

## **Disengagement from radical organizations. A process and multi-level model of analysis**

**Olivier Fillieule**, in Bert Klandermans and Cornelius van Stralen, *Movements in times of transition*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press.

*« Their behavior has been blamed on all kinds of social and psychological factors... a social common denominator seems out of the question, but it is true that psychologically this generation seems everywhere characterized by sheer courage, an astounding will to action, and by no less astounding confidence in the possibility of change. But these qualities are not causes »* Hannah Arendt, *On violence*, NY, Harvest, 1969 : 15-16, quoted in Horgan (2009 :4).

### **Introduction**

While research on political activism has essentially raised the question of recruitment and the enrollment of new activists, it has said very little until recently on defection and disengagement. Many factors explain this situation. For example, activism itself has been less studied from microsociological perspectives than through analysis of the organizations encompassing it, which naturally leads to reasoning in terms of current assets rather than in terms of flux. Moreover, microsociological approaches to individual behavior, except in their economicist version of rational choice theory, have long been dismissed in the name of collective behavior theory, also due to the scarcity of available sources for those who were, nonetheless, interested in the engagement and disengagement of activists. By definition, 'ex'-activists are no longer there at the time of study, and very often organizations do not keep or make readily available the membership files that would offer hope of finding people who had defected. Further, there is the difficulty in moving from snapshots of reality to a processual perspective, which in cases of this sort requires longitudinal studies, whether retrospective or, ideally, prospective (Fillieule 2001).

However, in broadening the range of literature to review related fields, the spectrum of potentially relevant research widens. If we exclude the autobiographical works of priests, terrorists and communist activists, literature that more or less directly broaches the question of disengagement emerges from the sociology of roles, in the Mertonian or interactionist tradition, especially in literature on churches and cults, but also divorce and professions (Vaughan 1986; Fuchs-Ebaugh 1988). In the same theoretical vein, a number of studies address various aspects of how individuals join and leave different types of clandestine, reclusive and stigmatized groups, namely by describing several stages in the disaffiliation process. One can mention a research tradition in psycho-sociology that focuses on group dynamics within terrorist groups (Wasmund 1986 ; Jamieson 1990 ; Crenshaw 1991 ; Taylor and Horgan 2006 ; Horgan 2009), but also on leaving racist and right wing movements (Fangen 1999, Klandermans and Mayer, 2006). Lastly, in the field of criminology and deviance theory, one should mention research on desistance from criminal lifestyle and the theory of differential association and the rich literature on criminal youth gangs which provide a significant source of insight to understand the links between life course and disengagement from

violent/criminal activities (Vigil 1988 ; Klein 1995 ; Decker and Lauritsen 1996, and Grenne and Pravvis 2007 for a review).

More recently, some scholars have turned to disengagement process in social movements, with a dominant focus on radical movements. (e.g. Della Porta 1992, 1995 ; Klandermans 1997 ; Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2003 ; Fillieule 2005, 2010 ; Leclercq 2008, etc.) Indeed, more and more social movements scholars maintain that there is no difference in nature between the reasoning and determinants of conventional law-abiding political protests, and illegal and violent forms of action, hence contending it's certainly fruitful to have recourse to a social movement approach towards radical organizations and violent political action that would consider it as forms of contentious politics, analyzable with the existing conceptual tools of social movement theory (Bennani Chraïbi and Fillieule 2003. See also Della Porta 1992, 1995 ; Goodwin 2004, 2006; Beck 2008).

At the same time, research specifically dedicated to radical organizations, in the rather broad field of "terrorism studies", are more and more distancing themselves with outdated theoretical models, whether analyses borrowing their structure from studies on relative deprivation and collective behavior (e.g. Testas 2004; Gurr and Björge, 2005)<sup>1</sup> or, worse still, from a psychopathology depicting radical activists as "abnormal" (see Silke 2003 for a critical review of such literature). Actually, these renewed approaches take a route which is closer to contemporary social movement theory and produce extremely interesting results. (Taylor and Horgan 2006 ; Horgan 2005 ; Gayer and jaffrelot 2008 ; Bjorgo and Horgan 2009 ; Horgan 2009 ; Gayer 2009 ; Bosi forthcoming)

In this chapter, I propose an interactionist model of activist withdrawal which is based both on the sociology of social movements and contemporary studies on terrorism. I have recently developed and formulated empirically this theoretical model in various publications. (Fillieule 2005; Fillieule and Broqua 2005; Fillieule 2010) Therefore, I will not discuss again all these elements. My aim is twofold here : First of all, I argue that such an approach offers a solid basis for building a process and multi-level model of disengagement ; second, I contend that it is particularly well suited to understand the peculiarities of disengagement from radical organizations.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows I start by exposing a process and multi level approach of disengagement from activist careers, based on an interactionist and configurational approach. I then turn to an exploration of the intrication of the macro, meso and micro levels in understanding disengagement. To doing this, one must abandon macro-level theories and focuss on the complex interplay

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<sup>1</sup> See Asel, Fair and Shellman (2008) for an approach that focuses more on the motive of relative frustration than on objective indicators of frustration. Nonetheless, Fair (2008) on Pakistani activists, and Roy (2008) develop a well supported critique of all the attempts to associate the terrorist commitment of the jihadis to socio-economic factors.

<sup>2</sup> By radical organization, I am referring to any form of organization ready to operate outside of the legal framework and to resort to violence, whether because it feels that the conventional forms of action are ineffective, or because repression leaves no other alternative than violence or the dissolution of the group. By violent action, I mean a vast array of more or less long lasting or extreme forms of commitment, including violence against oneself (e.g. immolation, suicide attacks) or against others (e.g. assassination, so called 'terrorist' acts, guerilla, etc). Disengagement from radical organizations is certainly one of the central social phenomenon that takes place in post revolutionary situations and democratic transitions.

between the activists' motivations for involvement and disengagement and organizational dynamics, structural factors and political opportunities being only considered at a second step in order to contextualize micro and meso dynamics. Only few research have chosen to focuss on individual activists, their motives and how their motives are tightly linked to organizational dynamics.<sup>3</sup> To unpack the web of relations between micro- or individual level dynamics of commitment and meso- or organizational level factors, I focuss on two central dimensions: the complex effects of organizational modeling on individuals and the ambivalent effects of repression on organizations as well as on individuals. I will show that organizational molding is key to the understanding of meso/micro interactions and that exploration of the effects of repression on individuals is a good entry point to grasp the complex web of interactions between macro and micro levels (the individual effects of repression) and between macro and meso levels (effects of repression on organizational forms and strategies).

### **Leaving militantism behind. Some answers, more questions**

Literature that has considered disengagement is mostly interested in 'total institutions', 'high-risk' activism, and 'extra-legal' activities, suggesting that we should pause and recognize the diversity of phenomena to which this term refers. Indeed, the process of disengagement is highly likely to vary as a function of what provokes it, the cost of defection, the manner in which it takes place, and therefore what becomes of those who leave.

