Subjectivity in detection of radicalisation and violent extremism: a youth worker's perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the challenges local youth workers face at the intersection of providing social care and detecting violent extremism. Extremism and other radical ideologies are often assumed to be a harbinger of terrorism. Even though both are still a rare phenomenon among adolescents, European states have become highly concerned with being alert to early signs of radicalisation processes. As a result, youth workers as well as other local professionals have been confronted with the task of detecting these early signs. However, despite training and increased knowledge, the question remains whether youth workers are sufficiently equipped to assess potential risks in youth who show no concrete plans for criminal action. In these cases, prevention targets ideas rather than violent behaviour. This article details qualitative results of a case study among Dutch youth workers and suggests that no clear framework exists for detection of radicalisation processes into (violent) extremism. This has two main causes. Firstly, the concepts of radicalisation and (violent) extremism are in practice difficult to distinguish. Secondly, the youth worker's judgement often relies more on individual perceptions rather than evidence-based criteria to identify potential 'risky' persons. This situation may lead to undesired side effects such as executive arbitrariness, prejudice or stigmatisation.

Introduction

After the terrorist attacks in Paris (November 2015), European states have made investments not only aimed to strengthen security services and the criminal justice chain at the national level, but also to increase information-sharing and monitoring of violent extremism at the local level. Municipalities have been given joint responsibility for the early detection of potentially risky individuals. This development is in line with international strategy in the field of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), which holds that 'indications which could point to violent extremism' should be reported as soon as possible to the local security chain (RAN, 2017). In order to detect indications of radicalisation and extremism instantly, the objective of much counter-terrorism policy is to identify ideologies that could have a destabilising effect on society, and not only early signs of

deviant behaviour. Subsequently, counter-terrorism policy has become a broad public task (de Graaf, 2011; Vellenga & Wiegers, 2013; van der Woude, 2010). The motto has shifted away from a 'War on Terrorism' to a 'Battle of Ideas' (Borum, 2011, p. 9). Unfortunately, there is often no consensus on which ideas, among whom, and at what level of extremism should be viewed as problematic. Sometimes these questions are just ignored (Payne, 2009). Nevertheless, in many Dutch municipalities, this alertness to the risk of radicalisation and extremism has become one of the focal points of public security and safety policy.

This shift in terrorism prevention from the national to the local level has direct consequences for social professionals. Professional youth workers have become particularly important for obtaining information about extremism. Youth workers are seen as 'the eyes and ears of the street' (Sweers, 2015). However, if we consider that youth work is intended as an easily-accessible provision for youths up to 23 years old, that is primarily aimed at influencing behaviour, promoting personal development and stimulating social participation (Dam & Zwikker, 2008), we see a very different type of organisation than other partners in the security chain. Given the importance assigned to the role of frontline professionals, such as youth workers, in CVE policy, it is important to understand how they view radicalisation and (violent) extremism, and to investigate the tension between their traditional role and the new expectations in the area of prevention. This is important because the effectiveness of counter-terrorism policy depends in part upon the role played by local professionals in general, and youth workers in particular.

Another issue that deserves our attention is the distinction between extremism, radicalisation and terrorism. In policy and practice it is often assumed that people become terrorists because they encounter extreme or radical ideas and that such ideas lead to violent actions. There is, however, no academic consensus about the definition of extremism, radicalisation or terrorism (Aly & Striegher, 2012; Borum, 2011, pp. 12–13; Brown & Saeed, 2015; Cragin, 2014; Schmidt, 2013; Schuurman & Eijkman, 2013). Also terrorism experts have not been able to specify with any certainty when people form a threat to society (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Horgan, 2010; Koehler, 2016; Mastroe & Szmania, 2016; Neumann, 2013; Schmidt, 2013; Schuurman, 2017; Schuurman, Eijkman, & Bakker, 2015). Especially when there is no clear evidence of preparation for an attack or incitement to hatred, evaluating the risk an individual poses is a matter of subjective judgment. Yet, we do know how to differentiate between (illegal) behaviour and ideas. This is why we, based on McCauley and Moskalenko (2017), argue that a distinction must be made between the concepts radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism and that this distinction should focus on violent behaviour. As Bartlett and Miller (2012) have stated, radicalism refers to one who intends to overthrow the status quo, though not necessarily in an illegal or violent way. Extremism, conventionally, refers to deviations from a norm. From this perspective, neither radicalism or extremism automatically lead to security threats or terrorism. It is, thus, important to distinguish between radicalism and extremism as ways of thinking on the one hand, and violent behaviours on the other. How we define the threat has profound implications for how we understand and address it (Borum, 2011).

Thus, instead of focusing on ideologies, counter-terrorism policy should focus on behaviour found in violent extremism. After all, what the concepts of violent extremism and terrorism have in common is that they are 'ideological' reasons to break the law. The difference between the two lies in 'being prepared' to break the law and 'actually breaking' the law (Ministry of Justice & Security, 2017, pp. 19). In the Dutch (local)

policy, however, people are talking about radicalisation. It concerns the broad spectrum of radical ideas that are assumed to pose a threat to the democratic legal order and the security of citizens. However, there is no consensus in science about how a person radicalises. After all, radicalisation has many faces. Then it is also not clear what to look out for. The pallet of indicators is very diverse. According to Feddes, Nickolson and Doosje (2015), trigger factors of radicalisation processes should therefore, for the time being, not be seen as starting points for local preventive policy. By addressing the terms radicalisation, extremism and terrorism equally, the criticism of many scholars is that the local approach results in a form of intervention in which the potential risk and not the (potential) act is leading for any person-oriented intervention (Hirsch Ballin, 2012; Lomell, 2012; van der Woude, 2010).

Because radicalisation, extremism and potential violent behaviour are often used as synonyms in policy and practice, it appears that local professionals' task to monitor is not explicit. This means that local professionals' task to detect instances of radical or extreme ideas are not clearly defined and that the criteria for information-gathering and monitoring are non-existent (Ragazzi, 2016). It is this lack of definitional clarity which leaves practitioners unsure of how exactly to perceive the potential violent or risky behaviour we want to be forethoughtful of. Matters become particularly confusing when practitioners are tasked with detecting *potential* risks. Mattsson (2017) argues that, instead of being convinced, professionals are confused by the discourse on radicalisation and the prevention of violent extremism. The terminology used in security-driven policy documents does not help practitioners make sense of their mission. One must ask whether the application of a security framework to local authorities' interactions with inhabitants will lead to labelling every deviation in behaviour, expression, and appearance (particularly when dealing with Muslim inhabitants) as a potential risk (de Graaf, 2011; de Graaff, 2008; Eijkman, 2017; Neumann, 2013; Schmidt, 2013; Vellenga, 2012)? As Jenkins (2017) has stated, such prejudices can lead to stigmatisation and impact negatively upon the targeted individual's feelings of safety, equality and solidarity.

