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War on Terror: Tunisia's Counterterrorism Strategy

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Contents

Acknowledgment:	4
Abstract:.....	5
Introduction:	6
1.1 Purpose of the study:.....	7
1.2 Research Question:	7
1.3 Outline of the thesis.....	8
2. Research methods:	8
2.1 Qualitative method:	8
2.2 Data collection, coding, and analysis:	10
2.3 Reliability and Validity:	12
2.4 Ethical Considerations:.....	13
2.5 Challenges:	13
2.6 Analysis of findings:	14
3. Theoretical framework:	15
3.1 Radicalization:	15
3.2 De-radicalization:	16
3.3 Disengagement:	18
3.4 Effectiveness of de-radicalization programs:.....	20
4. Literature review:.....	22

5. Actors involved the de-radicalization process:	30
5.1 The Strategies of the Tunisian government:.....	31
5.2 Counter- Radicalization Campaign and Network:.....	32
5.3 Actors involved in the counterterrorism process:	33
5.4 European Organizations:.....	35
5.5 European Union:	36
5.6 Other Countries.....	37
6. Analysis:	37
6.1 Government’s Effectiveness Strategy:.....	37
6.2 Actors’ Effectiveness Strategy:	41
6.3 Recommendations:	44
7. Conclusion:.....	46
8. Reference List:.....	48

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Abstract:

About 8 years ago and during the revolution in Tunisia, I witnessed drastic change in the society mainly in relation to religion in public sphere from radicalism to counterradicalism. So, I've always wanted to understand and research counterterrorism strategies of the Tunisian government and its allies. Many actors were involved in the process of de-radicalization in Tunisia; western countries and international civil society, and this allowed the birth of many local civil societies and non-governmental organizations. As this activism is new in Tunisia, it needed to be investigated carefully in relation to fighting terrorism. Albeit there were numerous studies on the topic, there was no single paper that researched de-radicalization process in Tunisia theoretically. For that reason, this paper applied de-radicalization theory to understand and evaluate its impact in Tunisia. Through historical research method, this document attempted to recapture and collect events in the past in order to give significance to history.

Introduction:

After the fall of Ben Ali's regime in 2011, Tunisia has been flooded with a significant growth in Jihadists terrorist activities. The list of terrorist attacks stretched from 2013 until 2019. However, the major attacks, in terms of number, happened in 2015 in Bardo National Museum and in Sousse shooting, leaving dozens of dead tourists. Between 2012 and 2014 and due to the political instability in the country, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) showed its intention to expand its activities in North Africa region (Fabbri & Paul, p. 16, 2018). An affiliated cell to AQIM, Uqba Ibn Nafi, carried out deadliest attacks against Tunisian security officers (ibid.), and the Tunisian flag was replaced by the black flag of ISIS in most of the poor suburb areas in the capital, Tunis¹. The Salafists took advantage of the fragility and the security vacuum and tried to force Sharia law in these poor areas (ibid.). In addition, between 6000 and 7000 radicalized Tunisian youngster joined ISIS in Syria (Ben Mustapha Ben Arab, 2018). The Tunisian national security became threatened by the return of foreign fighters and the several terrorist attacks. As result, the Tunisian government focused on security measures (Ben Mustapha Ben Arab, 2018) with the assistance of donor countries and civil society organizations (Letsch, 2018). Tunisia witnessed a high donor involvement in security assistance issues and externally driven civil society building to implement Preventing/ Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) projects (ibid.). In response to the growing interest of the donors, an important number of civil society organizations in Tunisia have developed policies and programs to counter violent

¹ <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/28/tunisia-and-the-fall-after-the-arab-spring>

extremism and radicalization (ibid.). The engagement of the civil society in P/CVE landscape in Tunisia is important in this paper not only to map the aftermath of the liberal peacebuilding efforts but also because the process of P/CVE is usually monitored by governmental or non-governmental actors (Bjørngo and Horgan, 2009) and the inclusion of non-governmental actors in de-radicalization and disengagement programs in the Middle East is commonly new (Koehler, 2017). Though criticized, the Tunisian Government played an important role in fighting religious extremism. But were the civil society, the donors, and the government strategies successful and effective in countering violence in Tunisia? To find out the outcome, research questions will investigate the strategies of each actor and the effectiveness of their intervention in the Tunisian de-radicalization strategy. The research questions are very vital to show the weight and the role of each actor in the process of de-radicalization in the country and to map their effectiveness.

1.1 Purpose of the study:

While there are various studies on the topic, there is a lack of conceptual and theoretical foundations for de-radicalization work (Horgan & Altier, 2012). Ben Mustapha Ben Arab (2018) discusses a “civilian” approach based on interviewing foreign fighters who came back to Tunisia without referring to a theoretical assumption to understand the adopted process of de-radicalization model. For that reason, my study will focus on the theoretical aspect of de-radicalization to illustrate the gaps of the government and the actors in tackling the de-radicalization process in Tunisia.

1.2 Research Question:

My thesis will be based on and will try to answer the following research questions:

- I. What are the de-radicalization strategies followed by the Tunisian government to fight extremism?

- II. Who are the actors involved in the de-radicalization process?
- III. Was the adopted de-radicalization process effective?

1.3 Outline of the thesis

Next section will outline the methods and sources used in this paper. Next, an in-depth theoretical approach definition of radicalization, de-radicalization, disengagement, and effectiveness of the programs will be provided as all these terms are somehow interconnected and should be defined separately. Fourth section will be discussing a detailed related literature review to show the process of and the conditions under which a de-radicalization model can be successful. The fifth section will identify the actors involved in the process which are the Tunisian Government, civil society, and western states. To assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies of each actor, the sixth section will evaluate the approaches of de-radicalization programs adopted by the actors and the government. Lastly, the paper will conclude with some recommendations and an overall summary with what was mentioned previously.

2. Research methods:

2.1 Qualitative method:

Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually highlights words rather than numbers in the collection and analysis of data with inductivist, constructionist, and interpretivist features (Bryman, 2016). He argues that the qualitative method refers to understanding any given society by examining and interpreting the participants' behavior. The data collection and analysis of this paper focused on investigating and interpreting the dynamics of past events called historical

research method because it examines, interprets, and explains events that happened in the past (Tan, 2015). Berg (2001) explains the historical research as an attempt to recapture events in the past which still have impact in the present in a methodological way. When I chose this technique, I intended to interpret a missing theoretical background and to assess past achievements of governmental agencies and institutions (Berg, 2001) which played an important role in the de-radicalization process in Tunisia, and to uncover and explain the strangeness of the past in historical settings (Tosh, 2010). This is a reason for me to choose historical research method in order to explain a phenomenon that many outsiders tried to investigate but they mostly lacked something of an insider's touch. As a Tunisian citizen, I could grasp knowledge about the issue from when it happened until today. I have experienced most of these events, though seemed complicated from the start, I could base my analysis on interpreting the collective memory of the Tunisian society that drew open a sense of identity and sense of direction (ibid.). Moreover, history does not stop at collecting "snapshots" of the past, it is rather a recognition of "historical process" or the relationship between the events over time that would give them more significance (ibid.). In other word, the cumulation of documents and stories of de-radicalization in Tunisia gained more significance when I studied the process over time and from different perspectives, documents became personalized and put in their context. In addition, choosing history came as an answer to progress, improvements, and continuity in the future, as it is a process that develops over time leaving a positive value in the society and also because human beings learn from their mistakes collectively and individually (ibid.). As Tunisian, I thought of gathering past events related to de-radicalization process in Tunisia to seek positivity through the gaps of the process and to find a way of fighting terrorism, as "history holds the clue to human destiny" (Tosh, p. 29, 2010).

