

RADICALISHOW

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RADICALIZATION LEADING TO VIOLENCE: BENCHMARKS AND CONTEXTS

As fully explained in the two reports on radicalization¹ published by the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV), Quebec has not been spared the waves of people leaving for war zones, particularly in Syria. Much is being done to address the situation. Raising awareness through various media is part of one of the strategies employed by the CPRLV to offer practical answers to the questions raised by violent radicalization, and thus to achieve better understanding among the public at large and especially among those directly involved. Better understanding begins with a definition of what we are talking about: what is “radicalization leading to violence”?

There are many definitions, but unanimity is hard to find. The CPRLV defines it as:

“a process whereby people adopt extremist belief systems—including the willingness to use, encourage or facilitate violence—with the aim of promoting an ideology, political project or cause as a means of social transformation.”²

There are many forms of violent radicalism or extremism, grounded in distinct ideologies or beliefs. The CPRLV distinguishes between these forms, such as extremism of the right, extremism of the left, political or religious extremism and single-issue extremism. Dealing with these various kinds of radicalization entails maintaining broader vigilance in identifying the problems and taking more effective preventive action.

In addition to its educational activities, the CPRLV wants to offer the public practical means of raising awareness. It has therefore published an **Educator's Guide**³ addressing campaign themes to be used in conjunction with the workshops that are part of its “What If I Was Wrong?” awareness campaign. As a follow-through, the Centre has designed this Educator's Guide to be used in conjunction with the *Radicalishow* awareness tool in comic-strip format. The Guide consists of an explanation of the content, together with a glossary and suggested activities. The Guide contains references to enhance the user's understanding of some key concepts.



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THE COMIC-STRIP FORMAT: A MEANS OF EXPRESSION AND AWARENESS-RAISING

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In *Radicalishow* 1 and 2, the CPRLV created two awareness tools, in cooperation with renowned cartoonist El Diablo.⁴ Both comic strips are based on the personal stories of people who have been assisted by the CPRLV. The first episode in the series recalls the story of three people who became radicalized. It tries to explain how it all happened, as a way of introducing the radicalization process. The second focuses on tensions within families. It explores experiences of people who saw their children leave, or saw them arrested by the police at the airport. This guide has two main purposes: first, to explain the content, and second, to suggest activities to get people thinking about the various points raised in the two comic strips.

WHY A COMIC STRIP?

The comic strip was chosen as an awareness-raising tool for two main reasons. First, it is an effective medium because it can reach all generations. Second, it facilitates understanding. Most importantly, however, it is first and foremost a work of art, and is thus consistent with the CPRLV vision, and its belief in art as a positive outlet, an effective means of expression, and a means of sending messages that convey the values underlying our ability to live together.

RADICALISHOW 1. DETAILED INTRODUCTION

1. THE CHARACTERS

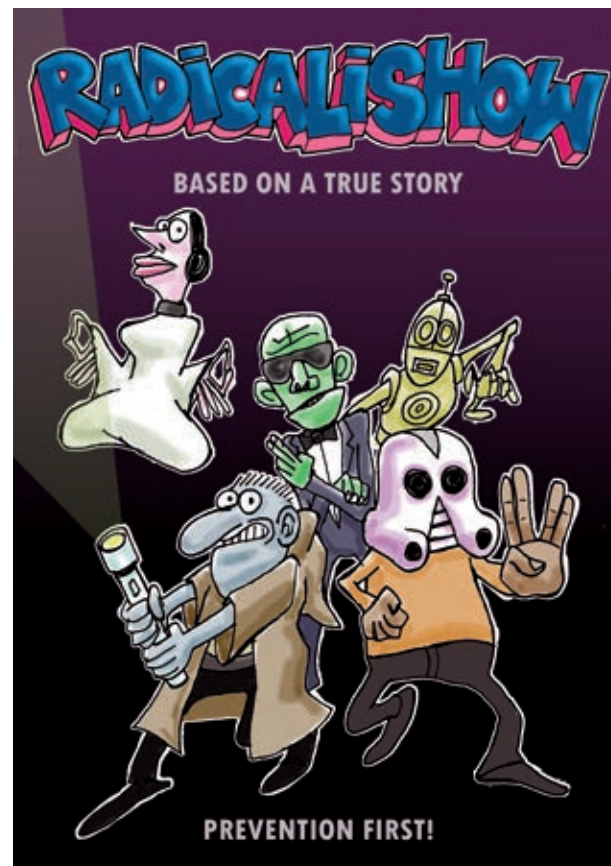
Princess Leïla, Hakim Skyworker and Bouba Fett are three people who have become radicalized for political and religious reasons. They recount how they became radicalized, describing the vulnerabilities they had to deal with, which intensified the process: family relations, individual discontent and the search for identity, debates within society, the feeling of being stigmatized, and so on.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE VULNERABILITIES