Mapping the field

Little is known of how monitoring potential 'risky individuals' works in practice. More insight is needed into how local professionals, such as youth workers, assess the assumed signs of violent extremism. Within terrorism studies, a modest amount of attention is paid to everyday practice of so-called frontline workers (Bjørgo & Gjelsvik, 2015; Horgan, 2004; Schmidt, 2013). There are a few. For example, Mattsson (2017) has collected empirical data on the understanding and reasoning of educational-frontline workers regarding the root causes of recruitment to terror groups that commit violence. He concludes that on the discursive practice level, 'it is obvious that the terminology used in policy documents and in the overall media discourse (i.e. talk about "radicalisation" and "violent extremism"), does not help the informants make sense of their mission' (p. 16). Another qualitative study done by Peddell, Eyre, McManus, and Bonworth (2016) emphasises heavily on the uncertainties that practitioners express when performing their duties. They point out how practitioner's perceived influences and vulnerabilities in radicalised lone-actor terrorists. In order to deal with the lack of academic knowledge the practitioners reached for 'folk-psychological' explanations to understand the phenomenon.

The outcome is that they construed radicalisation as a process over time, accelerated in the presence of generalised criminality or extensive Internet use. Vulnerability was seen as inherent, as well as a product of social context.

Although there is a paucity of research into the views and awareness of frontline professionals dealing with the local extremism approach, it appears there is little awareness of the tense dynamic between the social domain and the security chain (Eijkman, 2017; van Gorp, Hoorens, & Kowalski, 2014). This leads to an open question: 'Is it actually possible for responsible professionals to carry out the policy?' (Noordegraaf, Douglas, Bos, & Klem, 2016, p. 31). It is very well possible that youth workers' uncertainty about the norms contributes to creating prejudice among youth workers in their application of those norms (Tversky & Kahneman, 1975). Subsequently, the assessments that social professionals make may in reality lack a coherent basis in policy. It is probable that professionals establish their own subjective, social reality based on their own perceptions. To put it differently, cognitive prejudices can sometimes lead to perceptual distortions, inaccurate judgements, illogical interpretations or so-called irrationality (Ariely, 2008; Baron, 2000; Kahneman & Tversky, 1972). Because of this, from an academic and policy perspective, it is necessary to continually review how social workers monitor and conduct assessments at the community level. The outcome will not only be valuable for academics and politicians but especially so for those who are responsible for prevention and reduction of social tensions at the local level. Just as important, they are valuable for those who are being monitored.

Aims of the article

In comparison to other European countries, the Netherlands is said to be doing well in the area of prevention of terrorism and radicalisation (Van Ginkel & Entenmann, 2016). At the same time, national and international studies have concluded that being alert to alleged deviant behaviour and ideas is difficult to achieve (Dzhekova et al., 2016; Noordegraaf et al., 2016; Van Wijk & Bolhuis, 2016). If we assume that the professionalism of social workers is based on factual knowledge, norms, values and personal intuition (Buitink, Ebskamp, & Groothoff, 2012), analysing these three perspectives is a pre-condition for being able to reflect critically on professional judgements. If we apply this three-view-model to the current security-driven context, we can instantly conclude that no clear method is being used. The core reason for this is that countering terrorism is not an evidence-based practice.

In order to assess how subjective perception or 'feelings' (intuition) form youth workers' judgement of violent extremism, we focused on the following research questions: Are local youth workers able to detect (violent) extremism in adolescents? And, subsequently, do youth workers acknowledge a difference between radicalisation and extremism on the one hand, and violent extremism on the other? If so, on what grounds do youth workers do this? In this way we aim to ascertain the considerations youth workers deal with when making an official report to the security chain. After the section Methods & Methodology, the lack of factual knowledge and of a normative framework for local social professionals is set out in Part I. In Part II of this article we discuss the perspective of youth workers on the basis of qualitative data. We finish this article with our conclusions.

Methods & methodology

This study focuses on the social domain, a domain given significance in European preventive counter-terrorism policies. These policies have specifically tasked social workers with being alert to the first signs of radicalisation processes. We focus here on youth workers because of the important role these workers play in dealing with adolescents. Adolescents are assumed to be more open to radicalisation and extremism, as they are in the process of forming their identity (CCV, 2016; ESS, 2015; Hermans, van Kapel, van Wonderen, & Booijink, 2016; NJI, 2016; NCTV, 2016a; RAN, 2017; Zannoni et al., 2008). In order to research the influence of subjective perception on youth workers' judgment, open interviews were conducted with 18 youth workers. Using open interviews has several advantages in this context (Weggemans & de Graaf, 2015). Most importantly, this type of questioning is suitable for providing insight into the perceptions, experiences, and opinions of respondents about complex and sensitive matters. The form allows the researcher the option of asking extra questions, thereby obtaining more information about a specific subject (probing).

We must emphasise that the flexibility of open interviews also entails validity and reliability problems. For one, open-ended questioning requires interviewers to know when to probe and how to formulate follow-up questions. We are aware that in this way the researcher is the instrument for collecting data and how these are generated (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003). That is immediately a weakness. After all, it is through the facilitating interaction of the researcher that a context is created in which respondents share valuable data with regard to their experiences from practice. It is the researcher who facilitates the flow of communication and thus identifies patterns on which research results are based. We tried to minimise the risks associated with this approach by using multiple sources and by asking respondents to critique his own case. In order to prevent general, superficial politically motivated answers from being given, the respondents were triggered during the interviews to think more deeply. In this way they were encouraged to further explore the following themes: extremism, threat, prevention, multi-disciplinary cooperation, safety, risks and interpretation. All questions posed, after an open-ended initial question, avoided introducing specific terminology so as not to bias the informants towards a particular perspective (Brinkmann, 2014). In order to overcome this research bias, a number of interviewees where asked afterwards to indicate what they thought of the interview. The overall tendency was that the interviewees felt 'triggered' to think further than what they thought they knew up to now about detection, definition and perception. Although generalisability is still very limited, the outcomes of this exploratory study are a first step toward gaining insight into the daily practice of countering (violent) extremism in the Netherlands.

