POLITICO-IDEOLOGICAL MOBILISATION AND VIOLENCE IN THE ARAB WORLD

ALL IN

Ahmed Ajil

Politico-ideological Mobilisation and Violence in the Arab World

This book presents a study of politico-ideological mobilisation and violence by focusing on the life stories, trajectories and narratives of individuals who mobilised for causes and conflicts in the Arab World. It provides a greater understanding of the biographical, sociological, political and historic factors pertinent to their radicalisation processes.

What makes individuals identify with suffering and injustice, often of others and elsewhere? Why do individuals feel the need to stand up in the first place and how does violent action become a justifiable or necessary course of action? Why and how do they disengage from violence? This book, based on interviews conducted in Lebanon, Switzerland and Canada, answers these questions. It presents new theoretical insights about politico-ideological mobilisation and violence. By focusing on grievances and grounding analysis in the empirical reality as it is shared and narratively constructed by those who are at the heart of the phenomenon, it moves beyond the moralistic and politicised debates that characterise the field. Interviewees include non-violent and violent engagement for causes and conflicts related to the Arab World, such as sympathisers or members of groups and causes from a variety of ideological orientations, including Shiite militias, Salafi-jihadist groups, radical left-wing groups, Palestine-specific groups, Kurdish groups and others such as right-wing or unspecified affiliations. By choosing individuals with different forms of political engagement, both non-violent and violent, and different ideological orientations, it helps readers to get a better grasp of how similar grievances may lead to different outcomes. In focusing on three markedly different geopolitical contexts, the book also provides a cross-contextual understanding of mobilisation for political and violent action. The interviewees also include experts and peripheral actors such as professionals, researchers, policymakers, friends or family members. Their perspectives complement and enrich some of the findings by providing external yet in-depth 'expert knowledge'.

Politico-ideological Mobilisation and Violence in the Arab World will be of great interest to criminologists, political scientists, sociologists and other scholars interested in the study of terrorism, radicalisation and extremism. It will also appeal to journalists, policymakers and practitioners working in the field.

Ahmed Ajil has just completed his PhD (Criminology) at the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, and Université Laval, Canada. His doctoral research was empirically based on research conducted in Switzerland, Lebanon and Canada with individuals involved in politico-ideological violence, activists, political and religious authorities, researchers and policymakers. Outside of academia, Dr Ajil is a Scientific Collaborator at the Swiss Centre of Expertise in Prison and Probation.

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I dedicate this work to my grandfather Rasool Salman who lost his life in the fight against injustice, sectarianism and terror.

رحمة الله على روحك الطاهرة الطيبة

Then Richard shouted: 'But I wasn't there! Look at me, goddammit—I wasn't there!'

'You black bastards,' the man said, looking at him, 'you're all the same.' Then there was silence in the station, the eyes of the white men all watching. And Richard said, but quietly, knowing that he was lost: 'But all the same, mister, I wasn't there.' And he looked at the white man's bloody shirt and thought, he told Elizabeth, at the bottom of his heart:

'I wish to God they'd killed you.'

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

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Specific terms and abbreviations

ADP	Arab Democratic Party, Alawite and Arab nationalist party based on Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli, widely regarded as backed by Damascus
AQ	Designated terrorist group Al-Qaeda
Ahl Al-Bayt	Lit. 'People of the House', refers to the family of the prophet Mohammed. They are especially important in Shia Islam, in particular, Imam Ali, Imam Hussein and the prophet's daughters Fatimah and Zayneb.
Ahmed Al-Aseer	Salafist leader from Saida, sentenced to life for attacking the Lebanese army with his insurgent group in 2013
Al-Baddawi	Palestinian refugee camp near Tripoli in North Lebanon
Augusto Pinochet	Chilean army general and dictator from 1973 to 1990
Bashar Al-Assad	19th president of the Syrian Arab Republic since 2000
BT	Bab-el-Tabbaneh district in Tripoli
CHF	Swiss Franc
Christoph Blocher	Swiss right-wing politician and former leader of the Swiss People's Party
Daesh	Arabic acronym for the group 'Islamic State'
Dahyeh	Predominantly Shia suburb south of Beirut
Ein El-Hilweh	Palestinian refugee camp near Saida
Fatah	Formerly the Palestinian National Liberation Movement; a Palestinian nationalist social democratic party with affiliated militant groups
FCC	Federal Criminal Court of Switzerland, located in Bellinzona
Fedayi/Fedayeen	Guerrilla or resistance fighter, often used to refer to Arab guerrilla fighters against Israeli forces
Fitna	Among other things, the expression *fitna* refers to conflict among Islamic peoples
GWOT/WOT/SWOT	Global War on Terror/War on Terror/Swiss War on Terror

Haram	In Islamic jurisprudence used to denote something that is seen as immoral. In colloquial Arabic, can be used to express sympathy.
Hassan Nasrallah	Third and current Secretary General of Hezbollah
Hashd	Popular Mobilisation Forces (*Al-Hashd al-shaabi*) in Iraq, a predominantly Shia militia that mobilised against Daesh in 2014, later integrated into the Iraqi security apparatus
Hezbollah/Hezb	lit. 'Party of God'; Lebanese militia and political party
Hezbi	Hezbollah member or sympathiser
IDF	Israeli Defence Forces
Intifada	Rebellion or uprising, usually considered as legitimate, frequently referring to Palestinian resistance
IS	Designated terrorist group 'Islamic State'
ISF	Internal Security Forces, Lebanese national police force
JAN	Jabhat Al-Nusra (Al-Nusra Front), AQ affiliate involved in the Syrian civil war
JM	Jabal Mohsen, district in Tripoli
Kataeb	Lebanese Phalanges Party, a proponent of right-wing Christian nationalism
Kafir/Kuffar/Takfir/ ***Takfiri***	A person considered as an unbeliever or infidel (singular/plural), frequently used by *takfiri* groups which declare other groups or sects as infidels (through *takfir*) and thereby legitimise attacks against them
Khalas	Colloquial expression to say 'stop', 'finished' or 'enough'
Khattab Al-Shishani	Refers to Omar Al-Shishani, Georgian Chechen jihadist fighter who served as a commander of Daesh in Syria and Iraq
Kuffiyeh	Traditional Arab headdress that became a symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian people
LBP	Lebanese Pound, the currency of Lebanon (per 13 January 2020, 1 USD = 1515 LBP
Marine Le-Pen	French politician and leader of the National Rally Party, considered as right-wing and French nationalist. Daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen.
Mohamed Morsi	5th Egyptian president, elected in 2012 following the revolution and deposed by General Abdelfattah al-Sisi in 2013. Died in captivity in 2019.
Osama Mansour	Islamist militant and leader of a group affiliated with IS in Tripoli. Killed by Internal Security Forces in 2014.
Oslo Accords	Agreements between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation PLO, signed between 1993 and 1995, as part of a peace process

PKK	*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistane*, Kurdistan Workers' Party, a revolutionary socialist party and militant organisation working towards Kurdish independence
Rafic Hariri	Lebanese businessman and politician, Prime Minister of Lebanon 1992–1998 and 2000–2004. Assassinated in 2005.
Rifaat Eid	Leader of the Arab Democratic Party in Tripoli
Saddam Hussein	President of Iraq from 1979 to 2003
Salafism/*Salafiyya*	Movement among Sunni Islam that developed in Egypt in the late 19th century and promotes the return to the ancestors (the *Salaf*), the companions of the prophet Mohammed PBUH (the *Sahabah*) and rejecting most forms of modern hermeneutic Islamic jurisprudence
Salim al Rafi'i	Salafi preacher from Tripoli accused of recruiting for IS
Shii/Shia	One of the two main branches of Islam; believes that Ali Ibn Abi Taleb, son-in-law of the prophet Mohammed, is his rightful successor
SPVM	Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal
Subhan Allah	Exclamation that translates as 'Glorified is God'. It is colloquially used as a means to express astonishment or bewilderment.
Sunni/Sunna	One of the two main branches of Islam; believes that the first caliph Abu Bakr Abdullah ibn Othman is the rightful successor of the Prophet Mohammed PBUH
Istishhad/Shaheed	Arabic for martyrdom/martyr; frequently refers to death during military operations, but also more generally to include unjustified killings
Tareeq Al-Jdeeda	Neighbourhood in Beirut, predominantly Sunni district
USD	United States Dollar, frequently used in Lebanon
UN	United Nations
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon: Peacekeeping contingent established in 1978
Wallahi	Frequently used expression that can be translated as 'I swear to God'
WWII	World War II
YPG	*Yekineyen Parastina Gel*, Kurdish People's Defense Units, Kurdish-led militia in Syria

Introduction

Studying violence

Violence is one of those concepts that seems seductively consensual yet remains so elusive. We seem to agree that violence is undesirable, yet rarely go about actually engaging with its meaning. *When* is it really undesirable? When is it acceptable? The apparent consensus obscures the reality that violence is omnipresent and that we accept it, whether wittingly or unwittingly, in various forms on a daily basis. When we are directly targeted by physical violence, there may be little ambiguity from our point of view as to the actual meaning of violence. However, when we are not directly and immediately impacted, how do we make sense of violence?

Our perception of violence is often conditioned by notions of *legitimacy*: The same act may be considered as legitimate or illegitimate, depending on the perceived legitimacy of the acting individual, which resonates with the age-old adage that 'one person's freedom fighter is another person's terrorist', particularly relevant for research on political violence and terrorism. State actors such as soldiers and police officers tend to be considered to be acting legitimately when they attack and overthrow, injure or even kill a person in the name of 'defence' or 'security'. Acts by non-state actors against state actors, on the other hand, are usually considered as illegitimate and transform the agent of violence into a 'criminal', 'insurgent' or 'terrorist'. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) argue persuasively that 'the social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning' (p.1) and that 'rather than *sui generis*, violence is in the eye of the beholder' (p.2).

This idea can be taken one step further: For violence to come into existence, the beholder's gaze has first to be directed towards it. In other words, violence must be *seen* first, to be acknowledged and to provoke all the emotional and social processes that it tends to set in motion: Indignation, sadness, horror, defensiveness, search for protection and security, willingness to intervene and counter violence, etc. Yet, it is virtually impossible for us to *see* the plethora of manifestations of violence, let alone acknowledge all of them. Add to this that we are limited in our ability to see independently: More often than not, our gaze is guided by the information we receive, through friends and family, our schools and conventional (and

increasingly social) media, the social and political context in which we grow up. Hence, the violence we *see* informs our collective imaginary of what violence *is*. This has implications not only for those outlets that provide us with information and images daily, but for social science research as well. What do we choose to study? What are we encouraged to study? Where are we directing our academic gaze?

In his essay *Spiral of Violence*, Brazilian archbishop Helder Camara wrote that there are three forms of violence: **institutional** violence which legalises and perpetuates domination, oppression and exploitation; **revolutionary** violence, which is born out of a wish to eliminate the first type; and **repressive** violence, crushing the second type of violence, while being an accomplice of the first type of violence (Camara, 1970). One of the greatest hypocrisies is, arguably, looking at and fighting the second type of violence only, thereby supporting the third (which kills it) and ignoring the first (that bears it) (Plenel, 2019). Blakeley (2017) suggests that there is a widespread assumption that 'liberal democratic states do not use terrorism' (p.55), although the most devastating forms of indiscriminate violence have been committed in the context of colonialism and imperialism, during the two world wars, and during the era of decolonisation. 'State terrorism' tends to escape scrutiny, while politico-ideological violence by non-state actors receives disproportionate attention, by the media, the public and academia (Jackson, 2012; Sommier, 2002).

The academic gaze, it seems, rests stubbornly on what Camara considers as the second type of violence, committed by non-state actors. Within criminology, this translates as an overwhelming focus on the 'crimes of the powerless' and simultaneous neglect of 'crimes of the powerful', with as little as 3% of publications in criminology journals being concerned with the latter (Michalowski & Kramer, 2006). This is an implicit bias that researchers of PIV should, at least, be aware of, and, ideally, actively reduce by sincerely accounting for the first and third type of violence. As Brahimi (2016) suggests, intellectuals should contribute to the understanding of movements and individuals that engage in struggles against oppression in their respective contexts in a way that allows understanding of the complexity and plurality of their trajectories, including the dialectic nature of the violence they find themselves in.

As it stands, the academic gaze tends to be afflicted with a (state-centrist) moralistic framing of *non*-state violence. Gelderloos (2007) argues that, philosophically speaking, proponents of non-violence (which he calls 'pacifists') tend to fail to distinguish between the structural and institutional violence of the state, 'individualised social violence of the *criminal* sort, and collective social violence of the *revolutionary* sort, aimed at destroying the violence of the state' (p. 123) (a distinction maintained by Cohan (2006) as well). The self-declared anarchist invites us to rethink our biases in considering and condemning violence. Similarly, Dabashi (2011) suggests that there is a post-9/11 tendency to *politicise the 'criminal'* with the specific aim of *criminalising the political*. He argues that the politicisation of certain (what he calls) 'criminal' groups such as Al-Qaeda serves the criminalisation of many other political resistance movements that may employ violent means,

such as the Palestinian Hamas. Kundnani (2014) argues along similar lines, suggesting that the discourse and praxis of the global and domestic War on Terror have grossly neglected the role of state violence. He cites Martin Luther King, who realised that it was impossible to challenge individual political violence without challenging the more powerful and far-reaching violence of the state:

> As I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men, I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action. But they asked, and rightly so, 'What about Vietnam?' They asked if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government.
>
> (Martin Luther King, Beyond Violence, quoted by Kundnani (2014, p.290))

In line with these arguments, I suggest that is ethically untenable and analytically insufficient to, on the one hand, look at non-state violence exclusively, as if it existed in a vacuum, and, on the other hand, do away with terrorism and political violence as merely a form of 'criminal' social violence, thereby warranting the downplaying of socio-structural and political causes. Analytically (and ethically), the study of such an inherently social and political phenomenon ought to aspire to be operating outside politicised, biased and normative definitions. The focus on what is seen and presented as 'terrorism' and 'extremism' translates into a dubious moral stance, namely one which sides with conceptions of right and wrong that are defined by dominant *status quo* forces, which have an inherent interest in the delegitimisation of any form of violence that may jeopardise their existence (see also Becker, 1967; Liebling, 2001).

Introducing the book

Arguably, by focusing on non-state actors, this book is aligned with those tendencies. However, my ambition is to study the narratives of non-state actors engaged in revolutionary political action in order to better understand structural and state violence through their prisms. I will therefore engage with grievances as the core object of inquiry and study politico-ideological mobilisation and violence by focusing on the life stories, trajectories and narratives of individuals who are engaged in causes and conflicts in the Arab World, such as the Palestinian cause or the Syrian conflict. In my doctoral thesis, which forms the basis of this book, my aspiration was to gain a greater understanding of the biographical, sociological and political as well as historic factors that are or were pertinent for their violent engagement.

What makes individuals identify with suffering and injustice, often of others, elsewhere? What are the grievances that drive them and what do these grievances reveal about the spirals of violence and the vicious circles that continue to produce and nurture those who are called terrorists? Why do individuals feel the need to stand up in the first place and how does violent action become a justifiable or necessary course of action? Why and how do they disengage from violence? These are some of the questions that this book seeks to provide some answers to. It is structured as follows.

Part I presents definitions of politico-ideological violence (PIV) and mobilisation (PIM) – terms that will be used here instead of the better-known concepts of terrorism, violent extremism or radicalisation (in the narrow sense that dominates the radicalisation literature) and explains the study's geographical focus in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 starts out with an analysis of the overarching political environment in which research on terrorism has developed since 9/11, including the Global War on Terror, the rise of the Preventive State and the flourishing of the anti-radicalisation business. The role of academia is briefly explored by engaging with the three major biases that have dominated the field, namely orientalism, state-centrism and depoliticisation. I go on to argue that these biases are to a large part responsible for the sidelining of grievances as a valid category of analysis in the study of terrorism and radicalisation. In order to counterbalance this tendency, I put forward arguments for a radical engagement with grievances and the role they play in mobilisation and violence.

Chapter 3 describes the research protocol used in this book. It starts out by laying out the author's epistemic positioning which informed the methodological reflections and the choice of methods. Grounded Theory was considered to be the most appropriate methodology given the phenomenon at hand, the desire to make a significant contribution to the existing literature, and the aspiration to produce a perspective *from below*, based primarily on the narratives of those who are involved in it. This chapter also describes the primary data collection tool in this study, namely semi-structured interviews. After presenting the research sample, I briefly go into the sampling rationale and the strategies. This chapter also provides short descriptions of the interviewees that are intended to convey an impression of the variety of profiles, trajectories and backgrounds covered in this study.

Part II is concerned with the in-depth description and mapping of grievances. Chapter 4 starts by presenting the three ideal-types of grievances developed in my earlier work (Ajil, 2022), namely ethno-racial, socio-economic and political grievances. Chapters 5–7 then go on to map the grievances that were identified across the narratives collected and analysed. Chapter 8 presents an intermediate discussion on the ideal-types and the commonalities between them, as well as the characteristics that can be attributed to grievances.

Part III presents a core contribution of the book, namely an analysis of the way grievances emerge, are engaged with and acted upon. It does so by studying grievances as *social performances*, resulting from an iterative process of individual and collective construction and reconstruction. The term performance emerged throughout analysis of the data because it captures the ways grievances

are acted upon, how they may be actively used, misused and abused, and how they are embedded in ideological constructs that justify and promote mobilisation for a particular cause. Grievances revolve around a central theme, namely something that is perceived as a major and flagrant injustice: Individuals come to *identify* these injustices (Chapter 9), they *appropriate* them for themselves (Chapter 10) and *responsibilise* themselves to do something to redress them (Chapter 11). The three performances provide useful keys to understanding how grievances can lead to mobilisation and violence.

Part IV presents findings on aspects of PIM and PIV that are slightly disconnected from grievances, but nevertheless crucial for a holistic understanding of the radicalisation processes. One of these aspects is, for instance, what appears to be the *taste of radicality* (Chapter 12). Beyond merely acting upon grievances, radical trajectories can be attractive in and by themselves. Thrill-seeking, adventurism, bravado and excitement provide gratifying feelings that stand somewhat in contrast to the tragic necessity of violent action in response to injustices. The taste of radicality is mainly responsible for the recurring tensions between emotionality and rationality, and between authentic engagement with grievances and their instrumentalisation for political or idiosyncratic ends. Chapter 13 presents an in-depth engagement with the logics of extreme violence, elaborating on the role of contextual factors and biographic availability, and Chapter 14 provides findings on disengagement processes.

In **Part V**, Chapter 15 discusses the findings in light of the existing literature and presents an integrated theory on grievance-based engagement that incorporates the various findings and brings them to a higher level of abstraction. Chapter 16 concludes with a brief discussion of potential implications for research and policymaking.

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Part I

Towards a grievance-based analysis

1 Engaging with PIV and PIM in relation to the Arab World

Defining politico-ideological violence and mobilisation

This book engages with a phenomenon that has mostly been referred to as terrorism or violent extremism. Both these notions are heavily politically and emotionally laden and based on implicit and diverging assumptions about who is the enemy, what is legitimate or illegitimate violence, and what can be considered political and what cannot (Stampnitzky, 2017). There is still no consensus on how to define terrorism. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566, adopted unanimously on 8 October 2004, defines terrorism as

> criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, and all other acts which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.
>
> (United Nations, 2004)

In many ways, violent extremism has simply become a new buzzword to talk about what had hitherto been widely referred to as terrorism. In its *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, the UN General Assembly discusses measures to prevent **violent extremism** but fails, ironically, to define it: 'The present Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism considers and addresses violent extremism as, and when, conducive to terrorism. Violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition' (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Mrs Ni Aoláin, the UN Special Rapporteur on counterterrorism and human rights, expresses her concern that 'the definition of 'violent extremism' remains opaque and deeply contested' and 'warns against the use of new terminology that, like terrorism, is overly vague and allows for broad discretion in its application' (Ni Aoláin, 2020). According to Stephens, Sieckelink and Boutellier (2021), violent extremism posits a distinction between idealistic and behavioural definitions of extremism

meaning it can be used to refer to political ideas that are diametrically opposed to a society's core values.[…]Or it can mean the methods by which actors seek to realize any political aim. The concept of 'violent extremism' tends toward a more behavioral than idealistic definition, in that it places focus on violence as a means, rather than the holding of extreme views themselves—in other words, it would be possible to hold 'extreme views' in that they are in opposition to societal values, but not to be a 'violent extremist'.

(p.2)

Based on an extensive review of the literature and historical use of terminologies, Bötticher (2017) suggests that extremism

exists at the periphery of societies and seeks to conquer its center by creating fear of enemies within and outside society. They divide fellow citizens and foreigners into friends and foes, with no room for diversity of opinions and alternative life-styles. Extremism is, due to its dogmatism, intolerant and unwilling to compromise. Extremists, viewing politics as a zero-sum game, tend – circumstances permitting – to engage in aggressive militancy, including criminal acts and mass violence in their fanatical will for gaining and holding political power.

(p.74)

Extremism is therefore generally understood as destructive, divisive and therefore inherently negative. Bötticher (2017) goes on to compare extremism with radicalism and finds that a major distinction between the two is that 'radical movements tend to use political violence pragmatically and on a selective basis, while extremist movements consider violence against their enemies as a legitimate form of political action and tend to embrace extreme forms of mass violence as part of their political credo' (p.75). Radicalism is therefore considered as a generally positive and constructive, although potentially and strategically violent, political posture. Bötticher proposes radicalism as

an ideological mindset tends to be very critical of the existing status quo, pursuing the objective of restructuring and/or overthrowing outdated political structures. By their opponents, radicals are often portrayed as violent; but this is only partly correct, as radicalism tends to be associated historically more with a progressive reformism than with utopian extremism, whose glorification of violence it rejects. Radicalism is emancipatory and does not seek to subjugate people and enforce conformity like extremism does.

(p.75)

The notions of **radicalisation**, **radicalism** and **radicality** are inherent to the debate on politico-ideological violence, whereas the latter two refer to a state, similarly to extremism, whereas the former denotes the *process towards that state*. Bonelli & Carrié (2018) suggest defining radicality as 'acts and behaviours

that transgress established norms and the reaction to these transgressions by institutions which see in them a subversive threat to the political and social order of which they are the guardians' (p.16). This definition remains however focused on state-sanctioned definitions ('established norms'). As mentioned, state-centricity in research on the phenomenon at hand is largely unhelpful in analytical terms. In line with Bötticher (2017), McManus (2020) suggests reconceptualising 'radicalism' according to an understanding influenced by the work of Pablo Freire (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) as an 'increased commitment to a position one has chosen' that is 'predominantly critical, loving, humble and communicative, and therefore a positive stance' (1970/1996, p.327). A main component of radicalism or radicality is criticality (McManus, 2020). Violent tactics, however, are *not* a necessary corollary of radicality, as Schmid (2013) argues. Reidy (2018) proposes distinguishing between *malevolent* and *benevolent* radicalisation, depending on whether the outcome of radicalisation includes violence or not, whether it is destructive or constructive, anti-social or prosocial. Similarly, Kundnani (2014) suggests that radicalisation, 'in the true political sense of the word', may be the solution to terrorism, not the problem. He refers to a critical and conscious stance with the ability to question injustices and speak truth to power, which is reminiscent of *criticality* as mentioned by McManus (2020). Derfoufi (2020) also insists on a separation of radicalisation from pathways to terrorism. He defines radicalisation as 'the process of growing critical consciousness whereby individuals adopt norms increasingly different to mainstream groups, including belief in the efficacy of non-injurious (certainly non-fatal) forms of direct action' (p.15).

A specific manifestation of military engagement that is relevant for the contemporary discussion of politico-ideological violence in relation to causes beyond one's immediate context, is **foreign fighting**. Foreign fighting is the term that is commonly used to describe individuals who join foreign armies or armed groups. It has become popular with the growing flow of individuals from various countries joining conflict zones in Syria and Iraq (Dawson & Amarasingam, 2017; Hegghammer, 2013; Malet, 2013). The phenomenon per se is, however, not new. Well-known examples are the international mobilisation of an estimated 50,000 revolutionaries for the Spanish civil war to fight against the Franquist regime in the 1930s or around 5,000 individuals from various countries who joined Israeli forces in the 1948 Arab–Israeli War (Carlson et al., 2019). During the 1980s, up to 20,000 individuals joined the Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviet Union and during the Balkan Wars a similar, yet much smaller wave of foreign fighters joined the Bosnians (Hegghammer, 2013).

The term foreign fighting is technical and will be used for individuals who have travelled abroad to support the military activities of entities not related to the states of which they are citizens. The terms 'terrorism', 'radicality' and 'radicalisation' will be used for purposes of readability, especially where they refer to official definitions or self-descriptions by the actors involved. Broadly speaking, terrorism will usually refer to acts of violence, radicality to an activist posture and mindset, and radicalisation to processes of increased commitment to a cause. Generally, however, and in order to gain some distance from the politicised

debates on terminology, I will be working primarily with the concept of **polit-ico-ideological violence**, which I first defined as 'acts of violence committed in defence of a collective (not individual) cause, justified on political or ideological grounds and seen as inherently moral by the agents of violence themselves' (Ajil, 2022, p.13). Over the course of my doctoral research and based on continuous analysis of the data, I have expanded the definition as follows

> Politico-ideological violence is any form of armed violence by non-state actors that is justified on political and ideological grounds. It is considered morally just and warranted by the actors themselves. Although it is individual in its final materialisation (a person chooses to fight, attack, injure, kill, etc.), it is collective in its conception, for it is employed to defend, protect or revenge a collective that is being seen as suffering from flagrant, recurring and, crucially, unpunished, injustice.

The *political* is closely linked to the notion of *power*: 'Political means relating to the way power is achieved and used in a country or society' ('Political', n.d.). Political justifications in the specific context of PIV refer to the mishandling and abuse of power, as well as imbalances of power, which may lead to disadvantaging certain groups or segments of society. The 'ideological' is inherently normative, for it refers to a set of ideas and principles about how the world should be and how power should be handled. Ideology can be defined as a 'system of general ideas that constitute a body of philosophical and political doctrine on which individual and collective behaviour is based'[1]. Traditionally, ideology is understood as a set of ideas dominating a particular economic or political system. According to a Marxist understanding, an ideology is a set of ideas and values the ruling class employs to justify the mode of production that is dominant and beneficial to the ruling class (Marx, 1978). Similarly, Althusser (1971) defines ideology as a system of representations that serve to mask our actual relations in society, thereby distorting our view and facilitating our control through the state apparatus. In the study of political violence, however, ideology has become associated with the set of ideas that present a specific analysis of the world and provide justifications for violence against a designated enemy. Ideology combines empirical evidence with unsubstantiated ideas. As Shayegan (2014) suggests, 'ideology responds to two needs: The need for belief and the need for justifying that belief' (p.196). Both notions – the political and the ideological – are closely intertwined which warrants their subsumption under the combined adjective 'politico-ideological'. For purposes of readability, the terms political violence and politico-ideological violence will be used interchangeably.

Based on this working definition, we may argue that PIV tends to be seen as 'illegitimate' rather than 'legitimate', because it is employed by non-state actors. Depending on the motives of the main actors, PIV may be associated with either extremism or radicalism as suggested above. It is, however, more likely to be 'revolutionary' rather than 'criminal', because of its collective outlook and the politico-ideological construct that justifies it. Whether political and ideological

constructs as well as grievances are authentic or merely instrumentalised is a question that will be discussed in this book.

How, then, should we go about studying PIV? Which prism should we choose? Focusing on the violence itself is hardly useful in analytical terms, for the same action may have a completely different meaning depending on the context, the one who executes it, and the one who judges it. Focusing on the 'physicality' of violence (e.g., armed attacks, bombings, joining a militia) may be one way of reifying, objectifying and operationalising PIV, but it is still unlikely to tell us anything substantial about the diversity of actors engaged in it. Rather, it is likely to hamper the analytical project, as Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) argue

> Focusing exclusively on the physical aspects of torture/terror/violence misses the point and transforms the project into a clinical, literary, or artistic exercise, which runs the risk of degenerating into a theatre or pornography of violence in which the voyeuristic impulse subverts the larger project of witnessing, critiquing, and writing against violence, injustice, and suffering.
>
> (p.1)

Thus, the approach chosen here is intended to move beyond violence and look at the mobilisation towards violence in a more transversal light. The parochial focus on jihadist violence since 9/11 has hampered holistic analysis of the phenomenon at hand. More recently, with the emergence of extremism and radicalisation studies, transversal approaches have started to subsume jihadist, right-wing and left-wing violence under one analytical banner. This has provided some interesting insights into factors that are at play in mobilisations towards violent engagement more generally (although such approaches may miss out on the specific structural, political and cultural components of each group or ideology). In this book, the focus will be on both common factors and those that are specific to each ideological orientation.

Crucially, the focus is extended to individuals who care about similar causes but choose predominantly non-violent tactics for their engagement. Those will be treated as forms of **politico-ideological mobilisation (PIM)**. I suggest PIM as

> committing oneself on an intellectual, emotional and physical level to a cause one strongly cares about for political and ideological convictions. PIM may include individual engagement for, participation in, support of, or sympathy with a group, party or movement that is invested in that cause.