2.2 Data collection, coding, and analysis:

Organizational and institutional documents have been the main source of data collection in qualitative research for many years (Bowen, 2009). This paper used mainly texts and documents as an approach to collect data. Primary and secondary data are the main sources. Although I relied on secondary sources to collect data, primary sources were the base of my data collection and analysis because they are more trustworthy in terms of findings and source. Walliman (2016) identifies primary source as the primary data present around us including all kind of senses which are not interpreted, while secondary data are the data that have been recorded and interpreted. For primary data, I collected the official laws and orders from the JORT's official website available either in Arabic or in French as the state is considered a great source of data (Bryman, 2016). I selected the needed ones related to the government's actions to fight terrorism and I translated them into English. I consider myself advantageous as I am a native Arabic speaker with French educational background and translating these documents did not create any challenge or obstacle. Then, I pulled information from related institutions and organizations which were available in English. When it comes to secondary sources, I referred to national and international media outlets and academics. Numerous national and international newspapers and articles touched upon the circumstances under which the Tunisian government worked with some civil societies and with other states and donor countries with NGOs in order to combat extremism in the country and to limit the in and out flooding of terrorists.

Based on the triangulation concept, multiple sources of information were used to cross-check data and develop the conclusion presented in this paper. Triangulation consists of examining more data sources and identifying design, methods, approaches to analysis and theoretical

framework (Bowen, 2009) in order to avoid the personal biases of the analyst and overcome the concept of singularity in terms of investigation and analysis (Bowen, 2009). This paper utilizes a wide array of sources collected from practical and theoretical studies about de-radicalization, radicalization, and disengagement. It also uses the Tunisian governmental website (<http://www.tunisie.gov.tn/>) for legal references, the Tunisian Institute for the Strategic Studies (<http://www.ites.tn/>) for particle information, and the Republic of Tunisia Presidency of Government- Official Printing Office of the Republic of Tunisia (http://www.iort.gov.tn/WD120AWP/WD120Awp.exe/CTX_7920-12-ZXfBIndVMO/Principal/SYNC_127916189) to get the latest JORT related orders.

Data analysis involves skimming, reading, and interpreting (Bowen, 2009), it was proceeded simultaneously with data collection during the research phase. Analyzing while collecting the data, made it easier to look for patterns and elements along the way and also to assess the quality of the findings.

Bryman (2016, p. 573) explains that coding in qualitative study helps the researcher to be in a “constant state of potential revision and fluidity”. During the research process, I found writing memos is a good analysis strategy as it helped me to trace the final conceptualization that answers the research questions and also allowed new categories, themes, and ideas to emerge along the way. Organizing the findings in the emerged categories required structure to make sense. This step was somehow challenging mainly when it came to organizing the finding of the critics of the de-radicalization process of both, the government and the other actors. Coding from the side notes and the memos were used continuously to sort themes out. The main themes were de-radicalization, radicalization, disengagement, rules and regulations, civil society, government, other actors, theory of de-radicalization and disengagement, debates.

2.3 Reliability and Validity:

Reliability and validity are the most prominent criteria to evaluate a conducted study in social research (Bryman, 2012). While validity is concerned with the truthfulness of the conclusions that are generated from the research, reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable, consistent, and stable (ibid.).

“Qualitative researchers are not interested in causal laws but in people’s belief, experience and meaning systems from the perspective of the people” (Brink, p. 35, 1993). Being that said, transferring the data from different sources must be reliable, credible, and true to preserve the credibility of the researcher. However, there could be factors affecting reliability and validity of the research, among which collection and analysis of data and the subjectivity/objectivity of the researcher (ibid.). As a researcher, I am the only one responsible for gathering and analyzing data, so bias would affect my trustworthiness. I tried to be neutral in my research and only collect experiences and history from the Tunisian society and revive them in my paper, theoretically. As the documents are retrieved either from the government or academia or institutions, they should reflect the writer’s point of view and not the researcher. The researcher here only tried to gather findings and reflect on them with consideration to the original purpose of the document and the target audience (Bowen, 2009).

Saturation in qualitative research is a difficult concept to define but associated to the point in a qualitative research study when there is enough data to ensure the research questions can be answered (Bowen, 2008). To make sure, triangulation would improve the reliability of results and the achievement of data saturation (Stavros & Westberg, 2009).

2.4 Ethical Considerations:

During the research, it was very fundamental to embrace neutrality, mainly the subject I was investigating was contemporary in my country, Tunisia. Berg and Lune (2014) argue that the research must be guided by the research design and not by the feeling of the researcher. As Tunisian who lost some friends for terrorism after the revolution, this issue has always been in my mind and I've always wanted to understand it and analyze it and understand the government's stand in that. For that reason, I tried to stick to the research questions and not employ my feelings as an insider.

The primary data was used objectively in order to respect the source and also for the researcher's credibility. In my paper, I used literature, newspapers, and reports which are available in public domains and is therefore considered ethical to refer to (Bryman 2016). Regarding the JORT rules and regulations that has been translated from Arabic or French to English are also noted. As a researcher, I also avoided any type of misleading information, as well as representation of primary data findings in a biased way (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

2.5 Challenges:

My research was based on investigating reports and literature which could have a possible negative effect on my paper in terms of trustworthiness and sufficient information. I could have chosen to interview some participants in Tunisia from the government and from the civil society who are related to my research questions, but due to the political instability and the complicated bureaucracy in Tunisia, it was impossible to deal with Tunisian administration. Though, I

contacted some Tunisian figures related to de-radicalization process either by email, LinkedIn, and twitter hoping that I will receive an answer. This process took almost 7 months of reaching out to some people, but it was not fruitful. It could be because of the uncertainty of the roles of the people in charge or the terrorist attacks that happened in summer or the sickness then the death of the President Beji Caid Al Sebssi.

In addition, it would be more interesting if I could access the prisons in Tunisia to investigate and evaluate the programs of rehabilitation of the foreign fighters who came back to Tunisia after joining some terrorist groups.

When I chose to translate the official documents from Arabic and French to English, I relied on my knowledge of the three languages equally. This could have been very challenging if I misunderstood and mistranslated a legal term which would affect the meaning of the sentence. To refer to an authorized translator, the process will cost me money and time.

2.6 Analysis of findings:

As mentioned previously, I hoped the circumstances were different to conduct an interview with some Tunisian policy makers and civil society members related to the de-radicalization process. The obtained local data was, to certain extent, sufficient to answer my research questions. As a Tunisian citizen, I could grasp some knowledge about the issue even before referring to a broader finding. As Salter (2013) agrees the position of the researcher influences the analysis and the result of the study. It was somehow hard not to be subjective in this matter and not to see the process from an insider's point of view. In addition, I was surprised that the Tunisian media and academia barely touched upon the subject of de-radicalization process. At certain point, I felt lost while looking for any logical and analytical interview or article that discusses the program of

the Tunisian government to fight extremism. In the JORT, I found very vague legal terms that demonstrate the government's actions towards de-radicalization which could be applicable on any other crime. Further, the other literature used in this paper was also very broad and did not really explain the programs used by the Tunisian government to fight radicalization. It mostly brought up the financial and military aid received from other countries rather than where and how it was used. The double standard of the government and the lack of information made me think if there was really any de-radicalization program.