The interviews were conducted with youth workers active in eight Dutch regions. The government has prioritised these regions because problems of extremism and radicalisation have resulted in cases where the municipality has used administrative measures to anticipate to risks. The Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment provide extra support to these regions in the form of reinforcement funds to set up networks and to strengthen knowledge and expertise.[1] The 18 respondents in this article all work in a region that has been able to make use of this financial support. However, the areas in which these youth workers are active are not viewed as so-called risk municipalities. This was the first criterion for selection. After this, further

selection took place via LinkedIn using the search terms 'youth worker' and 'region name'. In the second stage of sampling, two names were picked at random from each of the search results. Subsequently, direct contact was sought by email and/or telephone. In some regions, this led to insufficient results. In such cases, a more specific search took place by using personnel lists from the youth work institutions. From these, names were again randomly picked.

All interviews took place between November 2016 and March 2017 and were conducted in person at a time and place requested by the respondent. The interviews were conducted in complete anonymity, at the request of the respondents. The most-often given explanation for this was the sensitivity of the subject. Some respondents also indicated that if the conversation could not be processed anonymously, they would not be able to take part because they were not authorised to do so. Anonymisation is common in research on terrorism and (violent) extremism and offers the respondents the chance to speak freely about policy, give critical opinions and elucidate their own visions (Schuurman & Eijkman, 2013; Schuurman et al., 2015; Silke, 2001). Thus, instead of names, the respondents have been given numbers. The interviews were, however, recorded with the respondents' permission. The audio recordings have been stored on an external hard drive. For transparency, the sections of the interviews that have been used for quotations were transcribed.[2]

The interviews were summarised briefly per respondent based on a narrative analysis so as to be able to extract patterns, similarities and mutual differences (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2006, p. 26). The choice for the use of this method was made following Durose (2011). Narrative interviews give insight into individual actions and motives of street-level workers; they illustrate the consequences of following, adapting or ignoring policy. 'This brings policy visions to life; narrative conversations illuminate the social environment behind the systems environment' (Durose, 2009, p. 41). The method of narrative analysis is both inductive and as well deductivism (King & Horrocks, 2010). Inductivism is expressed in the open and flexible research design, data collection in the natural environment and data analysis, starting from raw unstructured data. The deductivism is visible in the tendency towards systematics, verification and theory formation. While narrative analysis has clear advantages, it remains a complex, ambiguous, selective and subjective method (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003), which means the conclusions of this article must be viewed as a starting point for further research.

Part I

Background of local detection of (violent) extremism

Since 2013, Dutch society has struggled with a complex set of increased threats caused by religious extremism, and right-wing and left-wing extremism (NCTV, 2017). The government expects the safety-consequences of global terrorism to increase over the coming years. These consequences relate not only to transnational terrorist networks, returning or stationed 'foreign terrorist fighters' and potentially violent 'lone wolves', but also to rapid radicalisation processes within national borders (NCTV, 2016b, p. 3). It is this topic of radicalisation that has become one of the most significant pillars within Dutch local security policies (Gielen, 2015) and is referred to by Hemmingsen (2015) as 'identifying

radicals' in a political context. Because radicalisation and extremism are used interchangeably in Dutch anti-radicalisation policy, the task of detecting early signs is termed 'broad' and 'integral'. The government's anti-radicalisation offensive determines that the focus should be on 'potentially risky persons' and that detection should be carried out in multidisciplinary teams. In relation to the Dutch counter-terrorism policy, de Graaf and de Graaff (2010, p. 267) speak of a 'performative power,' meaning that the government is able to determine the set of acceptable solutions to the terrorism problem as well as the tone of the discourse with regard to the fight against terrorism. By doing so, the government is able to mobilise various groups in favour of the government's objectives.

Dutch counter-terrorism policy assigns an important role to frontline professionals such as youth workers in gathering information. 'Deviations in behaviour or the absence of specific persons can, of course, be detected first at the local level' (NCTV, 2011, pp. 18, 58). However, it must be emphasised that the broad and integral approach of Dutch counter-terrorism policy targets ideas rather than punishable acts. Deviating ideas are seen as a threat to 'social stability' and this stability is conflated with security (Boutellier, van Wonderen, Bakker, & van der Gaag, 2012). Dutch policy is thus concerned with behaviour, thoughts, convictions and beliefs that are not criminal but supposedly may lead to criminal behaviour. Accordingly, they operate 'upstream' in what we refer to as the 'pre-crime space'. Because of a lacking legal basis, wide discretion is available for how the detection mandate is implemented. Moreover, as a consequence of decentralisation, it is now municipalities that are responsible for this implementation. The discretion the various municipalities have in implementing their detection mandate also leads to fragmentation. In the following subsections, we briefly reflect on the factors that influence the detection of early signs of (violent) extremism. The three perspectives mentioned above in the aims of this study form the basis for this: factual knowledge, norms and values, and personal intuition.

Knowledge

Ideally, local frontline professionals would be trained in specific knowledge and expertise about radicalisation processes, (violent) extremism and terrorism in order to be given the knowledge necessary to be able to fulfil their monitoring task. In practice, the Dutch municipalities are free to choose which kind of training they wish to make use of. Because of this, the focus on increasing expertise varies per municipality (de Jongh, 2015). Also, the contents, duration, and quality of the training offered vary strongly (KIS 2016). Following from this, there are often large local differences in opinions about the so-called preventive approach towards radicalisation and extremism (Eijkman & Roodnat, 2017; de Jongh, 2015; Witte, 2015). In order to create awareness, numerous semi-governmental institutions have compiled overviews of factors that need to be heeded. The *Radicalisation Awareness Network* (RAN), for example, points to Ranstorp (2016) for an overview of research into push and pull factors that could trigger a radicalisation process (RAN, 2017). According to the Dutch Youth Institute (NJi no date given), this offers insight and structure for local, preventive anti-radicalisation policies. The youth workers' association, BVJong, states in turn that feelings and experiences of deprivation, discrimination, injustice and exclusion can act as a breeding ground for radicalisation. For an explanation of how these indicators interact, the organisation refers to the question and answer model of 'cognitive opening' (Recognising Radicalisation, 2008) that is included in the annually updated report 'Adolescent, difficult or radicalising' published by the Ministry of Education, Culture

and Science (no date included). The 'cognitive opening' model holds that if youths struggling with identity issues and showing feelings of injustice are brought in contact with an ideology which seems to offer the answers to their problems, a match can take place: 'the cognitive opening'.

