assess how individuals were progressing or to detect lies: “I ask myself. There was one person who showed me his books. There were references to ISIS and al-Qaeda. He was a French convert who didn’t understand everything. At the beginning, he told me: ‘I don’t understand anything.’ But he recognized the photo of al-Albani.¹⁶³ They can lie. If they tell us it’s all over, what do we know?”¹⁶⁴

Another staff member was more confident but still gave an evasive answer: “It’s difficult to know what stage someone is really at. We learn to tell whether someone is lying. We’re dealing with people. We talk a lot about evaluation grids. I’m cautious about that type of tool. Radicalization is a human phenomenon. The real evaluation is of what we feel, our knowledge of a person, an accumulation of signs. It’s experience”.¹⁶⁵

A third mediator, who had more experience than the previous two, was more specific: “You can detect the presence of radical speech and try to measure the level of engagement in radical ideology. You can detect *taqiya*. But you cannot guarantee that a person will never commit a violent act. The

162. Telephone interview with a manager in the Lyon PAIRS branch, March 17, 2020.

163. Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914–1999) is “one of the most prominent figures in contemporary Salafism.” See S. Lacroix, “L’apport de Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani au salafisme contemporain,” in B. Rougier (ed.), *Qu’est-ce que le salafisme?*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2008, pp. 45–64.

164. Interview with a cultural and religious mediator, December 18, 2019.

165. Telephone interview with a cultural and religious mediator, March 23, 2020.

level of engagement can be measured using several indicators: the individual's relationship to the caliphate, to jihad, to the Hijrah, to the principle of loyalty and disavowal, and so on. You can see which hadiths an individual refers to, which school of Islam he identifies with".¹⁶⁶ He went on to give some examples: "Almost every Friday, I accompany the participants to the mosque. We don't just go to pray. I'm also there to observe. We discuss the imam's sermon afterwards. Once, after attending the Great Mosque of Paris, a participant told me that the mosque collaborated with the French government, that it was *taghut*.¹⁶⁷ Another participant said, 'the imams in the Paris mosque pray too quickly.' His Salafist ideology was deep-rooted. Once, I was praying behind a participant. The way he bent his legs suggested to me that he adhered to a specific school".

A fourth, even more experienced mediator started with a warning: "There's no such thing as a test to detect jihadists".¹⁶⁸ He distinguished between two forms of dissimulation: "passive dissimulation consists of curling up into a ball and waiting for it to be over", while "active dissimulation is rarer and involves pretending to agree with the support worker". He listed some of the signs that indicate *taqiya*, some to do with appearance, some to do with an individual's religious practice, and others to do with how a person thinks. He approaches his evaluations with caution, frequently using the conditional in his reports. He is, however, openly optimistic about several participants who, in his opinion, "will not slip back in the name of religion". At the other end of the scale, some individuals have deep-seated radical beliefs without necessarily being likely to commit a violent act. Between the two extremes, there is a gray area encompassing the majority of participants.

Sometimes participants talk about "things clicking into place" and believe they are definitively out of danger. For example, one woman I met attributed her "awakening" to an educator from the Protection Judiciaire de la Jeunesse (PJJ, Judicial Protection of Young People): "My transformation happened in June–July 2016, just before the Nice attack. I was being monitored by the PJJ. An educator told me, 'You seem terrified when you talk about the father of your children. Your behavior changes when we talk about him. You have to realize that you are an individual. He's in prison. You

166. Interview with a cultural and religious mediator, November 26, 2019.

167. According to Luis Martinez, "*taghout* [spelled *taghut* in English-language texts] is the name given by Islamists to the state. It is borrowed from the vocabulary of the Quran and refers to the Devil. It also, in the lexicon of Islamist movements, means Tyrant, Oppressor, the 'false god' who one worships out of fear." See L. Martinez, "Le cheminement singulier de la violence islamiste en Algérie", *Critique internationale*, Vol. 3, 2003, pp. 165-177.