PIM is, therefore, more closely related to dominant understandings of extremism, as opposed to violent extremism. The overarching interest pursued by this approach to the study of PIV *and* PIM is to understand why and how individuals come to act upon grievances and feelings of injustice. How do grievances develop in the first place? While many may hold grievances, why do these individuals choose to act upon them? What do their trajectories look like? How do they narrate their engagement? Is their engagement predominantly violent or non-violent?

If violent tactics are chosen, how are they justified? By combining the narratives of those who end up engaging in various forms of violence for political and ideological reasons with those who have a predominantly non-violent political engagement, this book adopts an innovative and original methodological approach to shed light on these questions.

The Arab World as a focal point

A comprehensive analysis of politico-ideological violence including the various forms it has taken over the course of history would exceed the scope of this study. In this book, I am focusing on politico-ideological mobilisation and violence after 9/11 and in relation to the Arab World. Generally speaking, any engagement where the political and ideological motives refer to geopolitical situations in Arab countries such as Palestine, Syria or Iraq, which have been or become theatres of conflicts over the last two decades, is considered. Forms of contemporary PIV include joining a non-state actor involved in the conflict, participating in fighting and staging attacks. It may also include joining a group with ties to a non-state actor involved in the conflict, but which is active outside the immediate zone of conflict. This includes groups and individuals who plan and stage attacks in countries that are not directly involved in the conflict.

Increased awareness of conflicts in the Arab World has been shown to elicit sentiments of frustration and anger from people who identify strongly with the suffering of civilians (Conway, 2017). Causes linked to Palestine, the Arab World or the suffering of an imagined worldwide Islamic community have become emblematic. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict figures prominently in the narrative repertoire of various movements, ranging from the *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Della Porta, 2013), *Brigate Rosse* (Imarisio, 2003), the Irish Resistance Army (Miller, 2010), Swiss far-left groups (Villiger, 2013), Black freedom struggles (Abdulhadi, 2018; Daulatzai, 2012), Latin American revolutions (Meari, 2018) and groups aligned with Islamist ideologies, from more moderate ones to the most violent (Ahmed, 2005; Hegghammer & Wagemakers, 2013; Lakhani, 2014; Mohamedou, 2018). It is at the core of links between groups in very different contexts, such as Hezbollah and the New IRA (Arab News, 2020) or, formerly, left-wing groups in central Europe and Palestinian liberation fighters (Gyr, 2016). As Palestinian author and member of the Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) Ghassan Kanafani once put it: 'The Palestinian cause is not a cause for Palestinians only, but a cause for every revolutionary, wherever he is, as a cause for the exploited and oppressed masses in our era' (Meari, 2018, p.50).

Hegghammer and Wagemakers (2013) observed that 'the 'Palestine effect' appears to be a primarily motivational mechanism.[…]It is a fact of political life in the region that many young [men] feel strongly about Palestine and that this emotion often factors into the decision by non-Palestinian Islamists to engage in militancy' (p.314). Osama Bin Laden himself placed the Palestinian cause at the core of Al-Qaeda's grievances against the United States, in his videotape following the 9/11 attacks

> The blood pouring out of Palestine must be equally revenged[…]the American people have chosen, consented to, and affirmed their support for the Israeli oppression of the Palestinians, the occupation and usurpation of their land, and its continuous killing, torture, punishment and expulsion of the Palestinians.
>
> (*The Guardian*, 2002)

Elsewhere, researchers have identified a so-called 'Iraq effect' (Wehrey et al., 2010): The invasion of Iraq in 2003 became a *cause célèbre* that offered a narrative of resistance against Western domination, consolidated pre-existing grievances and provided an impetus for engagement in violence. Nesser (2006) found that the perpetrators of violent attacks like the bombing of Madrid or the killing of Theo van Gogh were strongly influenced by Western military operations in Arab countries, such as the occupation of Palestine and the Iraq war. To him, 'the impact of the Iraq war must be understood within the framework of motivational spillover effects from armed conflicts to international terrorism' (p.338). In their study of the Dutch *Hofstadgroup*, that was responsible for the killing of Theo Van Gogh, Schuurman, Bakker and Eijkman (2018) also found that

> in the absence of geopolitical events involving the perceived victimization of Muslim populations and the violent responses that this elicited from groups like al-Qaeda, the Hofstadgroup would arguably not have existed or developed in the way it did. Geopolitically inspired grievances were a key structural-level factor leading to the Hofstadgroup's emergence and motivating the violent intentions of some of its most extremist participants.
>
> (p. 107)

In a study financed by the UN Office of Counterterrorism (UNOCT), conducted by Hamed El-Said and Richard Barrett, and focusing on Lebanese foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), the authors found that

> Unresolved conflicts that include inter-communal violence appear to be one of the strongest magnets for FTFs. A sense of identity with – and a desire to help – co-religionists who are perceived as victimised and mistreated by other groups has developed into a sense of obligation to act in defence of one's in-group. This was one of the most common reasons that individual FTFs in our sample gave for travelling to Syria. Empathy with the Sunni communities in Syria that are portrayed as being under attack as much for their belief as for any other reason was a common theme. For some, this sense of brotherhood was reinforced by a sense of religious obligation.
>
> (El-Said & Barrett, 2017, p.3)

There is also plenty of anecdotal evidence pointing to the fact that Western powers' role in conflicts in Palestine, Syria and Iraq are major motives for terroristic violence in Europe and North America. For instance, the morning preceding the

Orlando shooting, the perpetrator Omar Mateen posted on Facebook: 'The real Muslims [*sic*] will never accept the filthy ways of the west[…] You kill innocent women and children by doing us airstrikes[…]now taste the Islamic state [*sic*] vengeance' (Ross et al., 2016). The perpetrator of an attack against Canada's parliament building, Michael Zehaf-Bibeau, had made a video prior to his attack, expressing his motives as being related to Canada's foreign policies (CBC News, 2014). The perpetrators of the Boston Marathon bombing, the Tsarnaev brothers, also reportedly stated they wanted to take revenge for American military invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (Pearson, 2013). In an interview with a journalist of France's BFMTV during the afternoon after the Charlie Hebdo attacks, one of the perpetrators, Cherif Kouachi, stated

> We are not killers. We are defenders of the prophet, we don't kill women. We kill no one. We defend the prophet. If someone offends the prophet then there is no problem, we can kill him. We don't kill women. We are not like you. You are the ones killing women and children in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. This isn't us.
>
> (NBC News, 2015)

Finally, the legacy of colonialism and its impact on postcolonial state systems also nurture globally oriented political grievances. In fact, to some authors, contemporary forms of political violence cannot be dissociated from the consequences of violence perpetrated in the era of colonialism and imperialism (Burgat, 2016; Dabashi, 2011). Mohamedou (2018) describes this effect as 'colonialism boomerang'. As he puts it, with reference to the group ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria): '*Return to sender* is in effect the motto of the violence counter-produced, remixed and shipped back by ISIS to the imperial centres' (p.2).

The emergence of jihadist groups has also drawn attention to the imaginary of a transnational Islamic collective. While these groups use this imaginary to reinforce feelings of solidarity and responsibility, the imaginary exists independently of their agendas (Piscatori, 2019). The imaginary of the transnational Islamic community, of course, spans far beyond the Arab World (itself, in fact, a similar imaginary). While some Arab Muslims may consider Arabness and Muslimness as closely entangled, the collective imaginary is much more plural in the eyes of most, especially Christian or Jewish, secular or atheist Arabs. The idea of an 'Arab nation', built on a common language and cultural heritage, is ubiquitous in an age of global connectedness through social media and transnational movements (Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020). Pan-Arab nationalism gave rise to transnational Arab socialist projects of *Baathism* or *Nasserism* and materialised to a certain degree institutionally in the form of the Arab League, which comprises 22 nations across Asia and Africa. It goes without saying that, as Ramsay and Alkheder (2020) point out, while the 'Arab World' may be understood as an imagined political and cultural geography, one would be mistaken to assume a monolithic Arab identity.

Specific Arab countries such as Iraq or Syria have also received significant media coverage since the turn of the century, and their civil wars have attracted foreign fighters from over 100 countries globally (UN News, 2015). Because individuals relate to the causes and conflicts in the Arab World via different imaginaries which exceed religion, a focus on the Arab World allows for a variety of trajectories of engagement and underlying ideologies, while maintaining a common politico-cultural focal point. It is therefore not surprising that the present study includes individuals from very different ideological orientations, such as left-wing, right-wing, Salafi-jihadist, Shiite militantism, pan-Arabism or socialist internationalism.

Note

1 'Système d'idées générales constituant un corps de doctrine philosophique et politique à la base d'un comportement individuel ou collectif' ('Idéologie', n.d.).

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2   Bringing grievances back in

The discourse of the 'war on terror' has a clear political purpose; it works for someone and for something; it is an exercise of power.

(Jackson, 2005, p.2)

Violent action by non-state actors based on political and ideological motives has appeared in different forms throughout recent European history: Anarchist groups around the turn of the 20th century, the Suffragette movement in the UK, communist volunteers from all over the world fighting against the Franquist regime during the Spanish civil war, resistant groups against Nazi Germany before and during WWII, Irish revolutionaries fighting British rule, revolutionary left-wing violence (most prominently in Italy and Germany) and right-wing terrorism in various European countries, to name only a few. Currently, we are witnessing the rise of white supremacist groups across North America, Europe and Australia (Auger, 2020).

Violence with links to the Arab World has mostly been the product of groups resisting the occupation of Palestine, active via hostage taking, assassinations and airline hijackings throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In the Arab World itself, non-state political and ideological violence in recent history has primarily taken the form of anti-colonial struggles against British and French rule throughout the region after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century. Though inspired by Pan-Arabism, the efforts often remained confined to the local national context and specifically aimed at defying the colonial rulers, such as the Great Iraqi revolt against the British in 1920, the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt during and its opposition to British imperial rule, the Libyan revolt against Italian occupation or the Algerian revolution against French occupation. Gradual decolonisation of the Arab World did not result in the reduction of oppositional violence, mainly because the newly established governments soon opted for authoritarianism. The nationalist forces that once paved the way for independence came to be perceived as threats, including Islamic political movements that had been allies during decades of anti-imperialist struggles. To preserve themselves, post-colonial Arab states engaged in heavy-handed repression of Islamic political movements from the 1960s onwards. The widespread

repression throughout the region provided a narrative of collective suffering at the hands of post-colonial regimes that had betrayed the cause of the Arab people, which set the foundations of the modern ideology of Pan-Islamism that prevails to this day. Pan-Islamism is at the core of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda, which emerged out of the involvement of Arab Mujahideen in the Soviet–Afghan War (1979–1989) – funded and supported by the US government – and evolved to become the main representative of pan-Islamist anti-imperialist violence worldwide. Through the attacks on 11 September 2001 (9/11), four coordinated aeroplane attacks in the United States claimed by Al-Qaeda, pan-Islamist violence grew to worldwide prominence (Abu Rumman, 2014; Mohamedou, 2018).

The *GWOT*, the rise of the *Preventive State* and the anti-radicalisation business

There had been large-scale violent attacks by non-state actors before 9/11 – none, however, as devastating and costly in human lives as 9/11. Crucially, on a symbolic level, it was the first time the violence that the United States had become very familiar with abroad, at the global periphery – through the various wars waged after WWII – struck back into the heart of the metropolis. 9/11 was the birth of the 'Global War on Terror' (GWOT), an imperial-militaristic project that sought to eradicate terror in its roots by invading Afghanistan and Iraq, at the price of *collateral damage* in the form of human suffering and death. While some saw this as a reaction to the attacks, the GWOT might be better conceptualised as a continuation of US foreign policy and an escalation of a vicious cycle of death and destruction (e.g., Kundnani, 2014; Mohamedou, 2018; Sanders, 2020).

While after 9/11, the efforts to counter and combat terrorism were directed to locations in the Global South, this changed around 2004 and 2005. The attacks in London, Madrid and Amsterdam led to the emergence of the notion of *radicalisation*, meaning *homegrown radicalisation*, focusing on individuals born and bred in Western countries that turn to jihadist violence (Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013). From then on, the image of a 'foreign enemy' was complemented with the image of a 'domestic enemy' who had 'radicalised' to the point of attacking the country he had grown up in. Efforts and policies of counterterrorism were then complemented by efforts to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. Kundnani (2012) suggests that the counterterrorism efforts of the US and UK governments shifted from a 'shock and awe' strategy to one of conquering the 'hearts and minds' both abroad and domestically, where the concept of radicalisation emerged as a vehicle to discuss the *process of becoming a terrorist* (as Neumann (2008, p.4) put it, 'what happens before the bomb goes off?') which had until then been taboo.

Hence, since the mid-2000s onwards, states have been concentrating their efforts on stopping acts of terrorism through the prevention of radicalisation (and 'extremism'), a phenomenon seen as a precursor to terroristic violence. As a result, states intervene when no punishable acts have been committed yet. Such preventionist logics have contributed to the exponential growth of screening

tools, projects and initiatives, designed to detect, assess and contain potential risks to society as soon as possible. These tendencies have been referred to as the *Preventive State*: A paradigm of security governance that includes control and surveillance practices put in place to prevent perceived risks, increased powers for security agencies, expanded criminal liability, pre-trial detention, and indefinite incarceration (Zedner & Ashworth, 2019). Generally speaking, the GWOT in both its international and domestic outlook has included and justified acts of torture, drone killings, arbitrary offshore detention, the use of *agents provocateurs*, targeted surveillance and selective criminalisation (Abbas, 2019; Codaccioni, 2019; Kundnani, 2014; Leman-Longlois, 2012; Sanders, 2020).

The expansion of resources, laws, policies, institutions, initiatives and companies with the aim of dealing with terrorism and radicalisation has also been dubbed the 'anti-radicalization business' (Kublitz, 2021 p.66) or the 'extremism industry' (El-Ojeili & Taylor, 2020, p.8). Apart from public actors, the private sector is increasingly involved in the so-called 'fight against radicalisation and extremism' (Kublitz, 2021; Kundnani, 2014).

El-Ojeili and Taylor (2020) provide a compelling analysis of the extremism industry as symptomatic of a dominant *post-hegemonic liberalism*, which ensued the thriving and successful neoliberalist project of the 1990s following the demise of the Soviet bloc. Post-hegemonic liberalism, they argue, has emerged as a way to counter the upsurge of antisystemic movements and ideas that threatened the neoliberal capitalist world order. The seeds of contemporary concern with extremism are to be located in the period of 'combative neoliberalism' (p.10) during the 1970s, which aimed to destroy collectivist competitors to hegemonic power. The rampant growth of the extremism industry from the 2000s onwards can then be understood from the vantage point of post-hegemonic liberalism, where knowledge needs to be produced on the threats and risks associated with antiliberalist contestations as a way to delegitimise, dehumanise and ultimately incapacitate these movements. This is largely achieved by depoliticising movements and actors and removing them from a social interactionist understanding of modern social relations. The authors suggest that antisystemic movements cannot be understood without looking at the role that neoliberalism plays in their existence: in the case of the Middle East's susceptibility to the 'extremist contagion' (p.12), the phenomenon has to be studied in the context of prior hopes of nationalist and socialist solutions, postcolonial economic dependency, Western interference, structural adjustments, repression and the frustration of popular hopes and expectations. For the European and North American context, Kundnani (2014) also attributes a central role to liberalism. The liberal state, he argues, presents itself as *a*-political and a neutral spectator, absolving itself thereby of its role in creating the conditions under which identitarian political violence occurs. This self-image, however, neglects that liberalism has itself developed a normative model of identity, a 'way of life into which lesser peoples needed to be civilised' (Kundnani, 2014, p.287). Thereby, in the context of the war on terror, the liberal state engages itself in a form of identity politics and conveys that one identity politics needs to be substituted by another, i.e., that ethnic,

cultural or religious affiliations needed to make space for the identity imposed by the liberal state.

Academia: A key stakeholder in the 'Global War on Terror'

Part of Foucault's legacy is the idea that all political and social forms of thought are inevitably caught up in the interplay of knowledge and power. There is, according to Foucaldian thought, no objective *truth* regarding social and political knowledge, but always a discursively forged and sustained *regime of truth*, dominant in a particular context, setting and time (Foucault, 1980). And the dominant truth about a certain phenomenon impacts has real-world repercussions for the individuals we associate with it. Stuart Hall describes this impact as follows: 'It may not be true that single parenting inevitably leads to delinquency and crime. But if everyone believes it to be so, and punishes single parents accordingly, this will have real consequences for both parents and children and will become 'true' in terms of its real effects' (Hall, 1997, p.49). Thus, when, as academics, we produce knowledge, we should be aware of the power structures that we were influenced by and that we inevitably end up feeding into. Given the devastating impact of the so-called 'Global War on Terror' in terms of human rights violations and the increased acceptability of Islamophobia and racism in populist, certainly, but in public discourse, more generally, producing knowledge on politico-ideological violence is inevitably an exercise of power that must be handled with caution.

The argument I put forward here is that academia is not a neutral and objective bystander in the global fight against terrorism, radicalisation and prevention. The academic world has been a key stakeholder in the fight against terrorism, by producing knowledge on the root causes of terrorism and the best ways to prevent such acts of large-scale violence. The rise of the so-called *terrorism studies,* a field that focuses specifically on terrorism and political violence after 9/11 quickly established itself as a discipline that tends to ignore the knowledge that has been produced in other disciplines before 9/11, as Jackson (2012) suggests

> How is it that the 'known' knowledge of the causes and resolution of violent political conflict (including conflicts where terrorism was present), which has accumulated from decades of conflict analysis and peace research, among others, remains largely 'unknown' within the terrorism studies field? Why is it that within terrorism studies research continues apace on questions related to terrorism's causes and effective responses without reference to the key scholars and existing studies of peace and conflict studies?
>
> (p.12)

It seems that this condition is at least partly due to the *New terrorism* thesis, which originated in the United States (Crenshaw, 2008). Put simply, *old terrorism* is associated with a form of violence that is comprehensible, with perpetrators assumed to have sensible political goals that can be negotiated and that are local (often territorial) in their orientation. States could bargain with the 'old' type

(Laqueur, 1999). *New terrorism,* on the other hand, is postulated as being irrational and megalomaniac, and associated with unlimited and unnegotiable goals. The role of religion, especially Islam, is put forward as a new driving force behind this violence. 'Old' terrorism is human and could be contained; 'new' terrorism is barbaric, monstrous and must be destroyed. The 'new' terrorism thesis resonates with Silke's observation that 'in dealing with extreme violence of any kind, there is a tendency to regard the perpetrators as psychologically abnormal and deviant' (Silke, 2004, p.178).[1] Following, I will present what I suggest as the three major biases in the study of terrorism and political violence, namely orientalism, state-centrism and depoliticisation.

Orientalism

The appeal of the *New terrorism* thesis can be better understood through a postcolonialist and constructivist, arguably Foucaldian, reading of Western knowledge production. The Western-centrism of academic knowledge production, which has been problematised elsewhere (Agozino, 2003; Al-Kassimi, 2018; Keet, 2014; Moosavi, 2018), is particularly pronounced when it comes to the study of politico-ideological violence. The pseudo-objective study of the Middle Eastern dangerous terrorist paved the way for Orientalism's renewed entry into force, three decades after Edward Said (1978) developed the concept and analysed its role in Western knowledge production. Almost all studies of terrorism considered as relevant are produced by researchers working in European and North American universities (Campana & Lapointe, 2012), who study phenomena and movements that are predominantly located in the Middle East and North Africa (Schuurman, 2019). It may be hardly surprising then, that 'persistent stereotypes, glib generalizations, and inaccurate assumptions about Islam and the Arab World underlie even the best terrorism research' (Mockaitis, 2003, p.211) – a statement Schuurman (2019) suggests remains valid almost two decades after 9/11. The seemingly objective study of PIV then mainly comes down to the analysis of 'violence at the periphery' through a prism defined by the metropolis, as cogently suggested by Mohamedou (2018). This might be particularly true in the case of criminology, which has been criticised for its traditional complicity with state power and imperialist projects in legitimising the control of colonial Others (Agozino, 2004; Bull, 2004; Kitossa, 2012), through what may be called processes of 'epistemic othering' (Keet, 2014).

Proper engagement with these foundational epistemological forces is hampered by the fact that the social sciences, especially criminology, continue to be dominated by positivist epistemologies (Ahmad & Monaghan, 2019; Tauri, 2013). In essence, positivism and its reliance on empiricism as the only source of genuine knowledge tend to ignore the extent to which academic research may be a site of persisting imperialist and oppressive structures and dynamics. Western science today perceives itself as post-ideological[2] and anti-racialist – an ideology which consists of dismissing racism as a relevant object of inquiry and refusing critical examination of the political conditions that enable racialised and racist

practices and politics (Boulila, 2019). Anti-racialism is a form of racial denial, 'characterised by historical amnesia, through which the histories of colonialism and slavery are not deemed important for the way race operates in contemporary Europe' (Boulila, 2019, p.1408). In fact, the radicalisation literature struggles to account for grievances related to historic experiences of suffering and large-scale violence, such as those produced by colonial-imperialist projects and slavery (Agozino, 2003; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010; Mohamedou, 2018). Prominent radicalisation scholars consider colonisation to be a 'thing of the past' (*une vieille antienne tiers-mondiste*, Roy, 2015) and downplay its pertinence for contemporary forms of PIV. A similar tendency was affecting the field of social movement theory, dominated by white male researchers, who were unable to capture the importance of the interplay between past and present, local and global systems of oppression and failed to predict the Black protest movements. African-American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois, on the other hand, had long pointed to 'the relationship among racism, colonialism, slavery, western empire building, and capitalist development. He theorized them as overlapping, mutually reinforcing systems of domination' (Morris, 2019, p.134). Hence, considering the Western-centrism of terrorism studies, the persistent focus on Islam and Muslimness as a central factor in terrorism research can be understood as a continuation of an orientalist tradition of thought (Said, 1978).

State-centrism

Another important characteristic of terrorism and radicalisation research is its proximity to the world of policymakers and political stakeholders. The concept of radicalisation, for instance, was developed by state actors and policymakers, before being adopted by academics (Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013). Even more problematically, many of these researchers entertain close links and have interests that overlap with those of state institutions (Jackson, 2012; Schmid, 2013; Silva, 2018). The most prominent researchers in the field are closely tied to law enforcement and intelligence agencies, such as Marc Sageman, former CIA officer and scholar-in-residence at the New York Police Department (NYPD) (Kundnani, 2012). Given radicalisation experts' positionality, one may therefore justifiably speak of radicalisation research as being a form of 'embedded expertise' (Mills, Massoumi & Miller, 2020, p.127). As a result of this, findings of such embedded experts are heavily skewed towards individualistic, psychological-culturalist and state-centrist assumptions about the radicalisation process (Ahmad & Monaghan, 2019). In his updated version of Kundnani's (2012) *Radicalisation: the journey of a concept*, Silva (2018) cogently demonstrates that

> governments ignore research critical of status-quo surveillance, intelligence and policing strategies in favour of questionable 'indicator' and 'evidence-based' studies attempting to identify the cultural, theological, psychological or even social characteristics of those in the so-called radicalisation process.
> (p.45)

Focusing on the individual is likely to cause significantly less institutional discomfort than considering the state and state actors as being involved in a dialectic with terrorists and non-state actors more generally (Duclos, 2020; Kundnani, 2012; Qureshi, 2020). As Kundnani (2014) writes

> An objective study would examine how state and nonstate actors mutually constitute themselves as combatants in a global conflict between the West and radical Islam and address under what conditions each chooses to adopt tactics of violence, paying close attention to the relationships between their legitimizing frameworks. Such an approach has the advantage of being consistent with what is known about the biographies, actions, and self-descriptions of terrorists themselves and those who publicly support terrorist violence.
>
> (p.141)

Although Silke and Schmidt-Petersen (2017) suggest that 'while a great deal of the recent work on terrorism is of mediocre or questionable quality, there is still more high-impact work being published now than at any previous time' (p.700), others judge the field's evolution less favourably. Schuurman (2019) examined the dominant topics in terrorism research from 2007 to 2016 (3,442 articles in leading academic journals) and found that there has been a persistent focus on jihadist forms of terrorism (in 74.5% of the articles), at the detriment of research into other forms of non-state political violence. The field also continues to heavily underemphasise state terrorism (mentioned in 2.1% of articles). This is unsurprising, according to the author, given that terrorism studies have traditionally construed political violence as something reserved for non-state actors, while foregoing that states have been the most active users of political violence throughout history. Another indicator of the field's state-centrist orientation is the fact that the research priorities and findings tend to mirror the terrorism-related concerns of states and match their counterterrorism interests. As Stampnitzky (2011) observes, 'the state has been not just the primary sponsor of knowledge-production, but also the primary consumer of research' (p.7) in the field of terrorism studies. The field of terrorism research continues to be driven by political and societal preoccupations. This may be understandable to a certain extent, yet it prevents in-depth engagement built on developing state-of-the-art knowledge on these topics. Another problem that both Schuurman (2019) and Kundnani (2012) point to is the desire and willingness of often self-proclaimed 'terrorism experts' (gaining legitimacy through sensationalist claims likely to be picked up and promoted by the media) to cater to the needs of governmental institutions and policymakers. De Koning (2020) writes about a 'security gaze' through which academic knowledge is used and misused by prosecutors and other public stakeholders to securitise individuals associated with particular forms of 'Muslimness'.

Given its genealogy and object of research, the field of criminology is particularly prone to producing state-centrist research and thereby dismissing the role of states and state agents as enactors of violence and harms themselves, including their complicity in criminal phenomena such as terrorism (Moosavi, 2019; Piché,

2015). Many concerns have been raised as to the state-centrism of criminological research, which has led some to speak of *administrative criminology*, including the tendency to sideline research that provides findings critical of states' use of power and violence (Belknap, 2015; Turner, 2013; Walters, 2003; Young, 1986). Scholars of state crime as well as the zemiologists (proponents of the study of social harms rather than crime) have pointed to the importance of recognising states as active criminal actors. Clement and Scalia (2020) argue, compellingly, that it is crucial to understand labelling processes in the 'War on Terror' which aim to produce and maintain the image of a 'public enemy', and the way they tend to obscure the dialectic relationship between state and non-state actors when it comes to crime and terrorism.

Depoliticisation

In line with orientalist and state-centrist tendencies, the field of terrorism and radicalisation research is epistemically dominated by individualist and psychological-culturalist approaches. The focus on religious, cultural, ethnic or psycho-pathological factors contributes to a *masking of the political* (Burgat, 2016; McEvoy, 2003; Sedgwick, 2010). Individualist approaches, therefore, serve another important tendency of terrorism studies, namely the *depoliticisation* of the phenomenon and its actors. Structural, sociopolitical, geopolitical and historical factors remain largely excluded from the analysis (Ajil, 2020; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010; Jackson, 2012; Kundnani, 2014; Lafaye & Rapin, 2017; Mohamedou, 2018).

Former US president George W. Bush shaped the agenda of depoliticisation in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 by claiming that

> we're not facing a set of grievances that can be soothed and addressed. We're facing a radical ideology with unalterable objectives to enslave whole nations and intimidate the world. No act of ours invited the rage of the killers – and no concession, bribe, or act of appeasement would change or limit their plans for murder.[3]

This statement resonates with Pomerantz' (2001) assertion that, to 'explain terrorism', emphasis should be put on 'mental difficulties as opposed to legitimate economic, political and religious grievances' (pp.2–3). As a result of these new *working hypotheses*, protagonists of PIV have been voided of their political agency and studied, usually from a distance, as actors whose ostentatiously political outcries ought merely to be understood as attempts to excuse or mask their *actual* intentions. Political grievances are considered as pretexts and cover to engage in violence or as post-facto excuses to reduce guilt or alleviate responsibility (Dawson, 2019). This potential instrumentalization, misperception of or overemphasis on grievances can lead analysts and researchers to discredit them in the study of politico-ideological violence (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Dawson, 2019).

The example of how the organisation of the so-called 'Islamic State' has been studied and analysed is telling. Mohamedou (2018) argues that the 'overwhelmingly under reductionist and sensationalist mainstream journalistic approach and through policy-oriented security expertise' has led to a 'focus on the group's extreme violence and its alienating discourse' and thereby 'prevented deeper examination of the political and social conditions behind its rise' (p.2). He goes even further by suggesting that

> the understanding of that violence of the savage has become boxed into a discussion on terrorism that strips it of its political nature and moves to discuss anthropologically the Muslim, Arab, Brown, Black or Southern perpetrator and the scriptures of their nominal religion.
>
> (Mohamedou, 2018, p.20)

Similarly, Crenshaw (2008), argues that the New terrorism thesis mainly serves the purpose of justifying the GWOT. It makes life easier for both policymakers and analysts, for existing knowledge can be dismissed by focusing on *New terrorism*, which is essentially regarded as *religiously driven terrorism*: 'If analysts can safely assume that religion is the cause of terrorism, they need not look for other more complex explanations that necessitate linking religion to other political, social, and economic factors' (Crenshaw, 2008, p.136). Maney et al. (2012) point out that approaches to terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11 have largely stigmatized insurgents and ignored political repression and structural violence as sources of armed conflict' (p.29). French Muslim scholars and practitioners agree that discourse on terrorism and radicalisation tends to 'exaggerate the religious dimension', 'obscure the political and geopolitical dimension of the emergence of extremist movements' and propose that the 'motives of jihadists are of the psychological, psychanalytical and religious sort, while in reality they are primarily of the political sort' (quotes in Geisser et al., 2017, p.200). The 'anti-radicalisation business', Kublitz (2021) suggests, was only able to thrive and travel across the borders because it developed a specific language that, 'by delinking words from historically and socially grounded phenomena […], decontextualises violence and reduces complex political and historical conflicts to a seemingly simple problem' (p.71).