Despite trainers' attempts to give insight into the complexity of the issue, the first studies show that in practice it is not possible to monitor and detect extremism and/or radicalisation methodically (Mattsson, 2017; Peddell et al., 2016). Knowledge about the monitoring and detection of extremism and radicalisation can therefore only be imparted to a limited extent.

Norms and values

As Schmidt (2013) states, in the discourse on fighting terrorism, the terms 'radicalisation' and 'extremism' are widely used in relation to prevention without any clear indication of their meaning. So far, at governmental and semi-governmental levels, there has been a great deal of variety in how these definitions are used. If one looks at national documents such as the official Counter-terrorism Strategy (NCTV, 2014b), or the Toolkits and Factsheets from various institutions that support municipalities, one sees that these documents only recently began to specific make reference to 'extremism'. An example of this is the policy brief 'Integral Approach to Terrorism' (Ministry of Justice & Security, 2017). Often, these documents only use the term 'radicalisation' or the terms are used interchangeably. In an attempt to create more clarity about the local approach to radicalisation, the NCTV (2014c) endeavoured to provide clarity on the 'norm' in its introduction to the 'Action Program Integral Approach to Jihadism' (2014a). Even then, however, only a cryptic explanation was given about how the task of 'detection' is to be viewed in relation to the 'norm':

> This is no simple matter, because many personal appearances and religious behaviours overlap with non-dangerous expressions of Islam. Assuming that radicalisation is a deviation from the norm, the task is to recognise this deviation as soon as possible. This is, however, only possible if the norm is known.

What the 'norm' actually is, stays more or less undefined.

It further becomes clear that the National Coordinator for Security and Counter-terrorism (NCTV, 2014c) – which in 2014 had a clear focus on a specific ideology, namely Jihadism – is uncertain about the feasibility of its vision. This can be illustrated by the document 'Explanation of Local Approach to Jihadism,' in which the following two questions are asked: 'Is the average experience and behaviour of (young) committed practising Dutch Muslims known? Is it possible to identify the process of deviation towards Jihadism?' Taking for granted that this strategic vision of the NCTV would also apply to other forms of ideology, we conclude that this lack of clear norm setting makes it fairly difficult to identify the grounds on which final assessments of radicalisation or extremism of any type are made. This ambiguity has, in turn, consequences for how youth workers fulfil their task of being alert to radicalisation processes and (violent) extremism. As Van Wijk and Bolhuis (2016) concluded, in practice professionals mainly trust their own experience and professional intuition. The definitional vacuum means that local professionals are left to trust their own judgement and their judgment, in turn, can be influenced by all kinds of developments. The 'values' that are ultimately attached to the phenomenon of 'violent extremism' may be strongly determined by political pressure, media coverage,

and social developments. Various researchers[3] have, for example, pointed to the effects external influences – such as economic crises, neo-liberal policy, reorganisations and bureaucratisation – can have on such assessment.

Intuition

Finally, there is the personal, moral assessment, which determines how radicalisation versus (violent) extremism is seen in practice. Moral assessment entails searching for answers to ethical questions and dilemmas. It is a conscious weighing of (professional) norms and values and depends on a personal understanding of the hierarchy to be used in a concrete situation. Moreover, according to Haidt (2007), our views are determined not by rationality but by our emotions, which means that emotions are also a factor that influences how local professionals experience problems. Emotions are mostly subtle – and therefore unclear. Instead of one knowing they are acting because of emotion, one will often attribute a decision to 'intuition'. In his later research, Haidt (2012) goes a step further and suggests that even if morality is universally determined, it is also strongly dependent on the prevailing culture. Because of this, it is ultimately circumstances that determine which moral intuitions will develop most strongly in a person at a particular time. It is precisely because of this that professionals differ in the way they view radicalisation versus (violent) extremism. Especially when knowledge levels have not been set methodically and norms are ambiguous, there is a chance that each perception leads to a web of moral preconceptions and interpretations, upon which individual professional attitudes and competences are thereafter based.

Based on this section, we make the case that distinct criteria for detecting violent extremism appear to be missing at the local level. Let us be clear, that in the Netherlands a relatively large amount of knowledge about terrorism is imparted to professionals. However, at the same time, we must realise that it remains difficult to prepare local social professionals for their role within the security chain. Because youth workers are seldom confronted with issues of extremism in practice it is difficult for youth workers to learn from experience. In addition, the above analysis has shown that the theoretical framework to support local detection of extremism seems above all to be based on 'moral assessment'. This subsequently leads to a situation in which social professionals are expected to have a reflective base attitude and a continuous drive to develop skills in detecting 'potentially risky individuals' (van Doorn, 2008). In other words, policy relies too much on the assumption that youth workers can 'think for themselves' about what the correct decision is (van Lanen, 2011). We can assume therefore that the detection process is opaque. More importantly, the outcome of the detection process is not always clear. It is because of the emphasis counter-terrorism policy places on the judgment of youth workers that, in addition to evaluating policy, measures and interventions, it is equally important to study the professionals who have to implement it (Hermans et al., 2016).

Part II

A youth worker's perspective on local detection of (violent) extremism

Before we discuss the case study on the basis on qualitative data, it is important to highlight that the 18 interviewed youth workers see their work as focused on the area of

religiously inspired extremism. In Dutch policy circles, this is called 'jihadism' or 'Islamic extremism' (de Graaf, 2011; de Graaff, 2008; de Graaf & de Graaff, 2008; NCTV, 2016a). This corresponds with conclusions drawn by Eijkman and Roodnat (2017) in their evaluation of how local professionals experience the person-focused approach to (potential) extremists. During training, courses, and presentations, the terms radicalisation and extremism were also mainly linked to the Islamic faith as well as to youths with a Muslim background. Most of the respondents (15) said without any hesitation that they thought this one-sided perspective was unfair and pointed out that other forms of extremism also exist. After follow-up interview questions, it became clear that all respondents considered the focus on Islamic radicalisation and/or extremism ambiguous. As respondent 5 put it: 'Radicalisation happens when a person or group deviates from what is desirable in society. It is about deviating thoughts and in the worst case, turning words into deeds.' Most respondents considered it 'tricky' to say what 'the norm' exactly entailed.