3. Theoretical framework:

3.1 Radicalization:

To begin with, let's first introduce the term radicalization. Radicalization has always been shallow in definition in literature and in policy makers discourses. Sedgwick (2010) argues that the term radicalization is used to describe anything that happens before bombing or committing radical act. He also claims the term radicalism is used in various ways that would result in creating misperception. In his article, Sedgwick demonstrates three different contexts of the term radicalism: "security, integration, and foreign policy" context (p. 479). Each context uses the term radicalism to mean something different, which is "analytical and official level, and public and political level". To avoid more confusion, Sedgwick focuses on using the term radicalization in more concrete concept and recognizes the relative nature of the term radical. Nathan, Lawi and Nthiiri (2018) agree that the term radicalization is very broad and applies to organizations and movements that use violence in order to achieve their ideological and political aim. According to Ashour (2009), radicalization is a process of relative change in which a group

of individuals sharing the same orientation reject democracy and political pluralism, in the other hand, they use violence to reach power. Pick, Speckhars and Jacurch (2009) argue that radicalization is a term that is related to extremism and terrorism. For individuals who are considered radicals, they are extreme to the accepted norms, values and tradition of the society. Koehler (2017) defines radicalization a result of a process of certain ideas that lead an individual to become a terrorist, or the process of “individual de-pluralization of political concepts and values” (p. 74). As many scholars related radicalization to violence, Bartlett & Miller (2012) recommend distinguishing between violent and non-violent radicalism, as the late one does not promote or commit terrorist activity. Horgan and Braddock (2010) describe non-violent radicalization as a social and psychological process of political or religious extremist commitment which may not automatically lead to violence, but it is a major factor to act violently, while violent radicalization is a social and psychological process of increased violent involvement. Like in de-radicalization, Neumann (2013) distinguishes between cognitive and behavioral radicalization. Cognitive radicalization is related to extremist beliefs, and behavioral radicalization is related to violent action.

3.2 De-radicalization:

On the other hand, de-radicalization has been used with conceptual unclarity and identified with other terms (Altier et al., 2014). For example, ‘reintegration’, ‘re-education’, ‘desistance’, ‘disaffiliation’, and ‘debiasing’ are concepts used to mean de-radicalization (Koehler, 2017). Also ‘rehabilitation’, ‘reform’, ‘counseling’, ‘reconciliation’, ‘amnesty’, ‘demobilization’, ‘disbandment’, ‘dialogue’ and ‘deprogramming’ are terms that has been used interchangeably with de-radicalization (Horgan & Taylor, 2011). Koehler (2017) argues that to understand de-

radicalization, the psychological mechanism involved in driving an individual to engage in violence and disengage from violence should be at the core of the process, as both reasons are connected. Braddock (p.60, 2014), also, claims that deradicalization is a “psychological process through which an individual abandons his extremist ideology and is theoretically rendered a decreased threat for re-engaging in terrorism”.

The term de-radicalization has been used to describe the process of exiting an extremist environment and the practical activities of the initiative (Koehler, 2017). In other word, de-radicalization can mean; (1) ideological subtraction (giving up on the extreme ideology), (2) physical disengagement (the authorities intervention to stop extremism), (3) psychological disengagement (when the violent individual stops supporting extreme ideology), and (4) deradicalization (the process of moderation of a terrorist’s belief) (ibid.). De-radicalization is also referred to “Countering Violent Extremism” (CVE) programs (Harris-Hogan et al., 2015) which usually are understood to be preventative programs intended to stop individuals from engaging and supporting violence (Williams, 2017).

Elshimi (2015) argues that de-radicalization is an instrument to fight violent extremism and de-radicalization programs were founded with the purpose of getting violent groups and individuals to renounce extreme violence. Same with Ashour (2009) who agrees that de-radicalization can occur on the behavioral level and it is a relative change within a radical group in which their strategy becomes softer towards using violence and weapons and accepting political, economic and social pluralism in order to achieve political ambitions. He also discusses that these Islamic groups undergoing de-radicalization process are not necessarily becoming liberals and democrats as much as giving up on using violence.

Braddock (2014) argues that deradicalization is a psychological process through which an individual leaves his radical ideology in practice, therefore, re-engaging in terrorism activity would almost be impossible.

Doosje et al., (2016) explain the de-radicalization process as a rejection of an extreme ideology which was embraced by a group of people or an individual. They also distinguish between disengagement and de-radicalization, as the first means leaving a radical group without giving up on radical beliefs, while de-radicalization is explained as disloyalty to a radical group. For Striegheer (2013), de-radicalization is distinguished through two main models; (1) to prevent an individual from engaging into more physical violence, and (2) to soften the terrorist's extreme ideology which he considered a rocky model to deal with. In his article, Islam (2019) argues that disengagement is essential in de-radicalization. He believes that disengagement is preventing a radical individual from committing more violence. For that reason, it is very important to stop people from engaging in more violence, but it is not easy to stop people in believing in certain ideologies or to disassociate them from following certain groups. Furthermore, Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez, & Boucek (2010) argue that de-radicalization is a process during which the individual alters their behavior and leave the radical group.

3.3 Disengagement:

Although disengagement is a complex process as radicalization, it is neglected from counter-terrorism policies (Bjørge & Horgan, 2009). They argue that there is a little attention given to disengaging terrorists except with the traditional means by using force or imprisonment. Even though there are some violent individuals who were forced to disengage from terrorist groups, they sustain their extreme views on society, therefore, it is important to alter the violent behavior

rather than change the radical attitude, since disengagement from terrorism is not a sign of deradicalization (Horgan, 2009). “The process whereby an individual experiences a change in role or function that is usually associated with a reduction of violent participation. It may not necessarily involve leaving the movement but is most frequently associated with significant temporary or permanent role change. Additionally, while disengagement may stem from role change, that role change may be influenced by psychological factors such as disillusionment, burnout or the failure to reach the expectations that influenced initial involvement. This can lead to a member seeking out a different role within the movement” (Horgan and Braddock, p. 152, 2010). In other word, the main focus of disengagement is the psychological side of leaving a violent extremist environment or the physical behavioral exiting.

Bjørgero & Horgan (2009) claim that it is crucial to distinguish between individual and collective disengagement from extreme milieu as the process and the strategies are different. As for individuals, they may exit a terrorist group or end their engagement with violence, groups may abandon the use of terrorism and abolish using terrorist campaigns. while groups might have political reasons to pursue (Ashour, 2009), individuals exit might be due to arrest or simply the group fail to reach the goals (Bjørgero & Horgan, 2009) and both individual and collective level disengagement might be voluntary or involuntary (ibid.).

Elshimi (2015) argues that many writings fail to distinguish the contextual meaning of the term de-radicalization without associating it to other terms like “dialogue, de-programming and rehabilitation” due to the lack of literature when it comes to distinguishing the ontological conceptual meaning of the term de-radicalization and the lack of dialogue between cognitive and behavioral variables. Horgan argues that there is confusion in distinguishing between the cognitive and behavioral de-radicalization (as cited in Elshimi, 2015, p. 113). He argues the

concept of de-radicalization program is supposedly founded to influence the psychology of individuals to renounce extremism or, in another word, to influence the cognitive process of these individuals. While the practicalities of these programs are forcing the armed groups to renounce violence which influences the behavioral process. Elshimi (2015, p. 113) describes the confusion between cognitive and behavioral dimensions as marriage and in order to understand the concept of de-radicalization, both terms should be analyzed and treated differently in de-radicalization programs.

3.4 Effectiveness of de-radicalization programs:

“Defining impact of de-radicalization programs can be one of the most difficult and complex tasks involved in designing and conducting these activities” (Koehler, p.166, 2017). This is essentially due to the actively blocked access for external researchers or need for material and transparency (ibid.). Therefore, to avoid further fragmentation and failure in the de-radicalization and disengagement field, there should be an advanced method with which experts can measure the effectiveness of the programs to be developed for each country, context, and target groups (ibid.).

In theory, deradicalization programs is measured by various effects; reduction of manpower, knowledge, intelligence, and internal group structure and narratives (Koehler, 2017). First, a de-radicalization program is considered successful when there is a decrease of potential member of a radical group which in return will reduce the pool of recruitments for extremism (ibid.). Second effect is knowledge which is usually building close relationship with individuals and groups connected to violent radicalism in order to get insight into behavior, radicalization process and causes, and recruitment strategies to give practitioners and policy makers knowledge on how to

design an effective counter-radicalization programs (ibid.). Koehler argues that all governments have the collection of intelligence as an immediate priority in order to build up a knowledge base of the nature of the threats that is provided by former terrorist or inmates. Lastly, the internal group structure in which a terrorist might turnover on the radical group and this process will push the group to recruit other potential members(ibid.). However, this process is costly and hard since it is so complicated to hire sophisticated and intelligent members and might also face external influences in terms of death and imprisonment of the group members and therefore it would be costly and tough to reach to certain stage of expertise (ibid.).