Sidelining of grievances

The combined effect of these epistemological issues afflicting knowledge production on politico-ideological violence – **orientalism**, **state-centrism**, and **depoliticisation** – must be seen as a major obstacle to proper engagement with its object of inquiry. Terrorist violence is studied from a distance by individuals who rarely share anything with their research subjects, on every imaginable scale. It is analysed through a lens that attributes axiomatic legitimacy to the state, while the nature of the violence itself is about defying and attacking state power. A state-centred approach will systematically fail to incorporate the missteps and abuses

that are either brought about or promoted by state actors (or from which they may benefit) into the analysis of the phenomenon, thus missing an important component for a holistic understanding. And finally, the violence and its agents are portrayed as a-political subjects mainly motivated by religious fanaticism, while their declared motives have always revolved around politics and geopolitics, even when embedded in a religiously tainted lexicon. Crucially, criminology's increased engagement with terrorism has not disrupted these forces. Despite its potential for critical reflexivity, it is the field's positivist mainstream that has taken on the study of the phenomenon, thereby mostly reproducing the already existing epistemic dysfunctionalities (for a mapping study, see Ahmad & Monaghan, 2019).

The combination of the field's epistemological handicaps is also responsible for the sidelining of grievances as an object of inquiry. Grievances have always been there as a central element in the formation of groups and movements that engage in politico-ideological violence. Bin Laden himself clearly stated that the motives for his actions were the harms produced by US foreign policy in the Arab World. In his 'Message to the American People', on 29 January 2004, he wrote

> God knows that it had never occurred to us to strike the [Twin] Towers. But after it became unbearable and we witnessed the oppression and tyranny of the American-Israeli coalition against our people in Palestine and Lebanon, the idea came to my mind. The events that affected my soul in a direct way started in 1982 when America permitted the Israelis to invade Lebanon and the American Sixth Fleet helped them in that. This bombardment began and many were killed and injured and others were terrorised and displaced. I could not forget those moving scenes, blood and severed limbs, women and children sprawled everywhere.
>
> (quoted in Mohamedou, 2018)

One may and must disagree as to whether grievances justify violence or not, but their centrality in the study of terrorism cannot be contested: 'It is known that terrorism, as a conflict strategy, is driven by grievances and, in the case of anti-American terrorism, by US military intervention overseas' (Jackson, 2012, p.14). However, as Mockaitis notes, 'The Al Qaeda attacks have produced no serious reassessment of US foreign policy nor even the recognition that the soft core of support surrounding bin Laden's extremists might have roots in legitimate grievances' (Mockaitis, 2003, p.211). Whenever reports on terrorist attacks include the self-declared motives of the perpetrators, these motives virtually always involve elements related to domestic repression or international politics and foreign policy. Considering this, the absence of proper engagement with grievances is all the more startling. Borrowing from Foucault (1980) and drawing on Jackson's (2012) arguments, I suggest that grievances can be considered as *subjugated knowledge* in terrorism research, sidelined by a hegemonic discourse shaped by the *New terrorism* thesis.

Of course, acknowledging political grievances is politically unpalatable in the post-9/11 context. Many analysts refrain from trying to explain *why* out of

fear of appearing to *empathise with* or *justify* terrorism (Crettiez, 2016; Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013). Also, grievances usually point to uncomfortable truths about past (and sometimes present) wrongdoings of today's dominant powers. In currently dominant forms of political violence, grievances tend to be related to situations in the so-called Middle East, where the foreign policies of dominant European and American powers have wreaked much havoc over the past century, and more recently, under the banner of the GWOT. It is difficult to accommodate the idea that large-scale violence in 'peaceful' Western countries could be anyhow related to the foreign policy of their governments, and that therefore they may hold a share of responsibility (Blakeley, 2017; McCauley, 2017; Burgat, 2016). McCauley (2017) puts it cogently when he writes that 'our blindness to seeing terrorism as interaction saves our image as blameless victims and eases our way to violence as retribution for terrorist violence' (p.88). Publicly voicing grievances is also likely to attract harsh criticism. The following statement by the UK-based think tank *Quilliam Foundation* about the NGO Cage is illustrative in this respect: 'It's very, very important to uphold human rights in counter-extremism work, but for an organisation like Cage to focus entirely on grievances and allow those to be extrapolated in a radicalisation process is surely part of the problem and not part of the solution' (Porter, 2015). Also in the British context, counterterrorism police reportedly produced a pamphlet stating that 'believing Muslims were oppressed was a sign of extremism' (El-Bar, 2020).

Another aspect of terrorism research hampering the acknowledgement of grievances is its association with self-attributed collective victimhood. McCauley (2018) contends, for instance, Olivier Roy's (2015) insistence on dismissing any link between youth in France and the suffering of Muslim populations in other parts of the world. This is an argument that is frequently put forward by researchers focusing on jihadist manifestations of violence that affect European or North American countries. It contradicts, however, the fact that vicarious victimisation and feelings of belonging to an imaginary collective are present in a variety of causes, from activism for animal rights to mobilisations for climate justice.

On the other hand, whenever grievances are engaged with, they tend to be construed as risk factors, or used to criminalise political dissidence by people associated with Muslimness (see Kundnani, 2014). Risk assessment tools used by criminal justice professionals to evaluate the risk of recidivism, and screening tools, designed to *detect* and *measure radicalisation* have been developed for the phenomenon of PIV specifically. Such tools postulate feelings and expressions of grievance as, essentially, 'risky' behaviour. The tool ERG22+ (Lloyd & Dean, 2015, p.46) lists the 'need to redress injustice and express grievance' as the first item. 'Personal grievance and moral outrage' is the first of ten distal characteristics used by the tool TRAP-18 (Meloy & Gill, 2016, p.7), which is widely used by law enforcement agencies. Display of 'strong feelings about political, religious or other injustices or felt discrimination', whether perceived in the individual or collective context, constitutes a 'high' risk for the second item of the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment (VERA) tool (Sadowski et al., 2017, pp.338–339). Meanwhile, Kundnani (2014) argues that

academic attempts to substantiate a link between radicalization indicators (such as expressions of religious ideology) and terrorist violence fall flat when properly scrutinized. Such studies always seek to trace the ways in which an individual's belief in a radical ideology emerges, on the assumption that radical ideologies cause violence—but this is precisely what needs to be demonstrated rather than assumed. In fact, expressing particular religious beliefs or anger at foreign policy are poor *predictors* of the likelihood of an individual becoming a terrorist.

(p.193, emphasis added)

Hence, as a combination of the abovementioned tendencies and pressures, I argue that grievances have become sidelined in the study of politico-ideological violence, although they remain at the core of engagement processes.

Choosing the prism: Making the case for grievances

In this work, I suggest centring analysis on the socio-structural drivers involved in PIV, based on the narratives, views and perspectives of the main actors themselves. Using an individual-based approach to study aspects located at the macro level may seem counterintuitive. However, as Abu-Lughod (2013) suggests, the story of the individual may reveal the nuances and complexity of the real, allowing for the analysis of geopolitical, sociological, economic, cultural and other factors at the global, regional and local levels. There seems to be an interplay between the collective and the individual, the global and the local, the big story and the small story, in the phenomenon of politico-ideological mobilisation and violence, which may be captured through an in-depth engagement with the feelings, views and experiences of the individual.

The notion of *grievance* encompasses feelings of injustice, frustration and indignation, usually about socio-economic and political conditions of inequality, abuse and neglect. Focusing on grievances is, I suggest, helpful in avoiding deterministic and voyeuristic tendencies, for grievances, by essence, refer to the socio-structural conditions under which forms of PIV may emerge. As shown above, terrorism and radicalisation research is plagued by a predominantly positivist, individualist and essentialising focus on cultural-theological, ethno-racial and psychological factors and therefore in need of more structuralist perspectives (Ahmad & Monaghan, 2019; Silva, 2018). As Lafaye (2017) cogently argues: the current paradigm of 'radicalisation processes' and individual 'tipping points' directs analytical attention mainly towards the individual's evolution. It is rather oblivious to the fact that it is perhaps not so much the individual that changes (supposedly, towards more 'radicality'), but the socio-structural and geopolitical situation that evolves to the point of intolerable injustice.

I further suggest that, from an epistemological standpoint, a grievance-based analysis can create more room for critical and reflective approaches to the study of PIV. To get a sound understanding of the grievances experienced by groups and individuals, researchers will be tempted to privilege the 'voices from below',

those of individuals directly affected or involved, via inductive, qualitative and ethnographic approaches. Such methods expose researchers to the complexity of trajectories into and out of PIV, the realisation of which may promote critical reflexivity and nuanced analysis.

More generally, I would argue, as elaborated in Ajil (2020), that by accounting for structural socio-political factors (using grievances as a prism), it may be possible to restore the political agency of protagonists of PIV and contextualise their engagement and actions, digging deeper into what they are reacting *to* or acting *against.* Using grievances, we may better capture the inherently *reactive* and *defensive* character of PIV, which is how violent action tends to be perceived and justified by those engaging in it, namely as a violent *re*action, or 'counter-violence' to some form of perceived or experienced injustice. The perpetrators of such forms of violence do hold profound convictions regarding the socio-political strains at the basis of their engagement in violence and the 'rightness of their actions' (Taylor & Quayle, 1994, p.103). By engaging with PIV as a 'counter-attack', a 'legitimate' retaliatory attack, revenge, payback and a redressal of grievance, we may be able to demystify contemporary forms of political violence and uncouple scientific analysis from the hystericising nature of public discourse. This is in line with the research of Huët (2015) in the context of Syrian rebel fighters, who found that engaging in fighting is the continuation of a process of dissatisfaction with socio-political conditions.

Furthermore, taking grievances as an analytical entry-point enables us to broaden the picture. While extreme forms of PIV are rare and committed by a small group of people, grievances are more widespread, and can be more intuitively related to. It allows us to ask questions such as: Why do people experience grievances? What are they about? How do they deal with them? How do they act upon them? How do they conceive of their actions considering these grievances? In other words, how are grievances involved in action? And when and how does this action become violent? How do individuals desist, disengage and de-mobilise? The focus on grievances enables us to consider inaction, non-violent action as well as violent action, thereby doing justice to the human heterogeneity and social complexity at the basis of violence. Zooming in on grievances allows for a transversal analysis of trajectories towards violence. It also allows for the comparison of both state and non-state actors across various sociocultural and historical contexts. Haggerty and Bucerius (2018), for instance, found that political grievance is used to mobilise both conventional soldiers and 'terrorists'. McEvoy (2003) strongly argued for increased emphasis on the political to enable a discussion of PIV practised by liberal democratic states. Others (Blakeley, 2017; Kaldor, 2013; Sommier, 2002) similarly argue for the elevation of both non-state and state violence to the same level of analysis, since both employ various forms of large-scale violence, which must be equally scrutinised.[4] Widening analysis beyond the currently dominant parochial focus on *jihadist radicalisation* is likely to counterbalance some of the exceptionalising tendencies of the current study of PIV. At the moment, jihadist radicalisation is treated as an analytical category *per se*, while a large array of *non-jihadist* forms of engagement for causes in the

Arab World is neglected, although precisely such engagement may provide crucial insights into why individuals choose to pursue violent tactics when it comes to causes and conflicts related to the Arab World. What, for instance, distinguishes individuals who travel to the Syrian conflict to join Christian militias, from those joining Kurdish groups, or from those joining Islamist groups? Such crucial questions remain largely unaddressed. By focusing on jihadist violence exclusively, in a sort of negative feedback loop, academia seems to produce biased findings that are fed back into the political sphere, thereby continuously reinforcing and narrowing both academic and public perception of the issue at hand.

Finally, securitisation and criminalisation in the post-9/11-era have led to the erosion of democratic and civil liberties and increasing disregard for fundamental human rights (Codaccioni, 2019; Jarvis & Lister, 2013; Kundnani, 2014). These tendencies disproportionately target the convenient Other. The post-9/11 era has therefore not reduced grievances but *generated* grievances through new (or renewed) forms of harm and injustice, that potentially foment rebellion, resistance and violence. A quote by Horst Herold, former president of the *Bundeskriminalamt* during Germany's era of widespread left-wing violence, is particularly telling in this respect

> In my opinion, it is the political powers that must change the circumstances in which terrorism can arise…there is no point in banging on people's heads, or taking their heads right off, as some demand; we should instead be concerned with exerting influence on historical causes and effects.
>
> (Aust, 2017)[5]

A focus on grievances may enable us to critically assess policies aimed at preventing or countering PIV by taking a holistic look at their impacts and effectiveness.

Notes

1 The New terrorism thesis resonates with the so-called New Wars thesis, proposed by scholars like Kaldor (2001), which suggests that the nature of contemporary conflict has fundamentally changed, and that, among other things, ethnic and religious conflict has become more widespread than conflict based on political ideologies. The thesis has been criticised for exaggerating the peculiarities of contemporary conflict (Newman, 2004).
2 Read alongside El-Ojeili's and Taylor's argument, academia's claim to post-ideology stands in conformity with its implantation in a system dominated by post-hegemonic liberalism.
3 Graduation Speech, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, June 1, 2002.
4 Conventional and unconventional forms of war tend to resemble each other, so that it is now wrong to distinguish terrorism from state warfare by saying that it [terrorism] ignores the laws and conventions of war, attacks civilians and is always indiscriminate and arbitrary. For these characteristics can, all in all, nowadays be applied to many forms of state violence. (Sommier, 2002, p.475)
5 Original version in Aust (2017, page unknown), author translation.

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3   Research protocol

Studying 'security from below'

This book is mainly based on first-hand data collection of the narratives of individuals who mobilised for politico-ideological reasons and of whom some engaged in violent action. It has been repeatedly pointed out that research on PIV lacks first-hand empirical data collection, with most research being based on literature reviews, published documents and media sources, although improvements have been noted in recent years (Jensen et al., 2020). There are many reasons for this, including the difficulty of gaining access to individuals, hesitations to provide interviewees with a potential platform to publicise their ideas or whitewash their image, apprehension that interviewing may be tantamount to appeasement and excusing violence, fear of legal consequences of getting involved with offenders, doubts regarding the veracity of interviewees' accounts and a general aversion to fieldwork (Dawson, 2019; Horgan, 2012). Because of this, researchers on PIV have remained 'removed from the violent field' (Dawson, 2019, p.76) and frequently resorted to literature reviews and the use of second- or third-hand data (Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013; Silke & Schmidt-Petersen, 2017). This has arguably facilitated the perpetuation of hegemonic discourse on terrorism and political violence dominated by a core of predominantly white male North American and European researchers and the subjugation of knowledge that may be inconvenient to US/European political agendas (Jackson, 2012).

In line with Abu-Lughod's (2013) suggestion, individual stories are chosen in this book as analytical entry-points to reveal the larger and more collective complexities underlying individual trajectories to PIV. This approach is also in line with Grounded Theory, which emphasises the importance of in-depth engagement with the stories at the micro-level to develop theoretical insights that transcend the individual trajectory and enable generalisation regarding the most common themes and patterns. For a qualitative study, the present sample is quite large, which has facilitated the attainment of empirical saturation (Saunders et al., 2018) and contributed to the generalisability of the findings.

The direct engagement with *the human being* is motivated by both a methodological as well as an epistemological rationale. As a method, the interview-based ethnographic approach is well suited to uncover the details of individual

trajectories, thoughts, motives, and emotions. Epistemically, as White (2000) argued, some of the best research on political violence 'is undertaken by researchers, who, on some level, interact with the people being researched' (p.100) and who understand that the phenomenon is 'politically, socially and morally sensitive' (p.105). Given the objective of engaging thoroughly with people's grievances, the inductive human-centred approach is considered the most appropriate for the present research endeavour.

Caron (2017) argues that the choice of methodologies should be chosen with regard to the ethics and politics of research. Mills et al. (2020) similarly emphasise that researchers on terrorism should take greater responsibility for the potential socio-political ramifications of their research. The promiscuity between academia and government agendas when it comes to terrorism and radicalisation studies (see Chapter 2) implies that knowledge production may more easily lead to practices and policies impacting human beings directly. In this work, I commit to conducting research into the topic of PIM and PIV through sincere engagement with the individuals engaged in these phenomena (talking *with*, not simply about), while taking care to counterbalance hystericising and exceptionalising dynamics of terrorism and radicalisation studies by putting the phenomenon of so-called jihadist engagement into a larger context of engagement in political violence for 'causes beyond borders'.

In this book, I adopt a deconstructive approach to the phenomenon, to the interviewees and their narratives. This means that language is understood as producing multiple, often conflicting meaning, and that no singular reading can do justice to this complexity. Both the literature as well as the narratives are therefore considered both momentary and fragmentary. Narratives are read through a post-structuralist lens, meaning that no statement is taken for granted, considered as fixed, or read within its immediate and superficial expression. Human identity is understood as a 'fragmented battlefield for competing ideologies' (Tyson, 2006, p.259) and a discursive construction of multiple selves out of the ideological material available to us in a given context at a given time and therefore inherently unstable and evolving, for I agree with other that a reifying approach to identity fails to do justice to the complexity of human nature (Brahimi & Idir, 2020). The deconstructive lens provides an extremely challenging analytical and philosophical approach, but one that is, I would argue, better suited to grasp and engage with the complexity of human behaviour, especially in relation to pain, suffering and violence. Finally, this book aspires to provide a departure from traditionally Western-centrist and state-centrist approaches that have dominated the research agenda and scientific and public discourse. Scientific discourse has produced a specific image of alterity. By breaking with this tendency, the ambition is to produce what has been suggested as *alternative knowledge* (Brahimi & Idir, 2020).

Grounded theory

In line with these reflections and given the aspiration of producing fresh empirical data on a still understudied phenomenon combined with the desire to provide new

theoretical insights, the methodology is inspired by *Grounded Theory* (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded Theory is well-suited to develop theoretical insights based on empirical data collected alongside an iterative process. In line with suggestions of Birks and Mills (2015) and Charmaz (2014), the study used theoretical sampling, initial coding and categorisation of data, concurrent data generation and collection and analysis, memo-writing, as well as constant comparative analysis using inductive and abductive reasoning. The insights gained from inductive empirical data collection and analysis are embedded in a dialogical relationship with insights, concepts and theories derived from the literature on politico-ideological violence and mobilisation. The application MAXQDA was used for coding and data analysis.

A narrative-based study: Primary data collection through interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2018 and 2020 in three countries, namely Switzerland, Lebanon and Canada. All three countries have been concerned by recent flows of so-called foreign fighters joining battlegrounds and rebel factions and militias in Syria and Iraq. In all of them, violent attacks have been committed, for which political and ideological motives related to conflicts in the Arab World have been found. Lebanon has also been the theatre of a spillover from neighbouring Syria. The recurring clashes in the northern Lebanese coastal city of Tripoli (Jabal Mohsen and Bab-el-Tabbaneh) – one of the main terrains where fieldwork was conducted – is widely considered to be the result of a confrontation between proxies of pro-Assad and pro-rebel groups. In all three countries, there are also people who correspond to the category proposed here as PIM: Individuals who sympathise with causes and conflicts and groups fighting for and in them but don't engage in violence, and activists who opt predominantly for non-violent tactics.

The three contexts differ of course in relation to their geographical proximity to conflicts in the Arab World: Lebanon is very close to the battleground, Switzerland is at a medium distance, yet feels the repercussions in terms of refugee flows, for example, while Canada is rather far away. The process through which an individual comes to connect with grievances related to the Arab World is certainly different depending on the context and can be captured, to a certain extent, via this cross-contextual sample. Of course, there are significant differences between the trajectories of someone leaving for Syria from Tripoli and someone leaving from Geneva. However, these differences tend to be situated at the level of opportunities, situational factors and local grievances. On the level of global grievances and how they push individuals towards action via political and ideological justifications, there are likely to be many similarities. In fact, Obaidi et al. (2020) found that, across different cultural contexts, very similar social psychological processes seem to underlie choices of engaging for causes in the Arab Muslim World. This may also be linked to the role of social media and the spread of information, pictures and videos worldwide. In such an environment,

grievances transcend borders, rendering a territorialised approach hardly useful. Rather, they take on a fluid, transnational and global character. Thus, given that the present analysis is centred on grievances and that all individuals in the sample engage for causes related to the Arab World, taking different contexts contributes to improving our understanding of how grievances may lead to different outcomes depending on the geopolitical and sociocultural context.

In total, **109 interviewees** were recruited for this study (see Table 3.1): 58 interviews were conducted with the two groups (A and B) that form the core of the present inquiry, namely individuals involved in PIM and PIV. Beyond that, 51 interviews were conducted with peripheral actors (group C).

Thirty-two interviewees were involved in or associated with politico-ideological violence (PIV, group A) and **twenty-six** individuals were involved in politico-ideological mobilisation (PIM, group B). They were sympathisers or members of groups and causes from a variety of ideological orientations, including Salafi-jihadist groups (20), Shiite militias (10), radical left-wing groups (14), Palestine-specific (4), Kurdish groups (3) and others such as right-wing or unspecified affiliations. Interviewees would sometimes correspond to multiple orientations. In those cases, the one appearing to be the most dominant in their narratives was indicated. 22 out of the total of 58 interviewees (i.e., 38%, almost two-fifths) across the categories PIV and PIM had spent time in prison in connection with their political engagement. Interviewees in this category were between 22 and 39 years old (one exception being a roughly 50-year-old interviewee).

Table 3.1 Overview of interviewees, groups, profiles, and countries

Groups/Profiles	Lebanon	Switzerland	Canada	Grand Total
Total PIM and **PIV**	41	7	10	**58**
A: PIV	**25**	**5**	**2**	**32**
Salafi-jihadist	18	2		20
Shiite militias	5			5
Kurdish groups		3		3
Palestine-specific	1		1	2
Left-wing			1	1
Other	1			1
B: PIM	**16**	**2**	**8**	**26**
Shiite militias	5			5
Left-wing	5	1	7	13
Palestine-specific	2	1	1	4
Other	4			4
C: Peripheral actors	**28**	**18**	**5**	**51**
Practitioners	10	17	4	31
Bystanders	9	1		10
Policy/politics	5			5
Researchers	4		1	5
Grand Total	69	25	15	**109**

The third group. group C, comprised 51 interviewees who are categorised as peripheral actors. This group includes 10 individuals who are ordinary people from the same neighbourhood as some of the main interviewees, as well as friends and families of those involved in PIV (these interviewees are qualified as 'bystanders'), who personally know and understand the circumstances of mobilisation. Thirty-one interviewees in this group are practitioners, which includes police officers, social workers, religious leaders and prison and probation officials. Five peripheral actors are researchers and five are involved in policymaking and/or politics.

Nine interviewees (all in the PIM/PIV group) were interviewed multiple times (between two and four times), but for the purpose of this description, one inter-view is counted per interviewee. In the core categories PIM and PIV, 41 inter-views took place in Lebanon, 7 in Switzerland and 10 in Canada. Overall, 69 interviews took place in Lebanon, 25 in Switzerland and 15 in Canada. Apart from one interview, which had to be done via the web-based videoconferenc-ing software *Webex* in November 2020, all interviews were conducted **face-to-face.** Sixty-six interviews were recorded. Recording was omitted most frequently with peripheral actors (18 out of 51 interviews recorded). In contrast, most of the interviews with the core groups PIV and PIM were recorded (22 out of 32 PIV interviews and all PIM interviews).[1] Interviews took between 1h20 and 3h, with the average duration being 1h45. Overall, an estimated **190 hours of interviews** were conducted.

Given my fluency in the languages spoken in the three contexts, interviews were conducted in the language preferred by the interviewee. Overall, most interviews were done in Arabic. In Lebanon, interviews were conducted in Arabic primarily, and in some cases in a mix between English, Arabic and French. In Switzerland, interviews were conducted in French, German and Arabic. In Canada, interviews were conducted in English, French and Arabic. Table 3.2 illustrates the distribu-tion of the languages in which interviews were conducted:

The distribution between the languages was very similar in the case of periph-eral actors (Table 3.3).

Besides the main corpus of data, namely the narratives of interviewees, I also collected writings that I produced myself during the research, in the form of field-notes and autoethnographic writing, as well as messages and voice messages through WhatsApp. Beyond the primary and complementary data collection, I considered some accessory materials for this study, namely Facebook profiles

Table 3.2 Language of interviews (PIM & PIV)

Country/Languages	Arabic	English	French	German/Swiss German	Grand Total
Lebanon	39	2			41
Switzerland	1		4	2	7
Canada	6	3	1		10
Grand Total	46	5	5	2	58

Table 3.3 Language of interviews (Peripheral actors)

Country/Languages	Arabic	English	French	German/Swiss German	Grand Total
Lebanon	27		1		28
Switzerland	3		5	10	18
Canada	1	1	3		5
Grand Total	31	1	9	10	51

and court judgments (only for the Swiss context). All the data was added to the MAXQDA Database and coded and analysed alongside the interview transcripts.

A departure from the focus on violence

The way violence is envisaged and justified is studied transversally but upholding a distinction between the categories PIV and PIM allows for a closer engagement with the contextual and personal factors that may lead to actual involvement in armed violence. Hence, the violence itself is not of particular interest in this study, which is in line with the desire to avoid the fetishist tendencies mentioned by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004). At the same time, within these two groups there are important nuances that contribute to how violence is justified and engaged with. In the PIV group, there are individuals who justify indiscriminate targeting while others clearly oppose it. In the PIM group, there are individuals who are very sympathetic to violent tactics and groups and somewhat on the brink of engagement in PIV, others who are ideologically committed to non-violent tactics, but justify it under certain circumstances, and again others who refuse violence altogether. Hence, although the resulting convenience sample ended up being different from the initially expected sample, it was in line with the core pursuit of the study, namely analysing how acting upon grievances and feelings of sociopolitical injustice may lead to different outcomes.

The importance of comparing non-violent with violent engagement has also been pointed out by McCauley (2018)

> Some individuals with a political grievance will use violence, while others with the same grievance will use legal or at least nonviolent forms of protest and political mobilization. The great advantage of comparing terrorists with activists is the possibility of learning, not how some people are moved to action, but how some people are moved to violent action—terrorism.
>
> (p.6)

Dornschneider (2021) adopted such an approach in her study of violent and nonviolent political activists in Germany, Egypt, Morocco and Palestine. Obaidi et al. (2020) compare individuals in Pakistan, Afghanistan and 20 Western countries and their

attitudes towards violent forms of engagement to defend Muslim suffering. Derfoufi (2020) insists that the selection bias inherent to radicalisation research needs to be countered by widening inquiry beyond violent trajectories to include non-violent radicalism and even apathy (which he suggests as also being a form of extremism).

Recruitment

The object of study is sensitive, i.e., potentially posing a threat to the researcher and/or the researched (Lee & Renzetti, 1993). Especially individuals involved in PIV can be considered as 'hard-to-reach populations' (Heckathorn, 2011), because the activities they are engaged in are not socially acceptable and they may fear stigmatisation and incrimination if exposed (Penrod et al., 2003). Given the difficulty of access, I relied mainly on nonprobabilistic approaches such as *chain-referral sampling* (Penrod et al., 2003) and *snowball sampling* (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), which proved helpful in identifying interviewees. To start the referral chains, I tried to strategically access individuals from all three categories in the sample (PIM, PIV, peripheral actors). I used different channels and means of communication to recruit interviewees, relying primarily on E-mail, telephone, Facebook, WhatsApp and Signal.

For those having engaged in violence, initial access was in many cases established via formal gatekeepers, i.e., social workers, police officers and actors involved in probation and reintegration, of which some, as mentioned, were interviewed as well. These formal gatekeepers were identified based on their work in this field and contacted via E-mail or telephone. In other cases, they were recruited through informal connections to individuals in activist circles (some of them also interviewed) who knew others who had resorted to violent tactics. Hence, individuals in category A (PIV) were often recruited through interviewees from categories B (PIM) and C (peripheral actors, specifically experts).

For individuals not engaged in violence (PIM), I contacted universities, student associations, NGOs and groups of activists, asking whether individuals engaged in causes in relation to the Arab World would be willing to speak about their experiences. A useful way has been to run through the list of Facebook profiles who indicated they were interested in or participating in demonstrations and protests or similar activities. Individuals who seemed particularly outspoken, either because of their posts their Facebook picture or profile banner, were contacted directly. Facebook's automatic friendship suggestion proved to be unexpectedly helpful here: The more I befriended individuals who corresponded to the profiles I was looking for, the more suggestions I received. Thereby, the algorithm certainly reinforced the bias inherent to snowball sampling, which grants access to a sub-network whose members may display similarities regarding their political orientation or certain sociodemographic characteristics. Although the literature has started discussing some of the challenges inherent to recruitment via Facebook (Kosinski et al., 2015), the biases of friendship suggestions remain poorly explored through the lens of social science research.