The difference between radicalisation and extremism according to youth workers

Only four respondents pointed to contexts such as the *zeitgeist*, political developments or social events in regard to determining what constituted radicalism or extremism. For example, respondent 1 mentioned that interpreting the concept of 'radicalisation' was mainly dependent on the time and place in which one finds oneself. Respondent 4 stressed this as well and also pointed out that people fighting for women's suffrage were seen as extremist at that particular time. Nevertheless; most respondents could understand the focus on radicalisation due to current events. Six respondents – from four different municipalities – said that as a result of the attacks in Paris (November 2015) various local meetings had been organised on the theme of 'detecting radicalisation'. Although most of the interviewed youth workers indicated that the focus on 'Islamic radicalisation' was unfair, when asked for examples (based on personal or hypothetical experience) they all could give examples of events, incidents or actions that were connected to Islam. Nine respondents stated that nowadays they also often encounter other forms of extremism amongst adolescents, such as nationalism, far-right or far-left extremism. After further questioning, some said that they did not associate these non-religious forms of extremism with their task to be alert to 'deviant behaviour'. From this, it becomes clear that even if the personal 'mind set' regarding this extremism is 'open', the matter of extremism is ultimately viewed one-sidedly.

Initially, in response to the research question, 15 of the 18 respondents seemed to have a clear idea of the various relevant concepts. They could often state the difference between radicalisation and extremism. In the case of violent extremism, they found that a line is crossed in regard to others, the living environment or democracy. To support their vision, they all referred to what they learned in various workshops, training courses, and meetings. The answers the respondents gave did not seem to be based on knowledge from different points of view or specific academic disciplines such as psychology, sociology or criminology. Approximately a third stated that 'democratic values' are being violated, but when asked what these values were, they were unsure. About half of the respondents spoke of 'the crossing of democratic boundaries', but again, after more in-depth interview questions, it became more or less clear that they found it difficult to identify what boundaries had precisely been overstepped or which values had been challenged. Upon specific follow-up questioning on the nuances between recognising

radicalisation versus extremism, most of the respondents became confused and no longer knew what to say. Some of them reacted in a visibly confused way. For example, these respondents showed classic signs of stress: they broke out in a sweat, pulled at their hair and started to blush. Sighing and twisting in their seats, they admitted that they found it really difficult to distinguish between the concepts. It is notable that after finishing the interview, about one-third of the respondents said they had found themselves in a crisis of conscience when responding to these particular interview questions. As respondent 6 stated: 'I've had training and thought that I had worked it all out, but I never really thought about it that deeply.' In conclusion, we saw that questions that probed the respondents from various points of view caused confusion.

Respondents 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 said that they had been encouraged to examine their ideas about what 'the detection of radicalisation' actually entailed more closely. They stated that they would like to better understand when radicalisation processes should be seen as alarming. The in-depth conversations clearly made them doubt themselves. A couple of examples of responses given during the interview show this: 'Is what I am thinking right?', 'Should I be seeing this in this way?', 'What is correct?'. Despite the confusion and – here and there – stress and tension, two-thirds of the respondents said that they had found taking part in this study very educational. In fact, all respondents wanted to read the article when it was done and hoped to be able to put it to good use. Half of the respondents said that they would be willing to do follow-up interviews or to act as members of test panels in the future. This enthusiasm among the interviewed youth workers stemmed from the current relevance of the subject to social debate and from the youth workers' feeling of solidarity with those most vulnerable to 'dropping out' of society.

When analysing the individual 'narratives' more closely, we came to the noteworthy conclusion that the five youth workers who were themselves practitioners of Islam were ultimately best able to distinguish between radicalism and (violent) extremism based on the core prevailing values in Dutch society. These core values are: freedom, equality, and solidarity (Ministry Social Affairs & Employment & Pro Demos, 2014). These five respondents belonged to different denominations within Islam (Sunni, Shiite, Salafi Muslims). The same was true for two respondents with migrant parents, one respondent who had in the past been affiliated with a mild form of far-right extremism, as well as for two respondents who had been involved with crime in their teenage-years. Gender and educational level seemed not to be a determining factor in relation to the views of these 10 respondents. To substantiate their views, they said they were aware (to a greater or lesser extent) that people are perhaps not all equal, but that identity must not be decisive for how someone is treated. Rather, equality based on tolerance and mutual understanding must prevail. In determining whether someone is a risk to society and, at the same time, to themselves, assessing their openness to 'central values' is key. This distinction is similar to Schmidt's (2013, p. 10) conclusion that: 'the most important thing is whether the state of mind tolerates diversity'. A closed mind entertains a simplified, monocausal interpretation of the world in which you are either with us or against us. The individual narrative analyses of these 10 respondents showed that understanding this distinction stemmed from their personal world view, personal experiences and the depth of their (religious and) social knowledge. In two cases, this understanding was also related to the literature, as these respondents stated that they had

read (academic) articles about terrorism, extremism and radicalisation on their own initiative.

Ultimately, there is of course variation in how youth workers view extremism and violent behaviour. It is however notable that their interpretations of radicalisation and extremism are affected by multiple factors. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, individual views on the different terms are shaped 'plastically,' through what youth workers are exposed to in courses, training, workshops and meetings about the subject. The knowledge they gain differs considerably, given that there is no supervision of the contents of such training courses. Secondly, youth workers' personal background seemed to be a determining factor. Those who had gone through an 'intense' identity development or crisis in their own lives proved to be best at seeing nuances.

Based on the results of these interviews, we argue that youth workers involved in countering (violent) extremism are regularly confronted with assessments that (seem to) demand balancing different moral values. 'This means that they are forced to make (ethical) considerations under political pressure' (van Gorp et al., 2014). Unfortunately, little attention is paid to this internal conflict during further education to impart knowledge and awareness. Definitions are not clearly outlined and it appears that there is also no clear idea of which academic discipline is the basis for viewing the matter. From the youth workers' responses, it can be concluded that there are no (or few) criteria provided for defining the terms radicalisation or extremism, let alone for violent extremism. This corresponds to what we described previously in chapter about the background on local detection of (violent) extremism (Part I). Training related to knowledge and norms appears to take place in an insufficiently clear way. Therefore, everyday reality in the Dutch CVE-practice does not succeed in meeting standards related to ethics and human rights awareness, as also concluded by several international reports and academic analyses.[4]

On what basis do youth workers assess?