“Other impact measures are program-type specific and aim to showcase the ‘demand’ for the program, such as number of calls, referral of cases to the authorities, duration of case counseling, etc. While all these measures are important to understand how a program might work and achieve some of its goals- if defined- much more detailed information is necessary to put this data into context.” (Koehler, p. 174, 2017). Another measurable impact of de-radicalization program will be measured by the public observation of the success or failure of the de-radicalization program which is determined against the recidivism rates of the ex-terrorist militant, their economic reintegration, their level of trust in the government, reconciliation with friends, family and community, and exit the radical group (ibid.). Koehler (2017) discusses the 3 different levels of impact of any de-radicalization programs (macro-social, meso-social, and micro-social) which can be targeted with 3 categories of tools (prevention, repression, and intervention) with which a de-radicalization program can be impact measured, which will be discussed later.

4. Literature review:

In this section, I will try to review some literature related to the process and the conditions of an effective de-radicalization. There is not a detailed and a common book on the de-radicalization processes nor there is a comprehensive study about the conditions under which de-radicalization can be successful in all countries and all cases. In *De-radicalization in the Mediterranean-Comparing Challenges and Approaches*, Ben Mustapha Ben Arab explains the strategies of the Tunisian Government in fighting extremism and the conditions under which de-radicalization would be successful. She based her analysis on interviewing some foreign fighters' returnees and on a general study of the Tunisian government's initiative. As a response to foreign fighters' crisis, the Tunisian government focused on security approaches only (Ben Mustapha Ben Arab, 2018). After 2015 attacks, the government closed many suspected mosques, suspended civil organizations linked to terrorism, arrested many militants and passed a new counter-terrorism law imposing severe punishments, including death penalty for condemned terrorists (ibid.). Even when the government considered establishing reintegration program, many political leaders, civil societies and unions opposed the initiative. Ben Mustapha Ben Arab argues the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) was among the other unions that opposed the return of the foreign fighters back to Tunisia without trial before Tunisian courts (ibid, 95). In her passage, she also claims the lack of societal dialogue along with the security-centric orientation of the government hampered the de-radicalization process of foreign fighters (ibid.). Ben Mustapha Ben Arab also states the fragmentation of the various ministries and the counter-terrorism agencies and the non-operational preventive strategies which the Tunisian government has adopted constituted an obstacle to have an effective integration approach and strategic visualization of the financial and technical aid Tunisia was offered as part of its collaboration

with regional and international partners (ibid.). So, in order to have a clear strategic plan, the author explains that the Tunisian government should first understand the characteristics and motives of the foreign fighters. For that reason, the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies (ITES) conducted a research in order to understand the motives of the Tunisian foreign fighters and the ways of extremism. Ben Mustapha Ben Arab explains that the study showed that most of these fighters are young, not married, school dropout and mostly don't have any historical extremist agenda. Over half of the interviewees participated in the 2011 revolution and had high hopes to overcome the injustice in the country. Some other participants affirmed that the old regime's religious restriction and deprivation made them seek refuge in extremism and joining some radical organizations like Ansar Al-Sharia². For many fighters, Tunisia became the enemy of religion and a source of injustice and lack of opportunities. Many interviewees claimed that Tunisia belongs to the Arab nation and the Muslim Ummah. Also, many of them believed the West is conspiring against Islam that's why they need to defend their religion along with their other "Muslim brothers". This feeling of victimization on the national and international level deepened their determination to fight "infidels" at home and abroad. "Sacred jihad" becomes the sole response for these "victims" to fight the West conspiracies and the disappointing home countries politics (ibid.).

Ben Mustapha Ben Arab explains the security approach that the Tunisian government has adopted to fight radicalization is not enough for these circumstances. She explains, First, policy makers should identify the different backgrounds and motives of the foreign fighters, then, depending on the outcome, they should identify the right approach to guarantee a successful de-radicalization process. She claims that investing in education in order to reduce the high rates of

² Stanford Center of International Security and Cooperation:
https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/ansar-al-shariah-tunisia#highlight_text_10009

drop out from schools at an early age which will have immediate and future consequences. It would enable job seekers to match the job markets needs and participate in the economic growth of the country, which in return would provide better financial statutes of youths and absorb the feeling of disappointment towards the government and rebuild trust relation between the state and people.

She also recommends the government to develop a modernist interpretation of religion in schools, mosques and on television. As a consequence, the society will either reject or modernize the Salafist jihadist ideology. For the inmates who were convicted as terrorists, the author recommends the Tunisian policy makers to institutionalize a formal de-radicalization program in the prison with the support of various stakeholders like psychologists, religious agencies and provide occupational trainings, managed by the state and supervised by the other stakeholders. Similarly, non-governmental agencies, Tunisian civil society and religious figures can have a say in absorbing the extremist ideology. These actors can address the threat of terrorism and the grievance caused to the countries where foreign fighters operated or planning to operate. Equally, terrorists' families, who are considered by most of interviewees significant, can play an important role in the rehabilitation and re-integration program. When it comes to the government role itself, the author recommends policy makers to consider granting an official pardon to militants who did not commit violence or crimes but were caught for planning to. By oppressing Salafists, the government would repeat the same scenario that happened with the previous regime in Tunisia. Many interviewees identified their belonging to extreme wings due to the repression of the government to practice religion freely.

Lastly, as terrorism is considered a key threat to national and international security, regional and global cooperation should consider the motives of the foreign fighters and understand the root-

cause of their extremism (ibid.). After identifying their motivations, a strategic social, economic and security measures would be taken to fight radicalization.

In his book *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements*, Ashour attempts to breakdown the causes of de-radicalization within extremist groups.

Accordingly, he started by categorizing the different typologies of Islamists in order to understand their ideologies and de-radicalization process theory. Ashour agrees that there are five major Islamist groups; Ikhwanism, Salafism, Jihadism, Takfirism and Al Jaz'ara. Each group tends to accept, reject or has mixed stance towards democracy and violence.

For Ashour, the concept of de-radicalization is a process under which changes occur collectively within the armed Islamist groups under regional and international circumstances. He distinguishes three levels of de-radicalization process: comprehensive, substantive and pragmatic. The last process refers to de-radicalizing the behavior of the Islamist groups but not their ideology, while substantive means de-radicalizing the behavioral and ideological level.

Comprehensive process, as its meaning, refers to de-radicalizing the Islamist groups at all levels. Ashour, also, differentiates three different levels of de-radicalization: ideological or the de-legitimization of violence, behavioral which refers to renouncing violence at the collective level and organizational level that refers to the release of members of violent groups.

Ashour (2009) demonstrates various factors leading the success of de-radicalization process; (1) "charismatic leadership", (2) the government's suppression, (3) interactions within the hierarchy of the radical group or movement, (4) the national and international motivation. Ashour goes further to explain the above variables thoroughly. First, he explains the important role of the leadership within the armed group that can influence the members to give up on their radical attitude. This step might be very important under the condition that this leader was historically

harassed by the government and has a credential within his community. Although they are considered as a non-armed group but has strong ties with Ansar Al Sharia³, Rashed Al Ghannouchi, the leader of Al Nahdha party, condemned the use of violence and insisted that his Islamist party did not take part in assassinating any political opposition or using violence in the country (YouTube page of Rached Ghannouchi, 2013). In many different occasions, Al Ghannouchi emphasizes on the peaceful, democratic and modern Islam that Al Nahdha party has as a doctrine. Another important figure, Al Nahdha co-founder, who is considered a very charismatic personality by most of Tunisians is AbdelFattah Mourou. Despite his traditional dress code, he always appears on Tunisian TV channels as a funny and modern personality. He sometimes sings or dances and insists on his passion to art. These 2 figures of the most dominant Islamic party in Tunisia had faced segregation and jailed by the previous regime in Tunisia, that's why they represent "the God father" figure to most of those who have sympathized with Al Nahdha party, therefore, they follow them blindly. This first variable condition for a successful de-radicalization process, explicitly is achieved. However, implicitly, Al Ghannouchi has glorified the Salafist saying that "they are the founding fathers of a new culture and they do not initiate violence" (YouTube Sami Ben Abdallah- 2016). The unclear stand of the leaders of Al Nahdha towards the Salafists and the Islamists created division within the community.