168. Interview with a different cultural and religious mediator, November 26, 2019.

can make decisions for yourself.’ I felt free. Suddenly, I woke up. Something happened”.¹⁶⁹

The PAIRS professionals are wary, however. Although they feel the woman has made significant progress, they say that she still finds it hard to accept responsibility for the acts she is accused of and puts the blame on her husband, who she claims manipulated her. Generally speaking, participants’ progress is rarely linear. There may be “advances” and “backward steps” depending on circumstances that are sometimes unrelated to the program (family event, chance encounter, administrative problem, experience with the justice system, and so on). That is why exchange between professionals in different disciplines is so important, and also why participants must be monitored over the long term, with close collaboration between the different agencies responsible for the PPSMJ.

PAIRS in its institutional environment

The institutional context of PAIRS has already been described, but it is worth discussing the way it was set up. As often happens, the progression from theory to practice involved a certain amount of friction and adjustment. Overall, the system works: the following observations should not be understood as calling the program in its entirety into question, but rather as pointing out specific areas that could be clarified or improved.

The SPIPs are PAIRS’s main institutional partners. The nature of the dialogue between the two entities varies depending on location and the individuals concerned. In certain cases, the relationship is one of real osmosis: the DPIPs and CPIPs see PAIRS as a partner in its own right and are full of praise for the program. In other cases, the relationship seems more strained. PAIRS is not perceived as a partner so much as a service provider whose job is simply to carry out the instructions of the prison administration.

Some DPIPs and CPIPs—a small minority—see the initiative as a waste of public resources and think it would have been more sensible to spend the money on improving the SPIPs’ monitoring. On average, one CPIP monitors eighty PPSMJs, and to some officials within the prison administration the level of support provided by PAIRS seems like undue luxury, or even a form of injustice. Some critics of the initiative—particularly in the provincial cities where PAIRS monitors the PPSMJs without a permanent team in the area—accuse the service provider of lacking local knowledge. These negative comments are often part of broader criticism of the dismantling of public

169. Interview with a PAIRS participant, December 17, 2019.

services and the trend toward outsourcing. Some prison staff find it hard to understand the need for a service provider to deal with radicalized PPSMJs given that the prison administration already employs radicalization specialists on a contractual basis: the support pairs (*binômes de soutien*) consisting of an educator and a psychologist. Moreover, since the beginning of 2020 some SPIPs can now be directly “supported” by cultural and religious mediators.¹⁷⁰

The support pairs deserve to be studied in their own right¹⁷¹ but it is clear that the interactions between them and the PAIRS staff can be complicated. An SPIP director expressed the problem succinctly: “The composition of the PAIRS staff is similar to that of the support pairs. It is not easy to delineate their respective remits, especially because it was already difficult to delineate the remits of the support pairs and the CPIPs”.¹⁷² Two psychologists, one from PAIRS and one from a support pair, discussed a specific example. The first said, “I don’t have access to the reports of the support pairs. I have a good relationship with them but they are quick to feel threatened. If they can get away with not sharing their documents, they don’t”.¹⁷³ She then described the case of a particular PPSMJ who was being monitored by a support pair before he was assigned to PAIRS: “The psychologist in the support pair did not want us to monitor the man at first. But she understood that she didn’t have a choice in the matter. There’s a vagueness around the role of the support pair when PAIRS is involved. In that case, I hung back when I saw that the psychologist from the support pair was staying”.

The support pair psychologist, for her part, acknowledges that PAIRS is seen as a competitor: “The PAIRS initiative threatens the support pairs. Lots of support pairs worry that their role will be abolished because of PAIRS”.¹⁷⁴ Her analysis of the PPSMJ in question was different, however: “He rejected the PAIRS initiative quite violently. My approach is more reliable because it doesn’t involve periods of intense involvement. For some people, several hours per week is much too much. They don’t tolerate it. It’s important to start small so you can continue the work in the long term”.

Besides the specific issue of the support pairs, I was struck by the often fragmentary nature of the information PAIRS was given about the PPSMJs at the start of the program. The *fiches-navettes* sent by the SPIP vary widely.

170. Interview with a manager in the prison administration, February 21, 2020.

171. For a discussion of the problems of the support pairs, see G. Chantraine *et al.*, “Enquête sociologique sur les ‘quartiers d’évaluation de la radicalisation’”, CNRS research report, 2018.

