

Racism & Extremism Monitor

The extreme right: entry and exit

Ineke van der Valk

Willem Wagenaar

Assisted by Froukje Demant

Anne Frank House - Research and Documentation

Leiden University - Department of Public Administration

Translated by Nancy Forest-Flier

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This report is about youths and young adults who have become involved in right-wing extremist movements and later terminated their involvement. It was produced on the basis of research in which the life stories of the young people played a central role.

Right-wing extremism in the Netherlands has been subject to considerable change in recent decades. During the eighties and nineties it manifested itself chiefly through political parties, while over the past ten years the main platform for this political orientation has been the internet, followed more diffusely by street activism. The street activism often has roots in the so-called Lonsdale scene, a youth culture that is part of the 'gabber' scene. It arose and spread quickly in the Netherlands during the years 2002-2007 and was a conspicuous feature of public life.¹ The Lonsdale scene involved groups of young people who were united in their common attraction to hardcore music and whose uniform behaviour, clothing and partying practices set them apart. It is possible that a hundred thousand young people became involved in the gabber scene during this period. Contained within this youth culture was a subgroup that espoused various forms of racist, xenophobic or right-wing extremist ideas. Although others involved in the hardcore scene did not have such ideas, they did tolerate them to a great extent. The more radical groups came to light after several series of incidents, often interethnic, that took place throughout the Netherlands. This problem gained more prominence through media coverage, particularly during the year following the murder of Theo van Gogh. The young people were labelled 'Lonsdale youth' thanks to the popularity of the Lonsdale clothing brand they wore.

The social context has changed in recent years. The drawing of borders between the fundamental right of freedom of expression and the right to be safeguarded from discrimination has come under pressure in the public discourse. While some advocate unlimited freedom of expression, even when it is discriminatory, others insist that this freedom has reached its limit when it encroaches on the right to live without discrimination. There is no doubt that the lifting of the taboo on negative statements about 'foreigners', expressed in terms of the claim to 'say what you think', has influenced the development of growing discrimination in society and on the extreme right. From all appearances, it has also had an effect on the mobilisation of gabbers by right-wing extremist groups.

In the spring of 2009 the study *Deradicalisation in Practice* was published as part of the *Racism & Extremism Monitor*.² This study focused on two experimental projects in which attempts had been made to help young people disengage from the right-wing extremist milieu and to support them in the deradicalisation process. The method used proved successful with newcomers and followers associated with right-wing extremist street groups. The study offered interesting insights, but it also gave rise to new questions. These questions have to do with the pattern of the radicalisation and deradicalisation processes involving persons in the Dutch extreme right-wing today and with the factors related to those processes, especially concerning members of the hard core. The research that has been conducted in the Netherlands up until now has been descriptive

¹ See, among others, J. van Donselaar (ed.), *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme: Het Lonsdalevraagstuk*, Amsterdam: Anne Frank House / Leiden University, 2005.

² F. Demant, W. Wagenaar & J. van Donselaar, *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme: Deradicaliseren in de praktijk*. Amsterdam: Anne Frank House / Leiden University, 2009.

for the most part and mainly focused on groups as objects of study. Studies of the individual persons involved are rare.³

The aim of the present study is to get a closer and more precise look at the processes as they occur on the *individual* level. To that end, we did not examine the growth or decline of radical movements. Rather, we focused on individuals who belonged to the hard core of the extreme right for the most part – persons who played a central or very active role in the movement for short or longer periods of time. We studied the process of deradicalisation *in connection* with the process of radicalisation: no exit without an entry. Not only has deradicalisation been relatively neglected up until now, but little empirical research has been done in this area as well. The empirical research on radicalisation has also been limited. Silke reports that only one per cent of the numerous publications on radicalised Islamists have made use of systematic interviews with radicalised individuals.⁴ Likewise, little or nothing has been published on the personal stories of right-wing extremists who regretted the choice they made.

Before beginning our study, we posed four central questions:

1. What factors and phases can be identified in right-wing extremist radicalisation processes and what do they have in common?
2. What factors and phases can be identified in right-wing extremist deradicalisation processes and what do they have in common?
3. What do the processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation have in common?
4. What does this teach us about possible interventions for preventing radicalisation and promoting deradicalisation?

In order to answer these questions, various steps were taken. The first step was to study the relevant literature. The fieldwork consisted of conducting detailed, individual, in-depth interviews with twelve former radicals. In these interviews we focused on the radicalisation process, entering the extreme right milieu, the period of time spent with the extreme right and the activities involved, the exit and deradicalisation. We also paid attention to experiences and events that preceded radicalisation, and the reactions from and influence of the person's surroundings.

This is primarily a qualitative study of a small group of people who were active for a period of time in right-wing extremist groups in the Netherlands. It is fully in keeping with the research tradition of the Racism & Extremism Monitor: conducting longitudinal studies in the area of racism and extremism in order to obtain more knowledge and insight into these phenomena over the long term. Whether the results can be generalised to apply to the extreme right as a whole is not the concern of this report, nor does it discuss whether, based on scientific criteria, generalisations can be made to apply to the total number of people who have left this milieu or the total number of

³ Exceptions are: A. Linden, *Besmet: levenslopen en motieven van extreem-rechtse activisten in Nederland* (Dissertation, VU University Amsterdam Faculty of Social Sciences, 2009) for activists in classical right-wing extremist organisations during the 1990s, and A. Gielen, *Radicalisering en identiteit: radicale rechtse en moslimjongeren vergeleken*. Amsterdam: Aksant. Gielen 2008, for a case study; also see A. Fermin, *Islamitische en extreem-rechtse radicalisering in Nederland: een vergelijkend literatuuronderzoek*. Rotterdam: Risbo / Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2009.

⁴ A. Silke, 'Holy warriors: exploring the psychological processes of jihadi radicalization', in: *European Journal of Criminology*, 5 (2008) 1, pp. 99-123.

youths and young adults who have done so. Rather, the aim of this study is to see whether the results can contribute to theory formation concerning processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation, and whether the findings of this study are in conformity with such a theory. To what extent do the results of earlier research in and outside the Netherlands also apply to young Dutch disengagers from the first decade of the twenty-first century? What can our study contribute to the prevention of processes of radicalisation, to deradicalisation and to reducing support for the extreme right?

Twelve persons were chosen to form a small research group. Up to the present day, the right-wing extremist environment has been difficult for scholarly research to access. It is extremely difficult to find people who are (or were) active in the right-wing extremist milieu and are willing to cooperate with a scholarly investigation. The extreme right is a closed, suspicious community. Contacts with other views and with social institutions are avoided as much as possible. In addition, former right-wing extremists have a lot to lose. They prefer not to call attention to their 'black' period, because doing so might have repercussions for their private or professional lives. Earlier experience also shows that it is almost impossible to find respondents within these circles, or only under very difficult circumstances.⁵ Seen from this perspective, therefore, the data collected from these twelve respondents can be regarded as exceptional. The persons we spoke with proved to be a reasonable sample of persons active in the extreme right in recent decades. Knowing this milieu as we do, we can state that our respondents are fairly representative of the current generation of right-wing extremist youth and young adults. It was a diverse group as well: men and women, different ages, spread out across the country, active in many different groups and playing different roles within these groups. We see the same kind of diversity in the population as a whole. The findings here cannot be generalised unreservedly to the entire population of right-wing extremist youth and young adults, but given the above qualifications it is certainly possible to make useful judgements.

The face-to-face interview is a central instrument of this research. In the interviews, the interviewees give their vision of reality. At the same time they give a presentation of themselves, not only with regard to the motivation and reasons behind their decision to do or to find something, but also with regard to their social identity. Partly for this reason some explaining is called for when it comes to the veracity of the statements made in the interviews. To what extent are we seeing a picture that is better and more impressive than what actually happened? We are not ruling out the possibility that socially acceptable answers were sometimes provided. In a few cases we had this impression as well. On the other hand, earlier research has made us well aware of the contexts in which our respondents have functioned. We were able to verify their statements by referring to the actual state of affairs with which we are familiar. In addition, our respondents regularly ran into each other in the small right-wing extremist milieu of which they were a part, and there is evidence of shared experiences. Their accounts of events were mostly in agreement. We conclude, therefore, that the discussions were reasonably truthful. Whenever we had cause to doubt the veracity of certain statements on the basis of known facts, we left these statements out of our report and our analysis.

⁵ F. Demant et al., *Teruggang en uitbreiding: processen van deradicalisering ontleed*. Amsterdam: IMES, 2008; W. de Koster & D. Houtman, 'Toevluchtsoord voor een bedreigde soort: over virtuele gemeenschapsvorming door rechts-extremisten', *Sociologie*, 2 (2006) 3, pp. 232-248; M.W. Bol & E.G. Wiersma, *Racistisch geweld in Nederland: aard en omvang, strafrechtelijke afdoening, dadertypen*. Gouda: Gouda Quint, 1997.

In response to publicity about the cahier *Deradicalisation in Practice*, two people who had formerly belonged to the hard core of the extreme right sought contact with the Anne Frank House. They were prepared to talk about their experiences in the right-wing extremist milieu. In the preliminary phase of the study, we expected to run into considerable problems in finding potential respondents. After all, they had little to gain from such an interview and possibly a great deal to lose, such as reprisals from former associates and the risk of being recognised for criminal offences. This expectation proved to be ungrounded. By various means we soon succeeded in establishing contact with people who had all recently left the right-wing extremist circuit.⁶ Only a few individuals were not prepared to engage in discussion. Another was willing to talk, but only for a fee. We did not make use of this opportunity.

The semi-structured interviews took place in November and December of 2009. In the vast majority of cases we were able to delve deeply into the entire list of questions and obtain answers to every point. The discussions took place in public locations such as cafés and railway restaurants. The interviews were conducted by two researchers together so that one person could lead the discussion and the other could take notes. If the respondent agreed to it, an audio recording was made. Two respondents were only prepared to be interviewed via the internet. We conducted those conversations via the MSN chat program. One respondent had been interviewed at an earlier stage for another study. Despite our attempts, we were not able to speak to him again using the questionnaire from this study. To protect the interviewees' identity, the quotes from the interviews and the findings in this cahier have been kept anonymous at the respondents' request. This is also why we present all the respondents as men. The role of women in the extreme right is discussed elsewhere. Our expectation that respondents would not be willing to talk about their personal history in the extreme right proved ungrounded. The vast majority of the conversations were open and took place in a relaxed atmosphere. Occasionally, however, there were certain topics that the interviewee did not want to discuss. Only one respondent explicitly stated that he was not being entirely open out of fear that the interviewers or third parties might abuse his trust. One respondent terminated the interview after a period of time because he thought he had said everything there was to say. In view of the resistance we expected, we wondered why our interlocutors were prepared to give us interviews at all. When we asked them about this, most of them referred to the negative image they had and the shame they felt about their time in the extreme right. They wanted to 'make amends' to society or, in more concrete terms, to prevent other young people from making the same mistakes. A few had even made far-reaching plans to that end. They want to be involved in prevention projects.

Chapter 2 deals with theories on processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation. In chapter 3 we discuss the extreme right, the groups and organisations involved and how the interviewees view this movement. The analysis of the data on radicalisation and deradicalisation is presented in chapters 4 through 6. In chapter 7 we examine the interventions in which the interviewees were involved. We look at what our findings mean for possible interventions aimed at preventing radicalisation and stimulating deradicalisation. In chapter 8 the findings are briefly summarised and conclusions are drawn.

⁶ We are grateful to the Kafka research group for its assistance in this effort.

Chapter 2 Theories of movement entry and exit

In recent years, radicalisation and entry into extremist organisations has been the subject of more and more scholarly attention. This was much less true of deradicalisation and disengagement. Little was known of these phenomena and little research was conducted to learn more. In 2005 a collection was published in France on the theme of exiting social movements, but it did not specifically address radical movements.⁷ Recently there has been a gradual increase in the attention being paid to this subject, which is so important for the development of possible policy interventions. The publications *Leaving terrorism behind* and *Walking away from terrorism* in particular have drawn international notice.⁸ Studies on radicalisation and deradicalisation have also appeared in the Netherlands in recent years.⁹ In Germany, Möller & Schumacher conducted research on processes of entry and exit among right-wing extremist skinheads.¹⁰ The insights obtained from these various studies will be briefly discussed in this chapter, along with older relevant publications. In these discussions two questions will be addressed: what factors play a role in radicalisation and deradicalisation (sections 2.1 and 2.2) and what do the processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation actually look like (section 2.3)? In answering these questions we will make use of theory formation on entry and exit for a variety of movements: right-wing extremists, Islamist extremist movements, terrorist groups and democratic social movements. Apart from substantive differences in ideology and objectives, the processes that take place within other movements are instructive when looking at similar processes of right-wing extremist radicalisation and deradicalisation.

2.1 Factors involved in radicalisation

One of the first investigations of right-wing extremist radicalisation in Europe was carried out by the Norwegian researcher Bjørgo.¹¹ He analysed the factors mentioned by right-wing extremists as having contributed to their entry into and exit from right-wing extremist groups. With regard to processes of radicalisation, his study includes both

⁷ O. Fillieule (ed.), *Le désengagement militant*. Paris: Belin, 2005.

⁸ T. Bjørgo & J. Horgan (eds.), *Leaving terrorism behind: individual and collective disengagement*. London/New York: Routledge, 2009; J. Horgan, *Walking away from terrorism: accounts of disengagement from radical and extremist movements*. London/New York: Routledge, 2009.

⁹ F. Demant et al., *Teruggang en uittreding: processen van deradicalisering ontleed*. Amsterdam: IMES, 2008; F. Demant, W. Wagenaar & J. van Donselaar, *Deradicaliseren in de praktijk*; A. Linden, *Besmet verleden*; K. van den Bos, A. Loseman & B. Doosje, *Waarom jongeren radicaliseren en sympathie krijgen voor terrorisme: onrechtvaardigheid, onzekerheid en bedreigde groepen*. Utrecht/Amsterdam: Utrecht University & University of Amsterdam, 2009; J. van der Pligt & W. Koomen, *Achtergronden en determinanten van radicalisering en terrorisme*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, Onderzoeksinstituut Psychologie, 2009; T. Veldhuis & J. Staun, *Islamist radicalisation: a root cause model*. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2009.

¹⁰ K. Möller & N. Schuhmacher, *Rechte Glatzen: rechtsextreme Orientierungs- und Szenezusammenhänge - Einstiegs-, Verbleibs- und Ausstiegsprozesse von Skinheads*. Wiesbaden: vs-Verlag, 2007.

¹¹ See T. Bjørgo, *Racist and right-wing violence in Scandinavia: patterns, perpetrators, and responses*. Oslo: Aschehoug, 1997.

ideological considerations and a multitude of mainly socio-psychological motives that are connected with phases of development:

- sympathy for the underdog position of the extreme right in relation to radical and violent opponents;
- protection against enemies and perceived threats;
- curiosity;
- search for excitement;
- opposition to previous generation or to parents;
- search for alternative to family or parents;
- search for friends or a community;
- search for status or identity;
- tendency to be docile in friendships.

Although Bjørge's list provides an interesting insight into existing motives, he does not place them within a broader context. There is no attempt to discover the factors that underlie the process of radicalisation.

In a German study of processes of entry and exit among right-wing extremist skinheads, attention is paid mainly to factors related to social and developmental psychology.¹² For these skinheads, concrete socio-economic conditions are far less important – the youngsters are fairly well off – than the perception that they are being unfairly treated. This is seen against a background of family relationships that are often flawed and problematic. In the families in which these people grow up there is a lack of communication and emotional closeness. This corresponds with a shortage of skills and a lack of self esteem. For the East Germans in particular this is complicated by the influence of rapid social change. The adolescents' capacity for social integration is underdeveloped, on both the personal and the social level. This affects the way they function at school and at work. It also has repercussions for their general social participation. So seeking connections with the extreme right serves as a form of compensation. The authors emphasise that there is no single way in and out of the right-wing extremist milieu. They identify and analyse the following socio-psychological and developmental psychological factors that are specific to young people and are relevant to entry:

1. there is a strong perception of interethnic competition;
2. the tendency to regard other social groups with hostility is an accepted norm;
3. the youngsters feel that they are not socially accepted and experience a great deal of conflict in their social lives;
4. at school they often have problems with teachers as well as with immigrant young people;
5. they often have poorly developed skills in a series of areas such as self-reflection, empathy, conflict management, self-esteem and the ability to defer gratification (mainly in connection with alcohol and drug use).

The researchers also observed that those involved have few institutional ties with sports clubs, organisations or churches and that they are influenced by the media.

¹² K. Möller & N. Schuhmacher, *Rechte Glatzen*.

Recently two research reports were published by Dutch social psychologists who analysed the radicalisation process.¹³ Both studies emphasise the role that feelings of injustice and threats to the group play in this process. A sense of insecurity also emerges as an important factor. If someone senses that the group to which he belongs is being marginalised, then his attitude towards extremist groups may become more positive and the steps towards radicalisation easier. His own group may be threatened in a real or a symbolic sense, or at least may be perceived as such. In the case of right-wing extremism, these are feelings of a symbolic threat to the Dutch identity by 'other cultures'. By being part of a group, one can strengthen one's opposition to other groups in society and imagine oneself superior. Involvement in society declines. Some people express themselves through anger, and this can lead to a greater readiness to take action. A number of demographic variables also seem to be involved in radicalisation such as education, sex and age. No demographic picture has been found, however, of the 'typical' young radical, so it is impossible to put together a profile. There is certainly no direct causal relationship between demographic factors and radicalisation.

Other studies mention a few additional factors that function as motives in the radicalisation process in addition to perceived injustice, insecurity and threats to the group. These are the need for meaning, or a clear explanation of what the world is all about and what one's own role is within it, and the need to connect and identify with a group that the individual regards as valuable. Buijs et al. refer to these motives in a study of radical and democratic Muslims in the Netherlands.¹⁴ In an international study of right-wing extremist activists in several European countries, Klandermans & Mayer endorse the importance of motives based on ideology and identity, adding to them instrumental motives.¹⁵ A person undergoing radicalisation expects to be able to achieve something via the radical group, both on the collective level, such as political justice, and on the personal level, such as status and a network.

The motives mentioned here – perceived injustice and threats to the group, insecurity, need for meaning, need for belonging, and collective and personal instrumental incentives – constitute factors that, generally speaking, may play a role in radicalisation. So they are important for many different groups of radicals and not only for right-wing extremists. All the different factors probably play a greater or lesser role in the radicalisation process. It does seem that the extent to which the various factors occur differs from group to group. Their function in the radicalisation of one group differs from their function in another. Bjørgo, for example, argues that ideology is less important in the radicalisation of right-wing extremist young people.¹⁶ Vague feelings of hostility towards foreigners do occur – there is a perception of injustice and threats to the group – but without any fully elaborated ideology. So to begin with, right-wing extremist radicalisation has no clear framework from which meaning can be derived. Such a framework will only be developed when a person already in the milieu is taught right-wing radical thinking by 'old hands in the trade'. It sometimes happens that the same

¹³ J. van der Pligt & W. Koomen, *Achtergronden en determinanten van radicalisering en terrorisme*; K. van den Bos, A. Loseman & B. Doosje, *Waarom jongeren radicaliseren en sympathie krijgen voor terrorisme*.

¹⁴ F.J. Buijs, F. Demant & A. Hamdy, *Strijders van eigen bodem: radicale en democratische moslims in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006.

¹⁵ B. Klandermans & N. Mayer (eds.), *Extreme right activists in Europe: through the magnifying glass*. London/New York: Routledge, 2006.

¹⁶ T. Bjørgo, 'Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right', in: T. Bjørgo & J. Horgan, (eds.), *Leaving terrorism behind*, pp. 30-48.

factors play a role in different phases, but not in the same way. This is discussed by Koomen & Van der Pligt.¹⁷ They identify two phases in the radicalisation process in which the emphasis is different with regard to the factors involved. In the first phase, the social context is very important, especially perceived marginalisation and discrimination. Then there are the individual factors and demographic variables. These have an effect on the extent of the perceived threat. This triggers a process in which the group's own identity is emphasised, and, running parallel to this, the distance between 'us' and 'them' is increased. In the second phase the following factors play a more prominent role: the degree of support encountered in the social environment, the degree of remuneration, group processes and psychological justification mechanisms such as dehumanisation – attributing all sorts of inhuman characteristics to the group. The common practice of 'blaming the victim' is another such justification strategy.¹⁸

The study of former terrorists that Horgan carried out on the basis of interviews with a few dozen people who had left the circuit is another source of informative on the processes of radicalisation.¹⁹ This study focuses on the individual in his own context and emphasises the processuality of the phenomenon: there is more than one route to terror, and becoming involved in a movement is a process of self-affirmation. The involved persons share an experience of social learning with related social and cultural practices that develop between and within groups. This strengthens mutual ties and forges reciprocal solidarity. Slowly but surely a community is formed (a 'community of practice'). This reinforces involvement and with it the ideological bonds. Channels of entry are different for everyone, as are the channels of exit. For this reason Horgan rejects a profile approach involving the formulation of a checklist of characteristics, which he says is far too static. The author distinguishes three key factors that cause a person to develop into a terrorist:

1. personal factors, such as social pressure from friends, emotions and moral considerations;
2. contextual influences; this has to do with events from the past that are transferred to a new generation, often by way of socialisation; examples are certain historic conflicts between different population groups, as in Northern Ireland;
3. the current social and political context.

It becomes increasingly clear from the above research data that the determinants of radicalisation involve a great many factors at various levels of analysis which, operating in mutual dynamic connection and over a number of phases, result in radicalisation.

One coherent model that integrates a large number of these factors in a cohesive whole can be found in the work of Veldhuis & Bakker and Veldhuis & Staun.²⁰ These authors conducted research on the determinants of Islamist radicalism. Given the abstract level

¹⁷ J. van der Pligt & W. Koomen, *Achtergronden en determinanten van radicalisering en terrorisme*.

¹⁸ This strategy was used between the wars by the NSB (the Dutch National Socialist movement) to justify the rising anti-Semitism. The argument here was that 'the Jews brought it on themselves'. It would be better for them to assimilate.

¹⁹ J. Horgan reports this in 'Individual disengagement: a psychological analysis', in: T. Bjørgo & J. Horgan (eds.), *Leaving terrorism behind*, pp.17-29.

²⁰ T. Veldhuis & E. Bakker, 'Causale factoren van radicalisering en hun onderlinge samenhang', in: *Vrede en Veiligheid*, 36 (2007), 4, pp. 447-470; T. Veldhuis & J. Staun, *Islamist radicalisation*.

at which many of their points are presented, however, their findings can prove useful for the study of right-wing extremist radicalism as well. They understand radicalisation as an 'embedded individual process': causes must be investigated from the perspective of the individual, who is in constant interaction with his social environment. They identify a macro and a micro level; the micro level is broken down into social and individual factors. In addition, there are so-called *trigger events* that also play a role. These are sudden momentous events in someone's personal life, and they play the role of the proverbial last straw.