#### *Disengagement as a multifaceted phenomenon*

Defection is not always voluntary. It may result from the dissolution of a collective, from the decline of a movement, producing orphans in a cycle of mobilization, as Verta Taylor illustrates with regard to post-war American feminism (1989); from exclusion; from extraction/de-programming (Beckford, 1978), or even from a forced exit through exile or, for example, a prison sentence. To these situations one must add the number of cases where a revolutionary movement leads to a change of regime, as in most democratic transitions, and therefore a conversion and institutionalization of protest organizations.

The cost of leaving relates primarily to the manner in which organizations frame defection through various constraints. As we have emphasized elsewhere, *«the psychic or material cost of defection, and therefore its probability, is due to a number of factors amongst which we will mention the extent of the sacrifices accepted to enter the group (initiation rites, trials, hierarchization and isolation of collectives); weaker or stronger group socialization, that translates especially into the reinforcement of emotional attachment, which varies as a function of the degree of renunciation of social*

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<sup>3</sup> Klandermans and others (1997, 2004; Klandermans and Mayer 2006) have introduced the supply and demand metaphor to explain participation in movement organizations, distinguishing between identity, ideological and rational motives. However, such distinctions are far too simple to account for the complex interrelations between organizations and individuals and fall short of establishing how the three range of motives are produced and do coexist in a process. See for example Tarrow and Tilly (2007) for a critic of the lack of a theoretical model that summarizes and links micro and meso levels factors.

*relations external to the group (networks of family and friends); and finally the rules in place at the time of the defection, sometimes rendered impossible by material dependence or the threat of being pursued as a traitor.* » (Fillieule and Bennani-Chraïbi 2003 : 123).

To these barriers to defection we must also add the existence of lateral possibilities (the opportunities to reconvert acquired resources, the possibility of reconnecting with alternative networks of sociability, and so on), and finally the degree of social legitimacy of defection.

Forms of defection are extremely variable. They may be isolated or take place collectively, such as when a group splinters or an entire affinity group leaves. Introvigne (1999, p. 62) distinguishes between defectors, who leave their organization in a negotiated fashion and by agreement; apostates, who become their organization's professional enemies; and ordinary leave takers, who disappear quietly, and whose disengagement carries no apparent notable cost, for either themselves or the organization (1999 : 67). Yet this is a rather cursory typology. It needs to be completed by various types of passive defection – withdrawal without leaving an organization – and different scenarios in which disengagement from an organization is followed, and sometimes provoked, by joining another organization or cause.

#### *A process model of disengagement*

A process model of disengagement strikes me as particularly useful today as means to build bridges between the two fields of terrorism studies and recent trends in the study of contentious politics. It is also one of the most promising routes to build a multi level model of disengagement.

Until recently, little work has been directly interested in disengagement per se, as a process rather than a moment in time. Research has centered on the determinants of defection, or the future of ex-activists, but rarely on the disengagement process and on what happens within organizations. However, two recent edited volumes have paved the way for new developments : one on disengagement process in conventional political organizations like unions, parties and SMOs (Fillieule 2005) and the other on individual and collective disengagement from terrorism (Björge and Horgan 2009). Horgan's model is quite similar to the perspective I am advocating, despite quite different theoretical underpinnings and epistemological foundations<sup>4</sup>. We share four basic ideas.

- . First of all, the idea that one should move from « *analysis of profiles to pathways, and from roots (as in root causes) to route.* » (Horgan 2008 and 2009 : XXIII. See also Crenshaw 2000).
- . Following this, the idea that one should abandon a logic of causal explanation, solely attached to singling out the determinants of violent trajectories, in order to concentrate on the process by which people join radical organizations,

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<sup>4</sup> One can find this model exposed in Taylor and Horgan, 2006. The basic ideas of this model are the following : « 1. There is never one route to terrorism, but rather there are individual routes, and furthermore those routes and activities as experienced by the individual change over time (hence the idea of a process) ; 2. Terrorism works at both an individual and political level, through behaviour acting on the environment sustained and focused by ideology, and the effect of that on subsequent behaviour; 3. The significant element in strengthening engagement with terrorism and giving it direction is the increased role of the social-political-organisational context (and especially as expressed through ideology) in exerting control over behaviour » (ibidem : 597).

remain involved and/or disengage.

. Third, the methodological principle that we must first investigate the individuals and their life story and then question the manner in which their existence is partly determined by structural factors at the meso and macro levels. Which means adopting the framework of a comprehensive sociology, attentive to the justifications of the actors.<sup>5</sup>

. Fourth, the idea that militant trajectories can only be understood through a multi-level analysis which articulates the micro level of the individual to the group and broader network to which he or she belongs and broader socio-political context (see also Hairgrove and McLead 2008).

I fully agree on these four methodological and epistemological principles. However, while I share this perspective on the appropriate objectives and the empirical ways to attain them, I am considerably less convinced by the theoretical foundations of an approach I consider much too eclectic which, in the field of social psychology, borrows simultaneously from deviant behavior theories (Sutherland and Cressey 1966), social learning theory (Hundeide 2003) and Merton's role theory (Fuchs-Ebaugh 1989). In particular, it seems to me that one should find a clearer delineation of the three levels of idiosyncracies, organizations and contexts. More precisely, the notion of « community of practice » which is at the core of Horgan's model (Taylor and Horgan 1986 ; Horgan 2009) and refers to the shared exercise of social learning and the related social and cultural practices that develop between and within groups, seems far less heuristic to us to analyze one fundamental aspect of militant trajectories, i.e. secondary socialization or what we call « organizational modeling ». In my own conception, two elements are central.

First, I consider that violent commitments, as well as disengagement from radical organizations, should be understood as the result of a process more than the product of a precipitating event. Approaches that are based on an analysis of deep psychological motivations or stick to the simplifications of rational choice theory can not understand the process of commitment. Indeed, people often act on purpose but without a fully formed intention, in the sense of a balanced appreciation of the possible costs and consequences of their actions. As John Searle states, « intention-in-action » is not equivalent to « intention to act ». The analytical language of 'motivations' which is polluted by intentionalism, is too often used as a substitute for 'thick description' of what actually happened. In fact, people are often forced to act violently because of a number of explicit (e.g. tying devices) or implicit (e.g. the strenght of 'role taking' into a close-knit group) pressures, which means that actors are not always 'purposeful agents' but can be 'subjects', as brilliantly illustrated by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) in his critique of Ranajit Guha's analysis of a peasant revolt in colonial India. (1983)<sup>6</sup>

These remarks are well in line with the "hypothesis of continuity" suggested

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<sup>5</sup> This point is crucial in the field of terrorism studies, where it is often falsely assumed that not talking to « terrorists » is a guarantee and a source of scholarly authority.