Interviews often took place in cafés or restaurants. In some cases, they took place at the premises of the professionals I was interviewing. In some cases, where professionals were also gatekeepers, the interview with the individual (PIM/PIV) was also conducted on the premises, if possible (for example, a social worker's office that the individual is familiar with). For most of the interviews in Tripoli, I was allowed to use a recording studio, which provided an excellent setting for the interview and the recording.

The semi-structured interview

Interviews were based on the semi-directed interviewing technique, in which I directed questions around an interview guide map that was established before-hand. At the beginning of each interview, interviewees were asked to talk about themselves, where they came from and what episodes shaped them early on in their lives, using questions such as 'Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?', 'How did you become [function, member, sympathiser, etc.]?' or 'How did you become politically engaged?'. The idea was not only to capture early experiences and influences, but also to understand how interviewees define themselves, build their narrative identities, and describe their engagement. What interviewees chose to say in that rather spontaneous and unrestricted opening was in itself telling, for it was an indication of aspects of their lives and upbringing that were salient to them (or at least seemed so) at the moment of the interview. From questions revolving around the *How,* it was possible to transition to questions more directly preoc-cupied with the *Why*: Why did a certain feeling arise? Why did certain options of engagement seem more reasonable than others? Why are you still engaged?

Meet the interviewees: Short descriptions

The following short descriptions of interviewees and their politico-ideological engagement are intended to provide the readers with a transversal impression of the research sample. The descriptions do not follow a specific structure apart from including the interviewee's name and age and indications of the causes they are/ were invested in. All the names used are fictional. Overall, the descriptions are organised by country. Further distinctions are intentionally avoided. As men-tioned earlier, the lines between the categories of PIM and PIV are often blurred and evolve throughout individuals' trajectories. Also, the stated intention of this research design is to seek out transversal themes and patterns between mobilisa-tion more generally, whether it leads to violent outcomes or not. Hence, the over-view ought to invite readers to dive into the diversity of the profiles and prepare them for the discussion of the findings.

Short descriptions of the peripheral actors are also added below, in order to give some impression of the variety of profiles in this third, complementary cat-egory. Interestingly, some practitioners and researchers in this category were themselves formerly involved in either PIM or PIV. This is a finding that will be touched upon in Chapter 15.

Lebanon (PIM and PIV)

Halim (29) grew up in BT. When his mother was shot and wounded, he started engaging in the fighting. He was incarcerated on terrorism charges and spent three years in Roumieh prison. After he got out, he tried to join IS in Syria. Strongly marked by suffering of BT at the hands of the Syrian army, suffering of the Syrian people and abuse by the state.

Amir (27) grew up in BT. Very engaged in local fighting with a small militia, to defend his neighbourhood and the oppressed. Was arrested and tortured several times. Tried to join the Syrian conflict but couldn't find a safe route. Holds a strong grudge against JM, politicians, abuse by state and impunity of Hezbollah.

Nassim (27) grew up in BT. Engaged in local fighting in BT and attempted to join IS in Syria. He was arrested and tortured for one and a half years and then freed without charges. Suffers from statelessness. Great admiration for figures like Osama Bin Laden. Driven by grievances related to abuse by the state and Hezbollah, suffering of the Syrian people.

Mansour (28) grew up in BT. He was affiliated to a larger group that was sympathetic to IS, engaging in fighting mostly locally, but would like to fight abroad. Strongly motivated by historic grievances related to the Syrian massacres in BT, the Syrian conflict, but also abuse at the hand of security services.

Bader (32) grew up in BT in a conservative and poor family. He was part of the local IS-cell and tried to join the Syrian conflict. He was imprisoned for almost two years for shooting at soldiers and being part of a terrorist organisation. Grievances: Suffering of Muslims in Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Burma.

Zakaria (25) was part of a notorious IS-cell in Tripoli, engaged in various criminal activities such as kidnappings, blackmail and killings. Participated in training in Syria. Spent three years in Roumieh prison. Motivated strongly by a search for excitement and power. Strongly marked by massacres against BT.

Adnan (29) grew up in Tripoli. Engaged primarily in local fighting to defend his neighbourhood, no particular ideology. Has 'killed many' and adopted the identity of a warrior. Wanted to go to Syria to fight. Driven by deaths resulting from local fighting, but also by excitement and adventurism.

Shadi (29) grew up in BT and feels very strongly about his neighbourhood which he would defend with his life. Engaged in local fighting, sympathetic to JAN and IS. Father was a warlord. Strongly impacted by abuse and torture at the hands of security services.

Rashid (32) grew up in Saida. Was attracted by the group around Ahmed Al Aseer and started proselytising in Saida, seeing it as a religious duty to improve society. When Al Aseer adopted a more sectarian and confrontative discourse, it came to clashes with the military. Rashed was imprisoned for three years and now engages in religiously inspired community service.

Aamer (26) grew up in Tripoli in a difficult family to an abusive father. His brothers fought and died with IS. He himself was a boxer and got involved with the mosque of Al Rifai, the infamous preacher in Tripoli. Spent one year in prison.

Ammar (32) tried to join IS in Syria after the twin bombing in Tripoli but was held back by his fiancée. Strongly driven by a sense of injustice about the economic neglect of Tripoli, the massacres committed against the Syrian people, and state abuse against residents of BT.

Fahad (27) grew up in Tripoli and was arrested at a checkpoint with three grenades. Had been drawn into IS by a friend. Was imprisoned for three years. Suffers from schizophrenia and hears voices, now under medication.

Atif (29) was a member of the elite special forces and fought against Al Aseer in Saida. Pressured to collaborate with IS gang leader Mansour, he is arrested for suspicion of plotting an attack against the army. Spent three years in prison and was released without charges.

Ashraf (24) grew up in BT and has always felt strongly about his neighbourhood and his religion. Wanted to join IS when they emerged but was too young at that time. Several of his friends fell fighting with IS. Driven by anger about massacres and economic neglect of Tripoli.

Salman (32) grew up in Tripoli, had many problems at home. Consumed drugs, used weapons at an early age and joined JAN and IS. Was caught on the Syro–Lebanese border with a suicide belt. Spent five years in prison. Mostly driven by grievances related to Syrian conflict, but also personal motives and a generally reactionary attitude to how Islam is treated.

Noor (31) grew up in a conservative family in Tripoli. Has a strong religious rhetoric. He joined local fighting mostly, but distances himself from IS, continues to be sympathetic to JAN.

Naseem (26) grew up on JM and joined the fighting when his father was injured. Started using drugs and grew into a local warlord, among the bodyguards of Syrian officer Rifaat Eid. Also joined Hezbollah in Syria. Driven by atrocities committed by IS.

Abdelaziz (33) grew up in Tripoli and joined the police forces. Was approached by religious figures who tried to use his grudge against Hezbollah to draw him into AQ and IS. Was arrested before he engaged in fighting, for planning a terrorist attack. Spent five years in pretrial detention and was released without charges. It's in prison that he joined IS.

Fakhreddine (32), Noor's older brother, is less outspoken than Noor. Also said to have engaged in local fighting. Is one of the few in the neighbourhood to have pursued studies beyond secondary school. Runs an internet café.

Yahya (24), Naseem's younger brother, engaged at a very young age after witnessing injuries and deaths of loved ones. Wanted to defend his neighbourhood.

Waad (32) grew up on JM, was drafted into the Syrian army, lost his brother in the fight against IS. Came back to join the local fighting in Tripoli.

Samir (27) grew up in Dahyeh, Beirut, in a traditionally pro-Hezbollah environment. Strong sympathiser of Hezbollah and active supporter through social media posts. Driven by the feeling that Hezbollah was finally able to fight back against American, Israeli and Saudi threats or IS.

Bashar (22) grew up on JM and has joined Hezbollah in Syria on several occasions. He continues to look for ways to join the fighting because he sees no perspectives in Tripoli.

Nidhal (24) grew up close to Saida, in a culturally diverse environment. During high school, he became a strong sympathiser of Hezbollah and would join them physically if necessary. Today at university, he is mostly supporting Hezbollah through social media. He likes engaging in political discussions with people from various backgrounds.

Justin (24) grew up in Jounieh in a traditional Christian and nationalist family. At university, he got involved with the right-wing nationalist Lebanese forces. In reaction to what he perceives as a Muslim threat to Lebanon in the form of Syrian refugees, he says 'we have the guns and we are ready'.

Aziz (24) grew up in the suburbs of Saida in a diverse context. In high school and university, he became a strong sympathiser of Hezbollah, but ended up distancing himself from the group because of personal alienation. Today, he remains strongly committed to ideas of Islam, Arabness and the defence of Palestine.

Abdeljaleel (29) is a Palestinian living in the refugee camp Nahr el Bared outside Tripoli. He has been involved in fights with the Lebanese army as well as Islamist factions, been injured and arrested several times for speaking out publicly against the way Palestinians are treated. He volunteers as a videojournalist for a small NGO.

Jaafar (24) grew up in Beirut in an environment that is sympathetic to Hezbollah. The significant events in Lebanon between 2004 and 2008 increased his interest in Lebanese politics. Today he is a vocal supporter of Hezbollah and acts as a leading figure for the party at university.

Thulfiqar (28) grew up in a Lebanese community in Nigeria and returned to Lebanon after secondary school. He got attracted to Hezbollah during Ashoura and joined a few training camps but could never formally join because of his studies and being the only son to his parents. He is very enthusiastic about Hezbollah's ability to defend his land and religion.

Pierre (24) grew up in a conservative Christian environment and joined the Lebanese Kataeb in his teens. At university, he distanced himself from their right-wing views and engaged with leftist socialist groups for a variety of causes in Lebanon.

Sobhi (23) is politically engaged in various committees at university. Because he doesn't feel like any party represents him, he has not joined any.

Adam (23) comes from a Druze family south of Beirut. At a young age he became a supporter of the Progressive Socialist Party and acts as an outspoken student representative at university.

Rafid (23) grew up in a pro-Hezbollah environment but joined leftist causes when he became political. At university, he is a vocal proponent of leftist socialist causes.

Rima (23) is very outspoken against social injustice and politically active in the Future Movement party.

Nadir (24) grew up in a Sunni family in Saida with strong ties to the Hariri family. A member of the Future Movement party, he is very patriotic and enthusiastic about the prospects of developing a comprehensive neoliberal market system in Lebanon as envisioned by Rafic Hariri.

Rafiq (28) grew up in Beirut in a diverse environment in a Christian family with ties to the political establishment. He is engaged with leftist groups with revolutionary agendas critical of neoliberal and imperialist vestiges among the Lebanese ruling class.

Suhaib (23) grew up in the Palestinian refugee camp Ein El Hilweh and is active with an NGO working for the promotion of the human rights of refugees. He is a strong advocate of Palestinian independence and the right of return, has engaged in protests but not fighting.

Baseel (23) grew up in a diverse background in a Sunni family involved in politics. He is an engaged member of the Future Movement party.

Amal (26) is from a Sunni neighbourhood in Beirut that was the theatre of conflicts after the death of Rafic Hariri. She is engaged with leftist groups at university and a vocal activist on social media.

Aqeel (26) grew up in the Palestinian refugee camp Ein El Hilweh and volunteers for an NGO in the camp.

Switzerland (PIM and PIV)

Nooreddine (34) grew up in German-speaking Switzerland and became active for the Palestinian cause around 2000, and increasingly active within an Islamist spectrum after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. He is politically engaged with his grassroots association for causes related to the Arab World as well as the situation of Muslims in the West.	**Karwan** (28) is a young Kurdish man who grew up in Turkey. During the Syrian civil war, he travelled to Kurdish-controlled areas to help in the fight against Daesh. In Switzerland, he is denied asylum because he is considered a threat to national security.	**Max** (22) grew up in Francophone Switzerland. During his studies, he meets a charismatic figure who draws him into right-wing extremism, then switches to some form of catholic extremism because of a romantic relationship and eventually ends up embracing the jihadist cause and travels to Syria to join IS.	**Richard** (33) grew up in Francophone Switzerland. During his teens he got involved in antifascist and anarchist movements and has several painful encounters with law enforcement. As the Kurdish cause becomes popular among left-internationalist circles, he decides to travel to Syria to support and defend the Rojava.
Daniel (31) grew up in Francophone Switzerland, a son to parents who were politically engaged against the regime of Pinochet in Chile. In his teens, he becomes active in communist and antifascist groups in Switzerland and Europe. When the Kurdish groups fighting in Syria ask for international support, he decides to join them.	**Souhail** (30) grew up in Francophone Switzerland to immigrant parents. He remembers the second Palestinian intifada as being a key moment in his emotional mobilisation for the Palestinian cause. Later, he travelled to Palestine on several occasions to support the resistance, always non-violently.	**Sami** (36) is originally from Iraq. He was convicted by the Swiss criminal tribunal as part of a group of individuals of being affiliated to IS and intending to create an IS cell in Switzerland. He continues to deny any involvement with jihadist causes.	

Canada (PIM and PIV)

Salim (50) is a Palestinian refugee living in Montreal. He was an active member of the Palestinian resistance during the 1980s up to the Oslo accords in 1994 and was imprisoned on several occasions. In Canada, he regularly participates in demonstrations for various causes.	**Kevin** (29) grew up in a poor family in Montreal and started becoming interested in the Palestinian and other internationalist causes during his teenage years. He is an active member of an anarchist, antifascist and anti-police group and has been arrested many times.	**Randa** (29) grew up in Sudan and came to Montreal as a refugee when she was 25 years old. She was an active member of non-violent civil society resistance movements in Sudan and continues to be active for Sudan and other causes while in Canada.	**Zahid** (32) is originally from Sudan and came to Montreal before the fall of Omar al Bashir. He was a leading figure in grassroots movements that were critical of the government and launched various awareness campaigns. He continues to be active for the Sudanese cause while in Canada.
Ziad (32) grew up in Jordan and came to Canada in his early teens. He got politicised during the second Palestinian intifada and became an active member of leftist internationalist groups.	**Khaled** (33) was born in Toronto to Egyptian parents. At university, he got politicised and engaged in the anti-war movement and for the Palestinian cause. Today, he is involved in a variety of causes, both international and mainly related to the Arab World, but also locally.	**Battoul** (36) has recently immigrated to Montreal from Tunisia. She was an active member of grassroots organisations engaged in social justice. In Canada, she is involved in internationalist groups that organise for various causes.	**Sabri** is a Syrian immigrant living in Montreal. He has been very involved in various causes related to the Arab World, adopting a socialist internationalist and panarabist approach.
Pasha is a former member of an AQ-affiliated group. Since his disengagement, he is involved in the prevention of terrorism and extremist violence.	**Asif** is a Palestinian refugee who has been active in the defence of the Palestinian cause. He organises music festivals and cultural events with Palestinian musicians and artists.	**Raid** (39) grew up in Algeria and Syria and recently came to Montreal. He found his way to politics through drama and was very engaged politically during the Algerian Black Decade. He was imprisoned for his activities. In Canada, he is a leading figure in the support movement for the Algerian Hirak.	

Peripheral actors (Lebanon)

Thamam (31) grew up in BT and fled the fighting after briefly participating. He took refuge with his family in a local school and avoided involvement in the fighting.	**Mazen** (29) grew up in Beirut and works for an NGO active in Tripoli. He is the programme coordinator and is closely involved with individuals who engaged in fighting.	**Marwan** (28) grew up in Tripoli but saw BT and JM for the first time when he started working with an NGO. He is a programme coordinator, strongly involved in the neighbourhood and greatly appreciated by the participants.	**Sultan** (28) grew up next to BT and witnessed the fighting but did not participate. He works with an NGO as the coordinator of a rebuilding project and closely involved with the participants.
Rakan (29) grew up in BT and did not participate in the fighting because he did not take it seriously. He participates in the projects of the NGO and knows the residents who engaged in fighting very well.	**Bilal** (36) grew up in Beirut and works in an NGO engaged in bridging sectarian divides. He is very invested in the respective communities and knows the residents well.	**Awwab** (19) grew up on JM and works at the café of the NGO, besides pursuing his studies in a local college. He was very young during the fighting and never engaged in it.	**Tariq** (29) grew up in BT and works at the café of the NGO. He was living in BT during the fighting but never actively participated.
Maysam (26) grew up in the refugee camp Ein El Hilweh and lives in Saida now. She works at the same studio as Zafer and is very invested in the Palestinian cause.	**Barah** (20) works with an NGO in Beirut that engages in local conflict resolution. He had the main role in a play that problematises sectarian schisms in Beirut.	**Yara** (19) grew up in the refugee camp Ein el Hilweh. She volunteers with an NGO active for the Palestinian cause.	**Zafer** (28) lives in the refugee camp Ein El Hilweh and, with Hiba, runs a small studio invested in photojournalism related to the refugee camp or the Palestinian cause more generally.
	Yamin is a researcher at a think tank affiliated with Hezbollah.	**Ritaj** (27) is a researcher at a think tank in Lebanon. She grew up in Dahyeh and has written about Hezbollah's recruitment efforts among Lebanese Shia youth.	**Khatir** is a Lebanese researcher. During the time of study he is also conducting interviews in Tripoli with individuals who joined jihadist causes.

Hussein is a Shia scholar and university professor. He grew up in southern Lebanon, lived through the civil war and feels very strongly about the 'South'.	**Jenny** (34) is a researcher and social worker. She has spent several years working in Roumieh prison and continues to support individuals in their disengagement process with her NGO.	**Sara** (31) is a researcher and social worker. She has spent several years working in Roumieh prison and continues to support individuals in their disengagement process with her NGO.	**Sheikh Nassif** is a Sunni imam, judge and scholar in Saida. He is involved in several projects aiming at promoting the disengagement of individuals who joined jihadist causes.
Sheikh Motaz is a Sunni imam in Tripoli. He is engaged in various projects that aim at building resilience against extremist ideologies.	**Michel** is a retired Lebanese Christian politician from Mount Lebanon.	**Antoine** is a security advisor at the Swiss embassy in Lebanon. He coordinates projects in Lebanon and Jordan that are aimed at the prevention of violent extremism.	**Jacqueline** works at an NGO in Lebanon and is very well connected to actors engaged in the prevention of violent extremism.
Jameyla works with the Lebanese branch of an international NGO. She engages in peace dialogues with leading figures of groups engaged in conflicts.	**Arslan** works at a Lebanese NGO that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and social health and justice. He is the coordinator of a programme dealing with men who engaged in some form of political violence.	**Mizil** (28) grew up in JM. He has started a small NGO that helps former fighters reintegrate and engages in various types of community work.	**Nizar** (39) is a Dutch-Iraqi who joined the Popular Mobilisation forces when IS invaded Mosul. He has been engaged in this paramilitary organisation for several years.

Peripheral actors (Switzerland)

Hanspeter is the representative of a contact centre in Switzerland specialising in radicalisation and violent extremism.	**Christoph** is a police officer in a Swiss canton who is assigned to the surveillance of individuals suspected of being involved in terrorist activities.	**Franz** is a police officer in a Swiss canton and has been engaged in a team specialising in dealing with individuals who are suspected or convicted of involvement in terrorism.	**Thomas** is a Swiss police officer assigned to juvenile delinquency. He has been increasingly involved in cases where minors are suspected or convicted of terrorism-related offences.

Hakan is a Swiss social worker in an association that works with youth in the prevention of violent radicalisation or the reintegration of individuals who were involved in terrorism-related activities.

Raseem is a Swiss social worker and co-leader of an association engaged in the prevention of radicalisation among youth and promoting social inclusivity and intercultural exchanges, as well as the reintegration of individuals who were involved in terrorism-related activities.

Jean-Luc is a Swiss social worker who is partly in charge of the reintegration of individuals involved in terrorism-related offences.

Frédéric is the director of a Swiss prison where several individuals accused of terrorism-related offences are incarcerated.

Rainer is the director of a prison where several individuals accused of terrorist offences are or were incarcerated.

Alisha is a prison doctor who treated Sami during his incarceration.

Silvan is a criminal lawyer who represented **Sami** during the trial.

Sheikh Mouloud is director of a mosque that has been involved in the prevention of religious extremism for years.

Sheikh Ajouz is the imam of a mosque in Switzerland. He was stabbed by a religious extremist in 1994 and continues to be involved in the prevention of religious extremism.

Daniel is a Swiss lawyer who has defended several cases of terrorism-related offences.

Mike works at a contact centre in Switzerland that deals with individuals signalled to authorities because of their presumed radicalisation.

Lina is a social worker specialising in individuals who display interest in terrorism-related offences and jihadist causes.

Alain is the director of a Swiss probation service.

Bruno is a social worker and therapist specialising in violent offenders.

Martin is a criminal defence lawyer who represented several individuals accused of terrorist offences before the Federal criminal court.

Peripheral actors (Canada)

Khalil is a researcher and educator. He has done extensive research on the Muslim communities in Montreal and the young people who attempted to join IS in Syria.

Meriem is a social psychologist working in a social support centre in Montreal. She has conducted research on jihadist and right-wing extremism.

Fanny is a social worker in a centre specialising in the prevention of radicalisation and the reintegration of individuals involved in terrorism-related offences.

Justine is a sociologist working in a centre that specialises in the prevention of radicalisation to violence, community work and reintegration into society.

Note

1 In some cases, I relied on notes, either because interviewees refused to be **recorded** or because of my personal appraisal of the appropriateness of recording in a particular setting. My insistence on recording shifted throughout my research stays in Lebanon. While, in the beginning, I tried to record as much as possible, I relied more frequently on notes towards the end. On the one hand, this was reasonable because I was getting closer to empirical saturation and interviews were becoming more confirmatory, not bringing up much new information. On the other hand, it was sometimes methodologically wiser because interviewees (especially in Tripoli) would speak more freely and openly when they knew they were not being recorded.

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Part II

Mapping grievances

4 Three ideal-types of grievances

> In the lived experiences of subalterns, grievances are important because they are barometers of their pain and suffering.
>
> (Morris, 2019, p.133)

This chapter uses the analytical grid developed before (Ajil, 2020), which – based on a review of works in a variety of disciplines that have engaged with grievances – proposes three ideal-types of grievances, namely socio-economic grievances, ethno-racial grievances and political grievances. Ideal types are analytical constructs by the researcher built to make sense of individual phenomena in the social sciences. Ideal types do not reflect reality, but a conscious choice of the social scientist who seeks to understand the adequacy of the ideal types for the study of the phenomenon at hand. In that paper, I also argue that grievances tend to relate to the local and the global level, while noting that perceptions of what is local or global are highly dependent on the protagonist's position and orientation. Importantly, grievances may also relate to a situation in the past. These can be referred to as *historical grievances* (Adam, 2018), which are more likely to exist, when there are events or circumstances that continue to nurture grievances in the present and thereby allow for a narrative about past grievances to be upheld. This is especially pertinent if there are current events that simplify the construction of a narrative of continuity

> The learning jihadist can easily see a parallel between the colonial domination that oppressed the Muslim world yesterday and today's brutality, such as the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the invasion of Irak, the military expeditions in Afghanistan. They resonate with the same logic of impunity and humiliation.
>
> (Geisser et al., 2017, p.198)

Socio-economic grievances are generated by actual or perceived low socio-economic status, in extreme cases poverty, usually affecting a minority of the population. Relative material deprivation may be experienced if there is a substantial difference between the socio-economic position of certain groups. Economic

discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation may be involved in the creation and maintenance of the low socio-economic status of portions of the population. They may be characterised by income inequality, hampered access to labour or the housing market and to the education system. At the global level, grievances may be related to the negative repercussions of capitalist neoliberal economic and political systems and trends like globalisation.

The second ideal-type refers to **ethno-racial grievances** that may be due to the presence of an ethnically dominant majority perceived as hostile by a minority, due to systematic 'othering', racism or ethnic and religious discrimination, often on a local and domestic level. In the context of the GWOT, these experiences include the securitisation, *suspectification* and misrecognition of citizens associated with *Muslimness*. Kundnani (2014) and Abbas (2019) suggest that racial-culturalist assumptions about Muslims and Islam must be understood as a form of racism or *new racism*. Sharma and Nijjar (2018) argue that Islam becomes racialised through a spectrum of implicit and explicit connotations related to security concerns. The term Anti-Muslim racism is also gradually imposing itself and substituting the term Islamophobia. On a global level, such grievances may result from the actual or perceived systematic or recurring stigmatisation and discrimination of a collective characterised by race, ethnicity or religion. For contemporary forms of PIV, grievances are related to the perception that Islam as a religion and people associated with it are being discriminated against, stigmatised and labelled as dangerous or unwelcome on a global scale. This belief rests upon the idea that conflicts in Algeria, Chechnya, Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen are not coincidental but due to a perception of Islam, majority-Islamic countries and Muslims as the major threat after the demise of Soviet communism (Lakhani, 2014). Daulatzai similarly argues that the figure of the *Muslim* has, since the end of the 15th century, been the major archetypal *Other*, against which the idea of a *West* started to cohere around concepts of 'whiteness and Christianity' and that European expansion and colonialism has to be understood through that lens (Daulatzai, 2012, p.8).

Political grievances can result from dysfunctional mechanisms of political representation and unequal distribution of political resources, low representation of members of a minority in positions of influence and lack of civil rights for a portion of the population. This may be tied to the alienation and exclusion of portions of society from mainstream political processes. Political grievances may also relate to the lack or loss of trust in the government and perceptions of it being unjust or corrupt. Political repression may foster grievances through the suspension of civil liberties, censorship, and the criminalisation or banning of political parties, groups or movements. Violent political repression may include state violence by police or the military, the persecution of minorities or political opponents. On a global level, political grievances may be related to the geopolitical domination and primacy of the perceived global West and a biased system of international law working in its favour, leading to impunity for war crimes when they are perpetrated by dominant powers, and thus a perception of double standards. Violent forms of geopolitical domination also fuel political grievances.

Formerly, these were characterised by large-scale European imperialist and colonialist projects. Nowadays, they include foreign occupations and invasions, as-well-as systematic and large-scale violence and persecution of minorities within countries or regions.

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5 Socio-economic grievances

'When you go fight, you don't care about the money': Financial incentives for fighting

The context of enquiry that was, at the time of the field research, most affected by poverty and economic hardship was Tripoli in North Lebanon. The city's poverty is striking and obvious to anyone visiting. Perhaps less so in the port region and city centre, but the more one moves up the city towards Syria street, the denser the neighbourhoods, the more chaotic and the dirtier the streets, the more modest the way people are clothed, and the more damaged the buildings. In a way, the Bab-el-Tabbaneh and Jabal-Mohsen districts reminded me of Sarajevo, which I visited twice between 2015 and 2022. In both places, the vestiges of the war are still prominently visible in the buildings there, in the form of bullet holes in the facades or torn-down buildings. Although life seems to have gone on, these marks on the city's faces feel like wounds that have never fully healed. They make a painful past seem very near.

It is unsurprising to find that most references to immediate socio-economic grievances were made by interviewees in Tripoli, more specifically in Bab-el-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. A theme that runs through all narratives is the enormous economic hardship that the people in this area of Tripoli are suffering from. One of the first encounters I had when I arrived in Bab-el-Tabbaneh was with Rakan and one of the first things he said was how difficult it was to get married and feel like a grown-up man, because of the difficulties of finding stable employment and earning a salary that would allow him to support a family.

While socioeconomic grievances are widespread across the world and especially in developing countries, they usually do not lead to protests and violence. There are different ways in which socio-economic grievances may be linked to mobilisations for the Syrian conflict, the most intuitive of which is that fighting may help make ends meet. Many of the interviewees in Tripoli, such as Waad, who fought alongside the Syrian army, do in fact talk about a direct link between poverty, unemployment and joining the fighting

> Nobody who participated in the fighting was happy. But at the same time, this life, nobody likes it. Anyone will tell you, if I was working, I would

not be carrying this weapon. Under these circumstances, you're obliged to participate!

(Waad, Lebanon)

Similarly, Abdeljaleel, a Palestinian living in the refugee camp Nahr-el-Bared near Tripoli, ascribes a central role to the socio-economic marginalisation of Palestinians in Lebanon in the success various groups have had in recruiting fighters from Palestinian refugee camps for their causes. Even before Jabhat-al-Nusra and Daesh existed, in 2007, the Palestinian Fatah came to dominate Nahr-el-Bared, to the point where clashes with the Lebanese Armed Forces erupted which lasted for several months. He explains that

> with all the pressures and hatred building up inside a person that is living in the camp, it should come to no one's surprise that an organisation which offers a project and money will be able to attract people like me. I am conscious and able to choose better options, because I don't trust any of these armed factions.

(Abdeljaleel, Tripoli)

Participating in fighting may therefore clearly present immediate economic incentives. However, the link between material gains or support and a willingness to engage in combat may sometimes be more subtle, as Nassim explains

> Politicians were employing people, giving you 100 USD per week maybe, for anything you may need. But when they wanted you to throw a grenade, you wouldn't say no, of course. […] Some people were defending their neighbourhood, they were resisting. Others were fighting because of personal interests, they would make money out of the fighting, they would go down to the port, the nice places, to extort people.