When some people are struggling with their identity or perceive personal injustice or marginalization, they will look for means of securing recognition or reparation that will lead them gradually towards violent radicalization. To explain their own radicalization, they will first relate how episodes in their own lives constituted vulnerabilities for them. These include:

- **Feeling at odds with your identity**

This is expressed on page 8. Hakim expresses the rejection he personally witnessed and experienced. He gradually starts to wonder whether he fits in a society that does not recognize his difference or his beliefs.



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- **Feelings of stigmatization and exclusion**

This is one of the key episodes in the process. It is depicted on pages 7, 8 and 9. On page 7, Leïla recalls that the way she dressed attracted no attention until the debates about the Quebec Charter of Values, when she suddenly felt that she was now being judged. On page 8, Skyworker expresses the same feelings as Leïla, but he points out that because he did not display any sign of belonging to a religion or belief, he witnessed conversations that stigmatized people. On page 9, the feeling is further emphasized. On the other hand, the new element here is that the character adopts a style of dress in reaction to comments and other messages about the Charter. While he tries to explain, he feels frustrated by his friends' incomprehension: they have only negative prejudices about his beliefs. The process leads to a kind of point of no return, where the various players have become two irreconcilable groups whose beliefs have become polarized, as expressed in the statement "Those guys are not like us!" (p. 10).

- **The feeling of injustice and the desire to get involved (p. 11)**

Bouba is a special character. He feels it was the storm in the media that piqued his curiosity at the very time when he was going through an identity crisis. Since he no longer recognized himself too well in his family's beliefs and values, he looked for a way forward of his own. He turns to the Internet to learn about the humanitarian crises generated by conflict, particularly in the Middle East. Bouba tries to mobilize his friends and alert them to the plight of people in those countries, but his desire to correct injustices comes up against the indifference of his peers. At this particular time, Bouba is clearly searching for a way to get involved, and bring meaning to his life, but when he fails to knock on the right doors, he is headed for an encounter that will be both dangerous and life-changing: this is where the agent of radicalization comes in, and we explain his key role below.

- **Family estrangement**

While the radicalization agent is a key player in the process, it is because he knows both how to exploit the vulnerabilities of individuals and how to convince them of his own credibility, using what he claims to know and taking advantage of the guilelessness of the people he is dealing with. When Bouba cannot get answers to his questions from people who are credible and well-intentioned, he is immediately charmed by the radicalization agent, whom he meets by chance at a social event. The result of their meeting is the radical transformation of Bouba, who adopts a vision and a message of absolute truth. While what the radicalization agent tells him finds a favourable echo in Bouba's mind, it is because he has broken with his parents, and the agent will exploit his fragility by offering an apparent alternative. The trick is to contrast a "Here" – his country of residence presented as a hellish dead-end ("Death Star"), and an idealized "Somewhere Else," an earthly paradise where you are told that "You don't have to make excuses for being yourself" (p. 12).

- **Rigid thinking**

In trying to explain to his friends what is important to him, particularly the plight of people in the war zone, Bouba shares the information he has collected. His friends are sceptical, and not unreasonably, they question the credibility of that information: "You don't even know if those things are true" (p. 11). Despite this remark, Bouba fails to check his information in order to deepen his analysis and his understanding of international conflict. From another point of view, however, we can clearly see that while Bouba is initially concerned about the humanitarian situation, he fails to find the right people to talk to or the right places where to express his frustration or to make a non-violent commitment through local initiatives.

TOOLBOX

PTo learn more about vulnerability and protective factors in the radicalization process:



<https://info-radical.org/en/radicalization/the-radicalization-process/>

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3. UNDERSTANDING THE RADICALIZATION PROCESS

The radicalization process is a series of non-linear developments. It depends on a multitude of factors related to the personal experience of the individual, and their surroundings. Radicalization leading to violence is rarely a sudden swerve, but is rather a complex social process that operates on more than one level. The comic strip tries to illustrate some of the steps in the process, including doubts about society's ability to live together, the search for answers, and the assimilation of answers and indoctrination.