172. Telephone interview with an SPIP director, March 17, 2020.

173. Telephone interview with a Groupe SOS employee, March 23, 2020.

174. Telephone interview with a psychologist in a support pair, March 20, 2020.

A PAIRS director exclaimed, “Sometimes we find more information by typing the person’s name into Google and reading the news reports!”¹⁷⁵ For example, one *fiche-navette* mentioned that a man had returned from Syria but did not specify which group he had joined there, nor that he had been wounded in combat. The SPIPs refuse to forward legal documents to PAIRS, claiming that it would be illegal because Groupe SOS is an external service provider and not part of the Ministry of Justice. The psychological and psychiatric expert assessments, therefore, are not communicated to the PAIRS psychologists. Even more surprisingly, given that trials are public in France, details about the judgments against convicted PPSMJJs are not sent to PAIRS, which means the staff waste precious time gathering information that is already included in court rulings. This situation is unfortunate, and my recommendation would be for rulings and judgments to be systematically sent to the PAIRS directors.

For PPSMJJs awaiting trial, the fact that the PAIRS staff cannot access the documents in their file is normal. Nevertheless, when I discussed the issue with an investigating judge, he said that he would be willing to talk to the PAIRS teams in order to verbally communicate important information as long as it did not breach the confidentiality of the investigation. He also expressed a desire to be able to talk to the PAIRS teams about defendants’ progress. The PAIRS directors signaled that they were open to the idea of such conversations, but immediately added that the SPIP was against it. And indeed, I was able to confirm during interviews with officials in the prison administration that the SPIPs are anxious to be the ones who deal with PAIRS and to mediate between the program and the judges. The relationships between judges and the prison administration were described on several occasions as difficult, or even “contentious”. As a result, the PAIRS teams sometimes feel as if they are caught in the crossfire, with contradictory instructions from both sides.

Another area in which the SPIP acts as an intermediary is in intelligence. The PAIRS initiative’s basic attitude toward the intelligence services is one of strict separation; this rule is rarely broken. The program staff see their mission as to support participants during the reintegration process, not to spy on them. They believe they must be completely honest with the participants in order to build the trusting relationships necessary for the program to work. This is one of the reasons the reports written by the PAIRS team are read to the participants before being sent to the SPIP. Moreover, some Groupe SOS employees worry that being seen to help the police could put their lives in danger.

175. Interview with a PAIRS director, September 6, 2019.

Some PAIRS staff see a contradiction between their mission of reintegration and the security-based approach of the Ministry of the Interior. I was given several specific examples, but for confidentiality reasons they cannot be detailed in this publication. Nevertheless, I can say that the attempt to find jobs for participants sometimes causes friction. Given the characteristics of the participants described above, most of them have no chance of getting an office job. For that reason, PAIRS participants frequently look for work in an industry considered “risky” by the security services (road transport, passenger transport, butchery, and so on), which can make the process more complicated.

To end this section on the interaction between PAIRS and its institutional environment, I will describe two examples where the program’s staff felt there was a discrepancy between their actions and those of another actor.

The first example once again involves relations with the Ministry of the Interior. Numerous PAIRS participants are subject to administrative obligations under the law strengthening internal security and the fight against terrorism of October 30, 2017. These obligations commonly take the form of “mesures individuelles de contrôle administratif et de surveillance” (MICAS, individual measures of administrative control and surveillance). The MICASs replaced the house arrest orders that were used while the state of emergency was in place. The law defines several types of measure: a prohibition against traveling within a certain area, no smaller than the territory of a municipality; a requirement to check in at the police station or the gendarmerie up to once a day; a requirement to declare one’s place of residence and any change of address.

These MICASs have caused various problems, especially in the early days of PAIRS when the procedure for implementing them was still being finetuned. For example, one man left his *département* for reasons to do with his vocational reintegration plan. He did not have an official pass, however, and was therefore arrested for violating the terms of his MICAS. Another example involved a man who went to the commissariat to check in and was detained in custody because he had not confirmed his declaration of residence on time. In that particular case, the local PAIRS team had not been aware of the required procedure and was able to resolve the problem in a few hours. Nevertheless, the participant was badly affected by the incident and was scared of checking in from then on. In some cases, the PAIRS staff think the police use too many safety measures in their interactions with participants, as if they saw them as an imminent threat. The question then arises as to why, if the Minister of the Interior considers these individuals to

be so dangerous, they are assigned to PAIRS, where the staff are not protected?