(Nassim, Bab-el-Tabbaneh, Tripoli)

Nassim points to the heterogeneity of the motivations of fighters. Beyond that, however, the dialectic between economic incentives and authentic political engagement was frequently brought up by interviewees more generally. There seemed to be a visible tension between the noble character of fighting for a just cause and the fact of being financially rewarded for doing so. There is a perception that one's credibility as a fighter for a particular cause is jeopardised if one is perceived to be mainly driven by material interests. This transpired through interviewees' frequent insistence that financial incentives were a secondary driver of engagement at best. Most interviewees stress that although there was a minority that joined the fighting primarily for personal material gains, everyone was also motivated by a desire to defend the oppressed and fight for what they considered as a just cause. Bashar, a young man from Jabal Mohsen, who fought in Syria several times, says, regarding the salary

[The salary] is like 40,000 LBP per month. It's nothing. The hezb [Hezbollah] gives you 400 to 500 USD. That's better. But when you go there, you don't care about the money anyway, you go there to die as a martyr.

(Bashar, Jabal Mohsen, Tripoli)

In a less straightforward manner, feelings of economic marginalisation and neglect or of blocked access to resources lead to frustration and grudge towards the state. This may lay the foundations for a growing disconnect from conventional social norms imposed by the state. Naseem explains this as follows

But, to make it short, all this is happening because of poverty. I don't want you to give me money or pay me my hospital bills. I want you to guarantee me a job, where I can earn my own money. I want to sweat for this. But if there is no work. I can't do anything, not even get treated. Of course, I start hating the state.

(Naseem, Jabal Mohsen, Tripoli)

Also, the socio-economic grievances, which often interact with political griev-ances, have not disappeared but continue to be present for the residents of the neighbourhood, even though the fighting has ceased for several years. In fact, violence is expected by several interviewees to erupt again, if the underlying driv-ers of frustration don't change

In order to find solutions without violence, you need a government that stands with you. We need a just country. We need justice. We need a country that takes care of its citizens, work, electricity, health, medication. What else? Education! That's the most important thing. My son is still in first grade. I don't have the means to put him in a private school and have to keep him a public school. I went there several times and the teacher just puts her feet on the table, coming to spend time there. She gets her salary anyway, she doesn't care.

(Mansour, Lebanon)

The lack of access to proper education and the failure of the school system also shows in the fact that hardly anyone among my interviewees made it past the fourth or fifth grade of primary school. For most of them, going to work was more reasonable at some point, because they felt they weren't learning anything at school anyway.

All of the interviewees in Tripoli were fighting at the level of foot soldiers. Hardly any of them ever thought of becoming rich through fighting. For the major-ity, the financial compensation seemed to be a way of connecting a purpose and a perceived duty to the expectations put on them to provide for their families. On the other hand, in some ways, the economic hardships also provide a convenient justi-fication for fighting. Thereby, the precarious socio-economic situation can be used as a means to diminish personal responsibility and put the blame on institutional

actors. Some also actively used the fighting to engage in various forms of exploitation and extortion. Zakaria from Bab-el-Tabbaneh, talked openly about the fact that he was forcing people to pay him 'protection money' during the fighting

> I was working in an organisation, and my employer was very good to me. I would behave as I wanted, work fewer hours, and they had an office just for me, I had my laptop and was playing games on it. The employer was very good to me but I wasn't good to him. And he stuck to me all the time. Throughout the years, even in prison. But after prison he couldn't get me employed anymore. Every week I would get 300'000, for his protection. Why was he paying? Because he had many shops, and he was afraid I could hurt him. I was bad to him. I would come on Saturday and ask for my money and if he didn't have it immediately, I would put a grenade on his table. And I threatened him until he gave me the money.
>
> (Zakaria, Tripoli)

Zakaria was, according to his own and other interviewees' accounts, one of the main members of a powerful gang under the lead of Osama Mansour, that formed during the later stages of the JM–BT conflict and pledged allegiance to Daesh. The group was the main reason for the Lebanese army's raid on Bab-el-Tabbaneh in September 2014. During the interview, he was very open about his harmful and exploitative activities during the fighting. This may be linked to the fact that he seemed to enjoy special privileges such as an ID card associated with Hezbollah that he inherited from his father. I noted in my fieldnotes that he appeared like a battle-hardened gangster and that it was very difficult for me to reach a level of depth, for he remained in a rather excited and boastful state throughout. However, his transparent narrative sheds light on the fact that criminal activities may develop and flourish under the label of righteous grievance-based and even religiously inspired mobilisation.

'Instead of building prisons, build factories': The impact of the WOT

Many of the socio-economic grievances preceded the interviewees' engagement in fighting. However, economic hardships did not diminish after their involvement. On the contrary, in the wake of the War on Terror, socio-economic difficulties are very common for individuals who are effectively engaged in fighting or who are in some way linked to terrorism and political violence. Again, the Lebanese context presents a case in point, given the hyper-repression put in place by the Lebanese state. Throughout the interviews, a recurring theme is the criminal record and the way it makes any employment impossible. Interviewees from Bab-el-Tabbaneh agree that a criminal record makes it impossible for them to find work. No one with a criminal record has been able to find stable employment, because employers want to avoid having anything to do with someone accused of or sentenced for terrorism-related offences

> Whenever I go for a job, they look at the criminal record and say: what is this?! killing, kidnapping! [shows me a picture of it]: joining a terrorist organisation, fighting the army, injuring army personnel, carrying military weapons.
>
> (Zakaria, Tripoli)

> I was finally happy to be working again. Things were good. And then the employer came and asked for the criminal record. And I told him please don't. But he insisted. So, I said goodbye.
>
> (Aamer, Tripoli)

Interviewees in Tripoli point out what they see as wrong priorities set by the government. Instead of helping them reintegrate into society, the state ostracises and marginalises them. Nassim praises the director of an NGO that helped him get at least temporary employment for doing what the government fails to do

> She [the director] is a role model. She is doing what an entire state has failed to do. They come and imprison you for your Facebook pictures, or the people who are defending themselves. Until now they are observing us. I think to myself: Instead of building prisons, build factories. At least people will work! That's what she did.
>
> (Nassim, Lebanon)

A particularly astonishing practice makes it complicated to find work even for individuals who are eventually acquitted, sometimes after years of pre-trial detention: Even when individuals are acquitted by the court, they keep their criminal record. The record simply indicates that they were *accused* and not sentenced. This is enough to shy potential employers away and to earn them harassment at checkpoints. Two of the interviewees, Atif and Abdelaziz, both formerly engaged in the security forces, confirmed that this was the case for them. Atif was detained for three years because someone accused him of plotting a coup against the Lebanese Armed Forces. Abdelaziz was arrested on suspicions of plotting a terrorist attack on an army tank and detained for five years. After their acquittal, both were of course unable to return to the security forces. At the time of the interview, they were both working in poorly paying temporary jobs. For the residents of Jabal Mohsen, the difficulty to find work is also an important factor in maintaining their socio-economic marginalisation. However, it seems that they rarely have a criminal record that indicates that they participated in the fighting. This results from the differential criminalisation discussed below, where terrorism is mainly associated with Salafi-jihadist groups and not with Alawite groups affiliated with the Syrian regime.

For Palestinians, the terrorism-label works similarly. On the one hand, this is tied to a general association between Sunni Islam and terrorism. On the other hand, and specifically in the Lebanese context, the crackdown on Palestinians resulted from the clashes between Fatah and the Lebanese army in the Nahr-el-Bared

refugee camp near Tripoli in 2007. Abdeljaleel, a resident of Nahr-el-Bared, explained that after 2007, Palestinian men were sweepingly suspected of aiding or being sympathetic to Fatah. He was arrested for ten days because of accusations of his being linked to Fatah and a bank robbery. He was later arrested for posts on Facebook that were critical of the government and the security forces. All Palestinians interviewed in Lebanon agree that, since 2007, the checkpoints around the refugee camps have become stricter and more humiliating, and job opportunities for Palestinians have become extremely rare. During my fieldwork in the summer of 2019, protests erupted in various Palestinian refugee camps and outside them after the government announced that work permits for Palestinians would be adjusted to cover fewer sectors and professions (Al-Arian, 2019).

Beyond the Lebanese context, these forms of economic hardship, which can be seen as the financial cost of engaging in specific forms of political violence, can be found as well. In the Canadian context, for instance, Kevin an anarchist militant and defender of the Palestinian cause is struggling to find a conventional job after several encounters with the criminal justice system. Although never clearly associated with a terrorist organisation, he suffers economically from engaging in violence against the state. Similarly, Salim, a Palestinian refugee in Montreal continues to be denied asylum because of his former activities in the Palestinian resistance movement. In that fragile legal status, he has a hard time finding a proper occupation, let alone save money to send to his family which he left behind in Palestine.

Suspicions, accusations or convictions in relation to terrorist offences are also making life difficult for individuals in Switzerland. Christoph, a police officer charged with the observation of convict Sami after his release from prison, states, with a mix of frustration and understanding, that 'it is absolutely clear that nobody wants to have a terrorist in their workplace, not even in their town. When you say terrorism, all doors shut' (Christoph, Switzerland). As a result of his conviction, Sami was refused asylum in Switzerland and ordered to leave the country. Given the heightened risk of being exposed to torture in his home country, should he return as a convicted terrorist, he is stuck in Switzerland. He would like to work in order to build a normal life, as he says repeatedly

> I am fed up with taking money from the state. I feel like a beggar when I go to the municipality to get my pocket money. If only I could work and depend on myself only. Start a life like a normal person. Even if I can live just 50% of the life of a normal person, I would be happy.
>
> (Sami, Switzerland)

Not convicted for any offence, but still associated with terrorism, Karwan suffers from his legal condition. The Swiss secretariat for migration refused his asylum claim based on an appraisal by the Swiss intelligence service, that 'given his biography, this young man could pose a potential risk to Swiss domestic security' (Confidential documents). Karwan is of Kurdish ethnicity and grew up in Turkey. When the Kurdish YPG were fighting against Daesh, he decided to travel to Syria

to support them. As a refused asylum seeker, he receives minimal financial support and has difficulty finding employment. For more than a year after his arrival, he was not allowed to leave the perimeter of the municipality he was assigned to, which further complicated his job-seeking efforts. Accused of spreading propaganda for AQ in Switzerland, Nooreddine also mentions socio-economic hardships as a consequence of his legal entanglement, but also because of his engagement more generally

> When he heard about my engagement for the Palestinian cause, he told me he would have to dismiss me unless I stopped my political activities. Or unless I made them less public at least. To me it was clear that I would not trade my engagement for the Palestinian cause against my job. Against no job, actually. […] Today, I know that nobody would employ me.
>
> (Nooreddine, Switzerland)

Nooreddine also explained that many of his bank accounts were closed after the accusations against him were made public. Similar things happened to people he knew

> They are all told by their lawyers not to talk to anyone, to keep hiding from the public, etc. And I can understand that, because there are many negative consequences. For example, your bank accounts. I have gotten used to be a man of cash, since nobody allows me to have a bank account.
>
> (Nooreddine, Switzerland)

Another example in the Swiss context is provided by my fieldnotes: During a trial on terrorism propaganda charges that I assisted in at the Federal Criminal Court, the lawyer of the defendant (not among my interviewees) asked for financial compensation for the loss of his client's employment. According to the lawyer, the employer had gotten wind of the accusations against the defendant and decided to fire him. Although no proofs were provided to sustain that hypothesis, it seems plausible considering the political climate that continues to be tense, the pressures that employers may be exposed to, and similar experiences by other interviewees.

'The ideal society': Anti-capitalism and resource misdirection

Beyond immediate or group-based economic hardships, socio-economic grievances are also present in interviewees' narratives in relation to economic systems and trends, class-based inequalities in a given society, or forms of what is considered economic exploitation more generally. The grievances related to the negative repercussions of what is perceived as excessive individualism and the ensuing lack of solidarity, as well as the lack of consideration for human costs when pursuing material interests. During the interview, there were no specific prompts regarding socio-economic grievances more generally. Hence, whenever interviewees spoke about these aspects, they should be understood as part of their narrative about

their engagement and trajectory. Although less directly tied to violent engagement like above, they are frequently part of a general critical posture and a component of interviewees' analysis of injustices that they identify. In the Canadian context, these grievances would relate to the treatment of migrants or detainees as well as factory workers. In the Lebanese context, interviewees voice particular indignation regarding the treatment of migrant workers, as well as Palestinian and Syrian refugees, the exceptionalism of Beirut and the neglect of other Lebanese regions, as well as class differences more generally. In Switzerland, frequent resentment is voiced against the Swiss illusion of perfect equality that glosses over various forms of socio-economic marginalisation, as well as the treatment of refugees and the economically disadvantaged.

One example of a transnational socio-economic grievance is related to the Palestinian cause. Palestinian interviewees, for instance, hold more general grievances beyond the immediate economic neglect of Palestinian refugees. Abdeljaleel from Nahr-el-Bared, but also Suhaib or Aqeel from Ein-el-Hilweh, or Salim and Asif in Canada, stress that the Palestinian cause has become a business, used and abused by all actors who wish to receive funding from international donors. Both the lack of attention to the plight of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons and the perceived instrumentalisation of the cause, fuel a grudge towards the international community and what is seen as the business of international development and humanitarian aid.

Similarly, general socio-economic grievances also relate to the perceived over-investment in repressive security measures in the context of the war on terror. Meriem, a practitioner in Quebec in the field of social work and psychological support, highlighted the enormous discrepancy between the funds allocated to security and crime prevention, while almost no money went to the support of refugees from the Syrian conflict. Through her work, she is strongly involved with the Muslim communities in the Quebec region of Canada and realised that this misdirection of resources was strongly perceived, alongside the growing securitisation of Islamic identity, from 2015 on.

Rashid, who was later arrested because of his participation in a designated terrorist organisation in Lebanon, explained that one of the first things that attracted him when he became more religious was the perceived equality inside the mosque he started visiting

> When I came to the mosque, what struck me most was that I found all parts of society there. The young and the old, the poor and the rich, the intellectual and the simple worker: There were no classes at the mosque, it was a welcome break from the materialistic society that I was seeing outside, in our city.
>
> (Rashid, Saida, Lebanon)

In fact, Islamic activism is frequently portrayed as pursuing a more egalitarian model of society. Thereby, the cause involves proposing an alternative to the capitalist models associated with Western countries. The general perception of

interviewees is that Arab governments have embraced capitalism over the past few decades, therefore making them accomplices of an unjust economic system. It is important to clarify, then, that across the narratives, strong Anti-American or Anti-Western sentiments are frequently at least partly the result of the perceived negative impacts of neoliberal capitalism.

This was the case, in all three countries, for non-Islamic activists as well. It should be noted that many of the interviewees adhere at least partly and to different degrees, to a Marxist worldview that focuses on the oppression of the working class by the bourgeoisie. For instance, Daniel, in Switzerland, said 'I grew up with a Marxist grandfather who explained the world to me through a Marxist lens. He would point at people and say "look, this is a rich man"'. Given his Latin American heritage and his parents' political activism, Anti-American and Anti-Imperialist sentiments were also always part of his intellectual matrix from his early years. The causes he engaged in, whether the Palestinian cause or the Kurdish cause, then, were to him never anathema to this ideological setup. Rather, his ideology facilitated his adoption of causes that pursued a more or less socialist and internationalist agenda. In his case and similar cases across the three countries, the ideological framework is mobilised for different causes, that are often unrelated to the larger context of the Arab World. Examples include the plight of the economically disadvantaged and the struggles of refugees in Switzerland and Canada or the mistreatment of migrant domestic workers in Lebanon. The Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation, and resistance movements against Arab dictators and the remnants of imperialist rule largely are, however, typical cases that can be easily reconciled with the Marxist ideology.

Finally, anti-capitalism also expresses itself through other forms of protest about dysfunctionalities that are seen as the inevitable consequences of capitalism. For instance Souhail, a Palestinian activist in Switzerland, had, at the time of the interview, become increasingly engaged in the promotion of climate justice. Interestingly, it is through his description of his feelings towards this fresh and more current cause, that it was possible to access the moral emotions that were present during the initial phases of his engagement with the Palestinian cause. His tone and posture changed dramatically when he started talking about climate justice

> Extreme indignation... I mean, it's been 46 years that we have been aware of this, since the first reports were published. And the governments haven't done anything. Experts talk of an 'ecocide', a genocide against the planet, against everyone in fact. That's something that revolts me. I think I am at the same level of indignation that I was at during the first phases of my engagement for the Palestinian cause.
>
> (Souhail, Switzerland)

Links between socio-economic grievances and politico-ideological mobilisation

In sum, it can be said that although socio-economic grievances are frequently referred to, they are rarely presented as the main, let alone sole, reason for PIM

and PIV. The link, if any, between feelings of socio-economic injustice and a politico-ideological engagement for a particular cause, must be understood as an indirect one. First, the perception that low socio-economic status is the result of an intentional policy of marginalisation or simply a neglectful attitude towards a particular region, city or portion of the population, leads to grudge and frustration towards the government and state institutions. This grudge can lay the foundation for a general posture that is hostile to the state and that may be exploited by groups and leaders who promise a more egalitarian political project that defies the state. Generally speaking, the immediate experiences of socio-economic hardship tend to be, by essence, locally oriented.

Second, a general ideological layout that focuses on and reveals socio-economic marginalisation, economic exploitation and oppression of the working class provides a vocabulary and a lens that may be adapted to different causes. As a consequence, a certain cause mobility and flexibility can be identified, which, at first glance, may seem hypocritical or dishonest. However, since many causes can be, at least at an intellectual level, brought back to a few argumentative building blocks that explain various manifestations of injustice in the world, the links between seemingly opposed causes does not seem that far-fetched. These grievances tend not to relate to the individual level: Rather, they are usually vicarious, collective and globally oriented. They tend to refer to economic systems and trends perceived to be exploitative and serving a ruling elite to the detriment of ordinary citizens. These inequalities manifest themselves, according to interviewees, in the resource misdirection in the age of the war on terror, when millions of dollars are spent on developing security forces, while relatively little support is given to the domains of social services, reintegration and general prevention of social ills.

A third way in which socio-economic grievances can be tied to engagement is through a more practical manifestation of economic hardship: unemployment. Someone who has difficulty finding a stable occupation has fewer reasons not to engage for a cause when other factors make some form of engagement attractive and reasonable. This aspect is related to biographic availability that will be touched upon later.

Crucially, and especially for PIV, these different connections between grievances and engagement present themselves neither in a linear nor in a one-time fashion: Rather they are part of a vicious cycle between socio-economic hardship and usually criminalised forms of engagement. Particular importance is attributed, across the narratives, to the socio-economic marginalisation that ensues association with terrorism-related offences, whether verified or not. The repressive counterterrorism apparatus leads to structural blockages of economic reintegration into society and thereby nurtures new grievances against the state. The devastating consequences of being associated with terrorism in the age of the War on terror make it extremely difficult to reintegrate into society, find stable employment and build a meaningful and purposeful life. Interviewees in different contexts point to this difficulty and repeatedly stress that it should come to no one's surprise if, under such conditions, a person radicalises again to the point of turning against society.

6 Ethno-racial grievances

'We were born to hate each other': Sectarian hatred

While most of the identified grievances draw more strongly on a discourse of victimhood or reactionary identitarian affirmations, they sometimes appear in more offensive forms. The most aggressive form in which ethnic, racial and religious grievances manifest themselves is through religious or sectarian hatred. Sectarian or religious hatred also includes the hatred of unbelievers, frequently presented by the media and public discourse as the main motivator of jihadist terrorism.

Forms of sectarian hatred are definitely present in interviewees' narratives, especially in the context of Tripoli but also beyond. During my fieldwork across Lebanon I realised that in the conflict between Jabal Mohsen and Bab-el-Tabbaneh, sectarian hatred is generally assumed to be the main reason for the fighting's flaring up over and over again. Interviewees do in fact express such hatred. Many statements contain expressions of disdain for the respective ethnicity or sectarian affiliation: Alawite residents of Jabal Mohsen are perceived as unbelievers, while BT residents are portrayed as Sunni fundamentalists. Across the interviews and discussions during the fieldwork, however, it became clear that the sectarian hatred towards people from BT was less frequently voiced than the other way around. In fact, residents of BT frequently state that they learned to hate the residents of JM from an early age, illustrated by statements such as 'in 2008, when I first went to fight, it was out of conviction. Religious conviction. When we went, it was because our parents told us they are unbelievers' (Mansour, Lebanon) or 'The people from BT and JM, from the moment we were born, we hated each other' (Walid, Lebanon). Across the narratives, racist statements by residents of BT are always closely intertwined with the massacres committed by the Syrian regime in the 1980s. The residents of Jabal Mohsen being mostly Alawites and predominantly in favour of the Syrian regime, they are seen as accomplices in the massacres. Sometimes, nuances are added when they specify that their problem is not with the Alawites on Jabal Mohsen, but with the leaders of the Arab Democratic Party and the Syrian military officers who were there, even during the fighting from 2007 onwards.

Anti-Shia feelings can haunt individuals in their everyday lives even outside conflict-ridden contexts. In cosmopolitan Beirut, where there is an ostensive

coexistence between all sects and religions, some narratives indicate persisting Anti-Shia hatred they experience, usually based on their origins (being from the South) or their name. Thulfiqar, for instance, who has a typically Shia name, states that he struggles a lot because of it

> In 2005 and 2006, I couldn't go to certain places because of my name. I had to be careful with whom I was mingling. Even today…sometimes, my employer tells me not to come to certain meetings because people might be put off by my name, or the fact that I am Shii. Sometimes he asks me to change my name for the meeting. It is extremely difficult to handle.
>
> (Thulfiqar, Lebanon)

Another example is Anti-Muslim hatred. Justin and Pierre were both involved with Christian right-wing groups. While Pierre had meanwhile turned to leftist-socialist causes, Justin was still strongly convinced of the righteousness of the Christian Lebanese cause at the time of the interview. He talked openly about his disdain for Muslims, Sunni Muslims especially. In contemporary Lebanon, the main figures incarnating Sunni Islam in the eyes of the Christian nationalist right-wing are the Palestinian and the Syrian refugees. Whereas the hatred towards the Palestinian refugees has a longer history related to the Lebanese civil war, the hatred of the Syrian refugee is strongly linked to stereotypes of Syrian refugees stealing, attacking and raping Lebanese women

> Some time ago, my anti-Syrian sentiments were very strong. I told my family that we should all get our weapons and go down. I said that if I see a Syrian, I would shoot him. That's how far it came. There were many news, a Syrian who raped a girl, killed her etc. …and then I go on the internet, and then I watch the news and then, my mistake, I go down to the comments and see how they insult the Lebanese. They say we are gays, not real men, our women are whores, etc. I can't accept these things.
>
> (Justin, Lebanon)

As Justin's quote also demonstrates, expressions of racial hatred towards a group are narratively linked to a perceived or actual attack by that group or past suffering at the hands of that group. Racial hatred or hatred of designated unbelievers do not arise in isolation.

   Importantly, in the Lebanese context, despite (or perhaps thanks to) the many internal sectarian and confessional differences and the collective memory of the civil war, there is a widespread awareness that peaceful coexistence is fragile and needs to be taken care of. For instance, Rashid stated that 'you cannot simply come and disrupt the harmony between Christians, Shia and Sunna in Lebanon. There is a history and you have to respect it' (Rashid, Lebanon). Similarly, in the wake of the terror attack on a mosque in New Zealand in March 2019, several interviewees in Tripoli stressed that it would be wrong to blame all Christians in Lebanon for what happened there

But you're upset, what should you do? In our street, people were devastated. Believe me, had we been at that place, we would have turned the world upside down. But you can't do anything here. People had nothing to do with it, you can't take revenge on them. I am against that. And you should not accuse Christians or attack churches. I am against that.

(Walid, Lebanon)

According to researcher Yamin, among the Shia in Lebanon, there was also an awareness that sectarian hatred must not be fuelled. With growing sectarian strives in the region, following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Hezbollah maintained a strong stance against sectarian hatred

But the Shia, aware of this danger, very quickly drew a bold line between the Sunna and the Wahhabites. There is a huge difference. We have a very specific problem with the Takfiri groups. There is a difference, this fight is not against the Sunna but against Wahhabism, the takfiri ideology. So, the Hezb was using sectarian symbols, but not a discourse based on sectarian hatred. There is a huge difference. We use Hussein for instance, but we don't say this fight is against the Sunna or declare the Sunna as unbelievers. But the takfiri groups do this of course.

(Yamin, Lebanon)

'We are suffering everywhere': Madhloumiya

The root of the word Madhloumiya (مظلومية) is *dhulm* (ظلم), which can be translated as injustice. The term Madhloumiya is frequently employed to signify not only a specific act of injustice against a particular individual or group, but a general long-term victimisation of an entire group defined by ethnicity, religion or sect. The term has therefore a clear political connotation and can be frequently found in narratives of resistance, such as the ones collected in this study. Khatir, a researcher I met during my fieldwork in Tripoli, attributed a certain weight to the idea of *'Madhloumyat al-Sunna'*

You've heard of this idea of Madhloumiyat al Sunna. I don't blame anyone who might believe that. If you look around, Iraq, Syria – Sunni Muslims are the targets. In Lebanon, there is clearly an unfavourable environment for Sunni Muslims. They have less resources, less access to education, justice and politics, and the security forces are very heavy-handed towards them. The reaction to such injustice is going to be violent.

(Khatir, Lebanon)

This feeling of a global perception of Sunni Muslims, or Muslims more generally, is frequently voiced by Islamic activists and former jihadists. It often takes the form of a mix between empirical evidence and conspiratorial hypotheses, such as here expressed by Mansour, a resident of BT in Tripoli and former sympathiser of the IS.

I am convinced that there is a war against Muslims, not only the Sunna. There is a global war but it's cold. A cold war. A media war and a subtle war. Very cold. But I feel that the war will break out soon… […] New Zealand, yes, that story got people crying. That was the first time I saw my mother cry. We even started thinking about going there! Where does that lead us? We want to go to Syria, then Palestine, now New Zealand! When does that end? There is a war against us. And we think about Yemen, Iraq, etc. there is a war. Libya. On a global scale, from one country to another. It happened here, two explosions in mosques. But it's continuing. It will come back here. It's not done yet. If tomorrow, I hope that we will meet again, I am convinced that this country, and this world, is going to a war.

(Mansour, Lebanon)

This excerpt is particularly interesting because it illustrates the constant mixing between locally oriented and globally oriented grievances. Evidence from different parts of the world is reassembled in order to sustain a narrative of coherence and a perception of systematicity regarding the oppression of Muslims and Islam. This iteration of the dialectic between global and local is a dominant theme in the narratives.

Madhloumiya as an idea is also mobilised by sympathisers of Hezbollah. The dominant narrative among the Shia interviewees includes many references to the century-long oppression of Shia at the hands of Islamic caliphs. Yamin, a researcher at a think tank affiliated with Hezbollah, for instance, explains: 'In the Lebanese context, there is of course the Israeli invasion of Lebanon that mainly affected the areas populated by Shia, but also the attacks by the Mamlouks in Lebanon, by the French, and in general, the attacks against the Shia by takfiri groups, starting in the 19th century'. More generally, the Shia interviewees sympathising with Hezbollah establish a narrative continuity between the early conflicts within Islam, the battle of Karbala and the killing of Imam Hussein, and their oppression across centuries since then. The links between the present transnational oppression of Shia Muslims, attacks against Shia in the Syrian civil war, and the link to historic suffering can be identified in the following two excerpts

For example, Iraq, yes, or Bahrain. You could say that. If you look at Iraq, after Saddam, but also before it of course. Under Saddam, the Shia were very oppressed. But here in Lebanon, the Shia were oppressed by Israel. Israel was attacking mostly the Shia, not all of Lebanon. Bahrain, Saudi, these are places where Shia can't go out. They are oppressed and attacked. In Yemen, that's a big proof. The Yemeni people, although not all Shia, they are suffering a lot. […] Look the worst news, the one that affected me most, the one where you really felt the mischief, that was the thing that mobilized each of us here. When they wrote on the mausoleum of Saida Zaineb "You will go with Bashar". This was the greatest shock. Because we remember what happened in Karbala, who suffered there. And you come and want to do this?

(Samir, Lebanon)

> So, the same thing happened here…They came officially to delete us, the Shia, Hezb…Here, it became purely religious. I remember that the Hezb sent many people to defend the shrines [in Syria and Iraq]. These were difficult years…before they [Lebanese state and Hezbollah] were able to get some control...We were targeted from all areas and we had to defend ourselves. It was as if we had been thrown back to Karbalah.
>
> (Thulfiqar, Lebanon)

These narratives and those of many others who speak about *Madhloumiya* demonstrate a recurring linking of events in different places of the world with events that are happening in their proximity. Since the collective that is affected is construed as being the same everywhere due to their religious affiliation, interviewees perceive a common trend in the targeting of that group across borders. The perception of *Madhloumiya* of a specific group therefore contributes to the transnationalisation of grievances. Importantly, as seen in the case of Hezbollah sympathisers, but also Christian militants, a narrative connection is also established between present and past situations of suffering and oppression, which sometimes reach back centuries.