• **Doubts**

In their radicalization trajectory, Princess Leila and Skywalker (p. 7) note that they began to ask questions amid a very lively political debate about the Charter. The nature of the debate, and the frequently stigmatizing interpretations of their beliefs that it generated, led them to question the ability of their society to accept and respect those beliefs. What followed tended to reinforce their feeling that society was rejecting their beliefs, and thus rejecting them.

• **The search for answers**

Quite logically, these doubts led to a search for answers. One source of answers was the Internet. The web is seen as a credible alternative source as compared with the traditional media, which are assumed to be in thrall to the dark side. In Bouba's case, when he says "It's not at all like my parents think..." (p. 11), we have to see it as a criticism of the information received from those media. While the Internet is not the main vector of violent radicalization, it exerts a powerful attraction, and its hate-filled messages and conspiracy theories can seduce some individuals, particularly those who have certain vulnerabilities.

• **Assimilation of answers and indoctrination**

It is helpful to focus on a statement that seems commonplace, but illustrates how fascinated Bouba is. As he sits at his computer, we can hear his enthusiasm: "This guy is so right" (p. 12). That statement means that the message he has received from the Internet has been enough to convince him. He finds answers to his questions, and accepts them as the truth. Yet any indoctrination begins with persuasion, and without the ability to step back and think things through, he takes everything at face value. Indeed, as he swallows all this propaganda wholesale, Bouba increasingly adopts the new ideology served up to him. In the end, he sees society only through the filter of that ideology, saying: "Little by little, I realized that the world around me was a lie" (p. 12). This acceptance of the ideology would be followed by another statement that illustrates his legitimization of violence: "Jedist law should be imposed everywhere. That was clear" (p. 12).

• **The radicalization agent: a key player**

Violent radicalization will very often be reinforced by a decisive encounter – actual or virtual – with a radicalization agent. By dint of persuasion, the agent will exploit the needs and frustrations of a vulnerable person in order to convince them. He will legitimize himself to justify his simplifications and sophistry. He will exploit every possible theory to arrive at a polarized vision that excludes any reconciliation between the individual and society. Any political subject will naturally be fair game for indoctrination purposes.

TOOLBOX

For the arguments used by radicalization agents, see the guide "Strengthening our resilience to agents of radicalization and their rhetoric," <https://info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/what-is-an-agent-of-radicalization-cprlv.pdf>; on the radicalization process, see for example:



<https://info-radical.org/en/radicalization/the-radicalization-process/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoXbLCiu4BM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ePE0ZCw1s0>

https://info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/PROCESSUS_EN_CPRLV_2016.pdf

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4. RECOGNIZING BEHAVIOUR

As the comic strip shows, the distrust of the characters is based on aesthetic aspects or negative stereotypes attributed to specific groups or individuals. This stigmatizing attitude suggests that a violent radical must be recognizable by their appearance or their origin, and there must be a profile of the typical violent radical. Yet studies tell us the opposite: anyone can become radicalized. A better way of averting radicalization is to pay special attention to types of behaviour. The comic strip tells us how to recognize some of them.

- **Polarization of beliefs, and a conviction of absolute truth**

When people believe that their own beliefs or convictions cannot be reconciled with those of others, the result is a polarized view of things. This is what happens when the characters distance themselves from everything that does not match their view of the world, which sees everything in terms of “us against them.” This is how we have to understand what Skywalker means when he says: “I only hung out with people who thought as I did” (p. 10), and what Bouda meant by “That’s when I decided to cut ties with everything that wasn’t strictly Jedist” (p. 12). However, this black-and-white view of the world is further reinforced by the conviction that they possess the only truth, and this justifies such messianic statements as “The world around me was a lie” or “Jedist law should be imposed everywhere” (p. 12).

- **Sudden changes in habits, or estrangement from friends or family (pp. 12-13)**

Estrangement from friends or family is one kind of behaviour seen in people who are becoming radicalized. If Skywalker says he started “wearing clothing that openly reflected my beliefs” as his “response” (p. 9), this is not the case with family breakups, which can be a sign of gradual radicalization, particularly when beliefs have become polarized, as we have seen. Apart from the break with family habits, Bouda goes a step further and claims absolute truth when talking to his parents (p. 12).

- **Legitimizing the use of violence**

When Bouda finds justification for his radicalization on the Internet, the videos he watches are obvious calls to arms. We see people on the screen carrying weapons. Having decided his guru is right, Bouda will then legitimize the use of force to serve ideological ends. This is clear from his use of the word “impose,” which assumes the use of force or violence to advance one’s ideas (p. 12).