The second example concerns relations with the Ministry of Justice and involves a general problem: Should people who have not yet been convicted be assigned to PAIRS? The logic for their inclusion is simple: the earlier in the legal process the reintegration work starts, the more chance the individual has of successfully reintegrating. Moreover, the delay between an offense and trial can be long (several years), so it would be preferable not to have to wait for the legal process to end before beginning the reintegration work. This logic works well when participation in the program is uninterrupted, but if the trial leads to incarceration, the program cannot continue.

Clearly, positive progress or a desire for reintegration cannot in themselves justify a PPSMJ avoiding prison. If the offenses committed are serious and proven, the person will be incarcerated. This argument is not always understood or accepted by participants, however, or by the program staff. Participants who are convicted after beginning their reintegration process can end up feeling bitter and angry. The staff, meanwhile, can feel disillusioned if their work is suddenly interrupted when the individual seemed to be making good progress toward reintegration. One vocational counselor said, “I was supporting Mrs. X. She had found a permanent job. She was the mother of two children. We visited her home and everything was as it should be. She was making good progress. She was tried and sentenced to six years in prison for having planned to go to Syria and having sent money there. What is the point of helping people to find a job, creating the hope of a normal life if they’re just going to be sent to prison? What’s more, word spreads and the other participants will think it’s pointless. It also risks causing further radicalization because it can make people working toward reintegration feel as if they are being hounded”.¹⁷⁶ This is not an isolated example. I was told about four similar cases.

176. Interview with a Groupe SOS employee, December 18, 2019.

Conclusion

The “prisoner’s dilemma” is a classic problem in game theory, well-known among mathematicians but also, since Thomas Schelling’s work, among geopolitics experts.¹⁷⁷ In the context of the fight against terrorism, one could say there is an “ex-prisoner’s dilemma”. Keeping people in custody after the end of their sentence is seen as highly problematic—not to say impossible—in a legal system where, having “paid their debt to society”,¹⁷⁸ detainees are supposed to be able to live among their fellow citizens again. Nevertheless, releasing an individual deemed to be dangerous is seen as a bad option because of the potential danger to society.

This “ex-prisoner’s dilemma” skews the debate about reintegration programs for people convicted of terrorist acts. In reality, the choice is not between keeping them in custody and monitoring them through a reintegration program, but between the program and a *sortie sèche*, where they are released with no further support. It is true that there is a risk involved in releasing an individual whose potential dangerousness can never be known for certain, and that participation in a disengagement program is a sort of “bet on human nature”.¹⁷⁹ If the bet pays off, everyone gains: a former terrorist will have been reintegrated and will be able to be useful to society, the reintegration program staff will have the satisfaction of a job well done, and the security services will have one less person to monitor. But the consequences of an unsuccessful bet can be tragic, as shown by the attack carried out by a former prisoner in London on November 29, 2019, in which two people who worked for a recidivism prevention program were killed. More recently, after the Vienna terrorist attack on November 2, 2020, the Austrian Minister of the Interior declared that the gunman had “managed to fool the justice system’s deradicalization program”.¹⁸⁰

So, has the PAIRS bet paid off? This question, more commonly expressed as “does it work?”, is dreaded by the program’s staff. They avoid giving a simple answer, even though many of them are convinced of the value of their work. One form of response involves describing success stories of

177. T. C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960.

178. R. Badinter, “La prison après la peine”, *Le Monde*, November 27, 2007.

179. Phrase used by a gendarme officer during an interview on March 6, 2020.

180. “Vienna: Police Investigate Terror Links to Gun Attack”, *Deutsche Welle*, November 3, 2020.

participants who seem to have reintegrated successfully and who attribute their progress to the help they received.

But there have also been failures. I tried to quantify them and understand them in more detail. At the end of July 2020, working together with the national PAIRS directors and the local directors, I analyzed all the instances where the program had been interrupted by the participant's incarceration. At that time, the oldest center (in Paris) had been operating for almost two years, while the newest (in Lille) had been running for just ten months.