<sup>6</sup> Chakrabarty criticizes Guha for sticking to an orthodox marxist explanation of the revolt which lead him to explain people's acts in purely strategic terms, when the actors themselves declare to the police that they were 'acted' by supernatural forces and that they do not understand retrospectively what happened to them.

by Brigitte Gaïti and Annie Collovald (2006: 39-42), to take account of the process by which radicalization and, therefore, the eventual de-radicalization of individuals, works. In this they draw upon both the fascinating study that Tackett (1996) devoted to the way in which deputies to the Estates General progressively became revolutionaries at the start of the French Revolution and the analysis produced by Browning (1992) on how “ordinary” German soldiers progressively came to systematically eliminate thousands of Polish Jews, by shooting them<sup>7</sup>. This brings us back to one of the strongest principle of the Howard Becker approach, that is, that one must stop reasoning in terms of “why” and shift to “how it happened,” in other words, to the chain of facts that result from specific contemporary causes and are reconfigured as events unfold. In sum, *“the principle of continuity involves hypotheses about the times experienced, comprised of small disjunctions, changes to routine, disparate initiatives, and events perceived as heterogeneous, ephemeral, anecdotal, and rationalized in the patchwork reality of the moment, brought back to familiar phenomena over which one is in relative control. We see this, the temporality of experience as distinct from the temporality of the process of radicalization, reconstructed and homogenized after the fact around “origins,” “turning points,” and “causes and effects”* (Gaïti and Collovald 2006: 35; see also Dobry 1986 and 2010).

Second, the process of disengagement is to be explained as well by idiosyncratic as by structural and contextual factors (i.e. the dialectic between dispositions and motives of the actors and their structural positions). Such an approach means that one should articulate micro (dispositions, socialization) meso (secondary socialization in protest groups, « organizational modeling », strength of « role taking » and dependance to the activist group, etc.) and macro (political context, repression and opportunities) levels of analysis. In other word a multi level approach to political commitment and disengagement. Calls for multi-level approaches are more and more frequent in the literature. However, scholars often contend themselves to make an analytical distinction between three series of factors of commitment or withdrawal at the macro, meso and micro levels, without offering a convincing explanation of their joint occurrence over time. In my opinion, symbolic interactionism, and more precisely in the version articulated by Hans Gerth and Charles Wright Mills (1954) and Howard Becker (1960, 1966) offers a powerful tool for resituating commitment process diachronically, within the totality of individual life stories, and helps to contextualize individual engagements and exits synchronically at both organizational and macro levels, rejecting the scholastic opposition between agency and structure<sup>8</sup>. In such a model, activism is conceived as a long-lasting social activity articulated by phases of joining, commitment, and defection.

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<sup>7</sup> One can also mention, for an other illustration of the continuity hypothesis, the contemporary revision of the usual explanations given for the individual engagement in the extreme violence of the Great War, by the culture of war, the brutalization of societies, the soldiers’ consent or the fact of constraint. (e.g. Mariot 2003 ; Loez, Mariot 2008).

<sup>8</sup> We do not have space enough to discuss at length the reasons why we privilege such a theoretical approach of the link between agency and structure and why it seems more appropriate to us in this context than other conceptual tool like those elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens or Marshall Sahlins.

Coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937, 'symbolic interactionism' is closely linked to the social behaviorism of George Herbert Mead. Its subsequent usage belongs less to a school of thought than to a wide array of research sharing two standpoints: a common conception of the individual and their relation to society; and a way of doing research inherited from the Chicago School of Sociology (i.e. field work and qualitative methodologies). More precisely, symbolic interactionism can be defined as a microsociological and processual approach which *systematically* links the individual and the study of situations to broader contextual factors and social order rules and norms. In this perspective, not only are individuals and society interdependent but they also mutually construct each other. I contend that recent developments in research on activism based on the interactionist concept of 'career' developed by Everett Hughes (1958), Anselm Strauss (1959) and Howard Becker (1960, 1966) – what I refer to as « *the sociology of activist careers* » (Fillieule 2001, 2005, 2010)- is particularly well suited to proposing a theoretical account of disengagement process as a multi level phenomenon.

The notion of career initially developed by Everett Hughes casts the stages of access to and exercise of a profession as a series of objective changes of position and an associated series of subjective upheavals. As Howard Becker stresses, quoting Hughes, the concept of career comes back to two dimensions: « *In its objective dimension, a career is « a series of statuses and clearly defined offices . . . typical sequences of position, achievement, responsibility, and even of adventure . . . Subjectively, a career is the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions, and the things which happen to him.* » (Hughes 1937 : 409-410 in Becker 1966 :102)

This powerful concept allows us to focus on the process and permanent dialectic between individual history, social institutions and, more generally, context. The outcome is less a case of predicting a state (activism, disengagement, and so on) than of rebuilding a sequence of steps, of changes in the individual's behavior and perspectives, in order to understand the phenomenon. « *Each step requires explanation, and what may operate as a cause at one step in the sequence may be of negligible importance at another step [ . . . ] In a sense, each explanation constitutes a necessary cause of the behavior [ . . . ] The explanation of each step is thus part of the explanation of the resulting behavior.* » (Becker 1966 :23)

A career approach consequently involves considering the two essential dimensions of social identity: from a diachronic perspective, the transformation of identities and the social mechanisms at work in these transformations; and from a synchronic perspective, the plurality of life-spheres in which social actors may be involved :

*Identity shifts* : In *Mirrors and Masks* (1959), Strauss analyses the manner in which identities are liable to change permanently, as a function of modifications of the social structure and actors' successive positions in this structure, with all that this means for different stages of actor biography in terms of the subjective interpretation of the changes experienced. Strauss thus analyses what he calls 'institutionalized changes' (changes in status provoked, for example, by entrance into the workforce, marriage, etc.) and 'biographical accidents' (crises, failures, losses, and so forth), placing particular emphasis on the processes of 'disidentification' and 'initiation' that

may produce lasting and irreversible changes in identity, such as in representations, attitudes, and motives.

*Plurality of sub-worlds*: In Strauss's work, plurality refers to the idea that social actors are embedded in multiple social worlds and sub-worlds that may on occasion conflict, and is a fundamental characteristic of contemporary social life. Activists are also individuals, inserted in a multiplicity of life-spheres and therefore permanently subjected to the obligation to submit to different norms, rules and logics that, at times, may conflict. In other words, the political memberships of individuals are in tension with the other involvements of the same individuals. Owing to this plurality of social worlds, individuals are governed by heterogeneous and sometimes even contradictory principles of socialization that they internalize. We may thus hypothesize that each actor incorporates a multiplicity of behavior patterns and habits, organized as repertoires, and relevant social contexts that the actor learns to distinguish through the totality of previous socializing experiences.