Second, Ashour argues that the state repression refers to the restriction and violation of civil rights by the ruling government. After the revolution, Tunisians gained freedom of speech and the oppressed citizens became allowed to practice their civil rights. According to human rights first organization and after their visit to Tunisia in 2013 in order to witness the flow of drafting the constitution, a positive feedback of the participation of different layers of the society in the

³ Zellin, Aaron. "Tunisia: Uncovering Ansar Al-Sharia." The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 13 Oct. 2013. Web. 14 Aug. 2014.

political life and the openness of the political leaders towards the opponents has been observed and reported to the international community⁴. However, as Ben Mustapha Ben Arfa mentioned in her studies, most of Tunisian foreign fighters felt oppressed by the Tunisian government to practice their faith freely and to call for the Muslim Ummah under the Caliphate rule. Such behavior is against democracy and modernism. It is true that Tunisia has included a wide range of civilians with different backgrounds to the political life, however, encouraging Salafists to build the Muslim Ummah Caliphate will destroy the modern, civil, and secular state. Furthermore, the state oppression variable cannot be applied to the Tunisian case of de-radicalization process success.

Third, the interaction between members of the armed group variable. According to Ashour, there are 2 interactions; external and internal. The external interaction is mainly between the armed group or the extremist movement and other actors not belonging to the same group or do not share the same ideology. Internal interaction is the relationship between the members of the same group having different positions in the hierarchy. On the external level, the Salafists in Tunisia are well connected to an international network in the Middle East, North Africa and West Africa. However, internally, members of Salafist groups have been divided on the successor or the Caliphate and also disagreed on Jihad. Some followed Al Qaida in their ideology and some others followed ISIS⁵.

Last, national and international motivations dimension. It refers to any implicit or explicit inducement by foreign or local socio-political and socio-economical agent to renounce violence in order to gain and share political power or to stop torture in detention centers of the members

⁴ <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/blasphemy-freedom-expression-and-tunisia%E2%80%99s-transition-democracy>

⁵ Stanford Center of International Security and Cooperation:
https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/ansar-al-shariah-tunisia#highlight_text_10029

of the radical groups. Giving the bloody history of Al Nahdha in the 80's, today Al Ghanouchi along with other figures proclaim their peaceful and modern ideology towards the state. In October 2011, they won the elections under the alliance with Troika. To certain extent, this variable is very relevant to Al Nahdha, however, their election was also successful due to the oppression of people to practice freely their religion and Al Nahdha came as the only savior of Islam in the region. During Al Nahdha rule in Tunisia, many Islamists prisoners were pardoned and provided financial compensations and were provided jobs.

The above various variables of a successful de-radicalization process can be relevant to the Tunisian de-radicalization procedures to certain extent. However, the Tunisian case is very unique and distinct from Egypt and Algeria. So, generalizing Ashour's de-radicalization concept might not be relevant to other programs. So, in order to have a successful de-radicalization program, a thorough study of the causes of radicalism and deep understanding of the geo-political dimensions and the historical background of the country should be grasped in depth. Koehler (2017) argues that de-radicalization is often used in the counter terrorism policies and strategies with conceptual and theoretical vagueness. For instance, rehabilitation, disengagement, de-radicalization, reintegration, dialogue, deprogramming is often named to describe the transition of behavior of an individual from being radical to modern. He also claims that the available literature on de-radicalization and disengagement described certain initiatives in certain countries and certain prisons in order to show specific structures and critics of the programs. While the studies differ, Koehler criticizes the lack of coordination of approaches between de-radicalization and disengagement. He also discusses the lack of investigation and literature on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs which is also known by post-conflict initiative process that ensures the reconversion of the terrorist fighters to the civilian life. For

Koehler, the motives of joining a radical group are most likely connected to the reasons of leaving the group, and based on identifying the reasons, a sustainable de-radicalization initiatives program can be planned.

Barelle (2015) introduced the first de-radicalization theories to the field (as cited in Koehler, 2017). Barelle's de-radicalization model is identified as a chaotic process of disengagement or de-radicalization along 3 stages of the radical's life; (1) limitation of engagement within the extreme group, (2) investment and expansion of a new self-identity, and (3) establishment of a new identity. Koehler (2017) claims that Barelle left the de-radicalization psychological mechanism out of her de-radicalization model which advocates the idea of an ideological reform with practical rehabilitation methods like skills teaching and social integration. Koehler (2017) states that the psychological distancing from a radical group can be conceptualized as "re-pluralization of political concepts and values" (p, 80), which is the relief of tension between ideological urgency to act on violent basis and the lack of alternative solutions. For him, a successful and effective de-radicalization "must be hand-tailored to the individual radicalization process and psychological driving factors behind commitment" (Koehler, p. 80, 2017).

In his book "understanding de-radicalization methods", Koehler believes that there is an immense chance to abandon a radical group if the individual is ideologically reformed through de-radicalization program, while the chance to re-engage with a terrorist group is high if the individual's behavior, only, has changed.

Bjørge and Horgan (2009) claim that literature on terrorism disengagement is very decent, not like the literature on criminal youth gangs that might provide an insight to the disengagement of radicals. These programs of anti-gangs' criminals have often strengthened the crime rates rather than weakened them among these gangs. So, as many studies were carried out to understand the

factors involved in exiting criminal gangs, stigmatization of these gangs rose to effect their reintegration in the normal life. Same as radical disengagement, Bjørgo and Horgan demonstrate that there is voluntary and involuntary exiting gang groups. The fact that disengaged gang members are often seen as gang members by the police, the gang, and the society, might affect the exit of other members since that specific image of a criminal will follow them until eternity. Therefore, religious disengagement programs would benefit from the mechanisms of gangs exit through providing guidance to facilitate disengagement process, giving the similarities that both groups share (Koehler, 2017).

“Disengaging might suggest critical cognitive and social changes, in terms of leaving behind the shared social norms, values, attitudes, relationships, and social networks so carefully forged while the individual was still a member of a terrorist network” (Bjørgo & Horgan, p. 20, 2009). Even if the radical violent and non-violent exit an extreme group physically, they still can share ideas with the radical environment. For that reason, psychology of the individual is important to approach (ibid.).

5. Actors involved the de-radicalization process:

This section will map the actors which intervened in the de-radicalization process in Tunisia. Bjørgo and Horgan (2009) argue that de-radicalization and disengagement programs are usually monitored by governmental or non-governmental actors and they differ in monetary resources, legal tasks, and accountabilities. This section will start with the Tunisian government strategies to fight radicalization then the other actors involved and their effectiveness.

5.1 The Strategies of the Tunisian government:

In 2003 and under Ben Ali's regime, Tunisia adopted repressive measures to stop Salafi Jihadists from expansion by jailing them, then in 2015, these laws were rectified to extend the pre-trial period and to define terrorism (Watanabe & Merz, 2017). The authorities restricted the activities of Salafi jihadists to recruit and build an advocate base and banned Ansar Al Shariaa after the assassination of the 2 political oppositions (ibid.). Furthermore, the government suspended and closed many civil associations for suspected links to terrorism, adopted some administrative measures to monitor religious institutions and their preachers, and restricted the accounts of jihadists groups on social media (ibid.). Tunisian policy makers also limited the extremist interpretations of Islam in public and private areas and increased the exposure of moderate Islamic interpretations, they also closed TV and radio stations that are believed to propagate and promote hatred and violence, and closed mosques that were not under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and to follow up, the authorities replaced imams who incited violence with others approved and supervised by the ministry, and also sent imams to be trained in Morocco, where the state has actively seen to adopt moderate Islam (ibid.).