In Paris, out of sixty-three individuals who had participated in the program since October 2018, two had been reincarcerated: a DCSR arrested for previously committed offenses was sent back to prison for two months and then reassigned to PAIRS, and a TIS who had been in the program for four months was convicted for drug dealing. Because PAIRS was not designed for those in prison, an individual's participation in the program may be paused indefinitely if he or she is reincarcerated. Upon their release, they may then be reassigned to PAIRS. In that respect, improvements could certainly be made in order to avoid excessively long interruptions to the program.

In Marseille, six out of thirty-two participants had been reincarcerated. All six were DCSRs and only one reincarceration was related to threatened attacks. In the other five cases, the offenses that led to reincarceration were not connected to radicalization. In Lille, two out of eleven individuals had been reincarcerated. There too, both individuals were DCSRs: one had breached his MICAS and the other—a rapist who had spent fifteen years in prison—had been prosecuted in a new sexual assault case. In Lyon, no participants had been reincarcerated.

These numbers allow me to draw two conclusions. The first is that only one TIS (out of sixty-four convicted TISs in PAIRS) had gone back to prison, and his offense was an ordinary crime. In other words, there are no recorded cases of terrorist recidivism among PAIRS participants. Clearly, however, caution must be exercised in light of the small sample size, the short time the program has been running, and the absence of a control group that could definitively attribute the lack of recidivism to the program's intervention.

It is important to note that there were also no cases of recidivism among RIVE participants. As of the time of writing, therefore, there has been no terrorist recidivism among individuals in disengagement programs in France since the beginning of the RIVE program in October 2016. This reassuring outcome demonstrates that the right choices were made when deciding which TISs to assign to these programs. The result would probably

have been different if terrorists classed as being “at the very top of the spectrum” had been chosen.

The second conclusion concerns the DCSRs. Unsurprisingly, these individuals have deeply ingrained criminal habits and can struggle to stabilize themselves. They are generally reincarcerated for crimes related to their criminal history rather than their radicalization. The reincarceration of these DCSRs should not, therefore, be seen as an indication that PAIRS has failed, especially as most of them were reincarcerated after only a short time on the program.

In summary, this study’s conclusions are encouraging. It suggests that disengagement initiatives in France should be continued, with an expansion into the main “dead zones” where PAIRS is not yet in operation while paying particular attention to the key points flagged in this report. Some of these—such as problems with staff turnover or training—could undoubtedly be resolved by a moderate increase in the funds allotted to disengagement.

Others are more to do with differences in professional or bureaucratic culture and will be harder to rectify. One local PAIRS director referred to “ethical friction” caused by the encounter between the social work culture of support, the legal culture of control, and the security services culture of surveillance.¹⁸¹ It is essential to reduce this friction, because each field has its role to play in the prevention of recidivism or progression to violence. The professional cultures of the different agencies and organizations are complementary. Pointless confrontation is not the goal.

Although this study is reassuring overall, the risk of recidivism can never be ruled out, even among individuals who are not *a priori* considered to be the most dangerous. Just as this report was going to press, two municipal police officers were injured in a knife attack carried out on the morning of December 9, 2020 in Bollène, southeast France. At the time of writing, the National Counterterrorism Prosecutor’s Office is yet to take up the case. However, it appears that the attacker was a former DCSR who had been released from prison six months early and was participating voluntarily in PAIRS. His brother is a returnee from Syria who is currently in prison and under investigation for attempting to carry out a terrorist attack on prison guards.

If a PAIRS participant did commit a lethal attack, many people would undoubtedly decry the naivety of the initiative and demand the program be shut down and participants be placed in detention. The reaction is likely to be especially strong given that the French have already had direct experience

181. Telephone interview with a local PAIRS director, March 17, 2020.

of terrorist recidivism: Chérif Kouachi, co-perpetrator of the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre, and Larossi Abballa, the Magnanville killer, both had prior convictions for terrorism-related offenses. We will never know whether these two men would have taken a different path if they had been assigned to a disengagement program after their first term in prison. In any event, there is no use rewriting history. But abruptly abandoning disengagement programs would be counter-productive, with potentially severe consequences for the future.

The fight against radicalization and terrorism requires a calm head, courage, reflection, and cohesion. The spirit of the age seems to be rather trending toward controversy and polarization. Let us hope that this study will at least help to make snap judgments more nuanced.



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