'You could feel the coldness settle down': Criminalisation of Arab-Muslim identities in the GWOT

Many of the ethno-racial grievances found in the narratives relate to the securitisation and the criminalisation of Arab-Muslim identities in the age of the Global War on Terror. These experiences relate, on the one hand, to general indignation about the frequent amalgam between Islam and terrorism, felt by all types of interviewees, including researchers and practitioners of (or believed to be of) Arab-Muslim backgrounds. On the other hand, the criminalisation of Islamic identity is experienced more directly by individuals who are themselves associated with terrorist offences or groups or are considered extremist or radicalised. These individuals come face to face with the full weight of the counterterrorism apparatus that has been built on a perception that there are risk groups and factors that need to be policed in order to detect radicalisation, extremism and potential gateways to terrorism. Their narratives allow for an in-depth understanding of how these practices unfold, often at the hands of security forces and outside of public scrutiny.

Across all contexts, interviewees are acutely aware of the symbolic violence of systematically and carelessly associating a wide range of ordinary Islamic practices or culture with terrorism. As a Canadian practitioner recalls, the first years following the outbreaks of the Syrian civil war were difficult for her to cope with

> I felt very bad, I thought that what was happening was absolutely disgusting, hypocritical, horrible and stigmatising. I wanted to give up, but my colleague, who was handling all of this better, perhaps thanks to her distance in terms of identity and background, made me continue. She said we have to change the discourse on this. […] You know it's different for me, when there's a war

in Syria or Iraq. These are my people. But I had to endure the islamophobia here, see the journalists that harassed the families of the students who left for Syria…It was absolutely disgusting. I could understand how some were so in rage to feel like putting a bomb somewhere.

(Meriem, Canada)

Such strong feelings were repeatedly voiced by interviewees in different contexts. They are testimony to the alienating power of a racialised public discourse, which leads to enormous frustration, grudge and anger towards the dominant powers in society. They can be part of the most violent trajectories. For instance, ex-prisoner Salman, who is from Tripoli and had joined IS, mentions that part of his radicalisation into violent jihadism was related to strong feelings about islamophobia: 'When I was 23 years old, I started asking more questions about why the West hated Arabs and Islam' (Salman, Lebanon).

Experiences of Anti-Muslim racism were more relevant for individuals in Canada and Switzerland, given that Lebanon is a Muslim-majority country. Sabri, a Christian Syrian who moved to Canada, but continues to be strongly invested in causes related to the Arab World, describes this as follows

For example, I didn't expect marginalisation of immigrant communities and black communities to be so strong…That I would find such a class-based structure here. I also realized how difficult it was to navigate my identity in the post-9/11 context, where I was of course associated with all Arab Muslims that were securitized. And I didn't necessarily distance myself like many other Christians would by adopting the hatred of Arab Muslims, this was never the way I handled these things. But discrimination and the othering definitely played a role in my realizing that I could not belong. That my access to society was hampered. I was that 'Other'. It felt like immigrant communities were just here to be exploited.

(Sabri, Canada)

Asif (Canada) and Justin (Lebanon), also Christian Arabs, have had similar experiences in the post-9/11-context. They feel constantly thrown into the same batch and struggle to maintain a healthy posture, instead of adopting the Anti-Muslim rhetoric themselves. While Asif continues to manage to do so, Justin has, as part of his radicalisation into Christian right-wing extremism, naturally adopted this discourse.

Ziad, a Canadian activist of Arab origin, recalls that the 9/11 years profoundly changed his everyday experience as an Arab-Muslim. Besides isolated incidents of verbal aggression, he would also get frequently controlled, in acts that he perceived as clear instances of racial profiling

Like, after 9/11…9/11 was the biggest one…that really fucked with me, because all of a sudden…you could feel this coldness settle down on everything…before it was isolated incidents, but then it was all over the place […]

> I remember one time, I was in McDonald's and a drunk girl started yelling at me about like the two towers and shit like that because I had a shirt on with Palestine on it…I'm like…but they were Saudis! [laughs]…[…] And I was often stopped by police…I think almost every time I went home at night…yeah…I mean like I…I made a big deal wearing my kuffiyeh [Arab headdress]… it was a big deal to force them to let me have my kuffiyeh in high school, because it wasn't proper attire or whatever…so I was wearing that everywhere …and then I had my long hair in my beard…yeah… had a much bigger beard than I do now…so yeah…so it wasn't…it wasn't helpful with the cops [laughs] and with the racism…they don't recognize necessarily what it [the kuffyieh] means or anything like that but they know that it's Arab…that's enough to trigger a racist yeah or they might not know it's Arab, but they think of it as Muslim or something right…so it's like, just like a Sikh getting attacked.
>
> (Ziad, Canada)

It is telling also, for instance, that in the terrorism trials before the Federal Criminal Court that I assisted to, the first question that was asked systematically following the name and age of the person, was whether he or she is a practising Muslim. While this has usually little to do with the acts the person is accused of, it demonstrates that the seemingly mundane amalgam between Islam and terrorism persists at the highest echelons of public power.

Another important aspect has to do with visible associations with Islam, such as facial hair in the case of men or vestimentary attributes such as a headscarf in the case of women. Although the choice to wear a long beard or a headscarf is highly individual, in the endless pursuit to find simple and straightforward ways of identifying purportedly problematic shifts in religiousness, seemingly towards excessive rigour or fundamentalism, they have become convenient markers for law enforcement and criminal justice actors to concentrate their efforts on and convey an illusion of toughness and effectiveness to the public.

To Battoul, an activist interviewed in Canada, wearing the headscarf became an early part of her everyday resistance. As part of a general crackdown on Islamists in the postcolonial Arab World, in her home country in Tunisia, under the reign of Ben Ali, women were fined and given a warning for wearing the headscarf: 'At that time, women with a headscarf were considered as intellectually inferior and less civilised. I wanted to prove the opposite' (Battoul, Canada). Finding this unacceptable as a public policy, she continued to wear it although she was repeatedly stopped and harassed because of it. In her new home in Quebec, Canada, she continues to experience widespread public hostility towards the headscarf, which evokes similar feelings and elicits the same resistant posture. The feeling is also shared in more complicated contexts: 'If you appear Muslim, by wearing a headscarf for example, you will be associated with Daesh', Noor (Lebanon) said angrily, during a discussion with him and his brother in a café in Tripoli. Social worker Lina also describes how she herself feels frequently ostracised for wearing a headscarf

Sometimes I am really shocked when I discover the real personalities of people…For example, when I come in to teach a class, they don't get that I can be a teacher and talk to me like a student or an assistant…And in the teacher's meeting room, there was a situation once…it was really bad…three white women started attacking me for wearing the headscarf…they were saying 'we fought for feminism for such a long time, and now you come along with that headscarf'.

(Lina, Switzerland)

Social worker Sara who does not wear a headscarf also voices her frustration with the discourse she encounters at conferences on terrorism and radicalisation in Europe and the United States

I am experiencing this racism myself whenever I travel. I don't look Lebanese but as soon as they know it, they ask me What you're Lebanese? Then they ask whether I am with Hezbollah…Why I don't wear a headscarf…Once at a conference, I told them that the German pilot who crashed an airplane into a mountain…had he been Arab or Muslim...he would have been called a terrorist and not simply mentally disturbed. They accused me of being racist. Only the German ambassador applauded.

(Sara, Lebanon)

In the case of men, the main marker has become the beard, especially long beards. Repeated reference is made thereto by individuals from different backgrounds, but it seems that the ones suffering most from this are residents of Bab-el-Tabbaneh in Tripoli. Similarly to the headscarf, the beard becomes an important object not only of suspectification but also of resistance, because many young men continue to wear one despite the difficulties it seems to cause them. Bader regularly gets into trouble and attributes this to his looks

Look at my hair, my beard. There are people who judge by the looks. If they see me at the checkpoint, they tell me immediately to go to the right.[1]

(Bader, Lebanon)

It is already problematic to have a beard. What's worse, however, is growing one, which tends to attract the scepticism of security forces who presume a sort of radicalisation. Amir, who is one of the very few of my interviewees in Tripoli who shaves their beard, explains his choice as follows

I mean, I can still go out and see my people. But I am careful about posting things on social media or via WhatsApp. And I don't wear a beard, I shave on purpose. Because they will come get me if I grow a beard. They will come and ask you 'So, you think you're becoming a sheikh?' and take you in for interrogation. The guys with long beards, they know they are being monitored by the security forces.

(Amir, Tripoli)

This practice is particularly visible in the Lebanese context. However, Nooreddine, who wears a long beard, adds an interesting observation, postulating that this profiling practice has become increasingly acceptable in Western contexts as well

> You know, a few years ago, when I was in Egypt or other Arab countries… It was very normal to be stopped because you wore a gown and a long beard. They would ask me a few questions, classify you as a Neo-Salafi and let you off. European countries, which were looking in disdain to such arguably uncivilised practices of profiling, are increasingly adopting them. These days, it becomes normal to be looked at with suspicion if you wear a long beard and are Muslim.
>
> (Nooreddine, Switzerland)

On this aspect, Pasha, a former displaying Salafi, noted similar reactions, but has adopted a more pragmatic stance

> Well of course you often have that feeling like you don't belong... It's normal. Especially when I came back from Syria. And with that anti-Islamic sentiment and all. But in the end, it's also the way you dress, in a way you marginalize yourself, so don't blame society for that. I changed the way I dress and don't have any problems.
>
> (Pasha, Canada)

Another aspect of this securitisation of Islamic identity and practice is the criminalisation of the Islamic prayer, especially when performed collectively. Some interviewees in Tripoli explained that intelligence officers would come to visit them while they were praying at the mosque and advise them to pray at home, unless they wanted to get into trouble with the police. Praying was also considered suspicious during arrests and detention, when officers would humiliate interviewees from BT while they were praying, especially when they would pray together

> As soon as he knows you're from Tripoli, he starts hitting you and humiliating you. I didn't want to pray when I was there. Because as soon as they see two people together praying, they make a big fuss about it. My friend was there with me and he said let's pray. I said, you go first, and then me. But he insisted and so we prayed together. Then they came and got him: 'So, you think you're making an Emirate here?', and they humiliated him – they cut his hair in some places and left it in others. The rest of the 12 days at the court, I wouldn't pray! It simply wasn't worth it.
>
> (Halim, Tripoli)

Nooreddine, a Swiss citizen who was also arrested in an Arab country, recounted similar experiences about his time in detention

My time in detention was very enriching. We were praying together, doing religious classes. Even though they came from time to time to slap us in the face for that. It was an enriching period.

(Nooreddine, Switzerland)

In Nooreddine's case, the animosity by security officials fed into his resistance identity and his defiant posture towards the state that punishes ordinary Islamic practice. The message that individuals who are treated as such has repercussions beyond the immediate prison context: It confirms the already existing belief that it is not terrorism or violence that is targeted by security forces, but rather the Islamic religion itself. Thereby, such actions performed under the guise of counterterrorism are likely to feed exactly into the narrative that drives some individuals towards violence in the first place. Interestingly, to many interviewees, extremism has already become associated with religiousness. When asking whether the security forces consider them to be extremists, many reply that, of course, they are religious and that they are proud of that.

An important aspect is also the securitisation and criminalisation of political grievances when voiced in relation to causes and conflicts in the Arab-Muslim World. As mentioned earlier, in the current political environment they have been problematised, to the point of being classified as risky by security forces. The differential treatment of grievances provokes feelings of alienation and injustice that can be associated with ethnic, racial and religious grievances. This point is well summarised by researcher and practitioner Khalil

First, I think it's just the human nature [experiencing grievances]. You should not treat it as a Muslim-specific syndrome. When Notre dame was burning, everyone was crying. If Iran occupied Switzerland tomorrow, you will see huge alliances and sympathies from Western countries. This is just human nature. The thing about the suffering in the Arab-Muslim world, is that this is not "the Other" to these young people. It's the brother, the sister. We share something. This idea of the Ummah Islamiya, the same thing with the Western Ummah: We share values with Israel, that's why we have to defend Israel against Arab countries. The only democracy in the Middle East... The Muslim body. Muslims for the past 200, 300 years have felt that they are being targeted everywhere. For no reason.

(Khalil, Canada)

The example of Nooreddine who has faced condemnation and attempts at incrimination by the public, the media as well as Swiss authorities, makes it very clear how grievances can become criminalised when voiced by individuals who seek to speak for a Muslim collective

I was very active during that time. My phone was constantly ringing, whenever something would happen, an attack or anything. I was also very vocal abroad. They started to consider us as spokespersons for the Muslims in

Switzerland. That was something that many took issue with. I think it has to do with something that one journalist made very clear at some point. He said 'Why do I think that they are dangerous? It's because they are fluent in Arabic and they talk to international television channels about Islamophobia in Switzerland. That creates hatred against Switzerland'. That's why most people see us as traitors. And that's why we were problematic.

(Nooreddine, Switzerland)

In the specific context of the years following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, the ones who are associated with religiosity are considered sympathisers of Daesh. This sweeping association earned them an unfavourable and delegitimising treatment by the criminal justice system. As Bader recounts

You know at the Ministry of Defence, I could tell them anything! If I said I was a drinker and I went out with girls, I don't pray…all these things, I even used to look different! But the judge would just say 'you Dawa'ish[2] you're all like this'. You could say anything, it would be used against you!

(Bader, Lebanon)

The stereotypes have a strong influence on how individuals are treated by the criminal justice system, i.e., by the police and army, the judges and the prison officers. Residents from Bab-el-Tabbaneh are likely to be considered sympathisers or members of IS and therefore treated more harshly, especially by representatives of the army and police.

Although these are recurring instances of discrimination, the cultural setup of Lebanon and the confessionalised political system does not really allow for generalised Anti-Muslim racism to unfold. The impact of Anti-Muslim racism is differential: The criminalisation of Islamic practice and identity is felt disproportionately by Sunni Muslims from the northern regions. Given Hezbollah's political position in the country (especially their domination of the justice system), the beard or the headscarf in combination with a Shii identity does not ring any alarm bell. However, a longer beard worn by a young man from Tripoli matches the dominant perception of a risky subject. This regionalised and specifically sectarian orientation of Anti-Muslim racism was frequently mentioned by interviewees from Tripoli, especially from Bab-el-Tabbaneh. There are many stereotypes about the residents of Tabbaneh being terrorists, jihadists or criminals more generally. These stereotypes were, as some interviewees mentioned, also perpetuated by some media outlets

It was Black Tuesday on Noor Square in 2008. There was chaos because of the uprising. And then we saw the team of the TV channel Al-Jadeed. They were always depicting us as terrorists. So, when we found them in front of us, we attacked their jeep.

(Mansour, Tripoli)

Interestingly, however, stereotypes also affect residents of Jabal Mohsen, who do not fit the risk profile of a jihadist, due to their Alawite background. In their

case, their stigmatisation is based on the association of North Lebanon with fighting and conflict. In fact, all residents from this neighbourhood in Tripoli seem to be regularly considered as 'troublemakers from the north' which earns them extra scrutiny at checkpoints and enormous difficulties to get employed outside Tripoli

> If you go to Beirut, you want to work, they don't take you, because you're from the North. They don't want us, because they hear that in Tripoli there is fighting, weapons, and stuff.
>
> (Yahya, Lebanon)

Finally, there were also some statements indicating that stigmatisation was experienced when individuals were targeted by NGOs. They would wonder why NGOs would always be focusing on Tripoli: 'Why are they focusing on me?' (Fahad, Tripoli). That was also something that I experienced in discussions and meetings where social workers, practitioners and individuals from BT were around. There was a constant form of voyeurism perceivable in the way questions were asked or individuals were targeted. In light of the general perception that the Tripolitanians were 'terrorists' and therefore 'dangerous', it is almost as if, at times, it became a sign of bravery or coolness to be in touch with these individuals.

In sum, the Global War on Terror has produced a discourse around Islam and violence that has led to various forms of stigmatisation, suspectification, securitisation and criminalisation. The ones found across the narratives include the stigmatisation of Islamic but also Arab identity, of racial and visible markers, of Muslim grievances, the securitisation of Islamic practice that is considered rigorous and finally, the specific criminalisation of Sunni Muslims from poorer northern regions in Lebanon. Importantly, the impact of these practices and discourses nurture a stance of defiance and rebelliousness. While their effectiveness in the fight against terrorism is highly questionable, these practices are clearly effective in entrenching individuals in their quest for an identarian exceptionalism and fostering grievances that can lead them to join groups and organisations that promise them unconditional acceptance. Another impact which is more desirable from the perspective of the state is a growing consciousness among individuals associated with Muslimness that engaging in politics comes with a heavy price tag: Religiousness by itself is unproblematic, yet when they become political, especially in a more radical orientation, they should be wary not to display their religious background too strongly and ideally reject it. It seems to be either religiosity or radicality, from the perspective of the state, because the combination of both rings alarm bells. This realisation struck me particularly when talking to Sheikh Mouloud, who is active politically, yet within a rather uncontroversial tendency, and who provided a mainly religious explanation for the jihadist phenomenon. He told my gatekeeper at the beginning of the interview: 'You know the politics, I leave that to you. I don't like political ideologies and politics is always at the service of an ideology.' (Sheikh Mouloud, Switzerland). This tension between radicality and religiosity can be felt throughout the narratives.

'We are the people from the South': Solidarity in Otherness

Beyond the frustration with the way Arab-Muslims are stigmatised or Sunni or Shia minorities are oppressed, there is another form of othering that could be identified across the interviews. It concerns the othering of Non-Western and Non-white individuals across the globe, individuals from the Global South, as some may suggest. The narratives of these individuals of which many feel somehow out of place, either because of their identity or because of their political orientation, reveal an underlying grudge against the West and the Global North, from which they feel excluded and othered. The flipside of this coin is a sort of internationalist aspiration to unite the struggles of the peoples from the south, people who are different from the dominant majority. This is the case for interviewees of different origins but can be easily reconciled with a quest for Arab solidarity and collective identity. The idea of an internationalist community in the South has been a common theme throughout recent history, especially since the era of decolonisation. This southern internationalist solidarity is symbolised by events such as the Bandung Conference between Asian and African nations that took place in 1955 in Indonesia or alliances between revolutionary groups in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and East Asia. It can be seen as a worldview which reads the injustices in the world along a North–South axis, where White Christian European male hegemony continues to prevail and where mechanisms of marginalisation and oppression are maintained, though in different forms. The Marxist worldviews alluded to above are also often easily reconcilable with this internationalist aspiration, for they consider the class-based struggle as the main vector of oppression around the world.

Interviewees narrate the ways in which these mechanisms have played out in their own lives, how they have been marginalised and delegitimised by dominant groups. They often feel that they are struggling against a hegemonic narrative that excludes them from participating in explaining the world, especially when it comes to pointing out dysfunctionalities and injustices. Daniel shared a very telling example from his time at high school

> We had a history assignment. And a girl in class presented something on the history of Chile. Very bad idea! [laughs] I don't know which book she read but she was basically suggesting that it's thanks to Pinochet, that the Chileans are not poor, that…basically he saved us! And I completely disagree with that version of history! You can't come give a class about Chile and tell me that Pinochet saved us! So I was furious, of course. They sent me out of class… that, I understood, because I was really angry. But afterwards, the director of the school wanted to talk to me and she said…basically that I was too political. It was as if I had violated the neutrality of the school. And basically…it was like…'you're from there so you can't be neutral. You're too involved, so you can't see clearly what's happening.' That was this arrogance of supposed neutrality…it kept haunting me later in my life, in my political trajectory.
>
> (Daniel, Switzerland)

What seems to be particularly problematic across the board – and this aspect comes clearly to the fore in Daniel's example – is the fact that *Otherness*, while already defined by ethnic, religious, cultural or linguistic differences from the dominant majority in the context they live in, is exacerbated by politicisation and radicality. Otherness is much less a problem if the Other remains acquiescent, calm and apolitical. However, if strong political positions are assumed, this tends to provoke defensive reflexes that serve to alienate and exclude. The experience of otherness is a central tenet of interviewees' radicality and engagement, because it can be reconciled with a rebellious underdog identity. In fact, at the point of their engagement, interviewees are usually reconciled with their Otherness, and experience this reconciled state as empowering. Interestingly, there seems to be a moment in their trajectory when that reconciliation takes place. It is often concomitant with a feeling of betrayal, which will be explored below.

Practitioners and researchers repeatedly point to the difficulty of handling such othered identities in Western countries. Hakan, a social worker in Switzerland, and Khalil, a researcher and educator in Canada, both stress that the young people they are working with are struggling with the fact of not really belonging 'neither here nor there'. This is especially true, according to them, for second- and third-generation immigrants who have not lived in their country of origin. This feeling of not belonging creates a void that can be filled by groups that promise unconditional membership. It can also facilitate the rupture from society's social tissue and thereby open a vacuum for new ideas and memberships

> The second and third generation…they are struggling...because they are stuck between here and there. It is a form of schizophrenia. There is an identity at home and there is an identity outside…that leads to a form of isolation and feeling lost. And then, someone comes along and gives you that feeling that you belong… 'there, no one cares about you. Here, we care about you'.
>
> (Khalil, Canada)

The mention of practitioners in this respect is not coincidental. In fact, the various interviewees conducted with practitioners who are strongly involved in this phenomenon clearly reveal that the practitioners themselves know the experience of Otherness and unbelonging. They include otherness from a dominant majority due to nationality, religion, culture, poverty, gender or political orientation. This is a crucial aspect, because they seem to be able to draw on these experiences of Otherness in their work with individuals who tend to engage out of a positionality of Otherness as well.

Links between ethno-racial grievances and politico-ideological mobilisation

The findings presented above give an impression of just how widespread ethno-racial grievances are among the interviewees in the three contexts. They refer to historic suffering at the hands of a particular group, identified by racial, ethnic, cultural

or religious markers, against whom hatred builds and persists over generations. This can be clearly identified in Tripoli's jihadists hatred against Alawites and Shia Muslims, or Christian right-wing hatred against Muslims. The idea of *Madhloumiya* was discussed, which refers to an identarian sense of collective and transnational victimhood, such as a sense of worldwide oppression of Sunni or Shia Muslims. Important ethno-racial grievances are linked to the manifestations of the War on Terror, which has bolstered the amalgamation between Arab-Muslim identities and terrorism. The impacts are felt very strongly by interviewees on individual and collective levels. Finally, the narratives reveal a general sense of alienation from and by White European societies, which is connected to a desire to foster links of solidarity between othered peoples around the globe.

The narratives reveal that ethno-racial grievances are connected to strong feelings of indignation. This has to do with the dehumanising effect of the practices and discourses that lead to these grievances: It is not because of anything they do, but for something that they cannot change about themselves that they are stigmatised in the age of the GWOT. Worse even, it is something to which most are strongly attached, whether simply their cultural heritage or their religious identity, that becomes vilified in the general discourse and sometimes manifests itself in practices that affect interviewees directly.

On a cognitive level, ethno-racial grievances can contribute to a perception of systematicity and coherence across time and space. Through the combination of personal experiences of othering and stigmatisation with instances of learning about the discrimination and oppression of others associated with a similar collective yet in very different contexts, a feeling arises that the world is somehow specifically targeting this collective. This can also contribute to feelings of solidarity with othered Others in different contexts and therefore promote pro-social and constructive postures. However, more problematically, it can foster new forms of othering, stigmatisation, hatred and dehumanisation of other collectives, if they are associated with the perceived oppression of one's own collective of reference.

Notes

1 To 'go to the right' (اطلع على اليمين) is frequently used by the interviewees to indicate being searched. I experienced this several times myself, when, at the checkpoint, they would tell me to 'go right' where, a few metres further, there would be another soldier who would ask for my passport and sometimes what I was doing in Lebanon. Many of my interlocutors attributed this to my looks: During my time in Lebanon, I was wearing a beard.
2 Expression used to designate people affiliated with or sympathising with Daesh.

7 Political grievances

'Even dogs have it better': Political exclusion and marginalisation

In the context of Tripoli, an enormous existential problem for a significant portion of the population is statelessness. When a father does not have Lebanese citizenship (which is frequently the case for those whose parents immigrated from Syria to northern Lebanon, but never applied for citizenship), his children are not granted citizenship, even though they are born in Lebanon and even if their mother is Lebanese. This poses significant difficulties in terms of access to basic social services and medical assistance

> I got out of the hospital and they asked for 10 Million LBP – had I had a rifle at that moment, what would I have done? Of course, I hate this state, that doesn't care for me, but should. This problem, statelessness, made me so angry, I wanted to hurt someone. Abroad, even a dog gets an identity card. Here, the most essential rights, we don't get them. I don't get an ID.'
>
> (Nassim, Lebanon)

This political marginalisation is something that Palestinians are suffering from as well. Palestinian interviewees in Lebanon stress the difficulty of living a normal life, i.e., getting employment, participating in civic and political activities and feeling like a full citizen. Their eternal status as refugees condemns many of them to a life in the camps, which are repeatedly portrayed as hotbeds of violence and safe havens for terrorists and criminals. Zafer, who grew up in the refugee camp Ein-el-Hilweh, said that 'the situation in the camps is so bad, that people cannot even think about Palestine. It becomes a memory from a place far away' (Zafer, Lebanon). Abdeljaleel similarly describes the difficulty of suffering from political and socio-economic marginalisation on the one hand, and humiliation, repression and criminalisation by the security forces, on the other hand. During my fieldwork in July 2019, protests broke out across the country, when the government imposed new labour restrictions on Palestinians and Syrians, making it even more difficult to get a work permit and further reducing the professions available to them. The

Palestinian cause enjoys great solidarity from the residents of Tripoli, who are closely following the international and national developments in relation to it

> The deal of the century, as Trump calls it, it is starting here in Lebanon! The idea is to weaken us all, because in the end, Palestinians are our brothers. This deal has been planned for 70 years and they are in delay now…These laws that they are imposing now [new labour restrictions on Palestinians] they should affect foreigners, but Palestinians are refugees, not foreigners! The whole country should ignite about this!
>
> (Noor, Tripoli)

Beyond this Sunni Muslim solidarity, the Palestinian marginalisation and oppression in the Lebanese context are also one of the main concerns of leftist activists. They are strongly opposed to the racism and exclusion suffered by Palestinians at the hands of the Palestinian state. Importantly, a frequent criticism is also the co-optation of the Palestinian cause for political reasons. As Amal, a leftist activist in Beirut, explains

> There are people who coopt the Palestinian cause for their agenda, but they support racist policies in Lebanon. Like what's happening now with the permits. You have to pay 700 USD to get a work permit. And they are not allowed to leave the country. That was two years ago. It started against Syrians, but now it's against Palestinians. But Palestinians have always suffered from this exclusion and marginalisation in Lebanon. I hate how…people in politics say they support the Palestinian cause, end the occupation, blablabla. But they say, if we integrate Palestinians in Lebanon, that means we have to give them citizenship, it will mess with the demographics because there will be more Sunnis, second, they will not want to go back to Palestine anymore. It's stupid and wrong. I know many Palestinians in the US or Europe who want to go to Palestine. Just because you get citizenship, doesn't mean they don't want to go back at some point. And the ones who grew up and spent all their lives here in Lebanon. Why should they not have their basic civil and political rights. There are 70 professions they cannot practice. For example, you can study medicine as a Palestinian, but you cannot be a doctor. …I find this not only politically and factually wrong, but ethically also. To deny someone his basic rights because 'I don't want you to forget about your cause'. It's their cause not yours.
>
> (Amal, Lebanon)

Amal and other leftist activists I interviewed in Lebanon were also very active on social media, posting videos of state violence against Palestinian refugees during the protests against the new labour laws.