In addition, the 2015 anti-terrorism law made joining a terrorist organization abroad a criminal offense and authorities prevented males under 35 mainly from rural areas in Tunisia from traveling to certain countries, including Turkey, Morocco, Libya and Serbia because it is believed to be transit countries before joining ISIS in Syria and Iraq (ibid.). In 2016, the Prime Minister- Youssef Chahed declared that the return of Tunisian militants from Iraq, Syria and Libya will be immediately stopped and judged under the anti-terrorism law (Reuters, 2016⁶),

⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-security-idUSKBN14J1AL>

which United States Institute of Peace (2017⁷) acknowledged to make the Tunisian prisons more crowded and unsupervised. Watanabe & Merz (2017) argue that the government did not show any plans of measures of rehabilitation and reintegration of the non-violent suspects due to the polarized debate of the returnees among politicians and civil society. To hamper the movement of Salafists between Libya and Tunisia and to reduce smuggling, the government built a wall at the Libyan borders (Chauzal & Zavagli, 2016).

5.2 Counter- Radicalization Campaign and Network:

Koehler (2017) claims that in recent years, counter-narrative campaigns became prevalent in the discourse of countering violent extremists and recruitment. Many of these campaigns were conducted by governmental and non-governmental agencies in Tunisia to counter radicalization. Together with the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior, some Tunisian TV channels launched an awareness campaigns on TV, on radio stations, and posters in the streets to show the consequences of adopting extreme beliefs and committing violence⁸. These campaigns used “attractive audio-visual material spread on social media channels with content directly challenging terrorist narratives” (Koehler, p.103, 2017).

As a counter terrorism network, Koehler (2017) claims that any terrorist-affected state might apply various methods of de-radicalization and disengagement programs that stretches over 3 levels of impact; (1) “macro-social” which refers to a large scale effect like the region or the city, (2) “meso-social” or close environment like work, family, school, and (3) “micro-social” focuses on individuals, and these 3 different levels are targeted with “prevention, repression, and intervention” (p,112 , 2017). Meso-social impact was portrayed in different occasions in Tunisia

⁷ <https://www.usip.org/blog/2017/03/looking-beyond-prison-when-isis-fighters-go-home>

⁸ Atessia TV Channel, taken from: <https://youtu.be/X7S9VAOCgIQ> and <https://youtu.be/86W5GIwSUgo>

as a counter-narrative network to influence radicals by their families and mainly their mothers. Take for instance *the Flower of Aleppo* a Tunisian movie that tackled jihad and the issue of youngsters who joined ISIS. The movie portrayed a regular Tunisian family in which the parents were set for divorce. The family dispersion resulted in emotional vacuum with the youngest son who decided to join ISIS in Syria to seek refuge and belonging. It also showed the struggle of the mother when her son left to fight for jihad and how she suffered to try to save him⁹.

The Flower of Aleppo sent an alarming message to the members of families who decided to join ISIS to consider their families mainly their mothers and the struggle that they will undergo when they lose their children to fall into radicalism.

On the other hand, macro-social impact came as a response from citizens and civil society. The Tunisian civil society and many active demonstrators met in front of the Municipal Theatre in Tunis the capital to condemn the violent act of terrorist attacks in Tunisia. All protestors used one word “Tunisia is a free country, and terrorism should leave”. They also raised signs like “defeating terrorism is a duty” and “we sacrifice with our soul and blood to protect the (Tunisian) flag”¹⁰.

5.3 Actors involved in the counterterrorism process:

As previously mentioned, engagement of civil society in de-radicalization and disengagement programs in the Middle East and North Africa is a pretty new phenomenon and wisely introduced in the region. In Tunisia, relevant stakeholder donors focused on civil society empowerment in order to fight extremism, mainly after the global policy efforts to emphasize

⁹ <https://www.goldenglobes.com/articles/flower-aleppo-tunisia>

¹⁰ <https://www.al-sharq.com/news/details/319115>

collaboration between governments and civil societies to combat radicalism (Letsch, 2018). Civil societies were favored by the stakeholders because they often possess knowledge of local communities and they are flexible to work with (ibid.) but also the most violent inmates (in case of DDP in prisons) and extremists are unwilling to cooperate with state-sponsored initiatives (Koehler, 20167) because of the lack of trust between individuals and the state. The international donor stakeholders are increasingly providing funds to Tunisia's civil society and pushing the P/CVE agenda as a policy practice in Tunisia (Letsch, 2018). She claims that most of preventive activities that has been carried out so far under the P/CVE initiative by local civil society tackled violent extremism which include cultural activities, citizenship teaching, community effort, capacity-building, trainings, awareness-raising activities and dialogue between youth and security agencies, which funded by EU main member states, the US, the EU and several UN bodies (ibid.).

According to the UN's regional focus of intervention, three main areas of engagement are the primary focus: (1) the border region, (2) prisons, and (3) disadvantages neighborhoods (Nations Unies, 2017). Letsch (2018) claims that the UN mostly team up with identified trustworthy, legitimate, and local civil society which operate in the border between Tunisia and Libya but not between Tunisia and Algeria which ignited criticism on the way the UN functions. On the other engagement level, the UN strategy interventions and engagement met difficulties to get access to the Tunisian prisons (ibid.). Letsch also claims that the UN's selection of NGOs created some confusion among stakeholders due to the financial incapacity of most of Tunisian NGOs to apply for EU projects as the call for proposals mechanism is arranged by the EU.

In 2015 and 2017, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)¹¹ held workshops to assist Tunisia with fighting radicalization locally and to “Strengthen Community Engagement in Implementing Security Council resolutions 1624 (2005) and 2178 (2014) and the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy”. This latter workshop was co-organized by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) – The Hague and the Human Security Collective and the Government of Tunisia and funded by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre. This workshop brought representatives from different institutions and organizations related to counter violent extremism. It aimed at engaging communities with the support of various civil society organizations and the government in implementing approaches and measures in order to fight extremism within the misfortunate social layer (ibid.). Likewise, the first workshop focused on developing a comprehensive program which combines law implementation procedures and initiatives to counter terrorism in Tunisia (ibid.).

5.4 European Organizations:

In addition to countries, many European agencies supported Tunisia in the process of de-radicalization. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) organized operational trainings in order to fight radicalization. Europol also strengthened the strategic direct cooperation with Tunisia without any prior agreement to be able to respond immediately to the country’s needs (IEMed, 2017¹²). The European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit (Eurojust) created a joint investigation team to coordinate prosecution strategies and support in the field when it is needed (Eurojust, 2018). Gilles de Kerchove (2017) argues that the new European

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/news/tag/tunisia/>

¹²

file:///nmbu.no/My/Home/Downloads/eu_tunisia_cooperation_security_counterterrorism_Gilles_de_Kerchove_EuromedSurvey2017.pdf

Board and Coast Guard Agency also cooperated with the Ministry of Interior and other agencies related to border safety in Tunisia in order to enhance security and protect the borders from the movement of terrorists in and out of the country. De Kerchove (2017) also highlights on the efforts of the European Gendarmerie Force (FGE) with the Tunisian National Guard to fight money laundering coming from organizations or individuals that finance terrorism, and some on-going projects to fight guns trafficking.

5.5 European Union:

Tunisia has always been showing readiness and openness to cooperate with various partners and enhance the sector of security (Country Reports on Terrorism, 2017¹³). To avoid effort duplication of the G7+6 and the UN agencies, international support was well coordinated among donors and stakeholders (Dwokrin and Al Malki, 2018).