Factors at the macro level – or external factors – have to do with factors that are located outside the individual's sphere of influence but do figure in his or her social environment. These factors can be divided along political, economic and cultural lines. Examples might be the integration policy or globalisation. It is not assumed that a direct relationship exists between external factors and radicalisation at the individual level. A single example makes that clear: poverty can be a macro factor, but if there were such a direct relationship then everyone living in conditions of poverty would become radical. Obviously that is not the case. This means that mediating factors are necessary to activate the macro factors, as it were, so they do contribute to a process of radicalisation. Such mediating factors are encountered at the social and individual level.

Mediating factors at the social level

According to the authors, membership in social groups probably plays a key role in radicalisation (in this case, Islamist radicalisation).²¹ Membership in social groups is not a fixed given. A person can be a member of many social groups at the same time, and his various social identities are constantly taking turns moving to the foreground, depending on the context. Self-esteem depends to a great extent on the social recognition experienced by the group. When the group is threatened it is a painful process with major consequences, since it also affects the individual members of the group one by one. This membership in social groups has an emotional component as well; members feel involved in the ups and downs of other members of the group with which they identify. If other members of the group are hurt, each member experiences it as a personal attack.

A second mediating factor consists of social interactions. These are the concrete networks in which the potentially radicalised persons find themselves. Studies show that social influence has a major impact on attitudes and behaviour. The tendency of people to connect with those whom they strongly resemble – the so-called mirror effect – also plays a role. This explains the role of relationships and friendship in the propagation of ideology. Conversely, this also applies to the rejection of radicalism: if one person rejects radicalism, the chance is greater that those connected by friendship will do the same. Once again, friendships, relationships and ideology play a role. According to the authors, while the internet serves to strengthen and accelerate the process, it cannot be regarded as a causal factor.

Mediating factors on the individual level

Finally, there are mediating factors on the individual level. Although the nature of these factors is highly varied, the researchers point mainly to the role of personal experiences and psychological characteristics, such as the need for order and structure. In addition, cognitive categories such as knowledge and attitudes are also important, as are psychological mechanisms such as cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a

²¹ T. Veldhuis & J. Staun, *Islamist radicalisation*, p. 40.

process in which a person tries to eliminate the inconsistencies between his behaviour and what he really believes by gradually believing more and more in what he says. The authors emphasise the fact that there is no demonstrable reason to assume that radicalised persons exhibit psychological characteristics that are different from those of the average person. In any case they are not psychologically disturbed, contrary to the belief long held both inside and outside the scientific community.

2.2 Factors involved in deradicalisation and disengagement

Deradicalisation, like radicalisation, has only recently become an area of research, and until quite recently studies on the subject were barely missed.²² In a publication from 2005, Sommier observed that so little research had been done on individual 'désengagement' that even the most rudimentary idea of how the process ran its course was lacking.²³

In that work she identifies four paths of disengagement.

1. The activist develops a rival form of involvement and activity. This may include having children or having a demanding job.
2. A worsening of the repression to which the movement has been exposed. The benefits no longer outweigh the costs. This can also be counterproductive, the author noted, in which case the problem is not so much the repression as it is the meaning imposed on it by the movement or the individual perception. A fearful response may result in demobilisation, and an angry response in an intensified effort.
3. A collective demobilisation that comes about because the movement has stagnated or ceased to exist.
4. The activist suffers from burn-out.

Paths of disengagement are many-sided from Sommier's point of view. They are related to the specific life story of the individual, but they are also shaped by the broader context of current political and social processes. In any case, the process of *désengagement* can be seen as the expression of a crisis in the identity construction of the individual, who must free himself from identification with the movement.

In a publication from 2008, Demant et al.²⁴ studied the factors that are important to the deradicalisation process. They were building on the insights drawn from the studies of radicalisation conducted by Bjørge, Buijs et al. and Klandermans & Mayer.²⁵ On the basis of this work they divided the factors into movement factors, ideological factors and practical factors that play a role in the deradicalisation process. They also mentioned factors that might constitute obstacles to disengagement from a radical movement.

²² See H. Moors et al., *Polarisatie en radicalisering in Nederland: een verkenning van de stand van zaken in 2009*. Tilburg: IVA Beleidsonderzoek en Advies, 2009; T. Bjørge, 'Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right'.

²³ I. Sommier, 'Une expérience "incommunicable"? Les ex-militants d'extrême-gauche français et italiens', in O. Fillieule (ed.), *Le désengagement militant*. This collection has to do with the process of disengaging from a wide range of mostly French social movements.

²⁴ F. Demant et al., *Teruggang en uittreding*.

²⁵ T. Bjørge, *Racist and right-wing violence in Scandinavia*; F.J. Buijs, F. Demant & A. Hamdy, *Strijders van eigen bodem*; B. Klandermans & N. Mayer (eds.), *Extreme right activists in Europe*.

Movement factors that lead to deradicalisation are aspects of the radical movement that result in disappointment, such as lack of mutual loyalty, internal conflicts or a failing leadership. These cause a decline in the connection and identification with the radical group.

Ideological factors are the factors that cause the individual to abandon his radical views. Over time, a person may begin to doubt the feasibility of the radical aims, for example. This may cause him to start looking for alternative, non-radical ways to combat the perceived injustice. But he may also have had certain experiences that give him an entirely different point of view. This influences his perception of injustice and the degree to which he derives meaning from the radical ideology.²⁶

Practical factors have to do with personal advantages and disadvantages associated with group membership. When disadvantages such as threats of criminal action, stigmatisation or loss of career perspectives, gain the upper hand over positive instrumental incentives, it can lead to deradicalisation.

Obstacles that prevent disengagement may consist of social or psychological dependence on the group or the measure of 'investment' that the person has made to enter the group in the first place.

Bjørge distinguishes three kinds of factors that may be involved in withdrawing from radical groups, but he employs a different classification with a view to offering entry points for policy interventions. He distinguishes between *push factors*, *pull factors* and *restraining factors*.²⁷

Push factors are the negative internal forces and conditions that make it unappealing to stay in the group. A *push factor* might be that the person has changed his way of thinking, either morally or politically.

Pull factors are the external positive factors that make another environment more attractive than that of the right-wing extremist group. A *pull factor* might be that at a given moment the 'ordinary' life has come to seem more attractive in the person's eyes.

Restraining factors are factors that make it difficult to leave the group. These factors are especially prevalent among people whose right-wing extremist identity is well known and whose involvement in the group has been relatively long.

Horgan identifies the following paths in the process of disengagement for terrorists:²⁸ with groups, a process of disengagement occurs following interventions by hostile or rival groups, or as a result of undermining from within. With individuals, a distinction can be made between psychological and physical disengagement. Psychological deradicalisation has to do with the experience of a gap between a person's ideals and the reality in which he lives. It may also have to do with disappointment over some internal division within the group, either tactical or strategic. A case of burn-out or a change in personal priorities may also occur. Physical disengagement is understood to mean a voluntary or involuntary exit from the group.

Möller & Schumacher identify the following exit factors for right-wing extremist activists in Germany:²⁹

²⁶ Although the male form has been used for reasons of readability, the use of 'his' here and in other places is intended to refer to both men and women.

²⁷ T. Bjørge, *Racist and right-wing violence in Scandinavia*; T. Bjørge, 'Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right', pp. 154-198.

²⁸ J. Horgan, 'Individual disengagement'.

²⁹ K. Möller & N. Schuhmacher, *Rechte Glatzen*.

1. disintegrating internal experiences within the scene;
2. positive or negative experiences in other meaningful social relationships, such as in the family or with a partner;
3. a maturation process takes place: the person outgrows the milieu;
4. institutional sanctions: punishments, problems at school or at work.

According to the authors, the various factors can also have a cumulative effect and often occur in the form of a process involving a series of stages. First irritation develops, then the person begins to disengage himself and finally he starts speaking openly of himself as an ex-extremist. Family, school and work play a central role among the young German people who leave the circuit. For these young people, the practical act of disengaging from the movement and disengaging from the ideology occur at the same time. During the exit stage, the development and recognition of one's own needs becomes more important. When it comes to fulfilling social needs, the right-wing extremist milieu is increasingly seen as non-functional. At the same time, personal skills are being developed.

Disengagement from the right-wing extremist social environment goes hand-in-hand with a general social integration at work and at school. The people concerned are more and more able to master the developmental responsibilities that are part of adolescence.

2.3 The pattern of the radicalisation and deradicalisation process

Although the existing research on the factors and motives behind radicalisation and deradicalisation offer insight into aspects of the two processes, little is known about the actual *pattern* of these processes. So far, few researchers have addressed this topic. Bjørgo, in his discussion of radicalisation, examines the transition from preliminary phase to the right-wing extremist movement. Koomen & Van der Pligt identify two phases in the process of radicalisation. When it comes to deradicalisation, a number of authors deal with the need to look carefully at the differences between 'deradicalisation', 'disengagement' and leaving a group.³⁰

In discussing the preliminary phase of the radicalisation process, Bjørgo distinguishes between *bounded* and *unbounded groups*: clearly delineated groups versus subcultures in which it is not always obvious who is in and who is out.³¹ Group boundaries have two sides, with those who belong on one side and those who are excluded on the other. In order to belong to a *bounded group*, one is often required to meet certain conditions. This process is often easier for people who are active at the 'gateway' of a group. Koomen & Van der Pligt distinguish two phases in the radicalisation process in which different factors play a dominant role.³² In the first phase, these factors are marginalisation and discrimination and the effects they exert, and in the second phase the dominant factors are the degree of support from the social environment, group processes and psychological mechanisms.

³⁰ J. van der Pligt & W. Koomen, *Achtergronden en determinanten van radicalisering en terrorisme*.

³¹ T. Bjørgo, 'Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right'.

³² J. van der Pligt & W. Koomen, *Achtergronden en determinanten van radicalisering en terrorisme*.

Demant et al. argue that deradicalisation can mean views becoming less radical as well as behaviour becoming less radical, or free of radicalism altogether.³³ Changes in behaviour may coincide with changes in views, but these changes may also occur separately. Horgan insists that a clear distinction should be made between changes in behaviour and changes in points of view, and he speaks of psychological and physical disengagement. There are different steps involved that do not have to be taken at the same time.³⁴ It is even possible for physical deradicalisation to take place without psychological deradicalisation, or vice versa. When a radical person is arrested and sent to jail without changing his ways of thinking, for example, we can speak of physical but not psychological deradicalisation. When a radical person abandons his radical convictions but stays in the radical group out of loyalty to his radical friends, we can speak of psychological but not physical deradicalisation. Yet another variant is that individuals can assume a different role within a radical organisation, such as a less violent one.

At the theoretical level, this means that deradicalisation is mainly a cognitive-emotional process. A change of opinion is suggested as well as a change of social vision, ideology, values and feelings. Disengagement, on the other hand, has to do with behaviour: the termination of participation in a movement, group or organisation. Both processes do not necessarily take place in combination or simultaneously.³⁵

2.4. In conclusion

Radicalisation

According to our findings, international research on radicalisation and entrance into extremist organisations has taught that these phenomena develop dynamically and in phases out of a complex interplay of diverse causes and catalysts at different levels of social and socio-psychological reality. This implies that there are many paths leading to radicalisation. For several reasons, an interdisciplinary approach is desirable when it comes to researching processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation. In the international literature on processes of radicalisation we see many findings that concur, even though they are not always verbalised in the same way. But we also see different accents. This is often related to different disciplinary approaches, different levels of abstraction and diverse scholarly orientations that are either theoretical or empirical. There is also evidence of accumulation of knowledge. In our study we make use of classifications and concepts from earlier work that is discussed above. This conceptual framework helps us to understand our findings and to explain them; in short, to give them meaning within the context of the research questions.

Deradicalisation

The factors mentioned by different authors have a great deal in common in terms of content, although accents differ. The classifications that are made do not always run in a parallel fashion, sometimes because both individuals and groups are being looked at (either alternately or simultaneously), sometimes because a different level of abstraction

³³ F. Demant et al., *Teruggang en uittreding*.

³⁴ J. Horgan, 'Individual disengagement'.

³⁵ T. Bjørgo, 'Uittreding uit terrorisme: hoe kennis van de onderliggende processen contraterrorismebeleid kan verbeteren', in: *Tijdschrift voor criminologie*, 51 (2009), 4, pp. 360-374.

has been chosen. The most important difference relevant to our study is that Bjørgo's classification is primarily based on the *direction* of the factors – pulling, pushing, restraining – while the classification of the other authors being discussed is based much more on the *content* of the factors, which are then further broken down into subcategories to a greater or lesser degree. In Demant et al. these subcategories are aspects of the movement, ideological aspects and consequences for personal living conditions. Both content-based and directional aspects are important to the study of motives and phases for deradicalisation and disengagement and for possible interventions to that end.

Phases

Research on the pattern of the processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation is very limited, but it does provide us with a few guiding insights. For radicalisation in a transitional period from preliminary phase to the right-wing extremist movement, it is useful to look at the extent to which there are groups and movements that are bounded or unbounded. For the process of radicalisation, it is important to find out whether there are multiple phases in which other factors are dominant. For deradicalisation, several authors discuss the need to carefully examine the differences between 'deradicalisation', 'disengagement from' and 'exiting' a group. Cognitive-emotional processes ought to be distinguished here from behavioural aspects.

In this chapter we discussed international theory formation and research with regard to processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation. This gives us a useful conceptual framework for analysing our data. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the present work is a delineated, restricted study with an equally restricted set of instruments.

Chapter 3 The extreme right

Before examining our research results, we ought to take a close look at the organisations in which our respondents were active. In this chapter we will first consider the debate concerning the definition of *the extreme right*, followed by a brief sketch of the interviewees' organisations. Finally, we will discuss the role played by the respondents within these organisations and their own understanding of the term 'extreme right'.

3.1 Definition

Defining the concept of right-wing extremism has been a subject of debate among scholars investigating the extreme right for decades.³⁶ Such continuing discussions are often inherent to the study of complex social phenomena – phenomena, moreover, that are always subject to change. But aside from this, there is something else about right-wing extremism that sets it apart: the emotionally charged history of the phenomenon since the Second World War, by which it has come to be associated with mass murder, annihilation and conquest. That association brings with it two complicating aspects that make it more difficult to define right-wing extremism:

- Since 1945, right-wing extremist groups have been the objects of constant scorn. Because of this political and social isolation, together with repressive measures of all kinds, the extreme right has been following a survival strategy for decades that is intended to conceal its ideological views and to present a more moderate message, or one that is modified in some other way.
- Besides being a concept from the political sciences, 'right-wing extremism' also became a label after the Second World War that was used to discredit groups, ideas or persons.

³⁶ For this debate in international academic literature, see among others U. Backes & P. Moreau, *Die extreme Rechte in Deutschland: Geschichte - gegenwärtige Gefahren - Ursachen - Gegenmassnahmen*. München: Akademie-Verlag, 1994; H-G Betz, 'The growing threat of the radical right', in: P.H. Merkl & L. Weinberg (eds.), *Right-wing extremism in the twenty-first century*. London/Portland: Frank Cass, 2003, pp. 74-93.; R. Eatwell, 'Ten theories of the extreme right', in: P.H. Merkl & L. Weinberg (eds.), *Right-wing extremism in the twenty-first century*, pp. 47-74; P. Hainsworth, *The politics of the extreme right: from the margins to the mainstream*. London: Pinter, 2000; C.T. Husbands, 'How to tame the dragon, or what goes around comes around: a critical review of some major contemporary attempts to account for extreme-right racist politics in Eastern Europe', in: M. Schain, A. Zolberg & P. Hossay (eds.), *Shadows over Europe: the development and impact of the extreme right in Western Europe*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 38-59; P. IgNazi, 'The extreme right: defining the object and assessing the causes', in: M. Schain, A. Zolberg & P. Hossay (eds.), *Shadows over Europe*, pp. 23-37; H-G. Jaschke, *Rechtsextremismus und Fremdenfeindlichkeit : Begriffe - Positionen - Praxisfelder*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001; W. Kowalsky & W. Schroeder (eds.) *Rechtsextremismus: Einführung und Forschungsbilanz*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994; A. Pfahl-Traughber, *Volkes Stimme? Rechtspopulismus in Europa*, Bonn: Dietz, 1994; A. Pfahl-Traughber, *Rechtsextremismus: eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme nach der Wiedervereinigung*. Bonn: Bouvier, 1995 (2., erw. Aufl.).

The first aspect, the concealment of actual ideas, is referred to by Van Donselaar as part of the so-called 'adaptation dilemma'.³⁷ In brief, this has to do with the fact that having been part of the 'wrong' side in the Second World War came to be regarded as strictly taboo, as did national socialism and involvement in political violence, which led to various forms of reactions that were often extremely negative. The threat of these reactions (including those from the judicial authorities) caused right-wing extremist groups to moderate, conceal or mask their identity in an effort to avoid sanctions or stigmatisation. This kind of behaviour has its risks. Adaptation involving moderation can be carried too far: followers, both current and potential, may find it harder to identify with the group's profile, or differences with other, more moderate organisations may become blurred. Hence the term 'adaptation dilemma'.

In many right-wing extremist organisations, repressive threats are often less effective 'back stage' than 'front stage' due to the influence of the adaptation dilemma. The group's true identity is more visible behind the scenes. In other words: the adaptation dilemma has given rise to differences between *front stage* and *back stage performances*.³⁸

So in order to form an accurate picture of a movement and its ideological views, one must take into account the possibility that certain elements of right-wing extremist groups are less perceptible or are completely imperceptible at first glance. The public message of potential right-wing extremist organisations is insufficient grounds for defining the extreme right. Indeed, the chance is considerable that because of the adaptation dilemma, an observer will only be given a filtered, moderate message.

At the Racism & Extremism Monitor, we attempt to determine an organisation's right-wing extremist 'content' based on three indicators: social genealogy, magnet function and ideology.³⁹

The indicator *social genealogy* is based on the finding that right-wing extremist groups don't just pop out of nowhere; usually they emerge from other right-wing extremist groups.⁴⁰ Often the founders of right-wing extremist organisations include persons who had previously been affiliated with related extreme right-wing organisations. This continuity of persons applies not only to the founders but also to any number of persons who gradually connect themselves to an organisation.

The *magnet function* indicator has to do with the appeal that the party exercises on 'radicals' – persons who have exhibited outspoken extreme right-wing sympathies.

The *ideology* that is common to the extreme right, as far as the Netherlands is concerned, boils down to the following. Followers are positively oriented towards their own typical qualities – towards 'us'. They have an aversion to 'them' – to foreigners, to political opponents and to established politics in general – and a predilection for the authoritarian.

³⁷ Jaap van Donselaar, *Fout na de oorlog; fascistische en racistische organisaties in Nederland 1950-1990*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 1991, p. 16ff.

³⁸ Van Donselaar borrowed the theatrical metaphor from Goffman's now classic analysis of everyday interaction processes. E. Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life*, New York: Doubleday Anchor Book 1959.

³⁹ For a more detailed discussion, see M. Davidović et al., 'The extreme right and discriminatory identity of the PVV', in: J. van Donselaar & P.R. Rodrigues (eds.), *Monitor Racism & Extremism: 8th report*, Amsterdam/Leiden: Anne Frank House / Leiden University 2008, pp. 167-198. See: http://www.annefrank.org/ond_upload/Downloads/Mon8-UK-Ch8.pdf (23 September 2010).

⁴⁰ Jaap van Donselaar, *Fout na de oorlog*, p.16ff.

Although a positive orientation towards 'us' and an aversion to 'them' is characteristic of many right-wing extremist movements, there are different parameters and accents within those movements. Differences can be seen, for instance, with regard to who is meant by 'them' and who is meant by 'us'. One group may draw the line between people who do or do not belong to the 'Aryan race'. In this case, the Jews are the ultimate enemy. They are attempting to dominate the world, so the reasoning goes, and to destroy the Aryan race. But non-Western ethnic minorities are sometimes equally viewed as outsiders, which implies that skin colour becomes an important criterion. According to this reasoning, the populations of neighbouring countries (Germans, British, French) are not included in 'them'. 'Us' means 'the Germanic peoples of Europe'. Another distinction is sometimes made in which 'us' refers primarily to the Dutch and the Flemish. This 'Greater Netherlands' approach often assumes a 'kinship' with white South Africans, which, given the history of South Africa, means that the English are among the foreign peoples, even the alien oppressors. The French, too, are regarded as foreigners according to the Greater Netherlands approach, and in view of 'their' oppression of the Southern Netherlands they are also seen as alien oppressors. But non-Western non-natives are regarded as even more 'alien' than the white neighbouring countries, and it's not unusual to see the Greater Netherlands approach go hand-in-hand with anti-Semitism. In a third variant, non-Western migrants are 'them'. and 'us' refers to our nation, our people, our country or simply 'the Netherlands'. There is a general opposition to the presence of 'non-whites', which today primarily means Muslims, who are said to be inundating the country and acting more and more like alien oppressors. All three of these approaches can be found in the Dutch right-wing extremist landscape, often in alternating combinations – sometimes more consciously considered or spelled out, sometimes less. In addition, the ideological depth can vary considerably, from a highly developed ideological orientation to one that is based on a few racist one-liners.

In the publication *Polarisatie en radicalisering in Nederland: Een verkenning van de stand van zaken in 2009* (Polarisation and radicalisation in the Netherlands: Exploring the state of affairs in 2009), Van Donselaar takes another look at the problem of defining the extreme right based on the aforementioned points.⁴¹ He makes no attempt to define right-wing extremism in general, but limits himself to 'contemporary right-wing extremist groups in the Netherlands'.

In our research, we made use of the three indicators mentioned above in order to determine whether the groups involved show evidence of right-wing extremism.

3.2 Groups

In this section we will briefly discuss the character of several groups that existed while our respondents were active: Netherlands People's Union (Nederlandse Volks-Unie; NVU), the New National Party (Nieuwe Nationale Partij; NNP), the National Alliance (Nationale Alliantie), Blood & Honour, Combat 18 (C18), Voorpost, National Socialist

⁴¹ H. Moors et al., *Polarisatie en radicalisering in Nederland: Een verkenning van de stand van zaken in 2009*, Tilburg: IVA policy research and advice for 2009, pp. 78-89. Van Donselaar speaks of right-wing *radicalism*, but notes that in his text this must be understood as a synonym for right-wing *extremism*. For the sake of continuity, we are using the term 'right-wing extremism' in our Racism & Extremism Monitor project. In the Monitor research, this term can be regarded as a synonym for right-wing radicalism.

Action (Nationaal-Socialistische Aktie; NSA), Stormfront Netherlands (Stormfront Nederland) and Action Front (Aktiefront). Right-wing extremist websites also played a role, especially the Stormfront and the Holland Hardcore web forums.⁴² This summary is mainly intended as a sketch of the milieu in which the respondents in this study were active.

The summary comprises three political parties – New National Party, National Alliance and Netherlands People’s Union – and six street groups. These three political parties increase their visibility by means of public demonstrations or small-scale actions as well as by electioneering. They have not achieved any major successes in any of these elections. They also have a formal structure, with an executive committee and various departments.