Other than the marginalisation of Sunni Muslims or Palestinians in the Lebanese context, forms of political marginalisation were also among the concerns of interviewees in Canada. Although interviews focused on their engagement with causes

and conflicts in the Arab World, the political events at the time brought another cause to the fore. During the first quarter of the year 2020, while I was conducting interviews mostly in Quebec, the Wet'suwe'ten first nation was protesting the building of a pipeline through their sacred lands in British Columbia. Most of the activists I interviewed during that time were participating in protests, marches and sit-ins to stand in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en people. I also joined Sudanese activist Randa for a commemoration of the many cases of disappeared indigenous women that were taking place alongside the protests. To the interviewees, their engagement for the cause of the Wet'suwet'en was in alignment with their general struggle against oppression, colonisation and marginalisation by dominant Western powers. Kevin, Khaled and Battoul point to the many parallels between the colonisation of Palestine and the continuing colonisation in white-settler Canada. Salim was very moved when he described the solidarity he felt with the Wet'suwet'en

> The Palestinian cause is a human cause. To me, it is connected to what happens with the Wet'suwet'en. Can you imagine what I felt when I saw them holding my flag? This act of solidarity? Of course, I will then go and hold their flag as well.
>
> (Salim, Canada)

Karwan, the refugee from Turkey interviewed in Switzerland, was to a large part driven by the marginalisation of Kurds in Turkey. Growing up in south-eastern Turkey, he had during his entire life experienced what it means to be oppressed and marginalised as an entire ethnic group

> My parents wanted to name me Karwan, but the Turkish authorities forbade that. Because they wanted to ban anything that is or sounds Kurdish, from the school to the citizen's registry. Kurds in Turkey are sweepingly considered as terrorists. Even at the university. When I was studying in Istanbul, three years ago, a man and his mother were killed just for being Kurds. The situation in the south-east of Turkey is even more difficult for Kurds. That's where I grew up.
>
> (Karwan, Switzerland)

'This, a ministry of the state?': Corruption of the ruling class and state violence

> I was asking myself how the military and the police can just kill someone like that. It should not be like this, right?
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

A major aspect touched upon by interviewees is the corruption of the state and the ruling class. Descriptions of that corruption are frequently accompanied by experiences of state violence, whether direct or vicarious, when a friend or

member of the family is affected, or when the violence is directly witnessed by the interviewees. Although corruption is by essence difficult to pinpoint and identify, interviewees tend to have strong positions regarding this aspect, not only based on isolated personal experiences, but a conviction that emerges from repeated personal and vicarious experiences as well as publicly available information. The links between state corruption, state violence and even the normalisation of violence in a given society are well illustrated by Randa's excerpt. She is a Sudanese refugee in Canada and continues to be very involved in a variety of causes, first and foremost the revolution in Sudan. She describes how she slowly realised the dysfunctionalities in the Sudanese system, which led to her growing activism and participation in protests against the regime of Omar Al-Bashir

> When I went to public school, in the capital Khartoum. And the capital should be the best city. When I went to school, people were fighting over chairs. Because there were not enough chairs. I took one, and a girl came and grabbed it from me. I realised, there is not enough chairs, you have to fight for it. That was the first bubble pop. Public education in Sudan is very very bad. The government simply did not prioritise education nor public health. Less than 10% of the public budget. There is huge neglect. […] And I was not particularly politicised, but I saw how the police was acting towards the young and the poor. And especially towards the women. The woman is very oppressed in Sudan. For example, there are the so-called tea ladies. They sell tea in the street and they sit together and chat. It's very nice to join them. But they are considered a social taboo. But I was very interested, so I went to talk with them. And I saw how people were treating them. They were humiliating them, many of them were raped, sexually abused. And it was normalised in society. And once I saw the police come and treat them very badly. I went home and asked my parents, and they said that was normal, because these women were a particular type of women. I was realising so many things about our culture that are wrong and violent and aggressive, but at the same time completely normalised.
>
> (Randa, Canada)

The Lebanese narratives, especially among the individuals from Bab-el-Tabbaneh, but also by leftist activists who participated in protests, point to a deep mistrust of Lebanese state actors, a loss of faith in the neutrality of the state and a cynicism about its promise of safety and justice for all citizens. Many have concluded that the criminal justice system is simply working in their disfavour. This feeling arises from wrongful convictions or detention that is longer than the actual sentence: 'Then the judge said '1 year'. And how much did I sit? 1.5 years. That's when my anger grew. 6 months for nothing' (Nassim). In relation to the justice system, this feeling was also, for the same interviewee, a result of observations he made when he was interrogated at the ministry of justice

I could not believe this was a ministry of the state. I saw signs of Hezbollah. […] the mouse for the computer, the pad they use, it on has the flag of Hezbollah on it! When I looked at it, the officer slapped me. When I asked where I was, he slapped me again.

(Nassim, Lebanon)

The strong grip that Hezbollah has on the criminal justice system is also pointed out by Sara, a Lebanese practitioner working with individuals detained or convicted for terrorism-related charges

When I was in court to give my testimony for one of the cases, I said it straight to his face. To the judge. I told him this whole justice system was dominated by Hezbollah and that they are just an Iranian puppet. He would have arrested me, had my colleague not intervened.

(Sara, Lebanon)

In Switzerland, political grievances often relate to perceptions of racism and xenophobia and the domination of the political agenda by right-wing nationalist groups. 'We are in Switzerland. And a guy like that gets elected', commented Richard when Christoph Blocher, an ultra-right-wing politician, was elected to the Federal Council in 2004. Nooreddine mentions the anti-minaret initiative that was voted and adopted in 2009, which to him demonstrated the open hostility towards Muslims in Switzerland. In his own judicial process, he perceives the criminal justice system as being biased and dominated by right-wing political judges

I always knew that judges are people who have a certain leeway to judge one way or another. But this is a completely politicised process. Of course, in Switzerland, it is not as bad as in other countries, but it's a little bit annoying, this utopia that we have in Switzerland, that everything is perfect. It works differently, but structurally it's the same.

(Nooreddine, Switzerland)

Similar feelings about this Swiss utopia of perfection were raised by the other interviewees in Switzerland. They denounce that systemic injustices can go unnoticed because there is a general carelessness when it comes to Switzerland. There is a strong belief that everything works well and that, if there is an injustice for which the state may hold some responsibility, it is an isolated exception.

Several interviewees in Switzerland had been in touch with the criminal justice system. Karwan narrates his experience of the entry interview, when he arrived in Switzerland to ask for asylum

During the interview, they accused me of being a terrorist. Just like that. I was completely baffled. They were speaking exactly like the Turks. Nothing was different!

(Karwan, Switzerland)

Sami, convicted for terrorism-related offences in Switzerland, expressed similar feelings of speechlessness when he realised the arbitrariness of the criminal justice system. He was accused of planning a terrorist attack, when in fact he had simply sent a Facebook message whose content was blown out of proportion by the prosecution in order to construct their scenario of a dangerous IS group on Swiss territory that they had prevented from acting. He also experienced very harsh and hostile treatment during his time in prison. Many members of staff would insult or intimidate him, ignore his demands for medical consultation and intentionally forget to bring him food or dip his cigarettes into water before handing them out to him.[1] Even the police officer Christoph in charge of surveilling Sami after his liberation from prison, expressed scepticism regarding Sami's case. After asking me what I thought about it, I replied that I found there to be very little evidence for these heavy accusations and the very long prison sentence. While I was speaking, he was nodding and then said: 'Yes, it feels…the whole thing seems a little far-fetched to me, if I'm honest' (Christoph, Switzerland).

Experiences with the criminal justice system more largely include painful interactions with the police. Instances of police violence were narrated by several interviewees in all three contexts. Richard, a leftist activist, shared his experience of being arrested during a protest rally as follows

> Something that I experienced, which certainly pushed me towards a certain form of radicality, was police brutality. […] I saw things that I will never forget, which no one who was present will ever forget. […] They arrested us, handcuffed us and brought us to their headquarter, where they put us into four cells. Once in the cells, that's where it became absurd. […] Since we were in there as groups, we tried to have some fun, by singing and playing football with a plastic bottle. The cops didn't like that. They kept telling us to stop and sit down. Then they started yelling at us. Then, they brought in the dogs, but that only got us more excited. Ten minutes later, they sent in the special forces who entered the cells, teargassed us, cuffed our hands behind our backs and kept us like that for another hour and a half. After eight hours and some interrogations, they let us leave. […] Imagine that, people were crying, begging them to stop. Many stopped all political activity after that.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

It is interesting to note that Richard's narrative creates some form of causality between this event and his radicality today. This is frequently the case when individuals narrate events that shook them very profoundly. By placing them in a coherent narrative, they can be processed despite the pain they entail. In a way, the narration itself becomes an act of resistance and defiance, for the narrator does not simply endure the injustice, but reintegrates it into his own trajectory of radicality and resistance. A similar example is provided by Daniel who recalls an instance where he and a group of friends were arbitrarily arrested and let go soon after

It was a bad experience. I think it has strengthened my convictions. Because the first time that I was arrested, it was particularly violent. The cops were completely mistaken. They were looking for a group of youngsters who were burning cars. And I was 13 years old maybe. I was sitting with friends in a courtyard. And all of a sudden, a guy appears and points at us with a gun. We are in Switzerland! Imagine that! We didn't get it. And then, more guys jumped out of the bushes and threw us to the ground, feet on our heads, in a really ugly way. And two hours later, they let us go: 'It wasn't you'. We were like 'what?' […] And again, I understood that the world was not a just place. I knew I was lucky they didn't find a box of matches in my pocket. Otherwise they would have accused me of having burned these cars. Until then, the cops were just nice guys you see on the street. Up to the moment when you find yourself between their hands. And they treat you like a criminal. Then you understand what they are capable of.

(Daniel, Switzerland)

Kevin talks about several instances where police officers brutally attacked protesters or where they were involved in the protests themselves as agents provocateurs

Once, during a protest, I saw a guy who looked weird. So, I went towards him to ask who he was…because he was with a group who had attacked other protesters…they were like a black block but not well organised. They had broken the leg of a girl…I finally found out they were cops…because when I asked with who he was, he took out a gun and pointed at me, saying he was there to defend Israel. There were a lot of students around me at that moment. Many of them have never come back to protest.

(Kevin, Canada)

Very similarly to Richard, he describes these experiences of police violence as being somewhat surreal. Also, importantly, he mirrors Richard's observation that many of the protesters stopped their political activity afterwards. It is almost as if part of the indignation is directed at this devastating long-term impact of police violence, which intimidates people to the point of becoming apolitical. Political grievances in relation to state corruption and state violence include the impunity of police officers, which, in Kevin's view, cannot be tried by a system that works in their favour

You know, I soon realised that the judges are in almost all cases, entirely siding with the system. They won't call out the police officers. Some are of course different, and it's a matter of chance which judge will eventually take your case. I had a judge once who knows that police violence exists and who does not believe in their absolute legitimacy. But most judges don't do that. There is a huge pro-police and pro-system bias of course. There are also emotional and reactionary judges who want to punish you harshly.

(Kevin, Canada)

Ziad expresses his indignation about the fact that the history of police violence in Québec is downplayed. Like their Swiss counterparts, Canadian activists are frustrated with the illusion of Canada as being a perfect country where the fundamental human rights of all are guaranteed

> I think people have this assumption that Canada is better…but the SPVM is quite quite nasty…Starlight tours they called them…which is a sick euphemism because what they would do is they would take native people, whether male or female…they would drag them out of the town middle of nowhere in February it's like negative 30 out right like so you're going to die if you're out there right…so they would drag them middle of nowhere, drop them under the under the starry lights right this is why they call them starlight tours… whatever they would just take them out and they basically killed them yeah….so so there is this history that lot of people ignore when they think of Canada as being nice and pretty and supposedly less racist supposedly less imperialist…but really Canada is just a smaller smaller imperialism. You know it has its own imperialist backyard you know it does mining operations all across Latin America and then in terms of racism here in Canada is just in a more enormous amount, like look what they're doing to the Wet'suwet'en people.
>
> (Ziad, Canada)

In the Lebanese context, many interviewees have been in direct contact with the security forces who have treated them heavy-handedly, at best, and tortured them, at worst. They have lost all faith in the ability of the state to protect them. Worse, they live in a constant state of insecurity, tiptoeing around security forces, out of fear of being humiliated or arbitrarily arrested

> When I see a soldier, I try to avoid him as much as possible. Because even when he sees you, he might annoy you and humiliate you to a point where you could not react anymore, and then they really come for you. And you're accused of attacking them. If there is someone to help you, you're lucky. Otherwise, you will be tortured. Others are protected, because they have people working for the state. They go for the weak, not for the strong. Those who have someone behind them, they are protected.
>
> (Amir, Lebanon)

In Lebanon, there is a widespread perception that the state is corrupt, and that influential people or those with connections can act with impunity, while the weak or unprotected pay the price. Also, given the various stereotypes around the residents of BT, it seems to be easy for security forces to randomly accuse them of being sympathisers of JAN or IS, which could bring them behind bars for years

> They could take me any second and accuse me of something. Once, there was a problem with another guy. And then another guy, an intelligence officer,

simply said that I was a Daeshi, that I was a small Daeshi when I went to prison and that I came out as a big one. Why? It's a problem between me and the other guy. Why do you get me into a story I don't have anything to do with? They wanted to make me part of IS. If you're part of IS, you're done here. Until now, I am afraid. When a soldier passes by, I am afraid.

(Bader, Lebanon)

This perception that the system works completely arbitrarily leads to immense mistrust and fear among young Sunni men from Tripoli. At times, the mistrust in the state is also born out of personal experiences of torture and abuse by soldiers during interrogations or police and military brutality on checkpoints. As Walid recounts what happened to him, he tears up and is still visibly shaken

The first day of the security plan after the last clashes here, they took me by mistake. They tortured me and beat me…until three months later, I kept crying by myself. And until now I can't forget it. I swear we were the first to help the military, the soldiers to get them to the hospital. But anyone can come and humiliate you, because you are considered a terrorist, a criminal, a troublemaker. That's the image they have of us. That we hate the military.

(Walid, Lebanon)

Importantly, interviewees stress that they would not have a problem with being arrested or even treated harshly by security forces, if they really did something wrong: 'The military harassed me, but they were right to do so, because I had done many wrong things' (Salman, Lebanon). What really fuels their indignation and mistrust of the state is the fact that these arrests often seem to happen either arbitrarily or in a systematically discriminatory manner, as Walid clarifies

We don't have a problem, I swear, if we are arrested for something we did. […] I have never been stopped for anything that I actually did. They took me for problems that they created! I mean they took me by mistake and treated me like this, torturing me. What happens to someone who really did something bad, then? God only knows.

(Walid, Lebanon)

Mansour was stopped by a group of soldiers while driving with a group of friends, one of whom was suspected to be related to someone involved in battles with the army. He was taken to a military post and beaten and humiliated by the officers, which created hatred that has only grown over the years

I got to the door and he made me trip. I fell on my face. I broke my nose and I still can't breathe properly [points to his nose which looks indeed crooked]. Then he [the officer] asked 'So, are you still laughing?'. I didn't say anything. 'Why aren't you saying anything?! As a military, I can squeeze your head!' I swear he said this. If someone says something like this, how do you want

me to love them? And respect them? Is that how you treat citizens? Is that how you should treat citizens? All you achieve is make me want to find a way to kill you! And for two days I was looking for a way to kill him, to take revenge. I wanted to shoot him, I wanted to kill him. Until now, if I see him today, I would deal with him. I swear, because he abused me, because what he did was pure injustice.

(Mansour, Lebanon)

Spending time with the people in this neighbourhood and discussing with them made me realise at some point that there seemed to be less hatred between the two neighbourhoods than there was towards the army. This is something that was very unexpected, especially since the conflict between the two neighbourhoods is repeatedly portrayed as sectarian.

Another troubling loss of trust in the government arises from witnessing the so-called counter-terrorism practices of the security forces first-hand. In one case, an interviewee described something that resembled a public execution

So, Osama Mansour [an important IS figure in BT] in his Opel, they stopped him. They filled his car with bullets. They were killed immediately. It was an order to kill. I was asking myself how the military and the police can just kill someone like that. It should not be like this, right?

(Mansour, Lebanon)

I personally witnessed the power of the military and the ways in which they can easily harass young men from Tripoli. During an event organised by an NGO in the neighbourhood of Bab-el-Tabbaneh, I was sitting with a group of men some of which I had previously interviewed. The military presence was, as always, impressive, with soldiers being on every corner of the small square on which the event was taking place. One could feel the tension between the army and the residents all along, but at one point it almost escalated. Following, an excerpt from my fieldnotes of that day

At some point, when I was sitting with some of them, suddenly everyone started running towards one end of the event. I saw Mohammed who I had talked to seconds before, and then saw his brother Mustafa pushing him away from militaries and putting his hand on his mouth. A group formed around him and pushed him into a coffee store. A few minutes later, more soldiers and the military police came to the coffee shop, waiting for Mohammed to come out. An older man from the neighbourhood went in and got him, they went together with the soldier around the corner and I later heard that he apologised there. Apparently, the soldier had told him that he couldn't enter the event. Mohammed called the soldier out and it quickly escalated. Soldiers were around all the time, walking around nonchalantly. But it became clear that there was a particular power balance to be maintained during that event, and that an occasional show of strength could easily occur. Everyone in the

neighbourhood seemed to dislike these soldiers for they were associated with much of the mistreatment the young people were suffering from. A fragile balance. I later learned that they told many of the BT guys to walk around, some of them would just do that without protesting, while others refused: Small acts of resistance that came with a heavy price tag.

<div align="right">(Field notes, 29 March 2019)</div>

The Lebanese interviewees fought (and would in many cases fight again), because of structural and systemic forms of neglect and oppression. The way counterterrorism efforts are currently led, however, seems to increase these grievances and add new ones instead of reducing them. The heavy-handedness of security forces and the deficiencies of the criminal justice system are actually *making the terrorists*, as Fahad said during a meeting with other ex-prisoners from Tripoli

At some point, Fahad spoke up and said 'the state is the creator of terrorism'. I noted that down, but realised that others didn't react. I think he was referring to both the actual fact of government using certain people to recruit others, but also to the heavy-handedness which leads people to become terrorists (again). I remember that he had to repeat this sentence to make himself heard: 'I said something, but you guys didn't pay attention. I said the state is the creator of terrorism', almost as if he knew it was an uncomfortable truth that people did not want to hear.

<div align="right">(Fieldnotes, 15 July 2019)</div>

'We want arms, too': Differential criminalisation

Which acts or groups are considered as illegal is always the result of a process of criminalisation that is strongly influenced by the *zeitgeist*, the local and global developments, as well as the pressures of political forces and dominant narratives. In the current context, most countries consider any form of support for the most notorious terrorist groups, namely AQ and IS, as a criminal offence. This often includes sub-groups or similar groups that are associated with these two umbrella labels. Many European countries and the United States also consider Kurdish groups such as the PKK as terror organisations. Many Western countries, most recently Germany, have also designated Hezbollah as a terror organisation. Hence, most of the interviewees in the present sample have had to engage with the question of criminalisation at least to some extent, be it because their own activism may be criminalised or because of their perception that the criminalisation processes are biased and unjust.

The narratives are riddled with expressions of frustration and grudge regarding the unequal treatment of different forms of activism and mobilisation. On a transversal level, many of these grievances refer to the general narrative around who is a terrorist and who's not. Frequent reference is made to the privileged treatment of the Israeli military or US armed forces, which have engaged in acts of large-scale violence that have cost the lives of millions of innocent civilians,

but which systematically escape the terrorist label as well as prosecution. On a more local level, these grievances refer to the differential treatment of certain groups over others. In the Lebanese context, these grievances relate mainly to the fact that Hezbollah fighters can be involved in the Syrian conflict without facing any legal repercussions whereas those wanting to support the Syrian revolutionaries are treated as terrorists. In fact, the heavy-handedness of the Lebanese security apparatus towards Sunni activists with sympathies for warring factions in the Syrian civil war stands in stark contrast to the impunity of Hezbollah fighters who engage in the very same actions. Even before the Syrian civil war, there was a discrepancy that led to the mobilisation of some Sunni groups, such as the group led by Ahmed Al-Aseer in South Lebanon, as Rashid, a former member, explains

> After two people of his group were shot, Ahmed Al-Aseer started to call for arms more aggressively. And naturally, he was able to rally many people around him with that. Because there was a prevailing feeling that if Hezbollah can be armed, if the Christian militias can be armed, we want to be armed, too. It was as if people wanted to restore the balance.
>
> (Rashid, Lebanon)

Many of the Sunni activists stated that the 2006 July War, which ended after Hezbollah had successfully pushed back the Israeli army, increased the group's popularity among the entire Lebanese people. 'Everyone in Tripoli was down in Sahat Noor, and the place was full of Hezbollah flags. Can you imagine that?', Marwan, a practitioner in Tripoli, recalls. Hezbollah's successful military campaign earned them sympathies from all across the Arab World. Asif, who was at the time still living in Palestine, recalls that 'I have always supported those who support the resistance. And in 2006, I remember, I had a poster of Nasrallah in my room' (Asif, Canada). However, the tides turned when in 2008, Hezbollah militants attacked civilians during an intrastate conflict in Beirut, after the government tried to shut down Hezbollah's telecommunications network

> You know in 2006, we were all with Hezbollah. We loved them, because they were the resistance. They were fighting Israel. We never thought about Shia or Sunna. Nobody hated them. But in 2008, when they went to tareeq jdeeda [predominantly Sunni neighbourhood in Beirut], everyone was shocked! People were shocked, when they killed Lebanese and Sunnis. And then they said, that Jabal Mohsen is with them, with Hezbollah. So, of course our hate was also against the Jabal.
>
> (Bader, Lebanon)

Similar indignation was also expressed regarding the impunity with which Rifaat Eid, the publicly pro-Syrian leader of the Arab Democratic Party commanding the fighters of Jabal Mohsen for years, claimed publicly that he was accountable to nobody, not even the Lebanese Army. This event had a strong impact on the neighbourhood of Bab-el-Tabbaneh, by signalling to them that their main

opponents were allowed to operate with impunity, while they in contrast were heavily controlled by the Lebanese army

> Rifaat Eid appeared on TV and said 'they can't do anything against me! These dogs of the Fir' Al-Ma'loumat [Information Branch, intelligence unit of the Internal Security Forces] should just come'[2]. Imagine, you are here in Lebanon, and talking about a security body that is Lebanese, and was created by Rafic Hariri! How can he say this on TV? Imagine if I said that on TV, they would clean the floor with my body! It was clear that Rifaat Eid was untouchable.
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

Residents of BT repeatedly stated their disbelief about the way in which Hezbollah was allowed to act as they pleased. This concerned especially Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war and the fact that Hezbollah fighters have been allowed to keep their arms

> Why don't you allow us to have weapons also? Why should we be the weak? We don't have the protection that they have. As soon as you carry a weapon here, you are a terrorist! If you leave for Syria and come back, of course you are a terrorist! They have a straight corridor to Syria from the south. That does not seem to be a problem.
>
> (Amir, Lebanon)

> They consider all of us terrorists. Bashar Al-Assad and Hezbollah can go in and out, there are videos of that – why are we not allowed to go?! Even if we don't go, but for merely thinking about going there, they could arrest me! And these guys go in and out and they celebrate them in Dahyeh. Of course, they come back as winners. They went to fight with Assad, and they would come back as victors. We would go and they would arrest us. Is that not biased? How can this pain get off my chest? If nobody is standing with me?
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

> We know people from our street who went and came back. Some didn't do anything here. But simply because they went there and came back, they are arrested. Even if they didn't do anything in Lebanon. But because they went and defended their brothers in Syria. Hezbollah go and come back and nobody asks them where they are going. How could I love this state if there is that much discrimination?
>
> (Nassim, Lebanon)

These views are not necessarily specific to the Salafi activists from Tripoli. However, given their position and their risk profiles, they are the ones feeling the bias in the security apparatus in the most immediate way. Activists, researchers

and ordinary Lebanese citizens, even some who grew up in Hezbollah-dominated neighbourhoods, agree that the differential treatment of Hezbollah's weapons and fighters is untenable. Researcher Ritaj, for instance, said she was surprised when she conducted interviews with Hezbollah fighters

> I was shocked to learn that it was completely normal for students to go down to Syria over the weekend, participate in the fighting, take a selfie with their Kalachnikov, and come back on Monday to pursue their studies at university. And that everyone knows that and to everyone this seems completely normal.
>
> (Ritaj, Lebanon)

Baseel, a member of the Future Movement, has a vivid memory of what happened in 2008 and continues to strongly advocate against the privileged treatment of Hezbollah

> In 2008, when the government wanted to take down their communications network, Hezbollah took to the streets, with their weapons and everything, burning the station of Future TV and about 28 people died then…there were military confrontations…their militamen were everywhere. That image really shook me and made me sad. They used their weapons, which are weapons of resistance, with which they fought against Israel in 2006…they used them against the Lebanese people in 2008.
>
> (Baseel, Lebanon)

In contrast, the Hezbollah sympathisers in the sample insist that Hezbollah needs to be armed. They are adamant about the necessity of Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict and that they should be celebrated as heroes and not as criminals. They are frustrated with the way society disregards the heavy sacrifice that the martyrs from Hezbollah's ranks paid to defend Lebanon from Daesh. In their view, it is a form of disrespect and hypocrisy, given that peace in Lebanon would have been at peril, had Hezbollah not preventively intervened in the Syrian conflict. Thulfiqar, for instance, describes his reactions as follows

> Now, whoever speaks against the cause, I get very angry. I react strongly. Because many young men fell to defend their religion and the land and their family. And now someone comes and is against that…I get very angry. It doesn't make sense to me. […] There were many situations and they even led to fights. I accept different opinions, but when they say things like 'had the hezb not entered, there wouldn't have been problems', or that they are only fighting Muslims...come on man…When they speak like this, they are humiliating the religion and all the blood that has been spilled for nothing. Every day, someone comes and tells me that this one fell as a martyr, the next day it's someone else…all of these were close friends.
>
> (Thulfiqar, Lebanon)

All in all, the privileged treatment of Hezbollah militants, which they earned to some extent because of the victory in the July 2006 War, has been put into question by most Lebanese. The fact that Hezbollah enjoys practical impunity, while, for the same or much less tangible acts such as expressions of sympathy, individuals whose sympathies are oriented towards Salafi-jihadist groups face heavy repression, leads to feelings of injustice and discrimination. These feelings are exacerbated by Hezbollah's strong grip on the security and justice system in Lebanon: Many military judges and officers responsible for arresting and sentencing Salafi-jihadists are themselves entangled with Hezbollah, according to many interviewees in Lebanon, including practitioners.

At this point and given that one interviewee fought in Iraq against Daesh, it is worth mentioning that the situation is similar in Iraq. The *Hashd-el-Shaabi*, i.e., the Popular Mobilisation Forces composed of mostly Shia volunteers, who mobilised and fought against Daesh in Northern Iraq in 2014, remain mostly unpunished. Public opinion has become more critical recently, especially with the popular uprisings starting in 2019, which were strongly opposed to the Iranian meddling in Iraqi affairs, among others their support for Shia militias. In contrast to that, actual, potential and presumed supporters of Daesh are heavily scrutinised, criminalised, arrested in masses and tortured. In combination with Noor Al-Maliki's discrimination of Sunni fragments of the Iraqi population, such differential criminalisation nurtures grievances and creates fertile ground for a violent rebellion by Sunni factions in the future. The similarity between the Lebanese and the Iraqi situation also contributes to the perception of a general conspiracy against Sunni Muslims, in line with the notion of *Madhloumiya* discussed above.

In the Swiss context, the differential treatment of foreign fighters engaged in the Syrian conflict became clear in spring 2019, when Johan Cosar was tried by the Swiss Military Court. He had travelled to Syria and formed his own Christian militia called the 'Syriac Military Council' there, in order to fight against the so-called 'Islamic State'. The Court acknowledged his 'humanitarian motives' (Alder, 2019) and decided to pronounce a mild sentence consisting of a conditional fine of 4,500 Swiss francs and a fine of 500 Swiss francs. Such a mild treatment of foreign fighting by the Swiss justice apparatus stands in stark contrast to cases where individuals had communicated via Facebook with presumed members of a group supposedly affiliated with IS in Syria and served a custodial sentence of 3 years (see Ajil & Jendly, 2020).

Activists in Switzerland are aware of this discrepancy and are frustrated with the way political Islam is gradually criminalised, as explained by Nooreddine

> We are certainly not among the most radical segments of political Islam. We have a pragmatic, certainly Islamist, but pragmatic approach that we have always been transparent about. We are for a pragmatic Islamism if you like. And I don't see where the problem is with that. From 2015 on, we had all these laws, and soon the prosecutors were asking themselves whether these laws were enough. Obviously not, that's why we have more and more laws

that try to criminalise pragmatic Islamists as violent extremists, propagandists etc.

(Nooreddine, Switzerland)

This is also a problem identified by Fanny, a social worker in Canada, who can understand, to a certain extent, why individuals are frustrated about the legal entanglements they get into because of their sympathies with particular organisations

> Of course, many of them ask themselves…why am I being put behind bars for years and this guy walks around freely, although he was much more violent than me?
>
> (Fanny, Canada)

This is a general problem in the case of counterterrorism: In their quest to prevent terrorist attacks at all costs, states have lowered the threshold for what constitutes a criminal offence in the realm of terrorism. Over recent years, activities that are not immediately related to violence, such as watching or possessing videos or pictures, have become criminalised in an attempt to quell any form of radicalisation, especially in the jihadist spectrum. As a natural corollary of this, the ordinary citizen, who doesn't have (nor has to have) a macro understanding of the social forces that inform criminalisation processes, is struck, and rightly so, by the disproportionately repressive response to what is usually a rather innocuous activity. This point is echoed by Sami

> You know, I could never have imagined that sending a message on Facebook would get me behind bars for years…and that years later they would come and ask me about every word in this message, trying to interpret it as evidence that I was – worse, am – a terrorist.
>
> (Sami, Switzerland)

'American dirty politics': Double standards and impunity of Western powers

Whereas the preceding section dealt mostly with forms of differential criminalisation in local contexts, this section explores perceptions of differential criminalisation and double standards on the international level. In fact, a common theme throughout the interviews was feelings that translate scepticism or even animosity towards something considered as the 'West' spearheaded by the United States of America, but more generally encompassing North America and Central and Western Europe. Given the overlaps between interest in causes and conflicts in the Arab World and anti-imperialist orientations, this is a theme that may not come as much of a surprise. Anti-Western sentiments are usually linked to colonial and neocolonial projects led by European and North American countries, mainly the British and French, but later also the United States, in the Arab World. Many activists in Switzerland and Canada were involved in demonstrations against the

US invasion of Iraq in 2003. For individuals whose interest in causes in the Arab World resulted from their general leftist internationalist and sometimes anarchist stance, the United States is met with scepticism because of their position as a symbolic representative of neoliberal capitalism, settler-colonialism and anti-communism. A further component explaining the animosity towards the United States and the West more generally, is the United States' steadfast alliance with and support of Israel, and the lack of Western opposition to Israel's actions. Anti-Westernism is also a consequence of the impression that the international community pursues double standards and remains idle when major crimes are committed in the Arab World, such as in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen or Palestine.