The link between social contexts and systems of disposition significantly reduces the value of analyses of the determinants of commitment or disengagement based on multivariate treatments which correlate the dependent variable with individuals' social characteristics. The explanatory power of social characteristics is established and varies in conjunction with the system of competitive interrelations in which they are found. This system may be interpreted at three levels.

First, *at the macro level* of the political field and social arenas. Depending on the social valuation, at a particular point in time and in a particular sector, of a particular model of a 'good activist', certain social characteristics and aptitudes will be devalued or, on the contrary, privileged. Second, there is *the micro level of biography*. As noted above, it is in the succession of encounters of social characteristics and variable socialization contexts that aptitudes are created. Third, the system of competitive interrelations must also be observed *at the meso level of organizations*. This means understanding how organizations, structurally, socially and politically, select and orient individual activities, in order to grasp how they differentially relate to their members' social attributes. Kanter (1968) confirms this when she places commitment at the intersection of organizational requirements and individual experiences, necessitating consideration of the logics of commitment, keeping in mind the social context of practical involvement.

Such a conception of the micro/meso/macro linkage is well in line with a configurational approach, which denotes a dynamic pattern in articulating different scales of analysis and that was coined by Norbert Elias (1939, 1970) when describing certain patterns of relations between human beings as 'configuration'. (figuration in German)<sup>9</sup> Such a concept contrasts deliberately with the dominant explanations of social action by the aims and strategies of the actors, as an expression of *weltanschauung* or by mere interest.

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of configuration is key to Elias' sociology of civilization. He defines these configurations as the changing pattern, which players form with each other, relations of suspense, interdependence of players and the fluctuating balance of suspense, the to-and-fro of a balance of power (*das sich wandelnde Muster, das die Spieler miteinander bilden, Spannungsgefüge, Interdependenz der Spieler, und das fluktuierende Spannungsgleichgewicht, das Hin und Her einer Machtbalance*) (Elias, 1939).



In the next two sections, rather than following the usual analytical route by describing successively ideological, identity and instrumental factors of commitment and disengagement at the macro, meso and micro levels, I explore two crucial series of mechanisms to determine their effects on individual reasons for withdrawal: the complex effects of organizational molding on individuals caught up in radical groups and the ambivalent effects of repression and the criminalization of radical activities. To put it clearly, my intention is not to offer a general model of disengagement process. Such an ambition would be contradictory with a configurational approach which can only suggest a number of mechanisms, the combination of which is always dependent on situated contexts. However, by examining the effects of organizational molding on individuals, we embrace the essence of meso/micro interactions, and by studying the effects of repression on individuals, we are at the very heart of the complex web of interactions between macro and micro levels (the individual effects of repression) and between macro and meso levels (effects of repression on organizational forms and strategies).

### **The Complex Effects of Organizational Molding.**

*« Forget the profiles, understand the cells » (Hairgrove and McLead 2008: 400).*

*« Nobody familiar with the literature would attempt to understand involvement in terrorism without looking at group and organizational dynamics. But we have become increasingly confused about how to understand the individual (and individual issues) within a multiple level analysis of terrorism » (Horgan 2009 : xx)*

Obviously, radical organizations vary widely and there is no intention here of minimizing these differences. Nevertheless, certain permanent traits of these organizations may be discerned in three broad characteristics: first, their illegal character and the repression they undergo; secondly, their clandestine and reclusive structure; and finally, their relative closing themselves off from the legitimate space of social and political struggles and the organizations involved in these battles. I offer the hypothesis that these three common attributes play a determining role at the individual level in modalities of involvement, the forms of its maintenance, and *at the end* the possibilities and means of leaving the organizations. Indeed, these three characteristics suppose very strong and peculiar forms of secondary socialization and organizational modeling that may have the potential to deeply transform a person's biography, in a similar logic to what Zeitlin nicely coined as the « independent psychological effects of activism. » (1967 :241)<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely these socializing mechanisms that Horgan attempts to capture by the notion of "community of practice" (2009:13) in order to take account of a learning process through repeated social and psychological interactions with an ideology and the related social and cultural practices. Within the interactionist framework, Hans Gerth and Charles Wright Mills offer a more sociological conceptual toolkit to examine the relationships between

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<sup>10</sup> This importance of secondary socialization within radical organizations has typically been neglected, due to the structuralist orientation adopted by the sociology of social movements, even if periodically, some authors underscored the imbalance between research on recruitment by movements and that studying the effect of the institution on militants (e.g. Keniston 1968: 353-354; Killian 1973: 36; McAdam 1989:123).

individuals and institutions (Gerth and Wright Mills, 1954 : 165-191). They define an institution as an organization with distinct hierarchical roles to which members must conform. The internalization of such roles occurs through secondary socialization, the strength of which needs to be studied – from conversion and alternation, in the sense used by Berger and Luckmann (1966), to strategic and limited adaptations – along with durability, from the viewpoint of biographical consequences in all spheres of life.

This model places the Goffmanian notion of ‘moral career’ at the center of the analysis of activism. This refers to *the selection of people* (to the incentives and barriers to joining, and the orientations of activities) and to *organizational modeling*, i.e. the multiple socializing effects of activism, themselves in part determined by organizational rules and modes of operation, understood as a set of constraints (status, proposed or reserved activities, leadership, and so on).

Organizations do a lot of work in socializing their members, understood as role taking, which allows individuals to identify the different roles they face and correctly fulfill their customary tasks. This secondary socialization can, at times, assume the form of explicit inculcations, the goal of which is to homogenize activists’ categories of thought and their way of acting within and in the name of the organization. However, know-how and activist wisdom also frequently amounts to a ‘practical sense’, what Bourdieu refers to as « *the anticipated adjustment to the requirements of a field, what the language of sports calls the “sense of the game” (like “sense of place”, “the art of anticipation”, etc.)* », acquired over the course of a « *long dialectical process, often described as a “vocation”, by which “we make ourselves” according to what is making us and we “choose” that by which we are “chosen”* » (Bourdieu, 1980 : 111-112). This process takes place outside of our conscious awareness. If, then, an institution « leaves its mark » on social actors who are part of it « by modifying their external conduct as well as their private life » (Gerth and Wright Mills 1954 : 173), we need to examine both the content and the methods of the process of institutional socialization to understand individual disengagement process.

Three different effects of the interactions between meso and micro levels may be distinguished: the acquisition of a vision of the world (ideology); the acquisition ‘know-how’ and ‘wisdom’ (resources); and the restructuring of sociability networks in relation to the construction of individual and collective identities (social networks and identities). It is at these three levels that we may discern factors explaining disengagement from radical organizations.