TOOLBOX

Consult the CPRLV’s Behaviour Barometer:

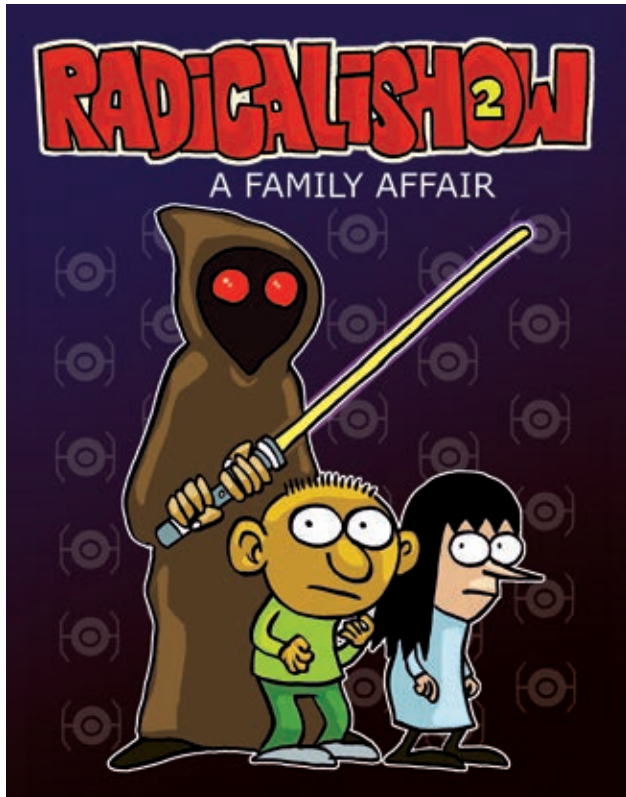
 https://info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/BAROMETRE_EN_CPRLV_2016-1.pdf

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RADICALISHOW 2. DETAILED INTRODUCTION

The second comic strip is subtitled “A family matter”. Another title could be “They never saw it coming”. This is very often how people close to radicalized individuals react when the truth becomes clear. The expression reveals the shock and incomprehension felt by the family. From what they say, we can see that with the benefit of hindsight, they had seen the signs but could not associate them with radicalization. Hence the need for group vigilance in recognizing changes in behaviour that indicate a gradual swing towards violent radicalization. This is the approach that the CPRLV takes in equipping organizations and professionals in various sectors to boost their skills in understanding and preventing radicalization leading to violence.

The comic strip also shows, more importantly, how families have experienced such events: incomprehension, disappointment, tension, depression, job loss and grief. We should also take a look at an aspect that receives less coverage in the media: how the families concerned, as collateral victims, also find it very difficult to deal with these situations. *Radicalishow 2* gives us the full picture.

1. THE CHARACTERS

Radicalishow 2 focuses on people close to radicalized individuals. The comic strip naturally concentrates on the characters of Leila and Bob, and their respective parents. Melania, Leila’s sister, has been arrested at the airport while attempting to travel to Syria. Shaq, Bob’s brother, has managed to get there, and will die there. The fate of these two characters is different, which logically enough produces different reactions on the part of Leila and Bob. The character of Kanakin is also interesting for the secret connection he maintains with Shaq, and because of his change of opinion about Shaq’s leaving, and radicalization more generally.

The sequence of events

- **The arrest: a very stressful time**

Panic and anguish are the emotions felt by the respective parents of Melania and Shaq when they are summoned to the police station, first of all because everything happens in the middle of the night. Until they get to the police station, they do not know why they have been called. The mystery and incomprehension heighten their anguish. The flood of questions asked by the characters on pages 1 and 2 give an idea of the stress they are under.

- **Anger and misery**

When told why they have been called to the police station, the members of the two families experience different feelings. While the children, Bob and Leila, are stunned, their parents are torn between anger, disappointment and sadness. What Bob’s father says reveals both anger – “Ungrateful little worm” (p. 3) – and a feeling of having been betrayed by his son: “How could he do that to us?” (p. 3). A little later, anger causes him to reject his son, unable to recognize himself in what his son has done: “I never want to hear that name again.”

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I have only one son and that's you!" (p. 5). The mother is inconsolable, and cannot hide her pain and despair.

On the other side, for Leïla and her parents, the dominant feeling is one of disappointment. The family does not understand and feels guilty, particularly the father, who asks: "But what did I do to her?" (p. 4).