As stated in the previous section, a clear framework for detecting radicalisation is lacking in policy. In this light, it is important to mention that in 17 of the 18 councils where the studied youth workers were active, public funds were spent on raising awareness on radicalisation in recent years. The duration and intensity of this education varied strongly. There have been, for example, thematic meetings and working groups, workshops for an afternoon or multi-day intensive courses. The majority of respondents experienced the knowledge they had acquired as useful, because some 'insight' is always gained. Many courses were mainly about detection of radicalisation, in which indicators, breeding grounds and trigger factors for radicalism were pointed out. This provided the respondents with more insight into the bigger picture. Nevertheless, most of the respondents found the content of the courses 'not so good', because they experienced a lack of depth in information on how to identify the problem or radicalism and on how to decide whether there is a potential risk or not. Almost all respondents missed input in the area of how to react to signs of radicalisation. As respondent 12 indicated: 'I would like to know how to best instigate a conversation about why peoples' cultures differ.' A number of respondents stated that they found it difficult to address sensitive subjects, because they missed in-depth cultural know-how or simply knew too little about Islam, let alone the Arabic language – although some training courses do go into some detail

in this area. Respondent 8 also missed certain tools for explaining global developments and gave as an example: 'Some things just cannot be explained! How do I tell a teenager that we hold one-minute's silence for the terrorist attacks in Paris, but not if an assault on a mosque takes place in Quebec or at a nightclub in Istanbul?'

In summary, the analyses suggest that respondents felt lacking in pedagogical and didactical skills that should have been acquired during the training courses. This means that they still had many questions and insecurities about how to address their role in preventing extremism. As respondent 17 put it:

> I am still looking for a method which is applicable for my target group, namely: a low socio-economic class where there are a lot of problems in the domestic upbringing and a great lack of social support. The youths talk about injustice, inferiority and unfairness. Try coming up with arguments against that!

Despite this, all respondents viewed themselves as sufficiently well-trained to judge radicalisation processes properly. They saw their role in this regard as belonging in the same category as other issues on which they ought to be alert, such as abuse of power, sexual intimidation, bullying, criminality and other undesirable behaviour. Respondents indicated that when detecting such 'deviant behaviour' they did not use a specific tool or methodology, but trusted their own value judgements. This fits existent knowledge about practical actions within the social domain (van Doorn, 2008; van Lanen, 2011). Some respondents literally called this 'trusting your own intuition', your 'compass' or 'gut feelings'. Therefore, at first sight, it seems that reluctance when judging radicalisation processes does not exist among youth workers; the interviewed youth workers are adamant in their opinions, vision and assessments.

It is remarkable, however, that although most respondents stated they had never actually encountered violent extremism, they all gave examples of situations and/or cases in which they said that youths were behaving in a deviant manner. For example, they pointed out situations of youths sympathising with suspicious content on the internet and social media. Or they knew a youngster who suddenly started wearing traditional clothing, which they found remarkable. They also mentioned examples of adolescents who talked of a war with 'the Jews'. Such behaviours are viewed as radical. However, further inquiry indicated that they meant that they have never had to deal with people who had the intention to become a foreign fighter. Probing led them to say they had never had any dealings with people who had gone abroad to conflict zones. These interviews lead us to conclude that these social professionals initially mainly link the concept of radicalisation to the intention to travel to conflict zones. They believe that is what they need to judge in the first instance – because that is what needs to be prevented. On this matter, five respondents also said explicitly that they find it alarming when a youngster suddenly starts to isolate him or herself. As respondent 4 said: 'if they suddenly don't bark at you, that's when my alarm bells start to go off. Then it is important to find out who they are associating with and where, as quickly as possible'.

In all other cases of deviant behaviour that does not so clearly overstep the proverbial 'norm' or 'standard', all respondents said they checked with the various authorities to ascertain whether there had been any change in other areas of the youth's live. If this is the case, then there is cause to think that something is going on. Challenging opinions about wars in the Middle East, sudden far-reaching interest in religion or changing

social viewpoints would give cause for alarm. What is again notable with the 10 respondents who have certain personal backgrounds (as described earlier), is that they do not see it as very troubling when youths adhere to an ideology (by means of interacting on social media, following media reports or political developments etcetera). They are quite relaxed about it and describe the behaviour due to lack of knowledge or due to youths searching for their identity. Their reasoning is that they understand what motivates these adolescents, because they have been through certain identity development processes or crises themselves. Nevertheless, they do worry about increasing 'us' versus 'them' thinking and the hardening of attitudes within the community, because they know that vulnerable young people can easily drop out of society. As respondent 1 said: 'searching for limits is scary in itself'. Actually, all of the respondents sensed a large amount of 'us' versus 'them' feelings amongst youths. This concerned them. The influence of social media, in particular, is seen as a great problem, because youths readily see the one-sided information stream readily as true.

When do social professionals notify the security chain?

As mentioned in the subsection about 'intuition,' there is a chance that each perception leads to a web of moral preconceptions and interpretations, especially when the knowledge levels have not been set methodically and the norms are ambiguous. Let us start by stating that it was clear from the interviews that all 18 youth workers felt responsible for their contribution to creating a safe society where people can live alongside each other peacefully. They think security is an important subject because it is a 'hot item'. The 'heat' around the term radicalisation seems partly to be related to policy of local governments, but is also strongly related to political discourse, media reports, and global developments. Youth workers' role in countering radicalisation is, in their opinion, therefore appropriate. It appeared that the interviewed youth workers experienced their role from a – for them – logical perspective. As respondent 5 expressed it: 'A safe living environment is the shared responsibility of us all. It is thus also my responsibility as a youth worker'.