By ‘street groups’ we are referring to informal networks, often with a low degree of organisation. Most of them have no official executive committee and are not officially registered with the Chamber of Commerce. These street groups consist mainly of young activists surrounded by a number of older leadership figures. Except for the organisation Voorpost, all the street groups mentioned here have a pronounced neo-Nazi character.⁴³

Netherlands People’s Union

The Netherlands People’s Union (Nederlandse Volks-Unie; NVU), founded in 1971, developed into an openly national socialist party during the seventies. The NVU’s greatest achievement over the past ten years was to gain the right to demonstrate legally after repeatedly taking the matter to court starting in 2001. Since then, demonstrating has also been the party’s most important activity. For a long time these demonstrations were almost identical in appearance. The NVU managed to mobilise its own rank and file of between fifty and eighty demonstrators. In recent years, these demonstrations have increasingly been attended by activists from National Socialist Action (Nationaal-Socialistische Aktie; NSA) and Blood & Honour, and these groups have come to dominate the character of the demonstrations. This has influenced the way the NVU functions. Because of the outspoken anti-Semitism of the NSA, the NVU leadership has also abandoned its cautious policy on this theme and expresses more frequently negative opinions about Jews, although in veiled terms.

In 2010 the NVU participated in local elections in four municipalities. Results were poor and not a single seat was won.

New National Party

The New National Party (Nieuwe Nationale Partij; NNP) was established in 1998 as a breakaway faction of CP’86 (Centre Party ’86, a nationalist party). The party was never able to come within miles of the success that CP’86 had known: a few hundred members and seven municipal council seats. In 2002 the party hoped to profit from the successes of Pim Fortuyn and the political unrest that was unleashed after his violent death. Their hopes were fulfilled to a certain extent when the party won two district council seats in

⁴² For detailed discussions of these organisations and websites, see W. Wagenaar & J. van Donselaar, ‘Right-wing extremist groups’, in: J. van Donselaar & P.R. Rodrigues (eds.), *Monitor Racism & Extremism: 8th report*, pp. 43-67. See: http://www.annefrank.org/ond_upload/Downloads/Mon8-UK-Ch3.pdf (September 23, 2010).

⁴³ The respondents we spoke with who had a background in Voorpost did hold unambiguous national socialist views, despite the official Voorpost line. This is a good illustration of the adaptation dilemma discussed earlier.

Rotterdam-Feijenoord in 2002. After a number of passionate discussions on the party's political future – moderation or radicalisation? – and a failed attempt to broaden the grass-roots support, the party broke down at the end of 2003 and dropped out of the picture for good in 2005.

National Alliance

The National Alliance (Nationale Alliantie; NA) was a right-wing extremist party with a strong base in Rotterdam. It was formed at the end of 2003 after a split within the NNP. With the competing parties beset by unrest and quarrels, the NA was able to take a flying start. It explicitly welcomed activists from a wide range of right-wing backgrounds, 'from Fortuynists to national socialists'. This seemed to work well at first. From 2003 to 2006 the party held one district council seat in Rotterdam-Feijenoord, but since then it has focused mainly on street actions. In time the party became more radical. An increasing acceptance of violence as a political instrument, and ever more virulent anti-Semitism, resulted in erosion of the membership. After the loss of the district council seat in 2006, a number of fierce conflicts, failed actions and police raids on the party executive committee, the NA was disbanded in the summer of 2007.

National Socialist Action

National Socialist Action (Nationaal-Socialistische Aktie; NSA) is the most outspoken national socialist organisation in the Netherlands at the moment. In 2005 a right-wing extremist group began to grow out of the Lonsdale youth circuit in the Hague region. After an ideological search and two name changes (Soetermeer Skinhead Front and Youth Storm), the group settled on National Socialist Action (NSA) in 2008. In 2010 the organisation consists of a few dozen active members. The NSA's ideology is extremely radical. The most important element is its radical anti-Semitism and fierce anti-Israel attitude. The NSA is mainly oriented towards the German 'Autonomous National Socialists', whose members in turn are known for taking many resources and methods from their left-wing opponents. Their objective is to develop their own right-wing extremist youth culture, complete with music and clothing. The activities of the NSA consist mostly of legal and illegal street actions: demonstrations, small-scale vandalism and acts of violence.

The use of violence is a point of discussion within the NSA. The discussion is not so much concerned with *whether* violence can be used but rather *what kind* of violence can be used as well as *when* and particularly *against whom*. There is a broad acceptance of violence within the organisation, for settling everyday conflicts as well as for use as a political instrument. The most important enemy for the NSA is 'international Jewry'. The NSA contends that Western governments are part of a great 'Jewish conspiracy', which is why it calls for actions against the 'Jewish' state and its representatives, especially against the police. Within NSA circles, references are made to sources of inspiration from the terrorist spectrum such as the RAF, ETA and neo-Nazi terrorist groups. In practice, the violence is limited to fights, cases of assault and minor vandalism.

Blood & Honour and Combat 18

Blood & Honour is an international organisation of skinheads with neo-Nazi ideas. The organisation was formed in the mid-eighties in England and has branches in many Western countries. In the Netherlands the degree of organisation for Blood & Honour is low. There are a few regional networks that call themselves Blood & Honour or Combat 18, after a militant Blood & Honour breakaway group.

Like its degree of organisation, the group's political ambitions are also low. Blood & Honour activists can more properly be described as political hooligans: a great deal of

attention is placed on going to bars, attending concerts, alcohol abuse and street violence. Blood & Honour is constantly being plagued by internal conflicts and rifts. At the present time (2010), several Blood & Honour groups are active. Most of them live in mutual discord which every now and then breaks out in violent clashes. In addition to these internal conflicts, Blood & Honour in the Netherlands also has to contend with a repressive climate. Gatherings under the Blood & Honour flag are often forbidden in the Netherlands because of their pronounced national socialist character.

Voorpost

The 'Greater Netherlands' organisation Voorpost was originally Flemish.⁴⁴ Since the seventies Voorpost has also had a Dutch branch. The history of the Dutch branch of Voorpost has had its highs and lows, but it has been undergoing something of a peak period since 2004. Voorpost is a street group that tries to influence public opinion by means of mediagenic actions. It also works on educating its own rank and file. Voorpost strives to give its actions a sense of respectability and openness, and the use of violence is officially condemned. Some of the themes that are chosen are classically right-wing extremist. On the other hand, the group does join in on topics that are currently part of the public discourse. Voorpost is against Islam and drug use, for example, and is strongly opposed to paedophilia. Left-wing organisations and parties are also among its targets.

Ideologically, Voorpost differs markedly from groups like NSA and Blood & Honour. These organisations are distinctly national socialist. Voorpost locates itself within the 'Diets' right-wing extremist tradition of the 'Greater Netherlands' and that of Flemish solidarism. Solidarism is an anti-democratic political movement that emerged in the 1930s and aligns itself with the fascism of Mussolini.

Action Front South Holland-South and Action Front Netherlands

Action Front South Holland-South (Aktiefront Zuid Holland-Zuid; AFZHZ) was established in the cities of Zwijndrecht, Papendrecht and Dordrecht (known as the Drecht Cities) in the province of South Holland in 2005. AFZHZ gained visibility mainly by participating in demonstrations and meetings held by other groups. After a while the original founders dropped out of the picture and the organisation was taken over by persons from outside the region. As a result, the name was changed to Action Front Netherlands. There was no appreciable change in the group's activities, however. In 2008 Action Front ceased to exist.

Stormfront Netherlands

Stormfront Netherlands (Stormfront Nederland; SFN) was formed in 2000 by a small group of former NVU members. They had been thrown out of the party for vandalising Jewish cemeteries and monuments. SFN managed to gain popularity with right-wing extremist young people from the gabber and hardcore scene. SFN's actions were hooligan-like in character: seeking confrontations with political opponents and ethnic minority youth, carrying out assaults and vandalising property. SFN became the focus of national attention in 2001 following a large-scale action in which the Jewish cemetery in

⁴⁴ The aim of the Greater Netherlands 'Diets' movement is to unify the entire Dutch language region into one great 'Dietsland'. The regions involved include at least the Netherlands, Flanders and northwestern France ('from the Dollard to Dunkirk'), but a strong connection with speakers of Afrikaans in South Africa is usually implied as well insofar as they are white.

Oosterhout was daubed with graffiti and vandalised. SFN dropped out of sight sometime in 2003.

3.3 Right-wing extremism on the internet

The internet is an important part of daily life for many young people. Obviously the same is true for young people drawn to right-wing extremism. The internet can serve many different functions: it is a source of information, a means of communication and a virtual social environment.

One of the ways that right-wing extremist groups make use of these possibilities is by setting up websites. But it is interactive web forums that attract the most attention. They supply all three of the aforementioned functions. Reports placed on these forums serve as a source of information for young people who want to learn about the ideas of right-wing extremist groups. The forums also serve as a means of communication, recruitment, mobilisation and propaganda. And lastly, these forums serve as virtual social environments or 'digital hangouts' for their participants.⁴⁵

All the organisations mentioned above have or had websites, and a number of them also had forums. In addition to these websites, two independent web forums are also dealt with in this study: the Stormfront forum and Holland Hardcore.

The Stormfront forum was set up in 1997 in the United States. Since 2000 there has been a separate sub-forum for the Netherlands and Flanders. In the previous section we discussed the organisation Stormfront Netherlands. This organisation is not affiliated with this forum. The Stormfront forum is aimed at a broad right-wing extremist public and also tries to win the allegiance of other interested persons and newcomers. As far as its everyday affairs are concerned, however, the forum is mainly populated by national socialists and followers of *White Power*.⁴⁶ Branderhorst's structural analysis of the reports placed on Stormfront concludes that the majority have a right-wing extremist character, a sizeable number with illegal contents.⁴⁷ In recent decades, several

⁴⁵ For more information on right-wing extremism on the internet, see W. Wagenaar & J. van Donselaar, 'Right-wing extremist groups', in: J. van Donselaar & P.R. Rodrigues (eds.), *Monitor Racism & Extremism: 8th report*, pp. 43-67. See: http://www.annefrank.org/ond_upload/Downloads/Mon8-UK-Ch3.pdf (September 23, 2010); J. van der Krogt, *Rechtsextremisme op het internet*, Amsterdam: the Magenta Foundation & the Dutch Complaints Bureau for Discrimination on the Internet 2009; L. Branderhorst, *De verschillende gezichten van extreemrechts in Nederland op het internet: een verkennend onderzoek naar de aard en omvang van extreemrechts in Nederland op het internet*, Research commissioned by the National Criminal Intelligence Service, 2008; Dutch Complaints Bureau for Discrimination on the Internet, *Jaarverslag 2009*, Amsterdam: Dutch Complaints Bureau for Discrimination on the Internet 2010.

⁴⁶ *White Power* is a battle cry that refers to the idea of the superiority of the white race. The cry was born fifty years ago in right-wing extremist circles in the United States in a reaction to the 'Black Power' movement there. During the late seventies the slogan became popular in England among circles of right-wing extremist skinheads. In 1982 the term first surfaced in the Netherlands skinhead circles.

⁴⁷ L. Branderhorst, *De verschillende gezichten van extreemrechts in Nederland op het internet*, pp. 169-171.

Stormfront forum participants were convicted, some for anti-Semitic remarks. In 2009, however, one of the Dutch website moderators was acquitted.⁴⁸

Stormfront was familiar to our respondents and was a popular place to hang out for a number of them. It was a virtual meeting place for right-wing extremists who often found themselves isolated from their former social environment because of their activities. Koster and Houtman characterised Stormfront as a 'virtual port of refuge' for right-wing extremists.⁴⁹ That picture corresponds with the experiences of our respondents.

In addition to these virtual gatherings, Stormfront visitors also seek each other out occasionally in the real world. Social get-togethers have been organised over the past ten years at which people could convert their digital friendships into real ones. Frequently these get-togethers ended in fights and vandalism, under the influence of alcohol.

Another web forum, Holland Hardcore, was set up in 2003 and was intended to function along the lines of Stormfront. This forum was aimed mainly at Lonsdale youth. The aim was to equip these young people with ideological baggage and, wherever possible, to interest them in participating in right-wing extremist actions or membership in right-wing extremist groups. Holland Hardcore was shut down at the end of 2009 and taken over by a forum allied with Voorpost.

3.4 The roles of the respondents

The twelve young people we spoke to played a variety of roles in the movements in which they were active. Broadly speaking, we identified four roles: ideologues, organisers, implementers and followers. Two of our respondents were followers: they stayed with their group for a long time but without contributing very much to it. Followers have little status, which is probably why they were not invited to take part in secret – often illegal – actions. They participated in actions and activities that had been developed by the group executives, such as demonstrations and folder actions, or they attended social activities such as get-togethers, parties and concerts. With the exception of these followers we regard all the others as members of the hard core. Some respondents were clearly leaders or guides within their organisations, either in the more practical sense or with regard to the development of visions or ideology. The first category of persons organised the group, set up meetings and initiated actions. The second category had more to do with guidance and inspiration at the ideological level. They formulated organisational positions, taught right-wing extremist ideology to the members and dominated at formally or informally organised debates and discussion sessions. Their opinions were often followed by others. The third role was that of implementer. The implementers took part in actions and activities, including secret actions. All the activists participated in the discussions of ideology and positions to a greater or lesser degree. Another frequent activity was attending meetings throughout the country and sometimes in other countries.

⁴⁸ Amsterdam District Court 1 October 2009, *LJN BK1564* and *LJN BK1571*.

⁴⁹ W. de Koster & D. Houtman, 'Toevluchtsoord voor een bedreigde soort'.

3.5 Perception of the ideology

We label the groups and movements within which our twelve respondents were organised as right-wing extremist. But what is the view of the twelve respondents themselves? Do they see these things the same way, or do they define themselves differently?

We rarely came across anyone who, when asked, described himself as a 'right-wing extremist'. Those who worked out a more or less detailed analysis of what they had experienced, after the fact, were willing to use the term. Terms that they themselves prefer or preferred when characterising the ideology were 'right-wing nationalism', just 'right-wing' and 'national socialism'. Most respondents clearly distinguished between the elementary racism of the gabber scene and the radical, ideologically embedded racism within the neo-Nazi groups.

'Being a radical is so much more. You have a genuine hatred of interracial marriage, Jews, etc. Gabbers, on the other hand, are more opposed to Turks and Moroccans and haven't got a clue as to what interracial marriage is all about. Radicals are pure supporters of the white race, let's put it that way.'

Apart from definitions, we found that the ideas held by most of our respondents were not very coherent or clearly thought through. With just a few exceptions, there was little knowledge of right-wing extremist ideologies. This is consistent with the findings from somewhat limited earlier research on the ideological convictions of right-wing extremist activists.⁵⁰ One respondent sees it as follows:

'Right-wing extremism is more a media invention. I prefer to call myself a national socialist. Right-wing extremism has more to do with nationalism, I think. And the difference between nationalism and national socialism has more to do with racial mixing, Hitler ideology, that kind of thing.'

A variation of this came from another respondent:

'Right-wing extremism is focused purely on hatred/violence/aversion to ethnic minorities – true nationalism, let's say. Whereas the radical right aspires to genuine national socialism. So the hate lies deeper. It's based on a belief that Jewish Zionists are pulling the strings in a secret worldwide conspiracy.'

Another respondent provided a more detailed view of the difference between nationalists and national socialists:

'So was I a national socialist? To be completely honest, I have to admit with pain in my heart that I could have passed for one as far as beliefs are concerned. Yet I preferred to call myself a nationalist. What's the difference between the two? There are a number of differences in my opinion. A national socialist supports the creation of a 'Diets' state and is willing to die for it, while a nationalist supports the interests of his country. A national socialist hates everything and everyone who doesn't have blue eyes and blond hair, Jews especially. A nationalist will have nothing to do with people who don't 'belong here', but he won't exactly call it 'hating'.

Only a minority explored the issues more deeply by reading books, entering into discussions with others and formulating their own – sometimes different – points of view.

⁵⁰ A. Fermin, *Islamitische en extreem-rechtse radicalisering in Nederland*; K. van den Bos, A. Loseman & B. Doosje, *Waarom jongeren radicaliseren en sympathie krijgen voor terrorisme*.

'I wanted to find information, see how I felt about it myself. I always had my own position, because I thought that change was important, they had to adapt more to modern times. If you want to achieve something you have to become political. You're not living in the twenties or thirties any more. I never had anything to do with anti-Semitism. They keep coming back to that even though there are much bigger problems to be dealt with. I think it's because it's an easy scapegoat.'

3.6 In conclusion

Defining right-wing extremism has been the subject of international scholarly debate that has produced a great many insights. In the Netherlands, the Racism & Extremism Monitor project has elaborated on this debate and has set demarcation lines based on its own research experiences. The essential points include orientation towards people like 'us', an aversion to people who are not like us – 'them' – and to political opponents, and a penchant for authoritarianism. The necessity of using social genealogy and the magnet function as indicators, in addition to ideology, is also emphasised: were the persons previously active in other groups? Is there evidence that persons with right-wing extremist sympathies are being attracted? There is no doubt that the organisations in which our respondents fulfilled various roles fall within the borders of these parameters. A division has been made, however, between national socialist and other, non-national socialist groups, as well as between political parties and street groups.

Chapter 4 Preliminary phase

A process of radicalisation doesn't appear out of nowhere. Radicalisation has a past history. In this chapter, we will examine the social background of the respondents and the conditions under which they lived during the 'preliminary phase', the phase that immediately preceded the radicalisation process. We will discuss whether those conditions can be regarded as radicalisation risk factors.

4.1 Background of the interviewees

The majority of the twelve persons we interviewed were men and the minority were women – the most common picture of the extreme right until recently. This picture has been subject to change for quite some time, and for several organisations it is certainly not clear-cut. Some groups are strongly dominated by men; if women are present at all in such groups, they are usually visible in relational terms as wives or girlfriends. In other groups we see more and more women playing their own active role, apart from their relationships. Both of these roles were in evidence among our female respondents.

The young people we spoke with lived across the country during their period of right-wing extremist activity.

At the time of our conversations (late 2009), the young people varied in age from 18 to 26 years. When they joined the extreme right they were between the ages of 12 and 18, and when they actually took the step to turn their backs on the movement they were between 15 and 24.

The duration of their stay in right-wing extremist groups also varied. The shortest period was 3 years and the longest 8 years. At the time of our interview, 1 to 4 years had passed since the vast majority of the respondents had decided to abandon the world of right-wing extremism.

VMBO	3
HAVO	1
MBO	4
HBO	1
At work, completed vocational training:	
MBO	2
Unknown	1
Total	12

Most of our conversational partners (9 persons) were secondary school students who lived at home with their parents. A few also had part-time jobs in addition to school. It is striking that almost all the respondents became involved in some kind of schooling after leaving the extreme right. Those who were already working continued to work in the same sector after their radical period was ended. All of them experienced problems at

work, usually because their right-wing extremist activities somehow became known – through an internet publication, for example, or because of publicity after an arrest.

Home situations differed. Some respondents came from complete families, others from divorced single-parents homes. The parents of two young people split up while their children were involved in right-wing extremism. Most of the parents had completed secondary school or had limited education; a few were better educated. Political preferences also varied among the parents. Some were apolitical to a greater or lesser degree, or they voted for the Greens (GroenLinks), the Christian Democrats (CDA), the free-market liberals (VVD) or some other mainstream party. A few parents also had outspoken negative opinions about ethnic minorities.

4.2 Risk factors for radicalisation

A frequently heard question is whether there are risk factors that might indicate possible problematic development among young people, the idea being that if these factors are known, then action can be taken at an early stage. Risk factors for problematic behaviour among young people include a problematic family situation, psychosomatic deficiencies and the absence of a successful career at school or work. To see whether such factors were present in our study group, we asked about living conditions and social context prior to and during the period of radicalisation. Because we were dealing with the problem of radicalisation, we also asked about political views. The level of prejudicial thinking was examined as well. This provided us with a broad range of factors.

First we will look at the cognitive side of the radicalisation process: what were the respondents' views and political ideas prior to their becoming radicalised? Did they have any bias against ethnic minorities? Earlier research has shown that ideological convictions almost never play a role in processes of right-wing extremist radicalisation.⁵¹ This accords with our findings. Only a small minority were interested in politics before becoming involved in right-wing extremism. If we restrict this question about the cognitive side of the radicalisation process to bias against ethnic minorities, we see that the greater portion of the group were prejudiced to a greater or lesser degree.

'I didn't know a thing about politics, but I did have my own ideas. I hated Moroccans. That fitted right in with right-wing extremism.'

Often these prejudices were partly inspired by negative personal experiences with immigrant youth.

'I was still in school. I was a gabber at the time, head half shaved and hostile towards society. I often got into fights with ethnic minority kids at our school. They didn't like me because my head was half shaved and I wore Lonsdale. Whereas I wasn't into that stuff at all; my best friend at the time was an ethnic minority.'

In several instances, these experiences involved violence.

⁵¹ T. Bjørgo, *Racist and right-wing violence in Scandinavia*; F. Demant et al., *Teruggang en uittreding*.

'And on top of all that, my father got beat up by some, I don't know, some kind of foreigner. I think that really got things stirred up [...]. Finally they got the guy who did it. He had committed crimes like this before that involved extreme violence. He got three years...'

Five of the twelve respondents said they had had these kinds of experiences to a greater or lesser degree, or that they knew about them firsthand. They also said that these experiences were influential, sometimes very influential in their choice of right-wing extremism. One of them pointed out the need to locate their anger and the perceived injustice in a larger political narrative. Making contact with an extreme right-wing organisation was part of this effort.

On the other hand, it is striking that several respondents maintained friendly contacts with ethnic minority peers. Sometimes those friendships just continued to exist alongside the right-wing extremist involvement.

'I stuck with the same friends. The group was very mixed. An Antillean, a Moroccan, an Ethiopian, ordinary Dutchmen and God knows what else. There was beer, drugs, you name it. And it never changed; everybody knew about my political activities.'

But sometimes involvement in right-wing extremist activities led to breaking with a close friend because he was from ethnic minority background.

'Another problem I had was what to do about him [an ethnic minority friend, ed.]. At some point I said to myself: he's got to go. That was very difficult. At some point I just stopped having contact with him.'

In addition to cognitive factors there are also social factors that play a role as risk factors for radicalisation. One important social context factor that was mentioned by a substantial number of the interviewees was a lack of friends – or, to put it more positively, a need for social belonging. Others did have a group of friends, but those friends did not meet the need for a group with a distinct identity.

'Because I never belonged anywhere, I was always different already and people thought I was weird. That's why it attracted me so much, I think.'

Sometimes there was also the wish that the sought-after group of friends would be 'exciting'.

'My old friends were much too boring, and I had already got rid of them.'

The influence of the wrong friends also becomes apparent.

'There really isn't anything that you can name as an obvious cause for choosing the path I took. I did do lots of stupid things. Even as a kid I had known lots of people who were dealers and smugglers.'

Other risk factors like a problematic home situation or poor performance at school were less prominent in the young people's stories, but in a number of cases they did appear to play a significant role.

The backgrounds of the twelve young people differed enormously with regard to the home situation. A number of them came from broken homes. A few of them even related this to their own behaviour.

'My parents got divorced when I was eleven. With divorced parents you can get away with anything.'