### *Ideology*

Socialization within organizations may bear on the internalization of a vision of the world, of the place of the group in this world and one’s place in this group. From the outset, it is vital to stress the fact that the strength of an ideology is rarely the driving force behind radical involvement but that it becomes important in the course of militant activities, under the effect of varied processes of indoctrination and sometimes even “programming.” In other words, the adoption of a political line and especially a visceral attachment to the cause rarely preceded involvement, and they are only acquired gradually.

It is in the observation of everyday activist practices that one can see how

institutions legitimize certain types of discourse and practices to the detriment of others, and how, faced with these constraints, members do not all have the same resources to modify or renew the dominant ideologies. Here, institutional resources (such as the exercise of a formal or informal leadership function, a proximity to or membership of leadership circles, and an activist legitimacy based on seniority or 'battle scars'), as well as those beyond the rewards offered by the organization (expert ability or moral authority linked, for example, to a profession such as religious responsibility, university scholar, elected politician, and so on), determine the capacity to resist and eventually contest the ideologies imposed by the organization.

Therefore, in order for us to understand disengagement, we must also examine the erosion of this aspect of activist socialization. How do we explain the weakening of the organization's ideological power, which may lead to a lessening of the sacrifices one is willing to make for the cause? Here we may distinguish two possible levels of determination.

First, the strength of beliefs may decline due to a change of political climate, whether due to the historical exhaustion of a model of commitment, or by a backlash and a return to order due to the erosion of the belief in the imminence of the revolution. For example, Whalen and Flacks (1989) show that after The Vietnam War ended and the repression of leftist movements intensified in the US, militant groups began to reevaluate the chances of success of the revolutionary project, as well as the cost of commitment. As a result, for young activists the question of the 'personal versus the political' became more important than any other considerations.

Second, the loss of ideological conviction may also be produced by a rupture of the consensus within a movement, the appearance of factions, and eventually of splits. The causes may vary, and on this point social psychology has produced a great number of fascinating results, especially from the study of small groups showing which conditions foster group loyalty. Here, historical examples abound. For example in Italy, in the context of the failed Red Brigades kidnapping of Aldo Moro in 1977, conflicts emerged between the groups of prisoners and the external management of the movement, at the same time as the state was creating a special category for those who left the organization and accepted to collaborate with the State, thus providing opportunities for withdrawal and treason (Moretti, 2004).

### *Resources*

Participation in a protest group may enable the acquisition of multiple resources, which obviously vary as a function of the social resources acquired in other life-spheres and prior to commitment, and which we will refer to by the generic term rewards and will define as the material or symbolic benefits individuals think they receive from their commitment. Four main characteristics of rewards must be stressed. First, rewards include both objective and subjective dimensions; in other words, they are not always perceived by actors. Second, they may be both expected prior to commitment and pursued afterwards, but also, and perhaps especially for 'grassroots' activists who do not always expect to acquire significant and tangible rewards, they may be discovered in the course of action, produced in some way by the activist experience. Third, rewards vary according to the evolution of contexts and individual experiences. Fourth, costs are often confused with benefits.

Such a definition of rewards makes it difficult to merely link withdrawal from radical organizations to a simple disappearance of the expected benefits. Since sacrifice is an integral part of the mechanism of attachment, then, as Kanter (1968) argues, the more one had to sacrifice to enter the group and remain a member, the higher the cost of defection. In other words, the cost of activism somehow determines its price. Following a mechanism close to the one identified in the concept of cognitive dissonance, the more intense the efforts, the more difficult it is to recognize the futility of these efforts.

This draws attention to a certain deficiency in 'classic' explanations of diminishing rewards which refer only to the evolution of radical organizations, such as the increased life constraints due to the strengthening of repression or loss of faith in the triumph of the cause. By excluding everything not directly related to the area of protest activities (which typically are not further explored), it is difficult, for example, to take into account individual defections or the crumbling of groups in contexts where there is no change in the functioning of the organization and the economy of rewards on offer.

Beyond organizational reasons, we need first to add a range of factors which are linked to the public image of the group, its social legitimacy and the accepted justification to the recourse to violence. This is because the value accorded to rewards in a particular life-sphere is also related to the value that other beneficiaries and society as a whole accord them. As a matter of fact, the social value of a cause, as well as ways of contributing to it, may vary as a function of the cultural context and its possible transformations. Specifically, it is often that social sectors initially assenting to radical movements which employ either targeted or random violence may become unfavorable and have an effect on the groups' trajectory, forcing them to retrench and rely on an increasingly restricted and vanishing social base. A process that the Egyptian Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (GAI) experienced after the killing of 62 people in Luxor and that Zwerman and Steinhoff (2005) illustrate with respect to leftist movements in the 1970s, especially in the cases of Germany and Japan (also see Crenshaw 1991 and Gupta 2008 on these trajectories of decline).

Most importantly, we must keep in mind what we have established previously: individuals are involved in a number of social spaces and the perceived returns from these different life-spheres are in themselves varying. In each of these spaces, individuals are led to adopt specific roles in which they are more or less 'stuck', and which define various contexts of socialization. With time, significant changes may intervene in different spheres of life, constituting bifurcations in which certain roles are redistributed and identities transformed. This is why analysis of the logic of disengagement must proceed through identification, in different life-spheres, of critical moments that can translate into a new valuation of the expected rewards, knowing that their value in a sphere co-varies with the value attributed to them in all other spheres.

This point is particularly important in understanding the withdrawal of radical organizations to the extent that they, due to the repression they experience, and, therefore their often clandestine and exclusive character, tend to compartmentalize different spheres of life, to a greater or lesser degree, and encourage activists to focus on a single field of militancy. This double process of compartmentalization and focus may have ambivalent effects. First, because it encourages a personal housecleaning and withdrawal

from social ties within the militant milieu, it contributes to cohesion. Yet, at the same time, this retreat to an increasingly confined world can lead to burnout and a degeneration of personal relationships (Ross and Gurr 1989 ; Della Porta 2009). The literature on small and exclusive groups is here very useful to understand to specificities of most of the radical organizations in this respect. For example, Lewis Coser (1974) argues that exclusive groups require total commitment from their members, which makes conflicts more explosive, since they are quite likely to take on an emotional and unrealistic cast. As a result, individuals tend to deny them, and thus accumulate tensions. Protesting and defection, therefore, become more difficult and tend to be put off, but they develop more rapidly and intensely: “*the intensity of the conflict grows when unrealistic elements are introduced into a realistic conflict. Thus, the conflict grows in intensity when participants are led to suppress their emotions of hostility and, in return, the accumulation of these feelings will aggravate the conflict if they burst out.*” (Coser 1974 :48).