- **Looking back and trying to understand**

Given the great distress experienced by their respective parents, we see Leïla and Bob asking themselves questions in an effort to understand. They each bring up memories of final moments together, showing us in a way what sort of family relations they had.

Leïla first thinks that her sister probably tried to leave because of the attitude of their parents. Then she, too, blames herself. Later, she cannot understand why Leïla showed more affection for their little brother than for her (p. 4).

Bob wonders why his brother was so nice to him, and then left him (p. 5).

- **How can we talk about it?**

The adults try to understand why this is happening to them. The children have questions of their own about the situation. The youngest character, Leïla's little brother, asks the family numerous questions:

"Where's Melania?" (p. 1), "Is she going to jail?" (p. 3), "Mom, why are the police holding Melania?" (p. 4). The parents do not have the desire or the strength, still less the right words, to discuss it. More broadly speaking, when situations or actions related to violent radicalization arise, with intense media interest, one of the challenges is talking about it with those close to us, particularly younger people – especially when the events or the information catch them unawares.

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TOOLBOX

Radicalization and violent extremism are delicate subjects, and therefore difficult to discuss with young people. The Centre has provided the public with free access to a guide entitled “Radicalization and violent extremism: How do I talk about it with my child?” It was put together with valuable contributions from the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) and the Ordre des psychologues du Québec.



https://info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/How-do-I-talk-about-it-with-my-child_CPRLV.pdf

• **Confrontation and reconciliation**

Melania’s return to the family home is by no means assured. Leïla remains angry with her and does not hesitate to let her know it. The dialogue Melania has initiated with her sister has begun to defuse the situation. The two sisters clearly needed to talk to each other, and are eventually reconciled. The comic strip expresses Melania’s regrets as she realizes that there are people who were there for her.

• **Kanakin’s realization of the truth**

While he was very keen to begin with, Kanakin eventually realizes the seriousness of what he was about. Having idealized Shaq, he finally realizes that it could have cost him his life. Seeing the level of violence on the Internet, and realizing that Shaq has gone, he decides to back out.



ACTIVITIES

1. PERSUASION BY EMAIL

In recent correspondence, and after seeing so many violent images during their earlier conversation, Kanakin wants to email Shaq to convince him to return. Help him write the email so as to convince Shaq that he can do more here than he can on the battlefield.

2. AN ENCOUNTER OF THE THIRD KIND: IMPROV THEATRE (TIME: 5 MINUTES)

The excerpt above shows the encounter between Bouba and the radicalization agent, but the episode is too short. Make up a longer dialogue in which the person playing Bouba refuses to be persuaded, and comes up with arguments to rebut what the radicalization agent says.

3. LEAD A DISCUSSION ABOUT KANAKIN'S ATTITUDE (5 TO 10 MINUTES)

- Kanakin is maintaining a secret correspondence with Shaq; how do you assess his attitude?
- What would you have done in his place?
- What resources could he have turned to?
- What lessons can we learn from his withdrawal?

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BRIEF GLOSSARY

STAROUARZ	STAR WARS	PAGE	REFERENCE
<< Que la puissance soit sur vous. >>	“May the Force be with you.”	p. 2 and p. 8	-
Leïla	Princesse Leia	p. 4	-
Hakim Skywalker	Anakin Skywalker	p. 3-4	-
Bouba Fett	Boba Fett	p. 5	-
Jediste	Jedi	p. 4	Jihadist
Astroport	Airport	p. 6	-
Planète Tatooline	Planet Tatooine	p. 6	Syria or war zone
Robe traditionnelle	Jedi robe	p. 7	Veil/hijab/Muslim dress
Wowoks	Ewoks	p. 11	Syrians
Maître Yoyo	Master Yoda	p. 12	Online radicalization agent
Padaouanes	Padawans	p. 13	Jihadist fighter
Porter le masque	Wear the beard	p. 17	-
Loi pour la neutralité des valeurs	-	p. 7	Charter of Quebec Values

NOTES

- 1 See: Radicalization Leading to Violence in Schools in Quebec: Issues and Perspectives: https://info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/SOMMAIRE_RAP-PORT_CPRLV.pdf
Women and Violent Radicalization: https://www.csf.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/radicalisation_recherche_anglais.pdf
- 2 <https://info-radical.org/en/radicalization/definition/>
- 3 <http://etsijavaistort.org/en/educators-guide/>
- 4 Boris Dolivet (to give him his real name) is a French cartoonist, scriptwriter and director. He is into hip-hop culture (rap and graffiti), and has worked in comic strips and animated films. He has numerous strips to his credit, including the Lascars series.