A number of the interviewees from two-parent households also reported difficulties at home, such as alcohol abuse or frequent quarrels, but this was not true for all of them. As far as political preferences and mentality of the parents were concerned, there was no consistent picture, as we noted earlier. A few parents had pronounced xenophobic ideas. There were also parents with a left-wing background.

Psychosomatic complaints are sometimes the basis for problematic developments in adolescents and may also play a role in processes of right-wing extremist radicalisation. This was true in the case of one person among the twelve whom we spoke to: this respondent said he had a multiple development disorder, which made him more easily influenced. None of the others mentioned having problems in this area. It was striking, however, that several respondents talked about the large number of people in the right-wing extremist circuit with psychosomatic problems.

'Those people there, the movement is a breeding ground for people with psychological disorders, with problems.'

4.3 Youth subcultures

When we look at the risk factors for right-wing extremist radicalisation, youth subcultures play a special part. Half the respondents came to right-wing extremism after a preliminary phase in a youth subculture. Those who were not involved in such a preliminary phase in a youth subculture came to right-wing extremism via recruitment and the internet.

By 'youth subculture' we mean the way in which groups of adolescents behave, the way they look, and their preference for certain ideas, kinds of music, forms of leisure activity and nightlife venues. By acting according to a certain style they indicate with whom they want to be identified.⁵²

Earlier we spoke of the transition from *unbounded* to *bounded groups*. A few youth subcultures can be considered *unbounded groups*, groups in which there is evidence of radical values and extremist behaviour but no clear borders between members and non-members. Someone active in a youth subculture can go on to become further radicalised by joining an extreme right-wing *bounded group*. Among our respondents we saw that in a number of cases there were youth subcultures that did indeed fulfil this 'gateway' function.

The persons we spoke with were attracted to several different youth subcultures, with the gabber scene and the NSBM scene (National-Socialist Black Metal) emerging as the favourites. Eight of our respondents identified with them. In the mid-nineties, tens of thousands of young people were involved in the gabber scene.⁵³ It was one of the most successful youth subcultures at that time. Of this large group, however, only a small

⁵² J. de Wit, G. van der Veer & N.W. Slot, *Psychologie van de adolescentie*. Baarn: HB uitgevers, 2002 (23rd printing, 5th ed.)

⁵³ Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst, "Lonsdale-jongeren" in Nederland: feiten en fictie van een vermeende rechts-extremistische subcultuur. The Hague: Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst, 2005.

minority underwent radicalisation and joined the extreme right.⁵⁴ Did this youth subculture function as a stepping stone for those who became radicalised? If so, how does this development take place? The same questions can be asked of the NSBM subculture. NSBM is a musical sub-genre of the Black Metal school of hard rock. Black Metal is an extreme musical style consisting of fast guitars accompanied by demonic screaming. It conveys a highly negative message with a misanthropic focus. For some in the scene this is merely a theatrical pose, but there are others who take the message seriously. In the NSBM this hatred is translated into a national socialist ideology of destruction. Song lyrics and CD booklets glorify the Holocaust and encourage the extermination of various social groups, especially Jews, Muslims and Christians. For some NSBM fans this is also a pose, but a significant number take the message seriously. According to the interviewees, within the gabber world and the NSBM scene there was quite some room for racist and extremist ideas.⁵⁵

'It was really easy to vent those kinds of ideas [*racist, ed.*] during the Lonsdale period, I mean.'

It is quite clear from our data that the presence and tolerance of racist and right-wing extremist ideas within a youth subculture serves to lower the threshold for further radicalisation. That is, the switchover to right-wing extremism is potentially facilitated by the widespread acceptance of such ideas within the scene. People who developed in that direction not only encountered little resistance, but they even enjoyed a certain prestige within whatever scene they happened to be in. It should be emphasised that the tolerance of such ideas was not common within the Lonsdale scene. When various incidents and media reports resulted in a very negative picture of Lonsdale youth, party organisers in particular tried to do something to change the image. Measures were taken against 'right-wing extremist' clothing and symbols, and public attempts were made to disassociate from right-wing extremism. Among the gabbers themselves, however, there was widespread tolerance.

In a number of cases these subcultures also appeared to function almost literally as gateways to radicalisation, as when members of a right-wing extremist organisation who were looking for potential followers developed recruitment activities at parties and concerts.

'When I was fourteen I started going to gabber parties with a small group of friends. I already had right-wing ideas, so I walked around with my pants legs rolled up, Doc Martens, etc. At one of the parties I was given a pamphlet from Stormfront Netherlands. I filled it in and that's how I signed up.'

Another route is when people within a youth subculture establish more informal contact with persons who are propagating extremist ideas.

'I immediately felt like one of them because I could voice my ideas in that group, and it wasn't all that pointless non-stop drugs and party stuff.'

At the same time, this gateway function is not an established pattern. Being actively involved in such a youth subculture does not necessarily lead to radicalisation, not even

⁵⁴ J. van Donselaar (ed.), *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme: Het Lonsdalevraagstuk*. As opposed to the image, in which gabbers are often equated with right-wing extremists.

⁵⁵ Two respondents were involved in Gothic and Tekno. Here there was no apparent connection with the radicalisation process. For this reason these youth subcultures are not included in this discussion.

among those who are obviously susceptible to it. We see this in the experiences of a few respondents who were active in a youth subculture and underwent radicalisation as well, but not as part of the subculture.

'Yeah, the Lonsdale guys showed up. Everybody in Doc Martens, everybody in those polo shirts buttoned all the way up. Suddenly braces were popular. I thought it looked cool, but the ideas behind the look didn't do anything for me at the time. They were the "zwabbers" – "benders", fake gabbers – so you didn't want to have anything to do with them. They ruined the mood, they were pretty aggressive most of the time. This wasn't how I got involved in right-wing extremism.'

One respondent was first active with the NSBM for a while, where he became acquainted with right-wing extremist sympathisers and their ideas. But he left that scene. A few years later the friendships were revived and he was recruited into the extreme right. None of the people involved in this were active in the NSBM scene at the time, however.

4.4 In conclusion

In the phase preceding radicalisation we can identify a few factors that can be regarded as radicalisation risk factors. First, it appears that being prejudiced against ethnic minorities did influence some of our respondents. Those prejudices were sometimes prompted by the respondent's own negative experience with young ethnic minorities. A second influential factor was the lack of friends or good friends. How these two factors influence the radicalisation process will be discussed in the next chapter. The role played by political interests was minor. Risk factors for problem behaviour in general also emerge as risk factors for right-wing radicalisation, but they are not very significant. One last factor is identification with certain youth subcultures. In half the cases there had been a preliminary phase spent in a particular youth subculture, either gabber or NSBM. The influence of this preliminary phase varies, however. Sometimes there is evidence of recruitment and sometimes of a more informal introduction to right-wing extremist points of view, or of gradually becoming accustomed to a radical message that only later becomes activated. In half the interviews, some form of youth subculture had served as a gateway to radicalisation. But there are also a few obvious exceptions. Those who did not undergo a preliminary phase in a youth subculture came to right-wing extremism via recruitment or the internet.

Chapter 5 Factors and phases in the radicalisation process

When research is conducted on processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation, the focus is often on the factors by which such processes are influenced, stimulated or curbed. Less attention is paid to the various phases that constitute these processes. In this chapter we will deal with both. What motivated the young person to become interested in joining the extreme right in the first place, and what phases took place in the course of the radicalisation process?

5.1 Factors

First we will look at what motivated these young people, who were between the ages of 12 and 18, to seek membership in right-wing extremist groups located in the margins of society. Almost all our respondents encountered the extreme right in their search for friendship, social protection, a personal lifestyle and a related demand for excitement, violence and adventure. There was also a social component at work: a sense of unrest, especially with regard to inter-ethnic relations, a need for rebellion and action, and a need to discuss social issues. Most respondents experienced a vague ideological recognition in their first contact with the extreme right. An emotional component was also apparent. Frustrations and feelings of hatred, sometimes vague and sometimes connected with specific negative experiences in social situations, such as at school or in the private realm at home, sought an outlet and found it. Many of these factors are obviously related to the phase of development that adolescents undergo between the ages of 12 and 22. In early adolescence, people separate themselves from their parents and focus on gaining autonomy. They then explore the lifestyle options that are available. They form their own identity and develop their own style in relation to others, mainly peers. Friends from the peer group occupy an increasingly important place in the life of the adolescent, replacing parents and other family members. In the next section we will take a more detailed look at the various factors.

5.1.1 *Social belonging*

Searching for social connections in the form of friendships is an important motive. In section 4.2 we mentioned social isolation as a risk factor for radicalisation. Certainly not all the respondents defined their contacts in the extreme right as friendships, but for a significant number this was indeed the case. For everyone, the need for friends was given high priority. In the beginning it was even an important factor for joining. Different variants emerged.

A number of respondents had no friends at all.

'For me it was ... I needed support. They took me in and gave me a whole lot of attention. My other friends were busy, they were working and all that. Many people on the extreme right don't work, so they had lots more time. [...] They never really asked me to join them, they just included me. They never said, "You belong here". I was a friend, I was just included. They also never talked about membership. My problems were solved for the most part, so it was logical to go along with it.'

Others did have friends, but the friendships weren't satisfying. Despite these friends, the respondent felt alone and misunderstood.

'No one around me understood me. That was it, really. Misunderstood. So I just gave everybody the finger. I was a loner. I did have friends, but I was always different.'

In a third variant, the respondent had a relationship with someone actively involved in the extreme right.

'I had a boyfriend, my first steady relationship. He was that kind of person [a right-wing extremist, ed.]. So one way or another you got drawn into their little world. I didn't know anything about it. They made it sound so good, but it wasn't good then and it isn't good now.'

Because of existing friendships, some respondents were willing to becoming involved in a process as part of a group that they would not have been interested in as individuals. They were already part of a circle of friends and underwent the radicalisation process collectively.

'My girlfriend came along. We agreed on that together. I don't know which of us did the pulling. Friends pull each other along. If I had been alone it might not have happened. I wasn't on the internet. I saw it going on around me. They became familiar faces. You kept bumping into the same people at parties. So you went along as a kind of group.'

5.1.2 Excitement and adventure

The extreme right satisfied a need for friendship. It also fulfilled a longing for excitement and adventure. For several respondents, this constituted an important aspect of the movement's attraction.

'The adrenaline, the excitement you were looking for, giving society a kick in the head – you can imagine that the extreme right would be just what you wanted. It didn't have to be the extreme right, though. You could do just as well with the left, or with hooligans. [...] But you're driven by the dislike of foreigners, of course, so it's an easy choice, it's the obvious option.'

As the above quote shows, there is an important emotional component at work here. The respondents often experienced violent feelings of frustration, aversion to other population groups and even hatred, which fostered social unrest and a need for rebellion or at least tied in with it. The search for excitement and adventure and the drive to vent frustrations and negative feelings have both a push and a pull component. In the eyes of the young people, the extreme right seems like the place where many of these things can be realised, a place of excitement and adventure where a person can indulge his pent-up frustrations.

5.1.3 Societal events

In addition to factors in the social micro-context of the respondents and factors within the extreme right that respondents found attractive, there were also specific societal events that contributed to radicalisation. Mainly these were devastating incidents, such as the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh. When Fortuyn was murdered, most of the respondents were still too young to contextualise the event politically. With few exceptions they described it mainly as a shocking experience that had no further impact. When Van Gogh was murdered, most of them were already active in right-wing extremist groups, so that event had little influence on their initial motivation. Its main impact was that it confirmed their existing ideas.

But there was also evidence of influence on the radicalisation process within the movement, which became more intense. In some cases this was marginal, but in other

cases it was more far-reaching. It caused several respondents to become even more extreme.

'After the murder of Van Gogh we got really angry. We didn't do much about it actively, but we were stimulated to become even more extreme. That was because you only followed the reporting on Stormfront. You only got that view of the news. Your own opinion was totally gone. [...] It wasn't about the fact that it was Theo van Gogh, but more about the incident itself. It was more like: it was done by an Islamist, he was killed for his political ideas. I didn't even know what his political ideas were.'

While some were rightly angry about this murder, as we see in the above quote, others saw mainly political gain for the case of the extreme right in the murder of the filmmaker.

'We saw the murder as good for our case. It made it easier to discuss our ideas in society. People had no trouble understanding what we were talking about. Otherwise I didn't shed a tear over him. Free speech murder? Free speech for us had gone out the window a long time ago. We weren't allowed to saying anything anyway.'

5.1.4 Ideological recognition

Inspired by Stuart Hall, we can think of ideology as the mental framework – the concepts, categories, thoughts, representations and interpretations – that different social groups use in order to determine and make sense out of the way in which society and its members function.⁵⁶ Do ideological considerations play an important role as factors in the first steps of the radicalisation process, or do they enter the picture later on, and in what way? In our research, there was not a single instance of a person wanting to join a group primarily because of its right-wing extremist ideology. Yet there were certain points of recognition among these ideas that did play a role. Generally speaking, when the young people sought refuge in the extreme right they were still politically underdeveloped. Many of them thought that politics was something for 'stuffy people' with whom they could not identify. They defined themselves as more apolitical than as politically engaged. The common picture of the ideological connection that the respondents found was as follows. A person enters the right-wing extremist circuit with xenophobic ideas. Those ideas have taken shape in a variety of ways. For some, negative experiences with immigrant youth played a central role in the decision to join the extreme right. We must bear in mind the fact that although these were specific experiences that took place with an individual or a group, they were later applied to an entire population group under the influence of cognitive mechanisms of stereotyping and generalisation.⁵⁷ This switch takes place more easily if there is a certain basis for prejudice. In the creation of this basis, negative stories told by others in the social environment play a role. One respondent describes the stories he heard at home.

'It was always a right-wing family. My father had to deal with lots of foreigners at work. He always had stories to tell about foreigners and how terrible their homes were and that they didn't give a damn about paying rent and keeping up the place. So those were the kinds of stories I heard at home.'

⁵⁶ S. Hall, 'Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity', in: D. Morley & K. Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: critical dialogues in cultural studies*. London/New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 26.

⁵⁷ For these mechanisms see, among others, M. Augoustinos & J. Walker, *Social cognition: an integrated introduction*. London: Sage, 1999; J. Duckitt, *The social psychology of prejudice*. New York: Praeger, 1992.

The influence of the general social climate also has an impact. In today's climate, the dominant image of Muslims is a negative one. The media play an important role as well. Studies over the years show that in the Netherlands there is a structural negative portrayal of ethnic minorities, although more balanced and positive approaches do occur. Among the Muslims, the Moroccans in particular are the subject of stereotyping.⁵⁸

The new accretion in the ranks of the extreme right recognises these xenophobic and Islamophobic viewpoints. An interpretation of existing dissatisfactions in a more elaborated set of ideas is served up to them by the extreme right.

'I went out one night with an old friend. We bumped into an old acquaintance who at that time was active in Blood & Honour. He sat with us because we had the same ideas; we also hated blacks.'

5.1.5 Violence as attraction and trigger

We cannot deal with the initial factors that lead to radicalisation and its phases without pausing to consider the role of violence. Violence in relation to the involvement of young people in the extreme right is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In the beginning, violence plays two different roles. For some aspirant members, violence, and everything connected to it, like training sessions and possession of weapons, is part of the attraction of the extreme right.

'I became involved because I thought the ideas were good as well as the training sessions. Plans to get rid of the blacks, fire bombs, things like that. There aren't that many Jews here anymore.'

It is not uncommon for violence to be associated with excitement and adventure. Some young people are fascinated by it. A number of them turn to right-wing extremism for the violence alone. It should also be noted, however, that many right-wing extremist groups openly distance themselves from the use of violence.

In addition, social violence committed by others is one of the reasons why a number of young people organise themselves in the extreme right. Violence committed by others can serve as a trigger. A few mentioned the murder of Theo van Gogh as well as other incidents like the knifing of an elderly woman. They are outraged by these crimes. They want to do something about them, and on this basis they regard themselves as self-sacrificing 'warriors for a good cause'.

Once the young person is involved in the extreme right, there are two factors – ideology and violence – that tend to play an increasingly significant role. Because of their importance at a later stage of the radicalisation process, both these themes will be elaborated on in the discussion of the phases into which the process can be broken down.

⁵⁸ See I. van der Valk, 'The Netherlands', in: J. ter Wal (ed.), *Racism and cultural diversity in the mass media: an overview of research and examples of good practice in the EU member states, 1995-2000*. Vienna: European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2002, pp. 287-310; W. Shadid, 'Berichtgeving over moslims en de islam in de westerse media: beeldvorming, oorzaken en alternatieve strategieën', in: *Tijdschrift voor Communicatiewetenschap*, 33 (2005) 4, pp. 330-346; R. van der Kroon, *Moslims in de media: verandering in beeldvorming*. Doctoral thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2005; I. Boog, 'Beeldvorming', in: I. Boog et al. (eds.), *Monitor rassendiscriminatie 2005*. Rotterdam: Landelijk Bureau ter Bestrijding van Rassendiscriminatie, 2006.

The most important factors that played a role when our respondents entered the movement are examined one by one. Now we will look at the phases into which entry and participation in the extreme right can be divided.

5.2 Phases

The radicalisation process goes through several phases in which the factors we discussed above alternate in terms of how decisive their role is. In that sense these phases do not follow a linear development. Furthermore, the process of radicalisation is sometimes delayed, set back or brought to a halt. Radicalisation does not proceed at the same speed in every case, or in the same way. Not everyone passes through all the phases; some abandon the scene before the last phase.

We distinguish the following phases, following the preliminary phase:

- phase 1 is the phase of getting acquainted and joining up;
- phase 2 is the follower phase: here the accent is on the social aspects such as attending get-togethers and concerts and developing friendships and other forms of social binding;
- phase 3 is the phase of increasing identification with the movement and ideological hardening;
- phase 4 is characterised by an increase in the use of violence and by cutting off external influences, ideas and points of view that run counter to the ideology.

We found that in a preliminary phase of the radicalisation process, the unbounded groups from the Lonsdale subculture and the NSBM music scene serve as gateways for entering the bounded neo-Nazi group. We saw that the threshold for entering is lowered by the presence of these gateway groups.

Sometimes radicalisation proceeds very quickly, whether preceded by a preliminary phase in a youth subculture or not. This occurred with two respondents. Usually there is evidence of a clear trigger moment. We saw this with one of them. He had been badly beaten by a group of immigrant youths, which led to his decision to join a right-wing extremist group. Speaking about his radicalisation, he told us the following:

'Then I was beaten up by a group, for no reason at all. For me that was the last straw. Then while I was checking out an internet forum I came across the website of a right-wing group that got together for meetings, and all of them had had the same experiences. It was, you know, a kind of brotherhood. And it clicked.'

These sudden trigger moments are not universal, however. For most of the respondents, the processes were a bit more gradual. With them there was some kind of preliminary phase that ran for several years (see table 5.2). The preliminary phase was followed by getting acquainted and joining up.

The next table is a visual representation of the relevant time span and the moments that were important for the radicalisation and deradicalisation of our respondents, as well as their ages.

5.2.1 Phase 1. Joining up

The first steps – getting acquainted and joining up – can be taken in a number of ways. Four variants were identified: joining up on one's own, being actively recruited by a right-wing extremist group, joining through friends and joining through a relationship.

- Three respondents took it upon themselves to find a group that corresponded with their own ideas or their need for friendship or protection.

Respondent	Born	Start preliminary phase	Year of entry	Age at entry	Year of exit	Age at exit	Duration phase of doubt
1	1990	Unknown	2004	14	2007	17	2 months
2	1988	Unknown	2003	14	2008	19	Unknown
3	1988	2003	2004	15	2009	20	12-18 months
4	1987	2002	2004	17	2007	20	6 months
5	1984	1998	2001	17	2006	22	24 months
6	1992	No pre-phase	2004	12	2006	14	12 months
7	1984	2000	2006	22	2008	24	12 months
8	1987	2002	2003	16	2006	19	3-4 months
9	1982	2001	2002	20	2005	23	12 months
10	1984	Unknown	2003	19	2006	22	24-36 months
11	1988	No pre-phase	2005	17	2006	18	1-1,5 month
12	1987	2002	2006	18	2007	19	6 days

- Four respondents were recruited. Recruitment took place at several different locations. One respondent was recruited during a gabber party, one through the internet and two others at school. One of the respondents recruited at school had been bullied by a classmate (of ethnic minority background). He was then recruited by a fellow student who initially appeared as his self-appointed protector.

'Actually it was all about what was happening to you at the time and that they were fighting against it. And that there should be more Dutch people walking around, and that if I would join I would always have people who would stand up for me, a whole tightly-knit group, and I'd be safe.'

- One of the young people was going through a tough time emotionally, and during an evening out he was taken in by a group of old acquaintances. They were active in a right-wing extremist group and they managed to interest him in joining.

- Joining up through a relationship is a special variant. This variant may occur by means of active recruitment, but it can also occur as a specific form of joining up through friends. In two cases the respondents were drawn into the right-wing extremist circuit through a romantic relationship with someone they had met on the internet. After a while

they found out that these partners were active in the extreme right. The respondents were then introduced to the right-wing extremist group as the partner of these people.

'I ended up in Blood & Honour because my boyfriend was already a member, so I had to join as well. I didn't hear this until six months later: "Maybe you can join, too".'

5.2.2 Phase 2. *Becoming a follower*

In this phase, our respondents came in contact with the other members of a right-wing extremist group. They became involved in a social network and thus they made new friends. In many cases this did not happen because of involvement in political activities but more in a social context of get-togethers and concerts. To a certain extent this follower phase also took place on the internet. One respondent found himself in a right-wing extremist network without being politically active in any significant sense. He went mainly for the fun.

'It was more like a bunch of overgrown boy scouts where we always had fun together. [...] It was all about having a good time. [...] Yeah, when we start talking about it I have nothing but good memories. Do I miss it? Sure, it would still be fun. Not with that ideological background though.'

Many of the organisations in which our respondents were involved organise a variety of social events: get-togethers, concerts, sporting events or excursions. At these gatherings and get-togethers the focus is on social life, on hanging out with friends and acquaintances. Active participants on the Stormfront forum regularly organise get-togethers for their circle of virtual forum contacts. These mainly are meant for enjoying the company of like-minded people. A side-effect of such get-togethers is once the alcohol starts taking effect they frequently result in incidents of an extremist character such as fights with ethnic minorities, vandalism or graffiti outbreaks.

'You hoped that the movement would grow and that the extreme right would finally gain more power. That was the tactic, at any rate. That was what you wanted ultimately. But the get-togethers were really all about getting to know more people. And to drink a lot.'

Some social gatherings have a more obvious political aim. Attempts are made to recruit people, to motivate them or to educate them in the ideology. A barbecue is organised for potentially like-minded people, for example. During the barbecue a speech is held to get the people there interested in joining the organisation.

'Speaking of advertising, no matter what we did, at any given moment we had a bar at our disposal that didn't cost us anything, and with our own tap, so we could drink to our heart's content at a euro a beer, I believe. [...] That also worked because it was word-of-mouth advertising. Oddly enough, there were people who became members and who were most active in the beginning. In demonstrations.'