Youth workers take the moral appeal to be alert to signs of deviant behaviour very seriously. With some of the respondents, their vision on the division of roles seems to emerge from a certain sense of duty to the authority they work for – whether that be the council, a charity or semi-governmental body. In addition, you could sense with various respondents that they derived some recognition from this delegated responsibility. Youth workers are often described as the 'antenna of society' and because of their role in detecting and interpreting radicalisation they sense that their core value as part of the so-called 'local triangle' in the safety and security chain is being recognised. Because of this, it probably seems very logical to them that they maintain close contact with community police officers and judicial partners in the security chain. Regardless of this cooperation, the majority expressed that they doubted the equality of this relationship. This fits with the conclusions from the expert meetings of BVJong (2015). BVjong illustrates the perspective of the youth workers as follows: 'If I suspect radicalisation, I am unable to test my suspicions, because partners in the justice system are too keen to get hold of the names of the youths and immediately threaten to label them.' For this reason, at least half the respondents reported experiencing a moral dilemma when actually handing over individual names within the security chain. Some respondents stated this literally.

Furthermore, the threshold for reporting persons at risk to the security chain can be divided into two kinds of situations: the first relates to signs of violence and the second to a deviant mind-set. As to the first, the individual narrative analyses made it clear respondents felt that signals which point to actions and dealings with violence, weapons, travelling to Syria or joining 'extremist' groups (virtual or real time) should be reported immediately. In order to do so, they use the shortest line of communication in their network. This may be a network coordinator, a civil servant in the Security and Safety department, a police officer, or a contact at a hotline.

As to the second situation, it appeared to be fairly unclear to all the interviewed youth workers where the threshold for reporting lies. All of them stated that they found ideologically inspired ideas and their expression – as discussed previously – disturbing. Sixteen of the 18 respondents stated that when it comes down to it, they do not really know what to do with this information. Generally, it boils down to youth workers finding it difficult to decide when they must report someone with a deviant mind-set to the security chain. They felt insecure about when and how to react to radicalisation. The limits of their responsibility are also unclear and this gives rise to great confusion. In addition, they worry that as a result they run the risk of losing contact with the youths and that they are relinquishing the 'fate' of the person in question to the security chain. Their opinions about this are equally divided, although a notable difference can be sensed. There is a strong sense that the 'personal baggage' a youth worker brings along with them on the job determines their choice whether to report someone within the security chain.

The 10 respondents who, as described previously, had know-how through religious study, experience with an immigration past or who have been in contact with the criminal justice system, tended to wait as long as possible before passing on names to the security chain. The reporting threshold seems to lie quite high for them, because they are scared that they will 'damage a human life', as respondent 7 explained it. These respondents seem to – consciously or unconsciously – first do as much as possible to support the youths in their search for their identity, whether this is by helping them understand the seriousness or possible consequences of their points of view, or by steering them in a different direction. They see their function more as being a role model or giving an alternative voice and describe this task as giving direction to and coaching the youth assigned to them. It is only when they get the feeling that the adolescent has given up on them that they notify the security chain.

The other eight respondents, which, in contrast to the previously mentioned 10, did not have experience with an immigration past and had not been in contact with the criminal justice system, said more readily that the shaping role was not their job. They seemed to be quicker to make an appeal to the shared responsibility in the team and the network in which they work. It has every appearance that, in this way, the decision to handover information about potentially risky people to the security chain is taken much faster. These respondents justified this with the argument that their job is predominantly detection. They cannot go any further than that: 'that isn't in my job description'. It is, of course, possible that this vision differs from one organisation to another. In that case, this result could be the result of coincidence. Nevertheless, our data shows that there is a distinction between colleagues within the same organisation.

Incidentally, and not unimportantly, this second group of youth workers often characterised youth who ideologically strongly support Islam as 'slipping away', while other

youth who are vehemently anti-Islam, are described as racist. This is said with the accompanying comment: 'but we live in a free country, so you have that right in the Netherlands'. Statements about intolerance, hatred and non-solidarity by for example potential far-right extremists are dismissed as discrimination and 'simply stupid'. This second group of youth workers did not see any cause to report such forms of extremism to the security chain, despite the fact that these beliefs and expressions could also be seen as violating democratic values.

Further, practically all interviewed youth workers stated that they were not well-enough equipped to counteract worldviews, life visions and social divisions which result in so-called 'polarisation'. 'You just cannot explain some things', is a much-heard answer. Or 'I am often forced to agree with them'. They recognise the term 'polarisation', but they do not receive much guidance on how to deal with this from the municipalities. Those who are strongly aware of the preventive value of counteracting the 'us' versus 'them' feeling, are saddened by this lack of guidance and even refer to it as 'an enormous weak spot' in the system. For those who have strong opinions about this, the key to opposing extremism lies in countering polarisation. They state very strongly that they hope that they, by taking part in this research, are able to create more awareness about this with the government and that more means can be invested in primary, preventive methods and techniques.

Conclusion

This article explores how social professionals implement local Dutch policy regarding (violent) extremism at the intersection of social welfare and social control. It provides insight in the way the task to detect is fulfilled within the social domain, not only in regard to detecting early signs of deviant behaviour but also in regard to identifying ideologies that could have a destabilising effect on society. To study such practice, this article mapped the perceptions of youth workers regarding the indication of potentially risky individuals. In addition, this exploratory study also provides insight into the possible (side) effects of the task given to the social domain to be alert to signs of assumed radicalisation processes and (violent) extremism amongst adolescents. The article does, however, have some limitations. Because it is based on qualitative research methods, the results can only be generalised to a modest extent. In addition, the interviewed respondents were anonymous and were not selected completely randomly. However, by reflecting on how youth workers judge risk among adolescents, the discussion about the effect of policies relating to preventing terrorism receives an extra stimulus.

It has become apparent from the literature and policy review that the definitions of radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism are used ambiguously in Dutch policy documents. When clearly deviant action is lacking, the terms do not say much about striving to commit violence. On this point, counter-terrorism policy in the Netherlands is relatively abstract. However, policy documents from the government and related (local) authorities on radicalisation and extremism use these concepts in a way that suggests a self-evident and self-explanatory meaning; the terms are frequently used interchangeably. No distinction is made between radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism. This distinction is, however, significant, because radicalisation and extremism are, as such,

not a threat to society if it is not connected to violence or other illegal actions such as inciting hatred. In other words: *violent* extremism is what needs to be combatted and not radicalisation and extremism, as such.