Fearing the threat of terrorism to reach the continent, the European Union (EU) was in rush to help the Tunisian government with 23 million Euros in order to reform programs in security field to implement and strength the institutional reforms and to contribute in modernizing the services in the Ministry of Interior and other institutions to better protect the border control (ibid.). On the internal level, the reform concerns building trust relationship between the police officer and the citizen through implementing control system. In addition, the EU supported the justice sector financially and technically with 40 million Euros in order to modernize the judiciary sector

¹³ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bcf1f7813.html>

(ibid.). With the help of the EU, Tunisia, quickly, adopted the National Counterterrorism Strategy and global policy to prevent radicalization (IEMed, 2017¹⁴).

In addition to the European Union effort, France cooperated directly with the Tunisian government due to the close relationship both countries share. Its assistance was represented in providing equipment and intelligence to the Special Forces to fight terrorist cells (Dwokrin and Al Malki, 2018). France has also cooperated with Britain to improve the Tunisian aviation security system and hotels security (ibid.).

5.6 Other Countries

With the cooperation of Germany, U.S.A focused on the Tunisian border security. Both countries funded the installation of electronic surveillance system between the border of Tunisia and Libya, while Italy provided support in the maritime border to overcome human trafficking related to radical groups (Dwokrin and Al Malki, 2018).

6. Analysis:

6.1 Government's Effectiveness Strategy:

Among other critical problems de-radicalization programs face is the question of how to demonstrate a positive impression of their goals, to evaluate their performance, and to design and structure the programs (Koehler, 2017).

Among de-radicalization initiatives' evaluation approach, Williams and Kleinman (2013) argue that the effectiveness of de-radicalization program is not evaluated by whether it succeeded or

14

file:///nmbu.no/My/Home/Downloads/eu_tunisia_cooperation_security_counterterrorism_Gilles_de_Kerchove_Eu_romedSurvey2017.pdf

not but rather with its impact on the participants or the target group. They urge the stakeholders to decide which measure and characteristics are more important for the program. They encourage to choose an appropriate risk assessment method, “identify benchmarks, comparison groups, and conduct quasi-experimental designs” (as cited in Koehler, p. 186, 2017). The authors also point out the importance of the programs’ records and archives that might contain enough data for the evaluation instead of interviewing the participants since they are aware of the assessment and it might affect their input. Another effectiveness evaluation approach suggested by Romaniuk and Fink (2012) to engage stakeholders in the process and collect data in order to evaluate the program before and after execution. A third approach as illustrated in Koehler’s book, *Understanding De-radicalization*, is by Horgan and Braddock. They suggest identifying the most important goals and priorities of the de-radicalization program and the difficulties of achieving them, then developing a successful sustainable initiative (2017). However, none of these approaches were tested by any of the de-radicalization programs experts due to the governments and the participants reluctance (Koehler, 2017).

“De-radicalization programs have struggled to demonstrate their impact or sometimes even actively blocked access for external researchers or requests for more information or transparency. This partially due to the fact that many programs are operated by security agencies, involve a target group deemed to highly dangerous to their surrounding countries, political and tactical motives” (Koehler, p.163, 2017). As previously demonstrated by Ben Mustapha Ben Arab (2018), the strategy that the Tunisian Government has followed was security intervention to force violent and non-violent radicals to exit terrorist groups. This governmental security strategy did not really succeed in demonstrating information about their operations, their impact, and their structure. All available information about these security operations were not detailed

whether in the local or international media, nor in the political debates. This secretive method imposed questions in regards to the confidentiality and the credibility of the operations and their “political and tactical motives”. If the government was not open to the public, they should at least be transparent with related researchers in order to jointly-evaluate and develop best practices of these de-radicalization programs (Koehler, 2017).

Letsch (2018) discusses the reluctance and resistance of the Tunisian Ministry of Interior towards new reforms to fight terror. She proclaims that such view is widely shared among international actors engaged in the security sector in Tunisia. Although it shifted their demands to focus on having more equipment, many stakeholders insisted on persuading the ministry to engage with new reforms and modernization. Letsch also explains the new reforms adopted by the government gave the police more power over citizens who are suspected to be terrorists instead of focusing on reforms aiming at modernizing the system.

Muhanna-Matar (2017) claims that there is an evaluation research of the effectiveness of a state-led religious rehabilitation approach to de-radicalization process through authorized Islamic Imams and scholars. This approach aims at enlightening the inmates with the more tangible religious approach they entered prisons for by correcting extreme Islamic beliefs and knowledge (Gunaratna, 2009), and limiting the unauthorized extreme Imams activities. She also argues that religious state-led rehabilitation represents radicals as irrational and incapable of thinking right about their religion and their desires, while in reality, these extremes are rational, have political-oriented mindset, and mostly educated people. This approach of de-radicalization denies the failure of the state for the socio-economic, cultural, and political gaps called by these violent and non-violent radicals (ibid.). Prisons in Tunisia are overcrowded with inmates with different crime

backgrounds¹⁵ due to the small size and the incapability of the infrastructure. This issue effected the situation between radicals and criminals and created some kind of bond and sympathy between them, but also played an important role as a platform to recruit new Jihadists (ibid.). The lack of rehabilitation programs in the prisons and the danger of recidivism due to that are issues that need to be addressed firmly and should be put as a priority to cut with radicalization inside the prisons¹⁶. The state-led religious rehabilitation approach in the prisons was neither clear nor structured.

Furthermore, the newly reviewed provisions in the JORT were also very vague¹⁷. There was no clear definition of terrorism or terrorist, or what is really terrorism actions. The revision included the establishment of new bodies and the updating of the existing agencies in the government to fight and supervise terrorism (i.e. National Intelligence Center, National Security Council, National Counter-terrorism Committee, Intelligence and Defense Security Agency). The decrees described the role of the agencies but without any specification to the exact task to fight terrorism. There were also conflicting roles of some of the agencies; like National Intelligence Center and National Security Council that both have similar tasks, among which, evaluate potential threat and danger, implement national intelligence, coordinate international programs related to de-radicalization field. First, the national security matters should be under the president of the Tunisian government¹⁸, while here, there was a clear intervention of the prime minister in

¹⁵ <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/comment/2018/4/16/radicalisation-in-prisons-cells-in-france-and-tunisia>

¹⁶ <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2017/2/28/tunisia-returning-jihadists-highlight-desperate-need-for-prison-reform>

¹⁷ <http://www.legislation.tn/recherche/legislatifs-reglementaires/keyword/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85+%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A9+%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%A8/sort/date>

¹⁸ <http://www.legislation.tn/sites/default/files/constitution/constitution.pdf>

these affairs, as the National Intelligence Center is under the occupations of the prime minister. Also, the roles of each agency should be identified clearly and explicitly to avoid confusion of roles and preserve the public interest above personal interests.

After reviewing some political debates and media outlets, the findings suggest that the government was engaged to implement de-radicalization programs to fight terrorism, however, it turned out that the policy makers fell in the confusion between disengagement and de-radicalization. Their public speeches show the determination of the state to de-radicalize the terrorist environment and support the radicals with psychological programs in order to modernize their extreme beliefs, but in reality, practices showed the engagement of the authorities in forced intervention towards violent and non-violent individuals and treating them equally without touching upon the root cause of radicalism in the country. This shows that there is a lack of program integrity in combination with an almost non-existent specialization or high-quality training programs for deradicalization counselors in “Tunisia” which created difficulties to evaluate the programs and increased the risk of ethical misconduct by programs staff (Koehler, 2017).