The groups take a pragmatic approach and allow new members to participate in phases. This occurs like a series of 'peels'. Newcomers and followers are active in the outermost peel where they can do little damage to the organisation while still being allowed to join in the social events or in public actions, such as demonstrations. The more a person is trusted, and the more he has made an actual contribution to the organisation, the sooner he will find himself in the innermost peel.

The advantage of this approach is obvious for the group in question. It allows the new recruit gradually to be exposed to more extreme activities and points of view. This process goes hand in hand with increasing radicalisation and contributes to an interplay

between the two. In addition, it limits the risk for the organisation so that image damage is avoided, and new members are kept from doing foolish things like betraying secrets or making statements to the police. To avoid these risks, it makes sense to shepherd new members into the movement in stages. Blood & Honour has even formalised the follower phase. First there is a trial period in which the candidate can prove himself as a 'supporter' in real-life situations.

'When I entered the group there was a test period. First I was a member of a support group. I was very active in that support group: putting up stickers, spray-painting, distributing flyers. I played hooky to do it.'

After this 'training period' the respondent began playing a more organisational role and finally was allowed to join the actual group.

A number of respondents were active in right-wing extremist discussion forums before becoming involved in a right-wing extremist organisation. In this case it was mainly the Stormfront forum. The digital follower phase usually went on for a relatively long period of time, more than a year. Only then did the person become involved in the extreme right outside the virtual world. Two of our respondents spent their entire time in the extreme right in this follower phase.

In many cases, the follower goes on to become more involved in the movement at the administrative, organisational or ideological level or by participating in secret actions. The next phase, however, is mostly characterised by ideological development and increasing identification with the movement.

5.2.3 Phase 3. Ideological development and identification

As we saw above, the extent to which ideology is an entry factor is quite limited. At the very most there is evidence of vague ideological recognition. That changes once the person has passed through the follower phase and becomes more involved. In the next phase, an important ideological development takes place along with increasing identification with the movement. Once a person has entered the movement, underlying emotions are stirred up resulting in a hardening of ideology and attitudes.

'The problems didn't get worse, but you focused on them more and more. Say you have a group of ethnic minority kids who are hanging around, and they see you and start shouting things at you. Today I wouldn't give it a second thought, but at that point you come home and you mull it over, and then you go on the internet to see how many Moroccans are coming to the Netherlands. You do all that, and just over one tiny little thing. You work yourself into a lather because some kid screamed at you. [...] Back then I would take that very hard; you saw it as something global, something much bigger that was getting worse and worse, that you wouldn't be able to get around in the future, that was already too far gone. That's how you get ideas.'

This process is strengthened by the fact that the person is surrounded by like-minded people, so his ideas are hardly ever viewed critically, if at all.⁵⁹ A number of respondents said that this greatly enhanced the influence of the group.

'If you're in a group like that where everyone totally agrees with everyone else, things happen really quickly. You sit down to talk together and actually you're all in agreement. There's really no

⁵⁹ For such processes, see C.R. Sunstein, *Going to extremes: how like minds unite and divide*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

discussion. You whip each other up. You just keep convincing the other person. In a real discussion, one person disagrees and you agree, and you try to convince the other person. But here the other person agrees, too, and you just add to the agreement. That's how it works in a group, you try to outdo each other. That's sort of what happened to me.'

The ideological development and immersion is not the same for all activists. There are a variety of positions and therefore different appraisals of the role of ideology. One respondent said he doubted that ideology and attitudes were really that profound within the right-wing extremist group he was in. He doubted whether his pals knew what it was all about. This respondent saw ideology as a secondary consideration more than anything else. Another saw the role of ideology more as the cement of the group. Being in agreement on certain things tended to connect people, and that connection was the point of it all, according to him.

A number of activists undergo further ideological development. For these activists, the next step is to fit all these ideas into a framework, a more or less coherent ideology. In most cases this means national socialist ideology.⁶⁰ Several respondents suggested that this step was not taken as a matter of course, that it required a certain effort. Especially anti-Semitism is not always easy to absorb. That bit of ideology is too remote from the world of daily experience. It is seen as 'alien', something from the past. The emotional charge of the Holocaust also plays a role: proclaiming oneself a supporter or denier of the Holocaust is going a step too far, at least at first.

'Actually it was more an opposition to foreigners. Being opposed to the Jews, that just wasn't my thing. I don't have anything against them. I never did.'

When asked why the radicalisation continued anyway, the interviewees had two kinds of explanations. First, that the right-wing extremist group said they expected it, or that pressure was applied to become familiar with the ideology.

'I felt obliged to learn things, their ideology. Otherwise I looked like an idiot. And I wouldn't belong. And I wouldn't be allowed to wear certain symbols. Another person saw them ask someone what a certain symbol meant. I thought, they're going to ask me, too. So that's when I started studying.'

A second explanation is the newcomer's own motivation to develop ideologically. It isn't that there is external pressure so much as there is an intrinsic motivation. Along with this was the conviction that 'you can't believe halfway', but that you had to swallow the ideology whole.

'At a certain point I really went over to the Nazi side – and all the things that go with it. At first I was really against it, with the Jews and all that. At first I thought, I don't know anything about this. That was history, so I'm not touching it. But at a certain point you do anyway, because you're following the ideology, after all, and apparently that's all part of it. [...] And then I thought, well, how can I give this my support if I don't support it all?'

Once this step is taken, anti-Semitism also becomes part of almost everyone's conviction and point of view. A few even become hard-core anti-Semites, traces of which were still in evidence at the time of the interview.

⁶⁰ It is striking that even the respondents who were associated with a more moderate right-wing extremist organisation like Voorpost were followers of a national socialist ideology, to which Voorpost is officially opposed.

'Once I was in, I thought: if I have to work on building a synagogue I'll just quit and go work somewhere else. I don't think that way anymore. [...] But in some respects I haven't changed. I still think Anne Frank's father changed a lot of things in the diary.

Another still has doubts about the Holocaust.

'Stormfront convinced me that the ideology was true. I really did think that history had been manipulated so as to depict national socialism as *the* evil. [...] I also read other information, but in my eyes it had been consciously manipulated. I still have my doubts about the history of Auschwitz. Which doesn't alter the fact that what happened there is really horrible and never should have happened.'

5.2.4 Phase 4. Further radicalisation: violence and isolation

Once a person had worked his way into the hard core, further radicalisation took place in a number of cases on two levels: use of violence and further isolation from the outside world. We have already seen that for some people violence was a factor in their joining the extreme right because it appealed to them, or because violence committed by other members of society had raised their indignation. Violence also plays a role in further radicalisation, however. When a person has been a victim of violence, it becomes a reason to go one step further. On the other hand, when a person is a perpetrator and uses increasingly severe forms of violence, the thresholds for the use of violence disappear.

Sometimes the use of violence by others leads to further radicalisation. This mostly happens when the young people are already involved in the circuit at the time the violence occurs. It may have to do with serious violence committed in the society at large. One of the respondents mentioned the role that the murder of Fortuyn had played in his radicalisation process:

'Now it was more serious. Bad things could happen to us, too. A lot of them [right-wing extremist activists, ed.] started stocking weapons.'

It may also have to do with violence experienced by the person himself, such as from political opponents. A number of respondents mentioned the following incident. Demonstrators from right-wing extremist organisations complied with an appeal from the neo-Nazi Stormfront forum⁶¹ to take part in a non-extremist demonstration in Amsterdam in response to the Danish cartoon riots.⁶² But their political opponents also appeared at the demonstration in order to subvert the participation of the extreme right. This degenerated into a number of brief, fierce incidents in which a few right-wing extremist demonstrators were assaulted.

'Everywhere we went the antifa got in the way.'⁶³ One time we were at Dam Square in Amsterdam for the Danish cartoon riots. A demonstration had been planned. That was just where we wanted to be; it was socially accepted, there was nothing crazy about it. It was a right-wing populist thing. [...] Then the antifa were on us, beating us up. And then things started moving really fast, mainly against the left side. I got hit in the head. But a few guys were really kicked around and were being chased and hassled. When that happens you change gears, because you're being directly threatened.'

⁶¹ <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=270513> (13 February 2010).

⁶² After a Danish newspaper published cartoons featuring the prophet Mohammed as an object of satire, riots broke out in many cities around the world.

⁶³ Commonly used abbreviation for anti-fascists.

The violence used by groups of ethnic minority young people can also play a role as a factor in radicalisation.

'I got beaten up by eight or nine foreigners, and we hadn't done anything at all. We were going to bring someone home and all of a sudden they jumped us. For me that was the last straw. I had had it.'

After experiencing such forms of violence, right-wing extremists find it increasingly normal to use violence themselves. Wherever they go, for example, they take into account the possibility of violence by carrying weapons with them. But they also seek out potentially violent situations. Such street violence is sold to supporters as 'political action'. Part of it consists of provocation.

'So we just walked around, to see what there was to see. Two people would go first. They'd purposely walk past a bunch of kids who were hanging out until the kids said something, then the rest of the group would come around the corner, 20 or 25 of them. Not to fight, but to let them know we were there, too, that you can't get away with everything. We thought that was great. Because we didn't have the feeling that we'd done anything wrong. We didn't destroy anything and we didn't cause any injuries. We did carry weapons, but they were for our own safety.'

Sometimes such provocations are justified as a form of self-defence. There is considerable tolerance within the groups for what they call self-defence. Situations were sought out, sometimes quite obviously, in which those involved could 'defend themselves' so that the border between self-defence and provocation became blurred. The use of violence as 'self-defence' is also sometimes anticipated during preparations for demonstrations. Whenever confrontations are expected with anti-fascists activists or with the police, protective equipment is added to the weaponry. Protective clothing such as vests and arm protectors are worn at demonstrations, in case blows start falling.

Not only did the thresholds for violence become lowered (or disappear altogether), but the violence itself often became more brutal. In a number of cases this resulted in grave consequences, such as wounds or serious injury. Sometimes there were unforeseen consequences. In the next example, violence was used against a group of ethnic minorities. The ultimate effect was not what the perpetrators had anticipated, but they did welcome it and accepted it as their own responsibility.

'We did a lot of damage to that group. Three families from the asylum seeker centre had to move because of us. I was proud at the time that some of them left.'

An increase in status and loyalty to the group were two other factors that motivated some to cross the threshold in their use of violence. In a number of cases mentioned, the violence was more or less spontaneous, often under the influence of alcohol. In other cases it was more organised. In some groups the use of violence was a subject of much discussion.

'Talking about violence was all part of it, so some time during the week a meeting was held. Things were discussed, and this was followed by a party. [...] There were three groups: one that urged others to commit acts of violence, one group that didn't talk about it but did it anyway, and a group that talked about it and didn't do it. They were afraid of losing their jobs or going to jail. At first I was in the group that used violence, but after that I was mainly in the group the talked others into doing things. Those discussions about violence don't have much to do with reality. Most of them didn't have enough brains to pass chemistry, for example.'

When violence is finally used, it's aimed in different directions and has different targets. Violence is used within the organisation itself, for example, with political allies as the victims. Internal quarrels, which happen rather frequently, are often literally fought out. Often the conflict has to do with girls. Someone was given a 'total loss' beating and thrown out of a group because he wanted to pick up young girls, another was beaten because he couldn't keep his hands to himself. In other cases, political differences were also fought out with violence.

Use of violence is a status enhancer in the right-wing extremist milieu. Violence and violent threats are also used internally as a means of applying pressure, which is intimidating to say the least.

'Was it threatening? Yes, it was a very intense discussion: making things perfectly clear. [...] People are "keyboard warriors": they sit at their computer in the safety of their home. But then the doorbell rings. Then it's a whole different story. Suddenly you've invaded someone's privacy, you really take them by surprise. That shakes them up and scares them off, and you accomplish a hell of a lot. [...] And it works.'

With violence regarding the extreme right it's important to distinguish between the role of the perpetrator and the role of the target. In both roles we're mostly dealing with two categories of opponents who switch back and forth between perpetrator and target: ethnic minorities (mostly young people) and anti-fascist activists.

'Violence does take place in the street. A number of people are really good at it. You're walking down the street and you feel like a little violence and you start looking for a foreigner to bash. Sometimes it's just a few punches and the person runs away. Sometimes you really lay into the person and leave him lying on the ground. One of us got into a fight with a nigger once and beat him to a pulp. I can remember going out for a drink one night. We bumped into two antifas. My friend just jumped on them from out of nowhere. Alcohol played a big role. [...] Some people pick a fight with Moroccans and get scared and try to calm things down, while they themselves provoked the fight.'

Besides 'the left' and anti-fascists, 'the state' is also seen as an important political opponent.

'There were even more violent actions carried out. But that involved smashing windows in police stations and ministries during the daytime, for example. Or covering police stations with spray paint. That's called "real work". Sometimes there's talk of going a step further. Not bombings, but intimidation techniques. That has to do with the state. That's the enemy, the root of the evil.'

This 'root of all evil' is often depicted in anti-Semitic terms as 'Jewish'. People often speak about the 'Jewish state'. But sometimes the aggression is more commonplace: reluctant family members, uncooperative bouncers in pubs.

This last phase in the radicalisation process is characterised by an ideological component as well as increased use of violence. The ideological hard core who pass through this phase have adopted and incorporated the national socialist way of thinking. These persons actively propagate this material; they educate and mould newcomers and initiate them into the ideology. In the end, the hard core develop a kind of tunnel vision. There is no longer any room for other information or points of view. Their outlook is distorted. This can be regarded as the ideological component of the last phase in the radicalisation process. All information that runs counter to national socialist ideas is regarded as propaganda, 'lies from the winner of the war'.

'I became more and more outspoken on Stormfront, since that's the only source you use. [...] You read it and accept it as truth. And if there's ever been biased news reporting, that's it. You get the news only through the extreme right, with commentary.'

For a number of respondents, being closed to other ideas went even further. Not only were dissenting opinions excluded, but so were the messengers themselves. Ties with old friends and family members came under pressure or were radically severed. In the literature this is called 'bridge burning'.⁶⁴

'But there were also friends who turned away and had less contact. I did that myself, and they did, too. I also had foreign friends. And it happened both ways. If people had the same opinions, they were automatically my friends.'

The role of the Stormfront forum that was briefly mentioned above alludes to another aspect of ideological radicalisation that cannot remain unaddressed, and that is the function of the internet. The internet plays an important role in the radicalisation process on several fronts, as we saw in section 3.2, such as mobilisation or the maligning of opponents. But another is the area of ideology. Extremists in the making get their ideas and arguments, including the foundations of those arguments, from right-wing extremist websites. The internet has expanded the accessibility of right-wing extremism enormously.

'You don't walk down the street and think, hey, that guy might have the same ideas that I do. And so the guy says, 'Hey, do you hate so-and-so, too?' – you don't do that. Internet was really one of the factors, of course. For lots of things.'

Discussion forums with a pronounced right-wing extremist character, such as the Stormfront forum, are especially popular. There people can start by reading undisturbed and gaining new ideas. When a person does not understand certain aspects of the ideology he can explore them in greater depth through in these forums. A next step is to sign up and join in the discussion. This is the beginning of actual involvement in a right-wing extremist group or participation in right-wing extremist activism. A respondent said the following about the Stormfront forum:

'I had been visiting Stormfront for a long time. In the beginning I didn't understand it very well at all, until I started reading the articles that were posted there about the lies concerning the Holocaust and that kind of thing. Eventually I became convinced that history had been incorrectly written, that the losers of the war were never, ever described as 'good', even though that may sometimes have been the case. [...] Through Stormfront I came to believe that whole body of thought. I really thought that history had been manipulated in order to portray national socialism as evil.'

5.3 In conclusion

In summary, we see five categories of factors that are instrumental in a young person's decision to join the extreme right. First are the micro-factors that are prompted by social circumstances: a person is looking for friends – and sometimes protection – in his pursuit of a certain identity and lifestyle. These factors have a pushing effect: in the preliminary phase, the respondents go to the extreme right in an attempt to compensate for an

⁶⁴ Bjørgo, *Racist and right-wing violence in Scandinavia*, pp. 166-173.

absence they feel in these areas. Other micro-factors that also serve a stimulating function are found on the personal plane. They are related to a need to rebel against society, with underlying frustrations and feelings of hatred. Along with the longing for excitement and adventure, this factor is closely linked to the developmental phase in which adolescents find themselves. Then there are a limited number of macro-factors that have a pushing effect. They are to be found in social circumstances, such as shocking events. A person may have become outraged by something that happened and wants to do something about it.

The next two categories are stimulating factors that are related to the group. They have to do with the attractive image of the extreme right as a place of excitement, provocation and violence, and with the extreme right as a place of ideological recognition.

To summarise, after a preliminary phase we can distinguish the following phases in the radicalisation process. The first phase has to do with getting acquainted and joining up. The second phase has to do with becoming a follower and developing friendships. In these first two phases the emphasis is on social aspects, the development of ties. In phase three there is increased identification with the movement and ideological development. In addition to racism aimed at ethnic minorities there is now another element that comes into play: anti-Semitism. In the fourth and last phase there is a hardening of attitudes. The use of violence increases and the person cuts himself off from external influences, ideas and points of view that contradict the ideology.

The different phases are characterised by the most central characteristic of that phase. This is not to say that characteristics from an earlier phase no longer play a role, but they have become less important. In the new phase they have yielded their dominant position to another characteristic. Conversely, characteristics from later phases also appear in earlier phases, but in an underdeveloped and less prominent state.

Chapter 6 Factors and phases in the deradicalisation process

For the people we spoke with, exiting a right-wing extremist organisation proved to be a complicated process involving numerous factors. In most cases, exiting happens in phases. As with entry into the group, a clear distinction can be made between ideological factors, factors having to do with the right-wing extremist movement and with the personal advantages and disadvantages of life within the extreme right. There is also an external factor that plays a stimulating role: the influence of third parties, outsiders, was extremely significant for almost all the respondents throughout the process of disengagement. Once again, there are several factors that serve either a pulling or a pushing function, and sometimes both aspects play a role at the same time or in sequence. We also came across factors that served a restraining function in the process of exiting the group.

The deradicalisation process also takes place in phases, although these are less distinct than in the radicalisation process. We have identified a doubting phase, a break-off phase and a normalisation phase. It is fair to ask whether these phases are not overly obvious and therefore lacking in significance. Isn't every such decision a break that grows out of doubt, with 'normalisation' as a result? We are using these three phases because in the deradicalisation process chronology is important. There is no break without doubt, and no normalisation without a break. The surprises are to be found in the contents of the phases and in their subdivision.

6.1 Movement factors

In the interviews with former right-wing extremists, factors are often mentioned that are related to the movement in which the person was active. These factors produce disappointment and alienation, thereby creating a stimulus for exiting the movement: the person is being pushed from the movement, as it were.

6.1.1 Disappointment in the organisation

One frequently heard factor – for nine of the twelve respondents – that led to misgivings about participating in the group is the behaviour of other 'comrades'. This has to do with behaviour in the mutual relationships within the organisation, which are experienced as negative. Often this behaviour is not in keeping with the person's norms and values, at least insofar as they are verbally professed. Sometimes it is because of behaviour that is blatantly anti-social. It seems as if the element of hypocrisy is also a decisive factor here.

'I stopped because of the hypocrisy about drugs. Lots of drugs were used. I didn't really care, but if you're going to use drugs you shouldn't come out against them. The only purpose of the ideals was to get attention. It wasn't fair.'

There was also frustration about the amateurish content of the movement, the lack of commitment and leadership and the internal quarrels.

'But at a certain point we didn't see him as a leadership figure any more but as a bigger and bigger asshole. You suddenly realise, if these are the people I'm supposed to grow with, then forget it.'

Sometimes the movement loses every form of credibility it ever had in the eyes of the activists. The evaluation of the behaviour of fellow activists is crucial here.

'Let me say it again, the extreme right is a cesspool. [...] At a certain point it just dawns on you: these jerks aren't getting anywhere. To hell with them. Total waste of time.'

A few respondents came to the conclusion that they had suffered personally from such behaviour.

'I felt inferior there. As a woman you feel constantly belittled. It's a sexist environment.'

6.1.2 Aspects of social binding

Disappointment in 'comrades' as partners in crime also has another, more personal aspect. The need for friendship and binding is an important factor in joining a right-wing extremist group. We saw this in the entry process. This need of social binding through friendships – or better, the disappointment in the breakdown of those friendships – also plays a role in exiting an organisation. The friends in the right-wing extremist circuit are not friends at all. For a few respondents, the disappointment that this realisation entailed was a very important factor in disassociating themselves from the group.

'He gave our names to the police. How can you do such a thing? How can you betray your friends that way? [...] After that, you don't feel quite so connected to each other anymore.'

6.1.3 Use of violence

Violence also sometimes plays a role as a factor that stimulates exiting the movement. In a few cases, the use of violence by a person's *own* group was a positive influence in the deradicalisation process. This involves what is commonly called 'senseless violence' today. The perpetrators do not experience this as senseless, however. They call it 'violence for the fun of it'. Violence against random passers-by can be so repugnant that it leads to the decision to disassociate oneself from the group for good. Internal violence within the group can have the same result.

'Sometimes if they were drunk they would feel like picking a fight with someone. That would have to be an ethnic minority or an antifa. I still remember very well the time that we were walking down the street and they attacked a nigger. He hadn't done anything, he was just walking there. They just started beating up on him. That's when I felt a stab in my conscience, like: beating someone up because of the colour of his skin?'

For most of the respondents, however, the significance of violence in the deradicalisation process was negligible. In a few cases just the opposite was true: the use of violence and the accompanying excitement were experienced so positively that they even served as a reason to remain active.

'Actually, the violence was a positive thing. The confrontations with anti-fascists. That was the fun of it. We'd go as a group and horn in on the antifas and shout crazy things. Provoking rows and fights.'

Violence by others was almost never mentioned as a factor that had contributed to the deradicalisation process. Only one respondent said it had been influential.

'I had my doubts about the use of violence. Use of violence by us, I mean. But violence by other against me or us also raised misgivings. We almost got lynched at a concert once.'

Violence by others was more likely to form a barrier (restraining factor) to stepping away from a right-wing extremist group. The group is seen as protection against this threat.

'The sense of friendship and safety and all that, that's one big reason why I just stayed in. [...] I really had the idea that I might be seized by foreigners, and that certainly didn't appeal to me.'

One final aspect of the use of violence in the context of deradicalisation is the threat of revenge. It goes without saying that leaving a right-wing extremist group is rarely something to make former comrades stand up and cheer. A person may postpone leaving the movement out of fear of being a victim of reprisals. In one case the person decided not to leave the group at all.

'I know someone who's still in the group. It's possible that he'd like to leave, but he's afraid of getting beaten up. He can't fight at all.'

But things are never as black as they seem. Quite often it never goes beyond threats. It's different than in other countries, where reprisals are more common and walking out on a group is seen as a betrayal. Here in the Netherlands the mentality is much more easy-going, according to the various respondents. Coming and going are seen as normal.

'I was mostly afraid of threats, and I had been threatened. [...] Yes. At a certain point they said, "next week we'll be there," and they never showed up. At a certain point I relaxed. They had a big mouth but they didn't follow through. After a while it eased up.'