Furthermore, the idea that youth workers can play a role in countering violent extremism in practice is not (yet) very concrete. Broadening the tasks of first-line workers in the area of counter-terrorism mainly depends on their already existing role in the detection of early signs that point to crime or problems in the social sphere. Nevertheless, while indications of oppression, sexual abuse, bullying, criminality and other unwanted behaviour from or against youths lead to an alert warning or action, the way to deal with the perception of radical mind-set or (violent) extremism remains very abstract. Dutch policy focuses on detecting various forms of ideology, undesirable expressions or profiles which cannot strictly be defined as 'deviant', but which are seen as possible first steps towards potential terrorist acts in the future. Because of this policy, youth workers deem a certain formal reaction to processes of radicalisation necessary and prevention is used as a synonym for early detection and intervention based on ideas or ideology. Viewed from a number of disciplines this is remarkable, because it calls into question the key values of Dutch society, namely freedom, equality, and solidarity.

Further, we can reach the cautious conclusion that youth workers currently appear to be insufficiently equipped to detect (violent) extremism at the local level. This is partly because the security chain makes no explicit distinction between radicalisation and (violent) extremism. In addition, while there is no overview of the contents of training courses on building knowledge and expertise, it appears that these courses vary in content and quality. In all probability, no solid expertise is being built up in this way. This is because different assumptions about prevention are being applied – mainly aimed at radicalisation amongst Muslim youths and so-called 'ideologically inspired' or 'Islamic' extremism. Given that there is insufficient cultural or religious expertise, this focus on Muslim youths means that recognising deviant behaviour is presumably carried with a one-sided focus. Moreover, various value systems influence the norm, which means that there is, in practice, a lack of clear criteria. The lack of a methodical framework means that the judgement of youth workers relies primarily on individual perceptions of the issue. This appears to be driven foremost by intuition.

The contribution of the social domain within the security chain thus relies strongly on the moral judgement of social professionals. It has become clear from the interviews that it is primarily personal norms, values, and feelings that seem to determine the view of the local social professionals. In the case of the youth workers, it has been shown that these perspectives are mainly formed from individual know-how and personal development based on individual life experiences. In practice, there is an insufficient methodological perspective on extremism for youth workers to rely on (Mattsson, 2017; Peddell et al., 2016). Therefore, implementing CVE-policy takes place on the basis of a mix of facts, norms, values and personal feelings. This influences the way in which youth workers interpret radicalisation and (violent) extremism. Together, these factors mean that, ultimately, a risk of non-objective assessments of 'deviant behaviour' cannot be excluded. How, and in which context, persons are labelled as potentially risky is subjective. Here again, the focus on Islamic youngsters and religiously or ideologically inspired extremism has created a one-sided view and has influenced the threshold for reporting persons (names) to the security chain. Far right-wing and left-wing extremists

or forms of nationalism are not labelled as a risk. The lack of an explicit framework and/or criteria at this intersection of social welfare and social control undermines the ability of some to make fair judgements.

The question remains: should the focus of the local approach not be shifted to prevention of extremist violence in general? Terrorism experts McCauley and Moskalenko (2017, p. 214) recently reacted to the discussion on the concept of radicalisation with this idea. They assert that we need to distinguish between radical thinking, extremist ideologies and violent actions, because from a psychological point of view, targeting ideas rather than actions multiplies the enemy by a 100. We suggest to take the difference between radicalisation and violent extremism very seriously in Dutch counter-terrorism policy and in the related local implementation. It is also advisable to ensure a clear distinction between these concepts during training courses. Ideally, this would be done in an inter-disciplinary fashion. This allows 'ideas' to be better distinguished from 'action' and thereby allows the risk of a potential deed to be assessed more clearly. In the near future, every definition and perception will provide a web of assumptions and interpretations on which professional attitudes and professional competences will be subsequently based. Recognition of the distinction between the terms radicalisation, (violent) extremism and terrorism is, in all probability, important to reach the desired effects of local counter-terrorism policy.

In addition to this, one might wonder if the emphasis should be placed on 'networks' instead of the current attention to 'individuals'. Even 'lone actors' typically radicalise in both online and offline radical milieus (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014). According to this insight, it makes more sense to address radicalisation and violent extremism from a relational perspective. The presence of social ties to larger radical milieus, groups, or movements during radicalisation processes suggests that it is interaction with the social environment that draws people to develop more extremist ideas rather than the ideology itself. In fact, this has been stressed for several years by numerous scholars.[5] As for example Bjørgo (1997) has stated, 'in most cases, young people do not join racist groups because they are racists, but they gradually adopt racist views because they have become part of a racist group'. Thus, the knowledge that people are strongly influenced by their environment and that social interactions largely determine our attitudes and behaviours, is important when looking for potential risks.

Finally, because social workers work closely with the security chain, we need to ask ourselves whether this partnership could have unforeseen effects. Could criminal justice partners make use of local social workers to collect information in local areas and about families and people to which the police have no access? As the writers of a large-scale report on the local Swedish approach to radicalisation and violent extremism (NIBR, 2016) asserted, there are different reasons why it is an urgent necessity to clarify, in the light of their close working relationships, which duties council workers and social professionals have in terms of notification and/or information provision as regards suspicions about potentially risky individuals. For the time being, the good intentions of prevention professionals are encouraging them to go the proverbial 'extra mile' to meet their own perceived responsibility. This leads to increasing social control in neighbourhoods and can be experienced as stigmatising and confrontational by sections of the communities involved. This is especially likely if the risk that is attached to far-right extremism and nationalism is not weighed as heavily as the risk attached to Islamic extremism. It is,

therefore, important to have a clear definition of roles. It must also be clear what the various institutions and organisations can expect from one another, so that municipalities do not lose the trust of (groups of) their own inhabitants.

Notes

1. In June and December 2016, 20 municipalities and/or regions were granted financial support from the Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment for their approach to radicalisation and Jihadism (Ministry of Security & Justice / Ministry Social Affairs & Employment, 2016).
2. These can be viewed upon request for academic purposes. An appendix is also available that shows the date and regions of the interviews as well as with the gender of the respondents.
3. Buitink et al. (2012); Schilder (2013); Scholte and Sprinkhuizen (2011); de Vries (2009); van Hassel, Tonkens, and Hoijtink (2012).
4. OSJI (2016); Ragazzi (2014); Reding et al. (2013).
5. For an overview see Weggemans and de Graaf (2015, pp. 41–44).

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