We also need to understand how and according to what logic individuals manage their commitment once the rewards it yields are exhausted; whether through psychological repression, distancing from or attempts to transform their role, or defection. It is at this point that the institutional set ups aiming at facilitating or sanctioning defection (Hechter 1987; Taylor 1988), the strength of the dependence on the role and the existence of lateral possibilities, determined notably by the degree of autonomy of life-spheres, describe a world of constraints making defection easier or more difficult. And it is as much the socializing force of the role that one is leaving as the manner in which one leaves, once the departure is finalized or even many years later, that best reflects the shift in trajectories and the degree to which the biographical consequences of commitment are sustained.

### *Social Networks and Identities*

It is pretty clear now that socialization within organizations also occurs through the degree of redistribution of activists' relationship networks, in the activist sphere, as well as in other social subworlds. Above all, belonging to an organization is belonging to a group, with its borders and world of meaning, participating in its *illusio*; it is interacting with other members, at varying degrees of regularity; therefore, to belong is to construct a place or an identity for oneself.

Here, Becker's approach in his article on the notion of “commitment” (1960) constitutes a valuable point of departure for exploring the inter-individual dynamics of radical groups. One may simply define this concept as a psychological state that pushes an individual to remain caught up in an organization (*sustained participation*). Attachment is both prior to involvement and the *product* of the latter, suggesting that beyond the motivations for joining, we should focus on the work of the institution in producing this attachment. At the end of the 1960s, Kanter proposed a typology of specific elements likely to encourage attachment within groups. She distinguishes three aspects of attachment: maintenance, cohesion and control, the mechanisms of some of which we have already seen.

The maintenance of attachment is based on *sacrifice*, already discussed, and *investment*. This brings us back to the existence of alternatives. The more individuals are caught up in a system that is the only one to distribute rewards

and costs, the more committed they remain: « *when individuals invest their resources in one system rather than in other potential paths, they tie their rewards and the future usefulness of their resources, in effect, to the success of the system, burning other bridges, cutting themselves off other ways too, allocate resources* » (Kanter 1968 :506).

The notion of cohesion designates the affective links between individuals and emotional attachment. As McCauley and his colleagues write, « *Devotion to comrades is not only a force for joining a radical group, it is equally or more a barrier to leaving the group* »(2008 :422). Two mechanisms are at play in this case: renunciation and communion (Kanter, 1968, 1972). Renunciation refers to a withdrawal from all social relationships outside the group, with the goal of ensuring a maximum of internal cohesion (see also Bittner, 1963; Coser, 1974). Communion, the 'we' feeling, is characteristic of the establishment of a unanimity-exclusion dialectic. Here, we find Turner's and Killian's very Durkheimian observations with respect to the importance of camaraderie and the role of ceremonies and rituals in the cohesion of social movements (1957 : 399, 442. See also Linden and Klandermans (2003) on the importance of conformity to the peer group in far-right organizations).

Cohesion is also assured through means and techniques of control, from the most subtle to the most extreme, such as mortification and denial. Mortification brings us back to renunciation of one's desires and interests, to the abandonment of a private identity in favor of identification with a group, which Goffman develops in his discussion of the total institution based on the notion of 'mortification of the self', that is, the loss of individuals' sense of self-determination when subject to such institutions as the army or religious communities. It shows, for example, how the practice of confession, as well as self-criticism, the notion of the sin of pride, etc. serve this function of mortification and *the "effacement of the sense of individual autonomy."* (Hoffer 1963 :66). Denial, for its part, brings us back to unconditional dedication to an authority, to members' internalization of what the group says and wants, what Catherine Leclercq (2005) calls *adherence*, "in the double sense of a merging ('sticking to') and a continued allegiance."

Overall, it is the manner in which groups structure sociability relations, both internally and externally, as much as the placement of individuals in the group, that suggests a series of important factors underpinning the logics of disengagement.

### **The ambivalent effects of repression on disengagement process**

Despite their proliferation, research on repression's effects on protest, at the level of social movement organizations (SMOs) as well as at the micro level of individual commitment and disengagement, remain largely inconsistent. For some, repression would have a positive effect on mobilization for a number of reasons. (Olivier 1991, Rasler 1996 ; Khawaja, 1993; Bayat, 1997; Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule, 2003, Hafez, 2003 ; Bianco, 2005 ; Francisco, 2005 ; Okion, 2006). These all stem from more or less explicit mechanisms of radicalization, such as the provocation of "moral shocks" and the generation of incidents of emotional mobilization. (Karklins and Peterson 1993 ; Kurzman 2004 ; Gayer 2009). The level of repression exercised seems crucial in this

case. Some scholars suggest a curvilinear relation, proposing that semi-repressive regimes are those which generate the most violence, while for others, the engines of radicalization are extremely repressive situations. (Goodwin 2001 ; Einwohner 2003). Yet, many studies stress how repression may decapitate a movement, slowing down activist attempts and putting an end to protests. (Gupta et Vinieris 1981 ; Lichbach et Gurr 1981, De Nardo, 1985 ; Mueller and Weede, 1990 ; Francisco 1996). Overall, the picture that emerges from the literature is very confusing. At most, we could suggest that, for those proposing different versions of the theory of frustration, repression tends to radicalize protesters, while from the perspective of the mobilization of resources it would tend to be dissuasive due to an imbalance in the costs, risks and advantages of taking action.

As I argued above, a method for dealing seriously with the question of individual effects of repression, consists of articulating the individual trajectories to organizational strategies and contexts (multi-level analysis), while considering the gradual unfolding of the course of the interactions (process analysis). In this way, we may hope to determine the precise effects (specification of relations) and the particular conditions at play (contextualization of relations).

#### *Macro and meso effects of repression on the micro level of disengagement*

First of all, at the contextual level, the reinforcement of activism or the withdrawal in the face of repression must be related to its specific or indiscriminate character (Mason and Krane, 1989). When only the most active leaders and militants in a movement are its focus, demobilization of occasional militants and simple sympathizers is more likely. In contrast, when this happens indiscriminately to all activists, sympathizers, and even the population suspected of supporting them, the spread of mobilization, even radicalization, is probable. The cases in France are a good illustration of this; the policy of “collective responsibility” confronting the FLN have undoubtedly played a major role in the commitment of broad sectors of the population to the war, or more recently in Algeria in the context of Islamist movements: « *Reactive and indiscriminate repression of Islamists in Algeria in the context of political exclusion contributed to widespread rebellion. The perceived injustice of the coup gave Islamist violence legitimacy. The mortal threat posed by state repression against Islamist organizations and cadres gave supporters of the FIS additional incentive to fight back. The indiscriminate application of repression meant that FIS sympathizers could not guarantee their security through neutrality.*” (Hafez, 2003, p. 82)