Yet in half the cases we studied there was verbal violence in the form of threats or intimidation, or physical violence. In a few cases it was really an act of revenge.

'I ran into some old friends at a party. They were still skinheads. After a while it ended in a fight, and I got punched pretty bad. Looking back I'm really grateful for that moment because I found it difficult to leave and to lose my comrades, who I thought were real friends.'

6.1.4 Termination of the group

In a few cases the termination of right-wing extremist activities was connected with the development of the group as such: it fell apart or stopped functioning. In the cases we reviewed this was always something incidental. The person had already wanted to leave the group, which was simplified by the group falling apart.

'The reason I was able to leave was because an internal argument had taken place within the organisation. So I was like, I'm out of here, finally I can breathe a little.'

Among our respondents there were no cases of group deradicalisation.

6.2 Advantages and disadvantages

According to rational choice theory, all human decisions are made on the basis of balancing costs against benefits, by which individuals make choices that maximise their personal advantage.⁶⁵ We saw our respondents make such rational choices at moments when the personal disadvantages of right-wing extremist activism were felt.

⁶⁵ The rational choice theory is a classical theory of economics. Nowadays the theory is also of interest in the social sciences.

6.2.1 Personal growth

We have already established that the attraction of the right-wing extremist milieu and extreme behaviour are partly related to the respondent's phase of development. Several of them referred to this link themselves.

'I take it for granted that everyone stops after a couple of years. It's all part of reaching a certain age, isn't it? [...] When you get older you become less harsh in your thinking. Of the big group of right-wing extremists there are only a couple who hung around longer.'

So in addition to movement factors and ideological factors there are also factors that are the result of, or are linked to, the individual's personal development. Coupled with biological brain development there is development of the ability to form judgements in the later phase of adolescence.⁶⁶ People change, open up and arrive at different opinions. This may result in alienation from the organisation or ideology.

In a number of cases, respondents also explicitly said that a stage in their life had ended and that it was time for different choices. They became 'serious', chose a future and left the radical period behind.

One respondent sketched out another variant. It was not his own psychological development that was creating doubt but that of others. He saw his peers leading a 'normal' life and felt like a straggler.

'They're much happier than we would ever be.'

This personal growth is also usually connected to the growing need to live a normal existence, to 'settle down' and get on with life.

6.2.2 Attraction of the outside world

One factor whose influence is easy to imagine is the attraction of the 'normal life'. The life of a right-wing radical is difficult to combine with a regular existence. In the right-wing extremist circuit, heavy demands are often placed on readiness to take action, mutual solidarity and relationships with others such as family members who are antagonistic, friends with different political views or ethnic minority friends and acquaintances. The sacrifices that are demanded for the group and the pursuit of a 'higher goal' are often difficult to combine with work, school or a normal social life with family and friends outside the movement. In many cases this leads to a break with old friends. Here too, however, the responses are diverse. A few of our respondents appeared to have lived a kind of double life. They spent part of the time in the right-wing extremist milieu and another part among their 'normal' friends. In a number of cases there were two divided worlds with the respondent alternating between the two. In one case the border between the circle of friends and the right-wing extremist milieu was much more fluid.

For seven of our respondents, the attraction of a normal life, including school, work and social relationships, influenced the deradicalisation process at a certain point.

'I took the course that was paid for by my boss. I was working on my future. I saw that everyone's life was in a rut and that you couldn't achieve anything there. [...] That's when I grabbed my chance. If I had continued and had been arrested, for example, or if my photo had appeared on the internet, I would have thrown away those two years that I had put into it. [...] I saw that someone was given the sack because of the internet. I thought it was ridiculous, as long as you

⁶⁶ E. Crone, *Het puberende brein*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008.

do your work properly. And that made me think. I saw the uselessness of the life around me. Thirty years old and drinking beer with kids of fourteen. That's no model for me. I started thinking about my own future. I'm ambitious by nature, and that's not where those ambitions lie. I saw there was no career for me there.'

Those who tried to combine a normal life with right-wing extremist ideology or activism were usually brought up short – by getting arrested, for example, or because their employer didn't want someone with such a background. So finally they had to make a choice between activism and future.

6.2.3 Threat of repression

Opinions differ regarding the extent to which involvement with the law influences the decision to terminate right-wing extremist activities. Most of the interviewees had had experiences with the law. A few had even been in prison for longer periods of time. Not everyone seems to be intimidated by the judicial authorities, however. Those who are not intimidated adapt the prison experience to fit seamlessly into their existing conceptual framework. They see themselves as victims of the enemy against whom they are fighting.

'No, that didn't put me off. The police were part of "the system" of the "powerful Jewish elite".'

But for some, the prison experience brings with it a moment of enlightenment.

'At the time I had no doubts. But when I was actually arrested, when I was actually isolated, sitting in a little cell, I started thinking. And the scales fell from my eyes and I saw that what I was doing was totally wrong. That was really the moment when I decided to pull out.'

6.2.4 Threat of stigmatisation

For a few respondents, the threat of becoming known as a right-wing extremist, especially through the internet, and the potential consequences of that disclosure were a significant factor.

'More and more publications came out. Not about me personally, but about the things I was doing, what I was involved in. You start thinking that this could easily reflect on you. In other words, maybe it's just a question of time before *your* name is mentioned.'

6.3 Phases

Exiting a right-wing extremist organisation seldom happens overnight, and it's rarely caused by just one decisive factor. Occasionally this does occur, but in most cases it's a prolonged process.

What emerges from our conversational data is that the process can roughly be divided into three phases. These phases differ quite a bit in length from one individual to the next.

- The phase of doubt. In this period, doubt arises about involvement in the extreme right. This doubt may be about ideology but it can also concern other things within the organisation such as the behaviour of the leaders.

- The phase of decision-making and execution. In this phase, the person takes the plunge in one of three different ways: he exits the organisation, rejects the ideology or does both at the same time.
- The phase of normalisation. After leaving the group or rejecting the ideas, the person searches for a way to reconnect with society. At the same time, he has to process his experiences. He searches for a way to confer a meaningful place to his radical past within his own life history.

In the introduction to this chapter we noted that this division into phases in the deradicalisation process is chiefly used to get a clear picture of the chronology. For the various respondents there were different factors that were influential in each of the three phases.

6.3.1 Phase of doubt

Almost all the respondents spent a long time struggling with their doubts about their involvement in the extreme right before making a final choice. Two respondents decided to leave the organisation immediately after an obvious ‘trigger event’ had taken place. We saw one example of a respondent who, after having been arrested and seeing the grief this caused his parents, abruptly decided to terminate all activities. For another respondent, the break came when he saw a respected comrade steal a friend’s girlfriend and then lie about it. That hypocritical course of events caused him to make an immediate break.

The other respondents went through a period of doubt that varied from a few weeks to a few years (for these periods see table 5.2 in section 5.2).

Doubts about the ideology or the organisation arose under the influence of the factors mentioned earlier. Some considered remaining active anyway. Others made a decision and left the milieu.

a. Doubts about the ideology

Doubting the ideology of an organisation is always part of the deradicalisation process. We did not speak to anyone who had taken distance from the extreme right circuit while remaining loyal to the ideology, although residues were certainly visible among some of the interviewees. This may be temporary, since ideological deradicalisation can sometimes take a long time.

For a number of respondents we observed that a definite break with the extreme right was preceded by a lengthy period of doubting the right-wing extremist ideology. In one case, the respondent even said that he had never identified with it. There were various ideological aspects that contributed to this doubt: the racist component of the ideology, the lack of a sense of reality and hypocrisy with regard to norms and values.

The racist components of the ideology

Not uncommonly, these collide with the person’s own experiences. An example that we see again and again is that the person knows ‘good foreigners’ or has become acquainted with them. In a few cases, as we saw, respondents fell in love with someone from an ethnic minority background. In one special case, a respondent who was active in the neo-Nazi circuit discovered that he himself had a Jewish background. The inability to identify with the racist component of the ideology, based on one’s own experiences, is

often stronger in the case of anti-Semitism, while neo-Nazi groups tend to lay great emphasis on anti-Semitism.

'I felt very guilty towards Jewish people, for example. [...] Because at a certain point I couldn't suppress it any longer and I kept thinking about it, and I didn't want to be like that.'

The lack of a sense of reality

After a while, respondents begin to question the feasibility of the ideas. Doubts begin to appear with regard to the ultimate goals that had been sketched out, such as the re-establishment of a Third Reich. Is the ideal of a tightly organised, dictatorial, national socialist society what I really want, they asked themselves, or am I more for a society with individual freedom?

'I became more and more engrossed in national socialism. I called myself a national socialist at the time. But the more I read about it, the less I could see myself reflected in it. I thought it was much too strict.'

Hypocrisy concerning the confessed norms and values

More and more, the interviewees discovered that the people who championed certain norms and values did not practise what they preached. This had implications for the group's credibility. A number of respondents who began to doubt the underlying ideology as a whole had been influenced by notorious drug users who were firmly opposed to drug use, or by elevated ideals that went hand-in-hand with alcohol abuse and senseless violence. For others it wasn't a single aspect but the ideology as a whole that became increasingly problematic. Sometimes that was because they had arrived at different insights.

'I thought you had to change, you had to adapt to modern times. If you want to achieve something, you've got to get involved in politics. You're not living in the twenties or thirties anymore.'

In other cases it wasn't the respondents who changed their views but the others in the group who began to have more radical ideas.

'I had more and more trouble agreeing with the points of view that they were swallowing. It became more and more radical. [...] On top of that, you're getting older. You keep on developing. And you have to wake up, but at a certain point you just get other ideas.'

b. Doubts about how the group functions

Doubt can also arise with regard to other, non-ideological aspects of the right-wing extremist subculture, such as the way the organisation functions internally and externally. There is growing unrest about the day-to-day operations within the organisation. The following phenomena, which were mentioned earlier, can also play a role: hypocrisy, amateurism, lack of commitment, internal conflicts, confrontations and betrayal. This doubting the group's internal functioning can present one with a number of choices. Breaking with right-wing extremist activism is one option. Another is to remain active in the extreme right but to join another group, if necessary. In that case the period of doubt is prolonged.

Our respondents made three different choices when dissatisfaction did not lead to the decision to exit the right-wing extremist milieu. The first choice was simply to put up with the negative aspects and to remain active. The second choice was to deny that there

were any problems at all. The person then would search for other forms of activity within the same organisation so he could continue to communicate his own political beliefs.

'Then I thought, maybe this isn't THE approach. But I was still the same inside as far as ideas were concerned. [...] Actually we were looking for something different, sort of: this isn't working either. But that didn't mean that we were less extreme in our thinking. I still wanted to take to the streets.'

A third choice that we observed was that people left the organisation but looked for another right-wing extremist group to join. One of our respondents exchanged his organisation for another because of the hypocrisy regarding drug use. This group was fanatically opposed to drugs in its outward behaviour, but members themselves were heavy users.

Doubts about the internal functioning of the organisation led a number of respondents to doubt the political vision of right-wing extremism.

'The doubts began with those quarrels we had. And then you realise: these aren't my friends, these are people who think the same way about certain things and that's why they're friends. [...] I thought ... then there must be other things that don't make sense.'

c. Others make the difference

Doubt alone, on whatever grounds, is usually not enough to make someone disengage from both radical ideas and from a right-wing extremist group. In most cases, the person needs the help of outsiders to move towards making a definite break with the right-wing extremist milieu. A helping hand from the outside world is apparently indispensable. Peering longingly at a new, different life outside the group is the deciding factor. If this factor had been absent, the step would not have been taken.

'Despite everything I stayed in the group. Yeah, I don't know. It was like, otherwise I have no friends. Otherwise I don't have anybody. What are you supposed to do?'

These important other people outside the narrow little world were old comrades or new friends, co-workers, fellow students, family members, social workers and even fellow prisoners with whom the person exchanged ideas in prison.

'Then I started going to different concerts, I got to know more people from outside the circle. I also happened to bump into two old friends. Suddenly there were these old acquaintances all over the place. That's when I finally was able to say good-bye.'

These new friends are not only important as an alternative social network, but sometimes they are of great value as actors who stimulate the disengagement process. They can help the person who is doubting his right-wing extremist involvement to arrive at new insights.

'I was in the same cell with someone from an ethnic minority family. I talked to him a lot and he really understood me. And he also showed me that not all foreigners are the same. [...] He was a really cool guy. He was in for theft, I think. But anyhow, the way he acted really opened my eyes: not everyone is a threat. I think that was one of the most important reasons.'

As we already stated, the absence of friends outside the right-wing extremist circuit sometimes serves as a barrier to taking the next step. If important friends remain within the circuit, however, this also creates problems for exiting the movement.

Love affairs, and especially new love affairs, can also have an impact, sometimes because the person tries to pull the partner out of the circuit and sometimes because a relationship involves serious future planning. In a third scenario, it's a new relationship that brings an end to a former existence in a right-wing extremist world. For five of our respondents, a relationship played a stimulating role.

'I fell in love. And I saw that as a very respectable reason, given the fact that the woman had an ethnic minority background.'

The role of family, especially parents, was usually not very important for the respondents. We'll return to this in chapter 7. In a few cases parents were influential, however – especially when things went terribly wrong and the respondents saw how much distress they were causing their parents.

'When I was arrested my mother just broke down in tears. That was really difficult for me – that I was causing my parents so much grief with all this nonsense. That was an incredibly intense moment. Then I didn't speak to them for six days, and at a certain point I was allowed to call, and then something just snapped. I said, that's it, I'm never doing this again. I'm never going to do this to them again. For me that was really the most important reason for leaving.'

Another example of a factor that initially contributed to further radicalisation, but later led to estrangement from the right-wing extremist ideology, was when a respondent found out during his right-wing extremist period that his own father was of ethnic minority origin. First this knowledge strengthened his involvement in the extreme right, but later it played a big role in the process of becoming disengaged.

A last 'other person' worth noting was God. Two respondents said that during their deradicalisation process they returned to their religious roots.

'I did a whole lot of praying to God at that time. Despite my [*extremist, ed.*] ideas, I always believed in him secretly. I think that because of that I had the courage to take the step [*to leave, ed.*].'

6.3.2 *The break*

Ultimately, this period of doubt can lead to a rupture. The break may take a practical, physical form when the person actually decides to leave the right-wing extremist milieu. It can also be a mental-cognitive break in which case the person abandons the ideas he had held: he deradicalises at an ideological level. In many cases we saw that the practical and the ideological rupture took place at different times.

Ideological doubt can manifest itself in outward changes in the things that mark the right-wing extremist identity. We already saw that search for an identity is an important motive for joining a right-wing extremist group. This identity is partly communicated during the right-wing extremist period by means of outward features such as clothing, hair style, tattoos and the like. Once a person has assumed the right-wing extremist identity, including the outer signifiers, he may find it an uncomfortable fit. The identifying characteristics of the extreme right no longer coincide with the person's aspirations. Casting aside these signifiers can constitute an initial break in the process of disengagement.

'My first step was my clothing. I started dressing normally because I didn't want to be seen that way anymore. I was ashamed of myself. It became increasingly clear to me that I didn't want to be like that.'

The exit process is a period of taking distance from the right-wing extremist identity and searching for new ways of identifying oneself, a process that is often psychologically intense.

'I kept thinking: this isn't who I am, it's not who I want to be. I could no longer agree with what they thought and what they did.'

For most respondents there were gradual developments that sometimes accelerated and then came to a dead stop. Sometimes there was a period of detachment from the group or from the ideas, followed by resumed radicalisation. Even after decisions are made and carried out, slow incremental change continues to play a role. The role of outsiders and social institutions, such as school and work, is of great value for a long time and is often indispensable.

'Every day it just got less and less. And then I started school and life just got busier anyway. I got a girlfriend, I made friends, I started going out.'

So a physical break and an ideological break don't have to happen at the same time. In fact, for our respondents they were always two separate steps. A break in intellectual involvement does not automatically mean a break in practical involvement with the movement. Ideological doubt, or doubt concerning the way the organisation is actually functioning, can serve as the basis for leaving. In the latter case, some people leave without cutting ties with the ideology.

Conversely, we saw that breaks were made with the ideology without this leading to a break with the right-wing extremist scene, at least initially. Apparently it was quite possible to remain active without still believing in the ideas. People who broke with the ideology but not with the organisation did this for either negative or positive reasons. Some were afraid to leave for fear of reprisals, for example, or because they had no friends on the outside. On the other hand, there were also respondents who valued enough of their group's particular aspects to continue participating in it, despite the fact that they no longer shared its ideological convictions. A person might still have a relationship with someone in the group or good friends within the group, or he might look on the group's militancy or violence in a positive way.

Conversely, a person can break with the movement without immediately taking distance from the ideology.

'I was still on the right-wing extremist side – not in a practical way but in my head. Then one day I got a job, and every day I went to work. And every day as I was walking to work I would think about it. At first I was just proud. It was, like: I can just keep on living with these ideas.'

Another respondent demonstrated that the ideology can take root and hold on for a long time.

'For me it's been a gradual thing. I've always been very interested in the Second World War (I still am). I read lots of books about it and watched plenty of documentaries. Then at a certain point I read some more and I became more objective about the Second World War and the political

movements behind it. Then you suddenly see that it's really pernicious. I wrote a paper for school on the Battle of Arnhem. I filmed a museum there and interviewed a number of people who were involved, and I filmed the cemetery. That was impressive, let me tell you. For me that was the big turning point. It was like, this is wrong. I was really confronted in a way that I had never been confronted before; that made a real impression on me. So I gave the film a particular twist: be on your guard, it can happen again. That was about six months after I had left.'

6.3.3 Phase of normalisation

After this last step, all our respondents were effectively disengaged and deradicalised for the most part. They had exited the right-wing extremist circuit and put their right-wing extremist ideology behind them. But what happened to the respondents after their departure from the extreme right?

The vast majority went back to school or found work. Most of them were untroubled by their past as they pursued their day-to-day lives. A few can still be found on the internet or are known locally as 'problem cases', with all the difficulties that entails. Such individuals often find it difficult to get a job or to remain employed. The respondents went different ways politically and socially. Most are no longer politically active, but they do vote for different parties in the various elections. Among the parties mentioned were the Socialist Party, D66 (a progressive, liberal party), the Animal Rights Party and the PVV (Party for Freedom, an extreme right-wing party).

'I'm relatively left-wing now: vote D66, something of a liberal. I don't see myself as an anti-racist, but I'd rather not have those right-wing extremists in my city. That's mainly because of the old people walking around who are scared to death, seeing them with their flags.'

Some are socially engaged in other ways. Two persons became active in the anti-racism movement and are now participating in actions against their former comrades. One respondent has taken up the animal rights cause, and one is active in a religious group.

'I'm now 23. I no longer need a niche so I can belong somewhere. I don't need that. I am who I am. I'm somewhat involved in animal activism. I vote for the Socialist Party or the Animal Rights Party. And that's it. If the anti-racism movement were to organise a good demonstration or hold a good action, I'd like to help.'

Two persons said they'd very much like to do something to help keep young people from making the same mistakes they had made. Now they're looking for a way to turn their ideas into action.

After disengaging from the extreme right, the respondents had different ways of dealing with the friendships they had made within the movement. Most respondents still meet people who were involved with them. In most cases – but not all – the friends pulled out as well.

'It was a little hard for me, the movement. People there know I've officially quit, but there are still a couple of people who I get along with very well. I still want to keep up those friendships. I hope they're really genuine friends, and that they weren't friends with me just because they had the same political ideas I had.'

The outer signifiers of a right-wing extremist identity

During their radical period, many of our respondents adapted their appearance in accordance with a particular clothing style as a way of marking their identity. For some of the respondents this process began earlier on because they had previously been part of a youth culture:

'They were already used to this kind of stuff at my school – long hair and shirts with really bloody images on them – so they didn't pay too much attention [to the fact that he was coming to school in right-wing extremist attire, ed.]. At first I wore shirts with pagan symbols or images of Norse gods. It didn't really stand out.'

Once they were part of a right-wing extremist group, some of our respondents assumed a skinhead look: shaved head, flight jacket emblazoned with right-wing extremist symbols and heavy combat boots. This wasn't true for everyone, however. Some respondents would have nothing to do with such ostentation:

'The eighteen- or nineteen-year-old skinheads with flight jackets and shaved heads. I thought it looked ridiculous. When other people see you they right away think, "Oh, one of those Nazis". And I didn't want that because that's not the way I saw myself. [...] If you want to go around in some big, provocative outfit, that's your business, but I didn't want to have anything to do with it.'

An extreme right-wing appearance during the radical period not only fuels stigmatisation but it also tends to create problems in everyday life:

'White shoelaces, T-shirts, that sort of thing – I soon got rid of them. After a while they became a normal way of dressing, but all it did was cause problems. Bouncers refused to let you in because of the dress codes; when you went to demonstrations in Germany you were constantly being frisked all along the way. [...] Otherwise [when you wore normal clothes, ed.] you didn't get into the newspapers. At demonstrations they only took pictures of the most extreme characters. I looked normal, so I didn't get in the papers.'

If extreme right-wing clothing was a problem during the active right-wing extremist period, it was felt to be even more of a problem during the period of doubt and deradicalisation:

'My first step was my clothes: I started dressing normally because I didn't want to be seen that way anymore, because it actually embarrassed me.'

Casting aside the right-wing extremist appearance is therefore a public statement, comparable to putting on the same clothing at an earlier stage:

'I'll never wear those old clothes again!'

Another mark of right-wing extremist identity is the tattoo. The whole tattoo question is a special point of focus in the process of deradicalisation. A great many of our respondents had themselves tattooed during their right-wing extremist period, often with right-wing extremist symbols. These include controversial Nazi symbols such as the swastika, the SS skull, runes or Nazi slogans. Often the tattoos were quite large and, as one youth worker put it, 'You don't want to know where they're located'. A few respondents realised, even during that period, that having these kinds of tattoos could have unpleasant consequences:

'I do have tattoos, but not with right-wing extremist symbols. I was thinking about the future when I had them done.'

Often the tattoos are done by amateurs from the right-wing extremist milieu. Professional tattoo artists usually steer clear of Nazi symbols. In addition, the respondents were often minors when they were tattooed, and there are conditions attached to the tattooing of minors. Those who leave the right-wing extremist milieu deal with their tattoos in different ways. Those with the most blatant tattoos such as swastikas, large Celtic crosses or SS skulls wanted to have something done with them. A few had them covered with another tattoo. But in one case the tattoo was so big that laser treatment was the only option. A few left their tattoos alone because, as they reasoned, they're part of your own history.

In many cases old friends came back into the picture. Sometimes a whole new circle of friends was built up.

'I have a couple of friends from before. I saw them earlier a few times, but the friendship had cooled somewhat. Two of them looked me up in jail, and I still hang out with them.'

One person felt compelled to break off completely with all the people from the right-wing extremist circuit. Some were labelled traitors by those who stayed behind and were even threatened.

'In the beginning I felt threatened. Suddenly there's this tattooed guy standing at your door. In the beginning it was really frightening.'