6.2 Actors’ Effectiveness Strategy:

With the help of the British Council and the British Embassy, Tunisia adopted a preventive counter-narrative platform that is supervised by the Ministry of Constitutional Relations, Human Rights and Civil Society (Letsch, 2018).”This platform has been criticized for insufficient expertise of the involved employees of the ministries and for its high dependency on the UK as major funder. The platform furthermore lacks a plan of action regarding the involvement of and coordination with civil society” (p.175). During one of her conducted interviews, Letsch points

out the unwillingness of some participants towards providing details on P/CVE-related activities implemented by civil society actors. She also describes the failure of the state to implement adequate preventive measures and the lack of information to the public about its official strategy. She claims that most of activities carried out by local Tunisian activists under the P/CVE initiatives are classified as preventive activities at the tertiary level of intervention, while prisons reform is considered of primary level, however it is carried out by state actors and international donors. One of her international European Union delegation interviewees expressed that civil society organizations and religious civil society participants are able to reach out to a wide range of stakeholders including violent and non-violent extremists. However, the local actor scene in Tunisia is divided between Nahdhaouist and Liberal secular participants. The western assistance could be criticized if they support one at the expense of the other (ibid.).

Letsch also claims that there is a perception of NGOs being greedy for money and intervene when rewarded financially. She could pick from her interviews that the number of NGOs claiming to have proficiency on CVE related interventions are growing due to the huge financial support received from the international donors. This assumption questions the nature of the donors' structure and ethics (ibid.). As response, in 2017, the Tunisian government issued a statement ordering all NGOs to declare all funds they receive from abroad and if any party fails to comply, the government will prosecute and abolish their activities¹⁹. It suggests that non-transparent NGO funding creates controversy in Tunisia because funding by foreign donors often leads to national security intervention and to the independence of NGOs (ibid.).

Some have criticized the knowledge level of the Tunisian NGOs who work with P/CVE initiatives due to their lack of expertise and the lack of working guidance (ibid.). It is also

¹⁹ <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/Tunisia.html>

important to highlight the failed international donor strategy to distribute funds and collaborate with local NGOs. They mainly work with known NGOs that are located in the capital Tunis. The reluctance of disengaging with other NGOs poses question about the credibility and transparency of the donors towards P/CVE oriented interventions and the method of selection of NGOs (ibid.). On the other hand, civil societies implemented some strategies to adapt the international donors' requirements; (1) technical agenda and (2) strategic agenda (ibid.). The first strategy is to adjust the agenda to adapt to the technical requirements of the international donors which consists of grants, designing project proposals and reporting. Some activists criticized this strategy as many CVE-oriented civil societies are not working with prevention projects nor have the expertise to engage in such initiatives. The second is to adapt to the strategic agenda of the donor that is related to the implementation of CVE projects including innovative ideas and concepts complying with international standards to fulfill the donors' requirements (ibid.). This attitude of local civil societies suggests looking deeper into the strategies they follow, is it really for the benefit of the locals or to satisfy the donor?

“... the ongoing agenda adaptation is regarded a strategic decision within the Tunisian civil society scene, as after all, receiving funds ensures the survival of these organizations” (Letsch, p. 182, 2018). This new tendency of job market shows the interest of these civil societies as it is leaning towards unemployment filling more than humanitarianism or implementing P/CVE strategies, and mainly shows the lack of expertise of these people who manage such NGOs.

6.3 Recommendations:

As previously mentioned, Koehler (2017) identifies 3 different levels of impact within a society's counter-terrorism landscape; macro-social, meso-social, and micro-social level. Each specific tool of prevention is displayed in figure 1.

	Macro-level	Meso-level	Micro-level
Prevention	Education, research, civil society, youth and social work	Community cohesion programs	Workshops with former extremists in school
Repression	National law enforcement architecture	Community policy, group banning	Incarceration, house searchings
Intervention	Counter-narrative projects	Family counseling	De-radicalization programs

Figure 1: The network of counterterrorism (Koehler, p.114, 2017)

Koehler (2019) argues that the preventative tools of each level are complementary in order to have an effective de-radicalization program. In section 5, the researcher tried to demonstrate the actors involved in the de-radicalization process in Tunisia and their different strategies. From a first glimpse in the table, it seems that Tunisia tried to follow and focused on the macro-level with its categories of tools (prevention, repression, and intervention). Although this strategy suffered a lot from deficiencies in terms of coordination between different CVE related bodies, incompetence of the state with de-radicalization programs, and the issues that civil societies and donors have faced -mentioned in the section above, the new government should take into consideration the adoption of new tools with its different categories in order to succeed and fight terrorism. It is true that there is no 'one size fits all' approach, Tunisia should be open to the international community and its people and mainly cooperate with researchers to acquire more expertise in the domain and learn from previous experiences. Also, if the budget doesn't allow

the government to adapt any of these tools and categories, they should show determination and transparency in order to implement an affective CVE oriented initiative.

Besides, micro-social prevention level should also be taken into consideration. Gøtzsche-Astrup (2018) recommends some practices in order to have an affective impact on this level. He focuses on motivating, counseling, building skills, and mainly tailoring specific approaches for each individual to cope with the traumatic past and integrate with the society.

Additional recommendations for consultant should be taken into consideration. P/CVE experts should be familiar with the cultural and ideological contexts of the extremist environments and their background, language, religion, clothing traditions, and behavior in order to assess the level of radicalization of the person and the relationship he/she has with the bigger group as Individual deradicalization therapy cannot be isolated from the group behind radicalization (Koehler, 2019). “Hence, it appears to be essential for CVE and deradicalization program personnel to be able to include in the counseling the social identity perspective of their users and their specific relationship with the group or milieu in question” (Koehler, p.48, 2019).

Also, donors’ intervention in civil society creates its own vision of political, social, economic norms and values standards which not necessarily applicable within certain societies (Howell & Pearce, 2001). For that reason, local civil societies should critically evaluate the international donor’s agenda mainly with the absence of the state in P/CVE landscape (Letsch, 2018).

Concerning rehabilitation programs in the prison, the government should step up and take the lead to provide programs with experts in the field and should take the issue of radicalism as a priority since it directly threatens the national security and the economy.

7. Conclusion:

Though it was rocky, Tunisia is the only Arabic country that succeeded in granting a democratic transition in the Middle East and North Africa region²⁰. However, this young and fragile democracy paved the way to a major recruiting pool for foreign fighters to join ISIS or its affiliates²¹. As a response, the Tunisian Government adapted a security-oriented initiative in order to confront the growth of terrorism and limit their radical activities, among which, arresting many suspected individuals, restricting activities of jihadists, suspending many civil organizations suspected to be linked to terrorism, monitoring religious institutions, and rehabilitating prisoners. This traditional security-oriented strategy is clearly a mixture between disengagement and de-radicalization initiatives. Koehler (2017) claims: “Many de-radicalization programs in the Middle East and Southeast Asia have been constructed with the deliberate goal of gaining specific intelligence for counter-terrorism operations, oftentimes with the direct involvement of security agencies in the program itself” (p.95). This suggests that Tunisia has also followed this model of de-radicalization in order to control over national security issues and to gain knowledge and intelligence within the terrorist group inside and outside the detention.

In addition to that, the return of foreign fighters to Tunisia, also, created a threat on the regional and national level. For that reason, Tunisia received many financial and logistical supports from western donors and other stakeholders. This approach was criticized by many as it gives more power to NGOs at the expense of the government actors and because many civil societies were criticized for their need for money in order to perform.

²⁰ <https://mepc.org/journal/tunisias-jihadi-problem-and-how-deal-it>

²¹ https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Final_External_Evaluation_Report_on_Bottom-Up_Approaches_to_CVE_Project_-_SFCG_Tunisia.pdf

As for effectiveness, Koehler (2017) distinguishes 3 levels or scales of impact; macro-social, meso-social, and micro-social which complement each other and provide support to have an effective deradicalization program. He also discusses the other measurable impacts among which the public perception of the success or failure of the program, the turnover and psychology inside the terrorist group, the reduction of potential members and recruitment pools, and the intelligence knowledge adapted by the authorities. In Tunisia's case, the government did not fully fulfill each and every aspect of impact. Albeit, it is hard to conclude that the de-radicalization/disengagement program adopted by the government was perceived to be a success, policy makers can be more open about their strategies to fight radicalism and cooperate with practitioners and scholars in order to get an effective de-radicalization effective program.

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