Still, at the contextual level, the individual effects of repression on withdrawal partially depend on the manner in which, in a particular time and place, this is socially perceived (notably with reference to the memory of past events), both in the population at large, in a specific area of social space, and in connection to the way individuals are variously caught up in preexisting relations (clans, and community networks). Thus, in societies where clan or caste solidarity is strongly rooted, rather than encouraging withdrawal, repression may leads to *block recruitment*, while offering the material means to proceed to action (mentoring, learning about violence and modes of action, armaments) and drastically reducing the domain of what is mentally conceivable (see Post, Sprinzak and Denny (2003) on the importance of social settings in terrorist

careers). Grogean and Dorronsoro (2004) demonstrate this well in the case of the PKK or Kurdish Hezbollah, organizations in which trajectories of involvement occur in blocks, mobilizing entire families from the same villages and associations. This is not far removed from Dorronsoro's approach (2001) with respect to Afghanistan and the role of *qawm*<sup>11</sup>. In the same way, research on the IRA (Bosi forthcoming) or ETA (Crettiez 2006) often shows how commitment to these organizations takes place within the context of a family tradition, fathers frequently playing the role of mentors to enroll their sons, and sons often being motivated to be involved to defend the memory of relatives who died in combat or were imprisoned.

At the meso-level of organizations, the monographic literature effectively demonstrates the multiple effects of repression on the internal functioning of radical organizations. First of all, repression automatically encourages the development of clandestine and exclusive organizations (Zald, Ash-Garner 1987:125-126; and Hafez 2003). Faced with the risk of infiltration, arrest, and the dismantling of militant networks, organizations progressively cut themselves off from the outside world and adopt strict models of behavior, very often leading to an isolation propitious for the building of tightly knit emotional communities (Crenshaw, 1981; Laqueur, 1987; Della Porta, 1995). Alvarez (2003) effectively demonstrates this in an analysis of the repression of the Chilean Communist Party after Pinochet's coup. Militants went underground and created a group prepared for armed struggle, the *Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez*. The author concludes that "*the subjectivity of clandestineness was an indispensable condition for 'naming' a new way of being a communist militant, from then on, increasingly linked to the military theme*" (Alvarez, 2003:16 and 221-222). "*The principal characteristics of clandestineness have incurred a tendency towards external control and disciplinary vigilance with respect to the party's operational behavior, perceived to be the only way to resist the new 'scientific' methods of the dictatorship's repression*" (Alvarez, 2003:23).

Another central effect of repression on radical organizations is the way they contribute to redefining their place within militant spaces, with consequences for the opportunities to leave and the constraints affecting withdrawal. The trajectories of revolutionary movements in the 1970s in Italy, Germany or even Japan provide many such examples. Thus, Sommer reminds us that the competition between leftist organizations was a determining factor in the Italian escalation, with the militaristic watershed of *Potere Operaio* and *Lotta Continua* starting in 1972, and the game of higher and higher stakes between those from the Brigade and independent actors and then amongst independent actors: "*the process of radicalization that characterizes the Italian cycle (and leads to its exhaustion through defection and a rise in the cost of involvement) is largely linked to competitions between groups on the extreme left, as well as their confrontation on the street with militants of the extreme right, who will, moreover, also be used as part of the strategy of tension to help in the counter-mobilization by a fringe group of military secret service people* (Sommer

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<sup>11</sup> This Afghan terminology refers to any form of solidarity that may be based on kinship, residence or occupation. Afghans identify themselves by *qawm* rather than by tribe or nationality. A *qawm* is usually governed by *jirga* or *shura* (a council or assembly of elder males).



2010; see also Della Porta 1995 and Sommier 1996). In Japan, competition assumes an even more critical form, to such a degree that internal struggles (the *uchigeba*) will soon result in more deaths than the repression. (Steinhoff, 1992 ; Zwerman, Steinhoff and Della Porta 2000 ; Zwerman and Steinhoff 2005 ; Wakamatsu 2008).

*The effects of repression in a process model. The continuity hypothesis*

The logics of interactions between different actors, therefore the temporal development of the relationships between repression and protest, has been mainly studied at both the macro and meso levels, especially with the notion of cycles of mobilization. Thus, Tarrow (1989) shows that in the mid-1960s, the Italian context was especially favorable to the emergence of protest movements, giving rise to an ascendant phase of revolt (from 1966 to mid-1968) and a phase of radicalization (from mid-1968 to 1972), following which the state unleashed a wave of repression that marked the end of the cycle. In this latter phase, new much more radical organizations detached themselves from the reform groups who had joined forces with them, and it is there that withdrawal first appeared.<sup>12</sup>

However, scant research has examined the succession of “micro cohorts” (Witthier, 1997) of militants who join and leave organizations at various stages of repressive policies. Research on the trajectories of radicalization of revolutionary movements in the 1970s under the effect of repression stresses that radicalization more readily affects those who did not experience the initial phase but joined the movement later, at the peak of the cycle of mobilization. This seems to be corroborated by a rise in the levels of violence with the second or even third generation of militants (Della Porta, 1995; and Sommier, 2010). The reasons are legion. Here we will refer especially to the research of Steinhoff and Zwerman (2005), demonstrating that in Japan, as well as in the USA, the first generations of militants withdraw generally at the moment when repression leads to a development of the clandestine armed struggle; they are replaced by others, younger and with quite a different profile. In the U.S., the second cohort includes more African-Americans, a substantial proportion of working-class members and various minorities, recruited from public and community colleges, organizations fighting against poverty, and gangs. In Japan, while the movement started amongst university-educated elites, it has spread to young workers, marginalized members of society and Korean residents born in Japan, who are deprived of their civil rights. For the two authors, these social differences definitely explain some of the waves of withdrawal and radicalization.

More generally, this effectively illustrates that, contrary to a homogenous vision of collectives, it is necessary to pay attention to two interconnected dimensions to understand the diversity of demobilizing effects of repression within a single movement: on one hand, the succession of militant generations in the center of the analysis of the internal dynamics of recruitment and selection, the transformations of collective identities and the organizational and ideological changes that result (Fillieule 2001); On the other hand, this ebb and flow of militants must be correlated with a historical period that

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<sup>12</sup> See Sommier (2010) and Zwerman and Steinhoff (2005) on leftist movements in the 1960s in France, the U.S. and Japan; as well as Brockett (2005) on the cycles of repression in Guatemala and El Salvador.

includes a succession of repressive events. Traumatic episodes, such as the killings of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark by the Chicago police in December 1969, or the “battle of Valle Giulia” in Rome on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1967, constitute “socializing events,” the weight and individual consequences of which depend, in fact, on earlier socializing events and the particular generation of militants (Bosi forthcoming). Furthermore, the specific forms the repression takes for a given cohort translate into a whole series of socializing effects that lay the foundation for generational phenomena. So, analysts often consider the experience of prison and torture crucial, as incubators of militancy, serving as intense forms of socialization, and indeed a manner of redefining identities (Kepel 1994 and Haenni, 2001 on Egypt ; Bucaille 1996 on Palestine; Martinez 2000 et Labat 1995 on Algeria ; Larzillières 2003, on Chechnya). Finally, the importance of the succession of militant generations in understanding the individual effects of repression also raises questions about transmission of the memory of struggles, which could be disrupted and facilitate withdrawal when repression decimates an entire generation, as Bennani-Chraïbi (2003) shows with respect to the disappearance of militants from the left and the extreme left on Moroccan campuses in the 1970s.