Most respondents have found their social niche, have made new friends and are busy with work or school. They've been re-absorbed into society. When they look back on their radical past, most respondents are overcome by feelings of shame and incomprehension. In the end they themselves don't understand how anyone could have had such radical ideas and engage in such violent activities.

'I'm enormously ashamed of what I did, and I don't understand why I did it. I just don't understand what I was up to. [...] Because if you had put a mirror of the future in front of me back then and said: look, this is what you've done over the past five years. [...] Who would ever believe it?'

6.4 In conclusion

There are a wide range of factors at work that influence the process of ultimately breaking with the right-wing extremist milieu. Various aspects of the movement can contribute to this: doubt about practices within the organisation, aspects of social binding or the use of violence. Doubts about the ideology can also arise. In addition to these factors having to do with the extreme right, there are also considerations of a more personal nature that can be influential. These include the attraction of a normal existence, the threat of repression in the form of possible arrests or imprisonment, or the threat of stigmatisation, especially in connection with the publication of personal information on the internet.

In most cases, these factors do not lead to a complete break with both the right-wing extremist milieu and the ideology all at once. As our respondents demonstrated, there are several phases involved. As a result of the aforementioned factors, a period of *doubt* first occurred with regard to the practice or the ideas within the right-wing extremist milieu. Finally, this doubt assumed such forms that the decision was made to *break* with the movement. In a number of cases, the break with the ideology occurred first but not

the break with the group. In other cases, the respondents broke with the organisation but were not yet able to take immediate distance from the ideas. In the last phase, following a complete break, *normalisation* takes place in terms of the person's relationship with his community and social environment.

These phases become more three-dimensional when we look at the factors that influenced them and the course they took. This was illustrated in the previous sections. But there are two points that deserve extra attention here.

In the decision to leave the right-wing extremist milieu, the role of others is crucial. Many respondents said they had been unable to break with the extreme right because of the lack of friends outside the movement. This factor caused them to stay longer than they had wanted to. Interestingly enough, none of our respondents was capable of making the break without an alternative social environment.

Something should also be said about the listing of the various processes involved in breaking with the extreme right. In the literature, the process of deradicalisation is often subdivided into two processes. Taking distance from an extremist ideology is called 'deradicalisation' and leaving an extremist milieu is called 'disengagement'. This is an important distinction but it is not exhaustive. As we have seen, there are also various hybrid forms. Take, for example, someone who has broken with the ideology but is still active in a right-wing extremist group. This person should be called 'deradicalised', but such an interpretation is hardly satisfactory.

Women in the extreme right

Among our respondents there were a few women. We did not ask them any specific questions about the gender aspects of life in the extreme right, but it did come up regularly during the interviews.

The extreme right is usually seen as a man's world in which a small minority of women are involved as girlfriends or partners. This corresponds with the subordinate role of women in right-wing extremist ideology: mother, housekeeper and subservient to men. The picture we're seeing right now, however, is more diverse. In some areas of the extreme right, women still play a subordinate role and are judged primarily in terms of their appearance. In other groups, however, women make an active contribution.

This development has been noticed for quite some time in the extreme right in Germany. In the literature, women in the German extreme right are divided according to two general role patterns.⁶⁷

On the one hand, there are women who demand an independent, active role for themselves as fellow activists. On the other hand, there are women who correspond to the classical model of women in the extreme right: women who are revered and protected by men and who satisfy the 'Aryan ideal'. One respondent had this to say about her experience in Germany:

⁶⁷ S. Grunenberg, 'Einbeziehung von Mädchen und Frauen in Aussteigerprogramme – Erfahrungen aus drei europäischen Ländern', in: *Betrifft Mädchen*, 22 (2009) 1, pp. 19-23.

'You really are put on a pedestal, also as a women. [...] They always saw me as an Aryan superwoman.'

The same dichotomy also seems to apply to the current generation of right-wing extremist activists in the Netherlands. In part of the scene, especially within Blood & Honour circles, few women play an active role. Insofar as they are active, they are mainly seen from a traditional right-wing extremist perspective. They are judged primarily in terms of their appearance and in relation to a male Blood & Honour partner.

'I felt rather inferior there. You're often belittled just for being a woman. It was a sexist climate.'

In a group like the NSA, however, things are different. The NSA is inspired by the German Autonomous Nationalists who have a more emancipatory perspective. Women enjoy full participation. In the Dutch setting, however, women are still a minority. The leadership of the NSA is solely in the hands of men, although women do manage to hold their own without being involved in a relationship. The end of a relationship with a fellow activist by no means implies that a woman is about to leave.

'They're not sexist within the group [=NSA, ed.]. It's very different at Blood & Honour. They protect the women at demonstrations, while we all wanted to move forward to join in the attack. That's why women at the NSA are active, too.'

In drawing this distinction, however, it should be noted that the role of girlfriend or partner is less passive than it may seem at first. Our research shows that women sometimes play an important role – often even a crucial one – in the process of disengagement. Three different scenarios demonstrate this.

The relationship forms within a right-wing extremist group. Time passes, and the woman expresses the desire to leave the scene. The man follows her example, usually after considerable discussion. This happened in three cases within our study. In a second scenario, the man enters into a relationship with someone outside the extreme right-wing circuit. The new attachment is aware of his right-wing extremist activities and accepts his involvement. The woman is an important factor in the deradicalisation process, but not to the same extent as in the first scenario. These women function more as safety nets in the new social environment. They prevent the man from becoming socially isolated after his disengagement, making it easier for him to leave.

In a third scenario, a relationship within the circuit founders. The end of a relationship is a decisive factor in the decision to separate from the extreme right milieu. This occurred in the case of four respondents.

So on closer inspection, many different aspects can be identified in the role of women in the extreme right, aspects that also have an effect on possible interventions. In Germany, Elverich and Köttig observe that whenever the extreme right is looked at with prejudiced eyes with regard to male/female relationships, there is a risk that women will be ignored or their contribution observed far too late.⁶⁸ This makes it possible for women to continue undisturbed in the radicalisation process longer than their male colleagues. It also makes external intervention more difficult. This observation has a great deal in common with comparable observations about Islamist women in the Netherlands. In their journalistic study of women and the Hofstad Group, Kranenberg and Groen note that women are wrongfully overlooked because of the existing prejudices regarding their role among intelligence services and judicial investigators.⁶⁹ In closing, it is our finding that the role of women in the extreme right is susceptible to change and is becoming more and more diverse. The same is true of women's role as partner.

⁶⁸ G. Elverich, M. Köttig, 'Theoretische und praktische Ansatzpunkte für einen geschlechtsbewussten Umgang mit Rechtsextremismus in Schule und Jugendarbeit', in: *bag Mädchenpolitik*, (2007) 7, pp. 10-26.

⁶⁹ J. Groen & A. Kranenberg, *Strijders van Allah: radicale moslima's en het Hofstadnetwerk*, Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 2006.

Chapter 7 Interventions

In this chapter we will talk about those who, according to the respondents' accounts, attempted to interrupt their process of radicalisation and involvement in the right-wing extremist movement and to bring it to a halt. What do the twelve interviewees think about the prospects of such attempts? We will also make our own recommendations on possible interventions. In the Monitor report *Deradicalisation in Practice* we demonstrated the need for stakeholders to cooperate at the local level, and we discussed how such cooperation functions, on the basis of experiences with a deradicalisation project for newcomers and followers in a right-wing extremist group.⁷⁰ We also drew attention to the professionalism required of the people who make contact with the target group and carry out the interventions. The primary responsibility and ensuing central role of the local authorities was discussed as well. This role is especially important in the early phase of group radicalisation so that timely intervention can be undertaken. We continue along these lines on the basis of the present research and pinpoint the potential role of various stakeholders.

7.1 Respondents' general remarks

Many interviewees look back at their right-wing extremist period with a certain regret. The question is whether someone should have held them back, and if so, who would that have been? The answers to this questions give us a varied picture. Some of our respondents answered the question with an unqualified 'no'. Nothing or no one could have held them back. They wanted to go their own way, they were stubborn and they 'knew what they were doing'. Most of them, however, when asked whether someone should have guarded them from this experience, answered in the affirmative. Intervening in the early phase in particular, when the radicalisation had not developed very far, has the greatest chance of being successful. Here the findings are consistent with the results of the study of deradicalisation in Winschoten. But that does not mean that stepping in at a later stage is pointless. Some respondents emphasise that this can be just as effective. A good example of this is a respondent who came in contact by e-mail with someone who is very much opposed to racism and fascism, and allowed himself to be persuaded by this person over time. Others point out that once someone joins the hard core he usually becomes insensitive to the arguments of outsiders. Those who 'speak the language', however, and 'know the territory' – in other words hands-on experts – are expected to be the most helpful.

Parents do not score high in interventions, but they are allotted a role by some. The same applies to teachers. But no matter who carries out the intervention, one thing is clear: the youngsters are in need of in-depth discussions. There is a great deal of talking to be done, and the radical young person should be firmly alerted to the experiences of others who took the same path. He should be forced to face the facts when it comes to where right-wing extremist involvement can lead: 'just keep on pounding into his head all the things that might happen, and use plenty of examples.' 'Know what you're getting into' is one warning that the respondents were told in a variety of ways. It should be emphasised that a relationship of trust is an essential condition. It should not be

⁷⁰ F. Demant, W. Wagenaar, J. van Donselaar, *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme: Deradicaliseren in de praktijk*.

paternalistic. The conversational partner should try to gain insight into the person's motives and background, and to muster up some sympathy.

'A few people did that [start a discussion] and I would get totally defensive. I was firmly convinced that I was right. Maybe they should have been more flexible, first listening to what I had to say and why I thought that way. Ninety percent are having an identity crisis. *That* is the reason why they're joining. If you just focus on that...'

If doubts arise, the situation changes. Interventions are more likely to succeed as substantial doubt increases, but obstacles occur that make it more difficult to exit. The absence of an alternative circle of friends is such an obstacle. Help from people on the outside has been shown to work in overcoming such obstacles. Carrying out these interventions in an organised fashion does involve certain problems. It's difficult to understand exactly what's going on during a phase of doubt, which complicates the timing of the intervention. Social contacts are also difficult to organise externally. One of the young people accepted some of the responsibility himself. He thought that he 'should have raised the alarm in time – with parents, with other friends'. Now he serves as a hands-on expert and has managed to talk several young people into breaking away from the radical path. He was asked by a youth centre to tell his story, and to pitch it in particular to a few 14- and 15-year-olds who were bent on getting mixed up in right-wing extremist circuits. His story had an enormous impact on the group. This intervention was successful because it put a stop to the radicalisation process of the young people concerned.

7.2. General policy interventions

Structured, policy-based interventions at the local level directed at right-wing-extremist radicals have been rare in the Netherlands in recent years. We know of only two examples. The first was the previously mentioned deradicalisation project in Winschoten, where an attempt was made to encourage newcomers and followers of a right-wing extremist group to choose another path. The intervention was a success. In most cases it was a relatively simple matter of engaging in one or more probing conversations. The second case had to do with a stalking project in Zoetermeer, the aim of which was to curb the anti-social behaviour of a right-wing extremist group by keeping a close eye on them.⁷¹ The police accosted the group's members repeatedly and took immediate action whenever they had the impression that the group were preparing to demonstrate in public or disrupt the public order. At the same time, attempts were made to approach young people who had had contact with the right-wing extremist group and to put them in touch with the department of youth work and the activities that were being organised there. The intention was to isolate the right-wing extremist group. This approach had limited success. The isolation was moderately successful, but the group as such simply moved. This did nothing to eliminate the problems, which became a cause of disturbance for other police districts.⁷² Both projects seem to have had roughly the same effect in the end: followers and young people who felt attracted to the group were alienated from the hard core, and the hard core itself sought refuge in another neighbourhood. In addition to projects aimed specifically at group, standard institutions

⁷¹ 'Politie "stalkt" extreem-rechts Zoetermeer uit', *Brabants Dagblad*, 15 August 2007.

⁷² W. Wagenaar & J. van Donselaar, 'Extreemrechtse formaties', in: J. van Donselaar & P.R. Rodrigues (eds.), *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme: achtste rapportage*.

aimed at individuals can also play a role. We're speaking here of the role of schools, parents, social services, youth work, police and the judicial authorities.

Some former extremists had become radicalized after a violent confrontation with immigrant young people. In these cases we see that polarisation between groups of young people of different ethnic backgrounds contributes to radicalisation. In general (and this is also the impression from the literature), polarisation and radicalisation are processes that tend to reinforce each other, especially where threats of terrorism put a strain on latent social tensions.⁷³

So the prevention of radicalisation is benefitted by measures that are aimed at blocking polarisation between population groups and easing social tensions. To discuss such measures and methods here is beyond the scope of this study and would exceed its aims.

7.3 Schools

Schools in the Netherlands are reporting disruptive behaviour by right-wing extremist pupils.⁷⁴ We found it striking that the schools our respondents attended seemed to have reacted in only a few cases, at least according to our interview data. We did not talk to the schools themselves. Yet involvement in the extreme right did negatively influence the young persons' performance at school.

'I just couldn't do my schoolwork because of the way I was living. [...] I started thinking about that. I just want to finish school and have something of a normal job.'

One student said there was no one stopping him. Even at school, no one suspected what was going on. Another did have problems at school.

'I got into trouble with my father as well as at school (suspensions and things like that) because of my ideas, but that wasn't what gave me second thoughts. If I really believe in something or I want to devote myself to something, I don't let other people's opinions hold me back, so that didn't play any role in my decision to leave. [...] They did get angry, and they absolutely didn't agree with me, but I think they didn't know how to react, they just didn't have any idea how to get me to stop.'

One respondent ended up in youth care and social services thanks to his school, and there he received psychological help that gave him the support he needed in his decision to exit the movement. Another, looking back on his experiences, sees the school as a possible interventionist, especially in situations in which other institutions were absent.

'[...] Somebody else could do it, too. An agency or something. But anyhow, in the beginning you don't think that's really necessary. In the beginning it's just a matter of keeping an eye on what the person is up to. So no peeking at MSN conversations or asking where he's going. Just see how he thinks about life. And then ask: how you think about this and that? Social studies teachers, in any case. I think they're trained, too, in spotting these kinds of things. I sure would keep my eyes open.'

⁷³ H. Moors et al., *Polarisatie en radicalisering in Nederland: een verkenning van de stand van zaken in 2009*

⁷⁴ Inspectorate of Education, *De staat van het onderwijs. Onderwijsverslag 2007/2008*. The Hague: Inspectorate of Education, 2009, pp. 290-293.

7.4 Parents

In general, the people we spoke to did not have very close contact with their parents. The parents were often barely aware of the actual activities of their children. This was usually because the children consciously managed to screen themselves off, and with apparent skill. The parents who *were* aware struck as rather powerless – at least that was our impression – or they seemed to have a serious lack of control.

'But now that I'm older, I think they were, like, "As long as they don't step over the line too far we'll just let them go and we'll try to keep an eye on what they're up to." The effect was that we thought we could get away with anything and that we could do whatever we wanted. They just turned a blind eye anyway. It wasn't an unpleasant time, though. We kept moving the borders or twisting them in such a way that I thought we could just barely get away with it. [...] Maybe this was the basis for getting rid of the limits altogether, which is almost what happened in the end, and then when your family and friends and acquaintances tell you to stop before it's too late, it just doesn't have any impact anymore. I would just say, "What's the big deal?"'

The parents of one of the respondents were mainly worried about what the outside world would think.

'They had no control over me. There was a lot they didn't know. They saw me as a radical Verdonk [former Minister of Integration and founder of the right-wing conservative political party Proud of the Netherlands ed.]. They did have problems when I hung a flag with a swastika in my window. But that was aimed more at the neighbourhood, since everyone knows you. But most people weren't bothered by us. My parents were mainly upset by what the outside world thought. Otherwise they really didn't get it.'

Parents who did try to hold their children back often ran up against adolescent behaviour and the evasion of their prohibitions. Sometimes the youngsters actually felt confirmed in their opinions by their parents' reactions.

'And as soon as I started talking about it with my mother [Nazism and anti-Semitism, ed.] we would have terrible fights. My father was the peace-and-love one, kind of "okay, okay, everybody settle down". But at a certain point my mother got very passionate about it, and I got very passionate about it, too. Then she said to me, get out of here. I don't want to see you anymore. And then ..., because your parents still mean a lot to you, and your mother is throwing you out on the street, and all because of this discussion. Then I thought: there, see that? I was just trying to talk about it and my mother throws me out on the street, you know? You're not even allowed to talk about it...'

In a few cases, however, when the parents let their grief show, it worked as a positive stimulus for provoking their children to leave the movement. Conversely, we also saw situations in which emotional reactions by the parents, certainly when they took the form of fights, strengthened the people's motivation to commit themselves to the extreme right. We met a great deal of ambivalence among the respondents when it came to the role of parents in combating right-wing extremist radicalisation. In the discussions, most of the respondents regularly insisted that their parents did not have very much influence in opposing the radicalisation of their offspring, but this was not true of everyone. Unambiguous 'no' or 'yes' answers alternated with ambivalent statements that expressed something of a double perspective: the perspective of the person undergoing radicalisation who wants to 'work it out for himself', and the perspective of the same person a few years later who is looking back on the effects and consequences of his actions with a certain amount of regret and is sorry that no one interfered.

'Other people certainly can do something. They can start you thinking: is this really what you want? You can't grab someone with both hands and say: get out! Because that just makes the person feel alone... Yes, that's what you feel, that they just want to get rid of you, and that doesn't work. I think parents have to step in early. You shouldn't be offended if people keep talking about niggers and stuff at home, and start in ..., but if people keep wanting to discuss these things after watching the news, like I did, and keep wanting to raise these kinds of topics, then I would advise those parents: pay attention to what's on his mind.'

Can parents play a particular role, or should they stand by and watch these developments, powerless to do anything? First of all, it's important that parents try to keep informed of their children's comings and goings, that they follow their development, that they enter into discussions with them and try to stay connected. When parents see their children undergoing risky developments, they may consider taking a variety of steps. Either they can intervene themselves or call on the help of 'significant others' from the person's environment. A mixture of responses is also possible, of course.

Because adolescents tend to turn away from their parents at this phase, it's a good idea to look for other important people in the young person's environment, people who could be influential in stopping or reversing the radicalisation process. Our findings show that the interventions of parents carry the risk of failure. On the other hand, it's not impossible that parents could make a constructive contribution, especially in the doubting period. One idea worth considering is the establishment of a support centre where parents whose children are undergoing radicalisation could meet and support each other. Such centres already exist in Germany and Scandinavian countries, where parents can bring their questions and receive advice and guidance. And this brings us to the subject of social services.

7.5 Social services

As we noted earlier, only one respondent received psychological help from youth care workers and social workers, giving him the support he needed to leave the movement. This is in sharp contrast to the fact that several interviewees, when looking back on themselves during the radical period, pointed out the need for some form of social service assistance.

'[...] If I had just had some good help at some point, this never would have happened. Then maybe I would have become a world swimming champion. Or if I had posted on the internet forum of the Greens. [...] Yes, now I can come right out and say that at that moment I was struggling with bottled-up rage that I vented in this way. If I had dealt with it in another way, or learned to deal with it, if I had been able to talk about it or whatever, then it would have been completely different.'

The interviews clearly reveal how much former radicals often continue to wrestle with their experience long after it's over, and to struggle to get their regular lives back on the rails. They would certainly benefit by some form of coaching by appropriate experts. As we noted earlier, several respondents believe that the extreme right is a 'reservoir of psychologically disturbed individuals'. This, too, points to the need for help from the social services. Social services can play a significant role in bringing the deradicalisation process to an end, in making sure a relapse does not occur and in supervising any adjustment processes that may take place. Then the person can assign his experience a

meaningful place in his life history and be smoothly re-integrated into regular society. Such a form of coaching can be provided by various chain partners, depending on the specific situation and context: the school, youth care, social work or youth workers. Other possibilities might include a contact service for fellow deradicalised young people and efforts by former radicals to prevent further radicalisation.

7.6 Youth work

We found a limited number of pull factors in the radicalisation process. The image of the extreme right as a place of excitement and adventure was especially appealing. Almost all the respondents also reported prejudices that were not very well articulated and feelings of hatred towards foreigners. But we also saw that quite a few of the respondents thought they might just as well have chosen the 'extreme left', 'left' or a 'sports club' or something similar. Apparently the specific attraction of the extreme right was limited, and chance factors played a role as well: the extreme right just happened to cross paths with them. As far as prevention is concerned, this means that it is essential that there are enough structures to which young people can have recourse. That would reduce the 'necessity' of joining the extreme right, or at least slow it down, because there would be sufficient alternatives on hand to choose from. It is important that there be other places within the youth culture for young people to make social connections and develop friendships. Training and educating youth workers in dealing with radicalisation is important. Besides parents and teachers, they can also play a role in the prevention and combating of radicalisation.

7.7 Police and the judicial authorities

The role of the police and the judicial authorities in carrying out interventions is two-sided. One is repression and the other is extending help. Repressive interventions mainly have to do with the application of criminal law, but they can also include actions taken to maintain public order in which strategies for dealing with violations of public order are applied. Help interventions include corrective discussions with police officers responsible for juveniles and practical help with the disengagement process, during the period of detention if necessary. Many of our respondents had had experiences of repression. Seven of them had been arrested at least once, while most of the others had witnessed repressive police action firsthand. In the wake of these arrests, six of the respondents were convicted by the courts, three of whom received nonsuspended prison sentences. As we mentioned earlier in section 6.2.3, the impact of these arrests and penalties varied. Most respondents saw the police action as a confirmation of the hostile relationship between their own group and the state, which they labelled 'Jewish'. There was nothing about these experiences that taught them a lesson and therefore hastened the deradicalisation process. In a couple of cases the arrest did trigger a shock effect, which led directly to a break with the right-wing extremist group. In one case a respondent escaped a prison sentence by breaking away from the right-wing extremist circuit for other reasons before the case went to court. The case had been long in coming. In stating the grounds for the judgement, the judge told him that by taking this step he had been spared a nonsuspended prison sentence.

Two of our respondents had been helped by the police. In one case, the policeman in charge was an officer responsible for juveniles who had been keeping a close eye on a

group of right-wing extremists. He tried to induce the young people to make different choices by means of motivational talks. After the respondent had left the right-wing extremist circuit, the police officer made a point of giving him frequent pats on the back for leaving the movement and staying out of trouble. In the second case, a respondent whose radical period was behind him was questioned about criminal cases that had taken place much earlier. One of the police officers involved in the questioning offered to help him establish contacts in order to undo the negative consequences of his radical past. This involved things like finding a job.