It is essential here to recognize that individual changes of attitude and conduct under the effect of repression do not follow the model of action/reaction but are rather part of long and complex process, leading us to the interactionist approach in terms of career and the ‘continuity hypothesis’, which helps us sociologize and historicize the disruption in individual trajectories through restoring the time periods and the sequences of these transformations.

To sum up, such an interactionist approach to the processes of involvement in and withdrawal from radical organizations also means that it is fruitless to try to construct a model for these changes in individual conduct within the framework of a rational conception of action. A few refinements that could offer explicit models of individual effects of repression based on cost-benefit analysis are shown to be particularly inadequate to sufficiently take account of the convergences of decisions that only a comprehensive approach attentive to the motives advanced by the actors, in association with their structural positions at each stage of their trajectory, can help to understand. To the extent that involvement in radical activity is usually marked by what Gupta (2008) called acts of “selfish-altruism” and “self-sacrifice,” it is impossible to understand withdrawal by merely invoking an exhaustion of the expected rewards or a modification in the perception of the chances of success, as, for example, Berman and Laitin (1992) do. The examples of “suicide terrorism” (Gambetta 2005 ; Pape 2003, 2005 ; Brym and Araj 2006) and voluntary immolations (Pettigrew 1997 ; Kim 2002 ; Bozarslan 2004 ; Biggs 2005 ; Grogean 2006, 2007 and Crenshaw 2007 for a review) show this quite clearly. We can only agree here with Elster (2009) who, in a recent book on the disinterest and the dead ends of the rational action theory, explores all the explanations produced on the rationality of suicide missions and finally concludes with the complexity of individuals mobile and institutional set ups that, at each stage of individual trajectories, can lead militants to become involved in the preparation and carrying out of such an action. (See also Merari 2005 on the importance of temporal factors in suicide bombings.)

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have offered a number of conceptual and methodological tools in order to develop a process and multi-level model of disengagement. I have illustrated this model by bringing out a certain number of characteristics that may be at work in the complex web of interactions between individuals, organizations and contexts. Let us summarize these characteristics.

First, *at the macro level*, there is the importance of specific contexts and the transformations in the structure of commitment and disengagement opportunities. The socio-political environment constrains organizational evolution at the meso level and shapes activists' expectations at the micro level. These elements are particularly visible in a diachronic perspective when one considers the observable differences between cohorts or generations of activists (See also Reinares, 2001, Roy, 2004, Zwerman and Steinhoff 2005, Viterna 2006). A range of characteristics can be listed here, including the state of the commitment offer, the nature of state intervention (or the lack of it) in the public policy domain addressed by the mobilized network, and the public image of the cause.

Second, *at the meso level* of organizations, one must study the extent of the development of the mobilized network (territorial spread and numerical growth, and therefore the extent of recruitment networks through people that know other people), the degree of homogeneity or heterogeneity of the group in terms of social-biological and ideological characteristics (which also constrain the nature and range of acquaintance networks), and finally the degree of 'openness' of the groupings studied (the voluntary recruitment policy, ways of integrating newcomers into the group, and so on). Consideration of all these organizational factors must be articulated to an analysis of 'moral career', the combination of the effects of selection and organizational modeling on the long-term commitment of individuals, in the orientation of their activities within the group, and in the forms (the practical modalities and the reasons they cite) that eventual disengagement will assume. This last point not only stresses the well known studied collective incentives (be they positive or negative) that enhance or discourage individual participation, but also the great importance of institutional socialization and of its libidinal dimension, a dimension which is increasingly stressed by contemporary studies in the field of social movements.

Finally, *at the micro level* of the individual, we have the importance of 'institutionalized changes' and 'biographical ruptures' at different career stages. The pivotal nature of the plurality of life-spheres underlines that activist organizations are also comprised of individuals who are inserted in a variety of social space locations. Activists are thus permanently subject to the obligation to comply with different norms, rules, and logic which may potentially be in conflict. These different levels of experience may proceed simultaneously or successively; for the observer, the difficulty lies in studying the succession of events within each order of experience at the same time (the structure of each order) and the influence of each level on all the others, and, consequently, of course, in studying the dependent variable: activist commitment.

Obviously, our interactionist and configurational approach does not aim to offer a definitive conclusion about which factors or combination of factors might universally determine disengagement from radical organization. Here we fully agree with Horgan when he writes that « *while we might aspire to*

*developing a scientific study of terrorist behavior, exploration (let alone description) might be a more noble and realistic achievement than true explanation at this point. The nature of this exploration may be empirical, but it is important to accurately reflect on the scientific limitations of our enquiry, at whatever level we operate as academic researchers ».* (2009 : xxii)

However, we propose a set of methodological recommendations for those who ambition to implement a process and multi-level model of commitment and disengagement. These recommendations will ultimately boil down to five components:

- Move away from reasoning in terms of « independent » and « dependent » variables, in favor of a « thick description » of the observed phenomena. This does not mean that we must renounce to any causal explanation. But that this can be achieved only after an analysis of series of mechanisms whose composition (in time and in space), produces observable effects, e.g. disengagement.

- Move away from mono causal explanations by discerning factors explaining individual behavior at the three interrelated micro-meso, micro-macro and meso-macro levels of observation.

- Move away from synchronic mechanisms towards diachronic variations with regard to context change, organizational transformations, and individual life course.

- Move away from models which suggest that individuals are either always strategic and rational, or the mere plaything of psychological or structural forces. One should try to overcome the far too simplistic analytical distinction between instrumental, solidarity or ideological motives. If such incentives are obviously at play in commitment and disengagement process, they certainly can't be used as a classification for characterizing different types of individual paths towards activism or, even worse, for building movements' typologies. The complex way interactionist sociology and configurational approach define individual entities and the links between agency and structure are of great help here.

- Focuss research on the individual level - i.e. one's life course and the justifications they give for their actions- as a mean to investigate the complex interplay between micro, meso and macro levels. If such a recommendation implies that the biographical material is certainly the most suitable source to relate the meso and macro conditions to individuals' motives, it remains that activists are always caught in social ties and organizational bounds at the meso level. Which means that it is virtually not possible to isolate the micro level of the meso level.

These five recommendations should help us to go farther than the structuro-functional generalizations of much of the sociology of social movements as well as the normative approximations of many psycho-sociological approaches.

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