7.8 In conclusion

The results of this study confirm the conclusion that also emerged from the deradicalisation project in Winschoten as presented in the 2009 Racism & Extremism Monitor: intervening in processes of radicalisation is most successful in the early phase. As the present study makes clear, an alternative social framework must exist if an exit is to take place. This is an important finding in our investigation. The person's own social environment consisting of old friends, immediate and extended family and representatives of institutions with which the person is connected, such as school, can play a special role. They can be regarded as informal intervention frameworks. Sometimes it is advisable that these informal intervention frameworks be given the support of professionals, which calls for the establishment of a special institution that provides such support. In the Netherlands there are no specific services for supporting people who have disengaged from the right-wing extremist milieu. The need for this service varies, as does the chance of finding it within regular institutional frameworks. A decentralised approach at places where there is evidence of problems in this area is preferable. Besides this, regular frameworks should be properly equipped to provide support and help to people – especially young people and young adults – who are involved in the often difficult process of exiting a right-wing extremist organisation. Disengagers from the extreme right receive little or no support during the exit process, not even if the situation lends itself particularly well to such assistance, as in the case of prison. Interventions are most likely to succeed if they are carried out when the person is still in an early phase of the radicalisation process, or when he is beginning to have misgivings about involvement in the movement. Hands-on experts can play an important role here.

Chapter 8 Conclusions, reflections and recommendations

This research report is based on conversations with twelve former extremists, most of them members of the hard core. In this final chapter we will go over the main findings concerning the processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation as experienced by young right-wing extremist activists at the present time. These findings are grouped around the research questions having to do with the risk factors of radicalisation in the preliminary phase, the factors that play a role in joining right-wing extremist movements, the factors that play a role in exiting such movements and the phases in which these processes occur. The relationship between the processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation will also be discussed.

8.1 Risk factors in the preliminary phase

In the phase preceding radicalisation, political affinity plays a negligible role. Bias against ethnic minorities, on the other hand, is quite common. Related to this is the impact of negative experiences with immigrant young people. These experiences are subsequently generalised to ethnic minorities in general, which fuels the development of prejudice. A lack of friendships and a need for social belonging are general hallmarks. Sometimes there are problematic family situations or problems at school. These are risk factors for problem behaviour in general, and they also apply to right-wing extremist radicalisation. A last important factor is identification with certain youth cultures. In the preliminary phase, the gabber, Lonsdale or hard-core scene and the NSBM style of music are typical examples of informal, unbounded groups that have functioned over the past decade as easy stepping stones or 'gateways' to more radical, bounded groups. These groups are often national socialist, right-wing extremist organisations. The way in which the transition is made varies, however. Sometimes it happens by way of recruitment, sometimes by becoming acquainted with right-wing extremist points of view in a more informal way or by gradually becoming accustomed to a radical message that only later is activated, as it were. Not uncommonly, this process is facilitated by the use of the internet, which forms a low-threshold link in admission to the extreme right. The threshold to joining the extreme right is lowered by this kind of preliminary phase. Those who do not undergo a preliminary phase within a youth culture enter the extreme right through recruitment or the internet.

Admission to the extreme right seems to be undergoing change. In the past, aspirant extremists would join a clearly delineated political party. Today, right-wing extremist radicalisation is chiefly a process in which persons from certain informal scenes or subcultures roll on to more radical groups. Such groups may be more clearly bounded, but they do not always have strict membership criteria. Usually, membership in these groups is conducted in phases, mainly for strategic reasons. This involves a series of 'peels' – levels of participation – and new members gradually make their way to the hard core after proving themselves worthy.

8.2 Entry factors

What motivates young people to join right-wing extremist groups in the margins of society?

Almost all young people who end up in right-wing extremist movements come in contact with the extreme right in their search for social belonging in the form of friendships and collaboration, and through a related need for social protection. They're looking for their own style and for a way to satisfy the need for excitement, violence and adventure. Coupled with this is a social component: a feeling of unrest that mainly has to do with interethnic relations, and a need to rebel, to take action and to discuss social problems. The adolescent experiences a vague need for social meaning and sees it expressed in the goals of the extreme right, which are often held up as higher ideals. Most aspirant members feel a vague ideological identification when they first become acquainted with the extreme right. They often have prejudices, sometimes prompted by their own negative experiences with ethnic minority youth. The extreme right offers an interpretive framework for these experiences and prejudices that strongly appeals to the experienced group threat of 'them' and 'us'. There is also a visible emotional component. Frustrations and feelings of hatred, which are sometimes quite vague and sometimes connected with negative experiences in social situations, such as school (as well as in the private sphere at home), search for an outlet and find it. For some there are also personal advantages. Finding protection in the safety of a group, attaining a higher social status and acquiring a new relationship are personal advantages that play a certain role as well.

The experience of unjust treatment by the government and society is a factor which, as we saw, was identified in another study of radicalisation, especially with regard to radicalised Islamists, but we did not find it in our investigations. We did, however, run into a general negative attitude towards the government and society. There sometimes was evidence of experiences of unjust treatment from peers, some of them from ethnic minority backgrounds. The people involved have little trust in the police to protect them from such threats.

To summarise, we see five categories of factors that cause young people to join the extreme right.

First, we encounter microfactors that are prompted by *social circumstances*: the person is searching for friends – and sometimes protection – in his pursuit of a particular identity and lifestyle. These factors have a stimulating influence: in the preliminary phase, the respondents look to the extreme right to compensate for a deficiency in these areas.

Other microfactors that also serve a stimulating function occur at the *personal level*. These have to do with a need to rebel against society, based on frustrations and feelings of hatred. Along with the desire for excitement and adventure, these factors are strongly connected to the developmental phase of adolescence.

Then there are limited microfactors that have a stimulating effect on organisational formation within the extreme right. They are rooted in *social circumstances*, such as certain shocking event. The person is outraged and wants to do something about it. The last two categories are factors *related to the group* and are located within the right-wing extremist movement itself. These factors exert a powerful attraction. They concern the appealing image of the extreme right as a place of excitement, provocation and violence, and the extreme right as a place of ideological identification.

8.3 Exit factors

Young people are active in the movement for shorter or longer periods, and during that time they fulfil various functions roles as ideologues, organisers, implementers and followers. Some organise a group, arrange meetings and initiate actions. Others are more managerial and inspirational when it comes to ideology. They formulate points of view, educate members in right-wing extremist doctrine and dominate formally or informally organised debates and discussion sessions. Yet another group, the implementers, take part in secret or open actions and activities. But at a certain point they decide to leave the movement. What prompts them to take such a step? *Ideological factors* can play an important role in the deradicalisation process of persons from the right-wing extremist hard core, but not in every case. When ideological factors do play a role, it's primarily because of a changed view of the perceived threats to the group or a change in the group's ideals. The ideology is not consistent with the person's own perception. He may become acquainted with 'good foreigners', or he may realise that the racist interpretative frameworks do not correspond to reality. The person discovers, for example, that the group's most important norms and values are being violated, or that the ideas being preached do not correspond to his own ideas. Disappointment in the extreme right as a trustworthy *social environment* also plays a role. Little or nothing is being done to satisfy the need for social belonging. The friends that the young person thought he had found when he entered the group are not genuine, loyal friends. The disappointment and anger over the untrustworthiness of the movement and the people active in it play a role in other ways as well.

An obvious factor that stimulates people to leave the movement is the need for a more conventional, regular, socially integrated existence with the person's partner. The person begins to attach more value to social mobility, education, work and perspectives for further development. He feels less inclined to look for excitement and the kick of 'doing what you're not supposed to do', and this, in connection with the adolescent psycho-social maturation process, also plays a role in deradicalisation. It coincides with *personal growth*.

Violence committed within the person's own organisation does not play a role in the deradicalisation process. The widespread acceptance of the use of violence for a variety of ends does not constitute a motive for those wanting to leave the movement. Nor does violence carried out by other actors play a significant role in the deradicalisation process.

8.4 Phases

Both the radicalisation and the deradicalisation process are made up of a series of phases. In the previous chapters we looked at these phases separately and in detail. Here we will describe them consecutively and in relation to each other.

In the various phases of the radicalisation process there are many different factors that play a decisive role. The phases do not always develop in a linear fashion. Perceived barriers can slow down the radicalisation process, set it back or bring it to a halt. The process does not always proceed at the same tempo in every case. It can be visualised as a series of steps, although the transitions are more fluid than the metaphor of steps would suggest.

Summed up, we can distinguish the following phases, all of which are preceded by a preliminary phase.

The first phase is the phase of getting acquainted and joining up. The person comes with several others and gets to know the group and the people involved. The second phase is the phase of following and developing friendships. In these first two phases, the emphasis is on social aspects: making friends and developing social connections. The third phase is one of increasing identification with the movement and ideological development. Added to the racism that the young person already feels towards ethnic minorities is another element: anti-Semitism now begins to play a role. In a fourth and last phase, hardening takes place. The use of violence increases, and the person shuts himself off from external influences, ideas and points of view that contradict the ideology. The various phases are characterised by their most obvious central aspect. This does not mean that characteristics from an earlier phase no longer play a role, but that they have become less important. In the new phase they have relinquished their dominant position to another characteristic. Conversely, characteristics from later phases also occur in earlier phases, but they are not yet fully developed and are less visible. This means that certain motives are more dominant in earlier phases, and others in later phases. Thus we found that in the beginning, when the person is interested in joining the group, the need for belonging and friendship is of great importance and the group threat of 'them' against 'us' also plays a role. In later phases, when the person is already active in the organisation, he identifies more and more with the movement and the accent shifts to ideological development. He becomes familiar with an anti-Semitic discourse and learns how to use it. Generally speaking, ideological considerations play a greater role in this phase. In the last phase he becomes hardened. The use of violence increases and the person shuts himself off from external influences, ideas and points of view that contradict the prevailing ideology. The violence factor comes to occupy a central position. Throughout all the phases of radicalisation, motives linked to the adolescent-to-adult phase of development, such as the search for excitement and adventure, play a role. Violence, the most pronounced element of this search, is a dominant factor in the last phase.

Violence is a theme that has many different facets with regard to radicalisation. A distinction can be made between internal and external violence, for example, and between various actors who alternate as perpetrator and target. Experiences with violence or abuse by ethnic minority young people tend to influence radicalisation, making a person susceptible to the interpretive frameworks that the extreme right has to offer. Violence plays a role in the early phase of radicalisation in the sense that young people undergoing radicalisation are attracted by the 'kick' that comes from fighting. In the middle phase, violence becomes standard practice. It is an increasingly used option for political action. In the last phase, violence becomes a standard action tool, an instrument to protect both the individual and the group, and a badge of high status. In many cases, young people anticipate violence by bringing weapons and protective clothing along to group actions but also by carrying weapons in daily life. It is striking that in radicalisation, this process usually follows a fairly fixed order.

Deradicalisation, like radicalisation, is a process with many phases in which a number of factors play a decisive role. It does not follow a linear pattern and it is not the same for all types of right-wing extremists. Unlike the radicalisation process, deradicalisation does not follow a sequence that applies in a broad sense to all respondents. We see that some begin to doubt the ideology, while others have misgivings about the right-wing extremist group in terms of its daily activities such as its methodology and the behaviour of its members. Some go on to take distance from the ideology but remain active in the organisation. There may be many different reasons for this. They want to remain loyal to

their friends and are still drawn by the element of excitement and violence, or they see no alternative outside the organisation. Finally, all of them reach the same point and break with the organisation. For those who have not yet taken distance from the ideology, a period of doubt takes place before they abandon the ideology as well. One important finding is that physical disengagement and cognitive-emotional deradicalisation do not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Both occur either separately or in combination.

This means that four variants emerge:

1. the person has taken leave of the ideology but remains connected to the movement;
2. the person has left the movement but not the ideology; this almost always occurs sooner or later;
3. the person has left both the movement and the ideology;
4. the person has taken leave of the ideology and is no longer actively taking part in all the political activities, demonstrations and actions, but he is still socially active in a group and may have the intention of pulling out at some later date; he keeps 'hanging around' with a group of radical friends or remains loyal to old radical friendships.

Often one question that is crucial to the deradicalisation process is whether there is any perspective of an alternative life outside the right-wing extremist milieu. Many disengagers go through a long period of serious doubt. They feel little or nothing for the organisation, but they simply can't see any way out. They no longer have any friends outside the movement. What they do have are a disrupted family relationship and lots of potential problems. Often they are not able to take a definitive step and leave the movement until they know that an alternative social environment exists for them. So different steps are taken in different ways on the basis of separate considerations and influences. But even more important: they are also taken at different moments, or sometimes even one without the other.

8.5 Correlation between radicalisation and deradicalisation

To what extent is the process of deradicalisation linked to the process of radicalisation? Do the same factors and motives play a role in both processes? The answer to these questions is important for understanding when to exert influence in a (de)radicalisation process and which stimuli are effective in this attempt. In the Monitor study of the deradicalisation pilot in Winschoten, we concluded that a practical approach aimed at conducting motivational talks and providing assistance in finding work, schooling and a place to live does have an effect on persons who are not yet deeply entrenched in the right-wing extremist milieu. Does this also apply to persons who already belong to the hard core?

On the basis of our study of the literature, we expected the processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation to be connected in some way but not to be mirror images of each other, and indeed that proved to be the case. A number of factors (but not all of them) occur in both processes but in different degrees of dominance, in varying relationships, along different lines of development and thus with different effects. Different factors occur in one process but not in another, in deradicalisation but not in radicalisation. Thus

we see, for example, that many elements from the person's particular phase of development play a role in both processes, with the need to identify with a social group playing a dominant role in radicalisation. A few years later, the need to appear as an autonomous individual will play a major role in deradicalisation. The group has become less important.

There are also factors that at first draw people in, only to push them away at a later phase. For the hard core of the extreme right we found that the formative aspects of social binding and identification later turned to disappointment and estrangement because of quarrels.

We saw that the need for friendship plays an important role in becoming active. A person may be searching for a group of friends or an alternative group of friends. Whatever the case, the friendship situation that existed before the person entered the group was somehow insufficient. Initially that need is met by the right-wing extremist group because the person has found 'real' friends there. In the process of leaving the group, the need for friendship works in different directions. On the one hand, the person may conclude that the friends in the right-wing extremist circuit are not real friends, or not good friends. These friendships exist only as long as there is agreement over political ideas. In addition, friendships tend to keep a person within the right-wing movement. A person may want to leave the right-wing extremist circuit, but the fact that his friends are still active there interferes with his determination to leave. The opposite sort of dynamic also occurs. For some people, the glue that bound them to the extreme right may be gone, but they are still unable to pull themselves away due to a lack of friendships in the world outside the right-wing extremist milieu. When a person begins to have doubts about his involvement, friends in the group can keep him from leaving, while disappointment in these friends can stimulate his departure. In that case, however, there must be new friends waiting outside the right-wing extremist group.

As for the 'ideology' factor, the picture is quite different. The pattern is the mirror opposite but the relative weight differs. In the radicalisation process, ideological identification is a minor pull factor, while in leaving the movement ideological doubt is a relatively heavy push factor. The moment at which the influence of the ideology factor is felt also different.

At first it has to do with a sense of general recognition upon entry. Xenophobic sentiments that the person himself feels are recognised in the right-wing extremist message. Only at a later stage, when the person has already been accepted into the movement, does ideological radicalisation occur. During disengagement the situation is more diffuse. Sometimes ideological considerations mark the beginning of a decision to leave a right-wing extremist group. Sometimes the ideology isn't abandoned until after the actual exit. In that case the person leaves the movement mainly for other reasons and remains loyal to the ideology for a while. In those cases, ideological doubt is not a stimulus for disengagement but is one of its consequences.

The factors having to do with the search for excitement and use of violence produce a picture that is just as diffuse. They are significant in the process of becoming active within the extreme right and also play a role in further radicalisation. Their role in disengagement, however, is practically non-existent. In a few cases, a person may disapprove of the use of violence by comrades and even condemn it, but it does not give rise to any serious doubt. It is not uncommon for the opposite to happen: the excitement and violence are reasons to keep hanging around, despite other factors that have caused misgivings with regard to right-wing extremist activism. Usually the person has renounced violence by this time.

Current societal events may play a role in the processes of radicalisation, but we did not encounter this in the stories about leaving the group. The fact that no relevant specific events took place during the period in which we conducted our research may have something to do with this, of course. In past decades, the events that affected radicalisation were mainly the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, and these were very exceptional occurrences.

8.6 Interventions

Intervening in processes of radicalisation is mainly successful in a preliminary and early phase. As the present study clearly shows, an alternative social framework must exist if an exit is to take place. This is an important finding. Informal intervention frameworks existing in the person's social environment can play a vital role here. Sometimes it is useful to bolster these informal intervention frameworks with the help of professionals. The need for this varies, as does the chance of finding such support within the bounds of conventional institutions. A decentralised approach in places where there is evidence of such problems is preferable as the intervention framework. Conventional institutions such as schools and departments of youth care and social work should also be equipped to offer support and help to young people, and young adults in particular, who find themselves in the often difficult process of leaving right-wing extremist organisations.

8.7 In conclusion

When we look over the results of this study, what stands out the most?

The first aspect that attracts our attention is the role of violence in the whole process of radicalisation and deradicalisation. Violence – interethnic violence in particular – is one of the reasons given for joining right-wing extremist groups. The experience of having been a victim of interethnic violence make a strikingly important contribution to the process of radicalisation. Violence also continues to be an influential factor that fuels further radicalisation throughout the entire process. Violence works as an attractive force because it is regarded as exciting and accords status. But the violence of opponents, such as left-wing activists and ethnic minority youths, also induces further radicalisation. It tends to break down inhibitions, so that right-wing extremists themselves use more and more violence, thereby raising the threat of a spiral of violence.

At least as striking as the role of violence in radicalisation is the *absence* of violence as a factor in the deradicalisation process. We encountered no cases in which violence in the person's own circle, or experiences of violence by others, significantly influenced the process of disengagement.

A second salient feature of this study is the possibility of intervention. People disengaging from the right-wing extremist milieu receive little or no support in the deradicalisation process, although they certainly do have need of it. Even in situations that lend themselves particularly well to such assistance, such as prison, no such support or help is being made available.

Interventions are most likely to succeed if they are carried out when the person is still in an early phase of the radicalisation process, or when he is beginning to have misgivings about involvement in the movement. An earlier study of a deradicalisation project for

right-wing extremist young people, carried out within the context of the Racism & Extremism Monitor, shows that it is in the early phase that good results can be achieved, and with relatively little effort. We have observed that these findings are confirmed in the present study.

But the results of this research also suggest that simple interventions can be successful during the doubting phase as well. In many cases, right-wing extremists are so isolated from the society around them that finding a way back to society is almost impossible. This often makes the termination of a right-wing extremist career unnecessarily difficult and prolongs the process of disengagement. Help from outsiders in such cases is altogether welcome. The experiences gained during the earlier deradicalisation project show that a *local approach* is preferable. The present study also clearly demonstrates that making use of former radicals with hands-on expertise can contribute positively to the success of interventions.

About the authors

Ineke van der Valk works as a senior researcher in the Research and Documentation Department of the Anne Frank House. She has a background in educational studies and ethnic studies, and obtained her doctorate on the interface between social sciences and discourse analysis with a comparative study of the perception of ethnic issues in the political discourse of the Netherlands and France, paying special attention to the extreme right: *Difference, Deviance, Threat* (Amsterdam, 2002). Before this she worked at the University of Amsterdam, where she participated in a joint research project with the University of Vienna on racism in European countries. Her earlier published works concern racism, public perception, human rights, citizenship and integration, the discourse on minorities, the history of immigrants and education and parenting.

Willem Wagenaar works at the Anne Frank House and is a researcher with the Racism & Extremism Monitor. He is specialised in right-wing extremism and racial violence, and in criminal law related to these issues. Wagenaar is the co-author of 'Het Lonsdalevraagstuk' in: Mieke Komen (ed.), *Straatkwaad en jeugdcriminaliteit: naar een algemene of een etnisch specifieke aanpak* (Apeldoorn/Antwerp, 2006) and *Deradicaliseren in de praktijk* (Amsterdam/Leiden, 2009).

Froukje Demant is a political scientist and a social-psychologist. She has carried out several studies of processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation and of the effect of deradicalisation programmes. In 2008-2009 she worked as a researcher at the Anne Frank House. Demant is co-author of the book *Strijders van eigen bodem: Radicale en democratische moslims in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2006), the report *Teruggang en uittreding: Processen van deradicalisering ontleed* (Amsterdam, 2008) and is co-author of *Deradicaliseren in de praktijk* (Amsterdam/Leiden, 2009). At the moment she is conducting research for her doctorate at the Amsterdam Institute for German Studies.

About the Racism & Extremism Monitor project

The aim of the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* is to track many different forms of racism and extremism – as well as reactions to these phenomena – and to publish the results in periodical reports. These reports cover forms of expression, such as politically organised racism, as well as forms of exclusion, such as discrimination in hotels, restaurants and bars. Various kinds of victims and perpetrators are also identified, whether native Dutch or foreign, with the latter further subdivided into various ethnic minority groups. The response to racism and extremism can vary, both in terms of the nature of the response, such as educational, legal, administrative or political, and in terms of the actors involved, such as governments, media, politicians and civil society.

The periodical monitoring of racism and extremism, and of the response to these phenomena, serves several purposes. It contributes to insight into the problem itself as well as to finding solutions to racism and extremism as social problems. Longitudinal research and the ensuing periodical reports result in an accumulation of knowledge, producing a picture of developments over the longer term.

The Monitor project was launched in 1996 at Leiden University and the first report was published in 1997. Since 2001 the study has been carried out jointly by Leiden University and the Anne Frank House.

All research reports can be found on the project website: www.monitorracisme.nl. The reports differ in nature. Some are broad, general reports that are published approximately every two years and whose subtitles are numbered, such as *Racism & Extremism Monitor, eighth report*. Then there are more concise special reports – *cahiers* – with interim updates on special sub-topics, such as discrimination of Roma and Sinti, and the ‘Lonsdale problem’. Also featured on the website is documentation of various kinds dealing with Monitor project subjects.

The following publications in this series have already appeared:

REPORTS

Monitoring racism and the extreme right: first report. Jaap van Donselaar, 1997.

Monitoring racism and the extreme right: second report. Edited by Jaap van Donselaar, 1998.

Monitoring racism and the extreme right: third report. Jaap van Donselaar, 2000.

Monitoring racism and the extreme right: fourth report. Jaap van Donselaar and Peter R. Rodrigues, 2001.

Monitoring racism and the extreme right: fifth report. Jaap van Donselaar and Peter R. Rodrigues, 2002.

CAHIERS

Racial violence and violence incited by the extreme right in 2002. Jaap van Donselaar and Peter R. Rodrigues, 2003.

Investigation and prosecution in 2002. Jaap van Donselaar and Peter R. Rodrigues, 2003.

Roma and Sinti. Peter R. Rodrigues and Maaïke Matelski, 2004.

The Lonsdale problem. Edited by Jaap van Donselaar, 2005.

Monitoring racism and the extreme right: sixth report. Jaap van Donselaar and Peter R. Rodrigues, 2004.

Racism & extremism monitor: seventh report. Edited by Jaap van Donselaar and Peter R. Rodrigues, 2006.

Racism & extremism monitor: eighth report. Edited by Jaap van Donselaar and Peter R. Rodrigues, 2008.

Racial and extreme right-wing violence in 2006. Jaap van Donselaar and Willem Wagenaar, 2007.

Investigation and prosecution in 2006. Marija Davidović and Peter R. Rodrigues, 2007.

Deradicalisation in practice. Froukje Dement, Willem Wagenaar and Jaap van Donselaar, 2009.