Hence, it is important to acknowledge that Anti-Westernism is not tied to any particular religion or ethnicity. Rather, it is the consequence of living in a political context that has been affected by geopolitical developments driven by Western powers throughout the 20th and 21st century. It should therefore not come as a surprise if Christian right-wing militants, despite their animosity towards Islam and Muslims, may also hold Anti-Western sentiments

> I always had a tendency to defend the weak. You'll laugh but before I got to university, I was what some call a keyboard warrior. You know, fighting over the Internet with people all over the world. I was defending Islam and Muslims! [laughs] Because these white Western guys were laughing at Arabs, so it was natural for me to stand up against them. I was telling them that Arabs were way better than them and things like that.
>
> (Justin, Lebanon)

Following, two recurring and dominant political arguments that explain the Anti-Americanism and Anti-Westernism identifiable in all narratives are explored in detail. One concerns the perceived impunity of Western powers, encapsulated by the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and another the idleness of the international community in the face of injustices such as the occupation of Palestine.

On 23 March 2003 a coalition led by the United States started bombing Baghdad. The invasion was launched despite strong resistance across the globe. The run-up to the invasion demonstrated that the US government at the time was trying to find reasons to invade Iraq and bring down Saddam Hussein. Many rumours emerged that George W. Bush had always had in mind to finish the job that his father had started in 1991, when Saddam was pushed out of Kuwait. With fabricated links between Saddam and Al Qaida and the alleged existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which were never found, the US-led coalition went ahead in violation of international law and against the position of the UN Security Council. The invasion demonstrated to the world that the instruments of the UN were ineffective in preventing military aggression, that the United States and their allies cared little about the opinion of the international community, and that war crimes were not prosecuted if they were committed by Western powers, hence putting the credibility and legitimacy of international criminal law into question. Even in the years after the invasion, when information

and videos proving the war crimes that had been committed in Iraq started to become public, the world seemed more concerned with prosecuting WikiLeaks leader Julien Assange than the perpetrators of the war crimes who have remained unpunished to date.

Interestingly, interviewees in all countries, from very different backgrounds and of contrasting political positions connect with the feeling of indignation about the Iraqi invasion, although from differing angles. They participated in protests if they were old enough, or learned sooner or later about what had happened in Iraq. Along with other major human rights violations in the GWOT led by the United States, the invasion of Iraq resulted in a great loss of credibility of US foreign policy around the world, especially in the Arab World.

For Swiss activist Richard, developments in neighbouring France coincided with his participation in a protest against the Iraqi invasion. The moment sparked his activist career

> It was the period of the beginnings of Jean-Marie Le Pen, etc. in France. There were questions that made me think. And then I did my first big protest, when I was 15 years old. The big demonstration against the war in Iraq. That was a moment when I started to think more seriously about questions related to global politics.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

To Daniel, also a Swiss activist, the reasons for his interest in the invasion of Iraq were also related to his family background and his upbringing. He had been socialised into Anti-Americanism or at least scepticism towards the United States

> I think the Iraq invasion…it's really because of the link with the United States. For us exiles from Chile, the big enemy is the US. More than the US, it's the imperialism, but specifically the one led by the US. We have not forgotten that the CIA was behind the military coup in Chile. So, we know we can't trust the Americans! [laughs]. I grew up into this way of thinking, that you can't trust the Americans. At school, many of my peers were watching American movies and stuff. I had always learned to hate these movies.
>
> (Daniel, Switzerland)

The Iraq invasion naturally had ripple effects throughout the entire Arab region as well. Interviewees describe moments of profound shock that the invasion was even possible. The images of the destruction and the violence following the invasion, the capture and execution of Saddam Hussein, and images of abuse and violence at the hands of US military personnel caused great indignation in the Arab World. Salim recalls the day of the invasion well

> The day of the Iraqi invasion was a terrible day. You know, my father, he was a very strong man, and believe me…I had never seen him cry in my entire life. The day of the invasion, I saw him cry for the first time. My entire world

broke down that day, not only because of the invasion, but also because my
father was crying in front of me.

(Salim, Canada)

Leftist Pan-Arab activist Sabri compellingly summarises the various events and
tendencies that have contributed to his Anti-American stance. His excerpt is par-
ticularly telling because it illustrates the complexity of clearly distilling the rea-
sons that may contribute to a particular mindset. Most often, it is a conglomeration
of aspects that relate to global and local events, tendencies that play out over a
long period of time and incidents that are located in a more confined timeframe

> Other events that played into my anti-imperialism were of course the war on
> terror, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, but also what happened after
> Rafic Hariri was assassinated and the whole movement that started against
> Syria. And then of course, the imperialist incursion in the region more gener-
> ally, by the Americans and the Israelis. The Palestinian question. That is why
> I was also fascinated by Hezbollah and Hamas, for example.

(Sabri, Canada)

The activism around the anti-war movement was formative for both Khaled and
Ziad, Canadian activists of Arab origin. Both of them were very active on campus
during the run-up to the Iraq War, and they particularly appreciated the 'breath
of fresh air' (Khaled) that came with the feeling of a 'collective sense of duty'
(Khaled) and 'excitement about the prospects of being able to really change some-
thing' (Ziad, Canada). The enthusiasm was met with great frustration and disil-
lusionment when the anti-war movement failed to stop the invasion

> We felt a strong sense of anger and powerlessness at that moment. But we
> also realised that solidarity is not enough. We realised that we had to end
> colonialism here. That's when those who continued in the anti-war move-
> ment became increasingly anti-colonial. And when the indigenous solidarity,
> the fight against poverty, etc. became more important.

(Khaled, Canada)

For Nidhal, a strong supporter of Hezbollah, the Iraq war was simply further proof
of what he calls 'American dirty politics'. It is the general Anti-Israel and Anti-
American stance, but also his Arab and Shia identity that makes the conflict per-
sonally relevant to him

> The Americans. To be honest, I believe the root of all evil is the USA, they
> are completely overrated. Maybe politically they won in Iraq. But every-
> where else, Afghanistan etc. I feel that theoretically they are the greatest
> army in the world, but in the field things change. These things have an impact.
> Defending is different from attacking. This American soldier who goes into
> Iraq, because he was ordered to, is not the same as the Iraqi defending his

land. […] I think I am impacted by this mostly as an Arab I think, more than anything else. And also…because Iraq is majority Shia, you see...the emotional Shia side of me empathises with them but most of all because it's an injustice, the interest in oil fields, the military bases, simply American dirty politics.

(Nidhal, Lebanon)

For Yamin, a researcher in Lebanon, not the Iraqi invasion per se, but the civil war that ensued, played strongly into the feeling among Shia Muslims that their holy places were being attacked and that this was a war against Shia Islam. He also suggests that to the Shia communities, this was seen as a continuation of what was happening in Syria later

The Shia–Sunna conflict appeared only in recent years and I think it's mostly due to what happened in Iraq after 2003. The attacks on the shrines. That sectarian dimension was revived then. So, in the Syrian context, this short-time memory was there, nothing really in the past, but yes there was a feeling that what is happening in Syria is a continuation of what was happening in Iraq. And as a consequence, we will suffer the same way.

(Yamin, Lebanon)

For interviewees that are ideologically oriented towards Salafism or even Salafi-jihadism, the Iraq invasion represents and confirms different aspects. On the one hand, it is a further confirmation of the impunity of Western powers, especially the United States, when they attack and decimate Arab Muslims. On the other hand, however, the suffering of Sunni Muslims after the Iraq invasion feeds into the narrative of *Madhloumiya,* of transnational Sunni victimhood. This can be seen in the following exchange with Mansour, a Salafi-jihadist from Tripoli. Another thing that is clearly illustrated is the links that Mansour forges between the suffering of Sunni Muslims in Iraq and his 'acquired right' to fight Bashar Al-Assad, since he is located on the same Shia-dominated axis of power in the region

AA: Did you remember other situations where Sunna were oppressed and targeted, in the world in general?

Mansour: I remembered Iraq, before. When I think about how Shia went to Sunni houses and killed the people there. After Saddam was killed, because after he was killed, the Sunna started to be targeted. That's where the thinking and the hatred started here.

AA: Until today you feel this hatred?

Mansour: Until now, but I don't think it's hatred. I consider it an acquired right to fight Bashar Al-Assad and his groups, Rifaat Eid, etc. believe me, if I knew Rifaat Eid was coming back to Tripoli, *wallah, wallah, wallah*, he wouldn't stay there a single second. Even if we had to die, we would mobilise. Not only me! I am telling you about all the people here. We all have this grudge.

(Mansour, Lebanon)

It is important to nuance here, however, that the narrative of a systematic Sunni targeting is again not only limited to Salafi-jihadists, but also adopted by ordinary citizens of Tripoli. For instance, well-educated practitioners Marwan and Sultan, both working with the former fighters in Bab-el-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, recall that the Iraq invasion and the subsequent killing of Saddam Hussein had a huge impact on the people of Tripoli

> When Saddam Hussein was executed, you could feel it in the streets of Tripoli. I remember that it was Eid-al-Fitr that day. We did not celebrate. Imagine the sadness. Everyone was wearing black. It was very similar to when Morsi was toppled in Egypt. And even more when he died [a few weeks before our meeting, he died on 19 June 2019].
>
> (Marwan, Lebanon)

The feeling that Marwan describes is frequently expressed by individuals who adhere at least to a certain extent to the thesis of *Madhloumiya*. It seems like wherever there is a powerful Sunni Muslim leader, he will sooner or later be imprisoned or executed. Regarding the example of Egypt, Battoul, a Tunisian-Canadian activist, also voiced certain indignation about the way the democratically elected Mohamed Morsi was toppled

> The oppression of Islamists is problematic. I think that Islamists must have their place in a democracy. We don't all have to agree with them. Of course, the Islamists made many mistakes in Egypt. But the way this was done, the oppression of a democratically elected Islamist with the tacit consent of Western powers…it gives you the feeling that it's a sort of hypocritical conditional democracy: 'You can have democracy as long as you don't vote for the Islamists'.
>
> (Battoul, Canada)

For Nooreddine, a self-declared Islamist, the Iraqi invasion was a continuation of his engagement for the Palestinian cause

> Everything that happened after 9/11 had a huge impact on the way I saw the world. Through my engagement for the Palestinian cause, I became more critical of the West and Switzerland and the way they were portraying the Palestinian conflict. It seemed so immoral. And then, everything that happened in the run-up to the Iraq invasion, this discourse of othering, etc. The invasion of Afghanistan did not shock me as much, to be honest, because I saw it as an act of revenge of the USA. But the Iraq invasion was different.
>
> (Nooreddine, Switzerland)

As an event of enormous significance to the Arab World and to the world more generally, the US invasion of Iraq and the ensuing civil war remain strongly ingrained in interviewees' collective memories and form an integral part of

their worldview, especially their Anti-American and Anti-Western sentiments. Another aspect of the interviewees' narratives that explains the prevailing Anti-Westernism to a large extent is the role of the international community when it comes to conflicts in the Arab World. While on the one hand, this is related to colonialist and neo-imperialist expeditions led throughout the 20th and 21st century, the international community, dominated by Western powers, is also seen as biased and as having double standards when it comes to the prosecution of states for crimes against humanity. For example, the Western powers that did not participate in the US-led invasion of Iraq were also not actively preventing it. The deadlock of the UN Security Council in the Syrian conflict made it impossible for the international community to act in a concerted manner, therefore conveying an impression of helplessness, which is by some commentators also viewed as intentional connivance. The impression of double standards is strongly prevalent when it comes to the protracted conflict between Palestine and Israel, as a result of the increasing occupation of Palestine and the still outstanding recognition of Palestine as a state by the majority of the international community. The Palestinian conflict has also garnered sympathisers across the world, from various political orientations and affiliations, who connect with the cause through their respective prisms and worldviews. For many interviewees, the second Palestinian intifada was the trigger for their interest in the Arab World or global politics more generally, and their subsequent mobilisation. What caused their indignation most was the persistent injustice by a power backed by the West against a relatively weak civilian population, the lack of resistance by the international community, and the way most Western mainstream media would portray the conflict, delegitimise the Palestinian resistance and side with the Israeli forces.

Souhail, Swiss activist, describes the first phases of his engagement for the Palestinian cause as follows

> It was during the second intifada; I remember seeing all these images and asking my parents a lot of questions. They were always following the political developments in the region. And then I started watching many documentaries first, and I found the way the Western mainstream media were portraying the conflict very disturbing. So, I continued to study the topic, I read books and articles. I felt increasingly strongly about this unjust situation, this colonisation in fact. And everything that went with it. Especially the way that history was being rewritten. That's when I read more about Chomsky regarding the way the media can reformulate and rewrite a cause. Now, thinking back, I think the cause combined everything that I could possibly hate about our politics and the international scene: Colonialism, North–South relations, immense injustice on a small geographic scale, islamophobia, associating Islam with terrorism, etc. I think it was all there.
>
> (Souhail, Switzerland)

Ziad also recalls that the first instances of his politicisation were related to the Palestinian conflict, the second intifada

> I would say my first political activity was beginning around the Palestinian question. It was something we always talked about in our family of course. And my scenarios as a kid, when playing with toy guns and stuff, was always liberating Palestine. Laughs. That was quite something. The event that kind of got me active. I think the second intifada. A lot was going on. I started posting the death count on the blackboard at school. And then I wrote an article for the school newspaper, that came out twice that year. I was not 18 yet. Then there was the image of the kid who was with his dad…Mohammed Durra. That really shook me. I tried to get it across to people.
>
> (Ziad, Canada)

To Daniel, it was the international community's failure to agree on indicting and sentencing former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet who was allowed to return to Chile after having been arrested in London. To Daniel, this event opened his eyes at a young age to the possibility of major injustices going unpunished

> We wanted to see justice in the face of this dictator. I think as a first political experience, this marked me significantly. We were hanging in there for a moment, expecting that justice would be done. But eventually, justice was not done. He was freed and that's it. I think it was the first time that I saw concretely, in front of my eyes, the emotions and the mobilisation of the community. And that the response of the world was injustice.
>
> (Daniel, Switzerland)

Salim feels strongly about the Oslo Accords, which cemented his view not only of the injustice of the international community but also the weakness of Palestinian leaders

> The Oslo Accords, they were the last straw…they broke the back of the Palestinian cause and legitimised the occupation. They gave away the last bit of dignity that the Palestinian people had. Peace is always imposed by the strong, of course. So it's ridiculous when the weak go sacrifice their rights in order to have peace. It's ridiculous.
>
> (Salim, Canada)

In relation to the Syrian conflict and the emergence of Daesh, there is also a widespread belief that Israel and the United States continue to support the terrorist group and use them as a proxy to maintain chaos in Syria

> The US, they have all the means and all the information. How come they haven't finished Daesh yet? It is obvious that they want this *fitna* to happen.
>
> (Noor, Lebanon)

Links between political grievances and politico-ideological mobilisation

Political grievances are widespread in the narratives. As presented above, they refer to both local situations such as political marginalisation and exclusion,

neglect by the state, instances of state violence and evidence of state corruption, as well as differential criminalisation. In terms of globally oriented political grievances, the narratives contain mostly references to the double standards of the international community and its connivance over war crimes and neocolonial projects when Western powers are the perpetrators. Interestingly again, a central tenet of the narratives in this respect is the constant mixing of locally and globally oriented grievances.

When political grievances refer to inequality and marginalisation in the local context, they tend to be the product of a long-term and recurring confrontation with the injustice, either personally or as a collective. When they refer to state violence differential criminalisation, they are often voiced by interviewees who have directly suffered from state action in this regard. In Lebanon, this is very much the case for Sunni Muslim interviewees from Tripoli. When grievances refer to global situations, especially the role of Western powers, they are usually the product of a collective narrative nurtured with information about major events such as the Iraq invasion or the actions of the Israeli military, which are not sufficiently condemned on the international level.

When grievances are the result of recent and immediate experience or witnessing of state violence or corruption, the feelings that ensue are usually anger and rage combined with a desire to take revenge and attack police officers or soldiers. When they are the result of an incremental long-term exposure to injustice, grievances are rarely put in relation to a willingness to take action, and often remain at the level of a narrative denouncing the state and state corruption for example. What all forms of political grievances do, however, is produce a sense of legal estrangement or cynicism about conventional and supposedly legitimate actors such as the government, the police, the law or the international community. As a result of that estrangement, respect for these established actors and norms breaks down, which can facilitate attitudes and behaviour that are hostile to the state itself or disregard the state's authority in prohibiting certain forms of behaviour. For instance, jihadists who are sympathising with Jabhat Al-Nusra or Daesh in Syria may not only do so out of alienation by the state in the first place; they can also be hardly convinced that their sympathies or even desire to mobilise for these groups is worse than what other groups such as Hezbollah or even states such as Israel or the United States are doing around the world. For instance, by disregarding international law the way it did, the United States, by invading Iraq in 2003, torturing prisoners in Abu Ghraib and engaging in arbitrary killings of Iraqi civilians and journalists, paved the way for jihadists to completely neutralise and delegitimise any form of opposition or condemnation by conventional state actors. Similarly, as long as Hezbollah members are allowed to fight alongside Bashar Al-Assad who has been committing war crimes for almost a decade, it is delusional and hypocritical to expect that Salafi-jihadists with sympathies for JAN or IS will have any respect for the Lebanese state and laws, other than that which is imposed on them by force. As long as double standards persist in the world, there will always be ample grounds for non-state actors to engage in violent action either against the state or in disregard of the state's condemnation of it.

Notes

1 For an in-depth analysis of Sami's case, see Ajil and Jendly (2020).
2 Probably referring to the following interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v =aoteabEZZRM&t=123s. During the interview, he says (16:45): 'I want to be clear: The ones who made it permissible to kill us – the Information Branch – it is permissible for us to kill them, too'.

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8 Grievances, a relevant object of inquiry?

In the previous chapters, I set out to explore grievances in their relation to politico-ideological mobilisation and violence, using three ideal-types, namely socio-economic grievances, ethno-racial grievances and political grievances. The analysis of the interviewees' narratives about their trajectories of engagement revealed that all three ideal-types were relevant. Depending on the context, the background of the interviewee and the type of engagement, some grievances would prevail over others. It should be noted that during the interviews, grievances were enquired about more generally and not specifically to each type. Although it may be that specific enquiry about each ideal-type could have yielded further information, a general enquiry ensured that the narratives contained only grievances that were most naturally prompted by the discussion around the interviewee's engagement.

The findings reveal that, in terms of socio-economic grievances, interviewees are mostly concerned with forms of economic marginalisation and neglect, a lack of efforts to support the weak and economically disadvantaged, strong class inequalities, corruption among the ruling class, dysfunctionalities in the distribution of resources, economic exploitation and the nefarious effects of capitalist societies. Ethnic, racial and religious grievances refer most commonly to specific sectarian hatred, for instance between Alawites and Sunni Muslims in Tripoli, a feeling of collective persecution of a collective defined by race or religion, encapsulated by the notion of *Madhloumiya* or collective victimhood, instances of stigmatisation and criminalisation of Arab-Muslim identities in the context of the War on Terror, and feelings of Othering of Non-White Non-European identities.

When it comes to locally oriented political grievances, the narratives revolve around situations of political marginalisation and exclusion, abuse of power and corruption by the ruling class and state violence, as well as unequal criminalisation of different forms of activism. Globally oriented political grievances refer most commonly to the role of imperialist meddling in the Arab World, colonial projects in the past as well as those in the present, whether in the Palestinian or in the Canadian context. Closely linked to these grievances are sentiments of Anti-Americanism and Anti-Westernism, in all three contexts. Most prominently, these sentiments can be brought back to two major points of contention which are closely intertwined: First, the blatant impunity with which Western powers can invade countries and commit war crimes, most frequently mentioned in relation

to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Second, the perception of double standards and idleness when it comes to the international community, dominated by Western powers: There is a strong cynicism regarding a form of hypocrisy attributed to the international community, which fails to bring perpetrators to justice.

Commonalities between ideal-types

Overall, based on the analysis of the grievances that were identified, it seems like the various forms of grievances share a certain number of characteristics. They may further our understanding of which types of grievances may be relevant for PIM and PIV.

1. **Grievances are historic:** First, grievances, as opposed to short-term indignation about a specific incident, tend to be located in a prolonged experience or witnessing of injustice. In that sense, grievances are inscribed in an analysis of a situation of injustice which has existed in the past, has not been remedied, and therefore continues to produce new instances of suffering. References are made to the fact that the persecution of a particular group has existed for centuries and that the suffering caused in the past has never been completely remedied, accounted for, commemorated or compensated. Whether all the dots can be connected as proposed by the interviewees may be open to debate. What matters, however, is that grievances are embedded in a narrative continuity between past, present, and perhaps even future, which lends grievances a particular gravity. Importantly, the further the grievances relate to events and situations in the past, the blurrier and the more black-and-white the analysis becomes, clearly establishing winners and losers, identifying perpetrators and victims, attributing the roles in a fixed and given setting. This loss of complexity can rarely be remedied in a narrative that is, still, primarily focused on the present and thereby escapes in-depth engagement with the past. The past is occasionally brought in as selective evidence, an aggravating factor, however proper engagement with the narrative about the past is difficult and presented as secondary.

2. **Grievances relate to large-scale suffering:** Grievances do not tend to relate solely to forms of suffering and injustice that are confined to a specific local context. Rather, they present recurring connections to forms of injustice that are regional or transnational in nature, affect entire collectives and that reach into various spheres of civil and political life. A dynamic can be identified throughout the narratives where the analysis of a local dysfunctionality is rarely left standing for itself, but usually, throughout the interview, placed into a larger, if not global, then at least transnational context. For instance, the suffering of Sunni Muslims in Tripoli is put in relation to the suffering of Syrian Sunni Muslims and that of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The suffering of the working class in North America is put in relation to the suffering of Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Like the inscription of grievances in a *historic continuity*, the narrative connection between different situations

around the world serves to establish a *spatial continuity*. Thereby, again, grievances are lent credence and legitimacy, but also gravity. In the eyes of the interviewees, fighting the suffering that one sees in the local sphere then gains greater relevance, because the struggle is considered to be the same elsewhere.

3. **Grievances are oriented towards the collective:** Although individuals may be suffering themselves from the injustice or oppression they are denouncing, when grievances are expressed, they tend to concern the collective. Whenever individual suffering is elaborated on in the narratives, it is accompanied by explanations that place it into a larger context. Interviewees seek to clarify that what they are experiencing as individuals is far from limited, individualised suffering, but one that concerns an entire collective. Thereby, narratively, grievances are again given weight, because they are extrapolated to a dimension that surpasses the individual, thereby shielding the interviewee from accusations of idiosyncrasy.

4. **The suffering is the suffering of the weak and the poor:** Another commonality between the various types of grievances is that the injustices they refer to impact those perceived as weak and defenceless. Frequently, the victims that are presented by interviewees are either poor, physically disadvantaged or women and children. The consistency with which women and children are presented as victims of the violence that is being denounced is striking (this will be further discussed in chapter 11 in relation to combat masculinity). The indignation expressed by interviewees is particularly pronounced because they are shocked by the power disbalance between the designated perpetrator of the injustice and the victims. The disbalance increases the sense of injustice in a way that may be less likely were the violence mainly perpetrated between more or less equivalent groups. Narratively, the disbalance serves to clarify the analysis, by clearly designating the different roles and cementing the indisputability of the injustice.

5. **The injustice is flagrant:** Hence, and following from the preceding point, the injustice that the grievances refer to is clear and indisputable. The extreme power disbalance, the gravity, the systematicity or the recurrence of the abuse or the oppression are such that the injustice can only be denounced. There is no room nor a particular need for complexity or nuance given that the injustice committed is of such enormous nature.

6. Finally, and crucially, the **injustice remains unpunished:** The grievances that are expressed refer to situations, events or systems of oppression and abuse that persist because they are either not given enough attention or intentionally connived upon. This is such an essential element to grievances that, without it, grievances would not have a sufficient grounding to persist and to be accepted by others. If the injustice is met in one way or another, especially by an actor perceived as neutral and legitimate, grievances tend to dissipate. Grievances in the narratives are systematically accompanied by expressions of indignation about the impunity of the perpetrators. Narratively, the effect of this aspect is to reinforce the gravity and the salience of the injustice, thereby lending it further clarity.

Relationship between local and global: Glocalising grievances

Another question of interest concerns the relationship between locally and globally oriented grievances. Several authors (Akbarzadeh & Mansouri, 2010; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Mohamedou, 2018) point to the importance of the dialectic between the two ontological levels and the fact that violent political groups tend to be driven by an interplay of grievances that refer to the global and others that refer to the local context. For example, as Akbarzadeh and Mansouri (2010) suggest

> Neo-Islamism's notion of global jihad feeds on political grievances of Muslims against the *global* order. The unequal power relations in international affairs represented for example in *global* inaction in the face of Israel's incursion into Lebanon in August 2006, or growing pressures on the Muslim diaspora reflected in the 2004 French law banning hijab from schools [a *local* grievance], are noted as evidence of a global conspiracy against Islam.
>
> (p.11, emphasis added)

Kundnani (2014) writes that 'when some young Muslims are alienated by their own society and see some of the wars the United States and UK governments are fighting, they may come to believe the West is indeed at war with Islam' (p.182). Muslim experts in the French context point to this interplay between the local and the global context as well

> the postcolonial reading in terms of colonial fractures is closely tied to a geopolitical reading of jihadism: a violent reaction to the internal neocolonialism (experienced by the youth in French society) is mimetically linked to the international colonialism (experienced by Muslim peoples under Western domination). Of course, the Muslim actors interviewed here do not justify these representations but propose them as a key analytical tool to study the motivations of young Frenchmen radicalised into the jihadist imaginary.[1]
>
> (Geisser et al., 2017, pp.198–199)

Based on the collected narratives that were analysed in this study, there seems to be indeed a constant mixing of locally oriented/inspired and globally oriented/ inspired grievances. In this sense, the findings suggest a *glocalisation of grievances*. Glocalisation, a term frequently used in economics, denotes the 'simultaneous occurrence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems' (Blatter, 2007). The narratives do indeed point to a sort of recurring use of both universalising and particularising tendencies, which produce a sort of *grievance cocktail*, a combination of local and global references, that serve multiple purposes that have been elaborated on above, namely the legitimisation and the reinforcement of grievances.

By referring to globally oriented/inspired grievances, individuals who at least envisage action, seem to be doing two things: on the one hand, they are *individualising* and personalising collective grievances that are present on a global

scale but affect a collective that they adhere to. On the other hand, it seems to allow them to place their own struggle into a global context, a bigger picture. Thereby, their idiosyncratic story is placed into a bigger story, which not only spans across geospatial but also temporal dimensions, reaching back into struggles that preceded them, but form part of their collective memory and awareness. Whether intentionally or not, the grievances are thereby transported outside the individual and the local realm to gain a greater dimension, and therefore justify greater engagement.

The findings further indicate that the equilibrium between the local and the global depends much on the privileges and positionality of the interviewee. Individuals who are living in a conflict-ridden setting such as Tripoli are more likely to point out the locally oriented grievances because they are omnipresent in their everyday lives. On the other hand, individuals living in Switzerland or Canada or Beirut, who are well-educated, healthy and employed, are more frequently referring to grievances that are located outside their immediate environment. However, as several interviewees point out, with increasing political maturity and a prolonged political engagement, there is a point where the analysis turns inwards towards the local dysfunctionalities. This sort of turning point is well described by Kevin

> In fact, I remember that at the beginning, my engagement was very internationally oriented. I was interested in these international causes. But slowly I realised that domestically, there were many things that weren't working well. I think this has to do with the fact that the traumas you are personally experiencing are so recurring, so constant, that you are not even experiencing a post-traumatic shock. There was a researcher who spoke about the traumas of the Ghazawi [people of Gaza]. Of course, I would never claim to be a Ghazawi, but the fact that you are experiencing the trauma day in day out has as a result that you don't realise it easily.
>
> (Kevin, Canada)

Decomplexification

Kevin's quote is illustrative of a further aspect, namely the difficulty of engaging with local dysfunctionalities. While the findings confirm this outward-oriented focus across the different forms of engagement, the fact that the local is somehow too present, too close and too recurring, only tells part of the story. Another dimension is the *reduction of complexity* or *decomplexification*. Again, whether intentionally or not, resorting to global grievances provides a narrative about the injustice that is usually less nuanced and also less understood. A situation far away from the interviewee's immediate context, perhaps in a place they have never visited before, is often exposed to less rigorous analysis and engaged with more simplistically. This vagueness facilitates the narrative of a Manichean world, where good and innocent actors are being oppressed by evil powerful ones. Thereby, the narrative of grievances, which combines the global and the local context, can be

strengthened, similarly to the combination of past and present events. Locally oriented grievances are often shaped by too much detail and thus maintain a certain degree of nuances where the image of one designated enemy becomes elusive. By globalising grievances, the narratives are therefore bolstered.

The role that complexity can play when it comes to the decision in which context to intervene is well described by Aziz

> If the weapons would one day turn against occupied Palestine, I think I will be one of the first who will be there, physically and mentally. But if the weapons are directed against places where it's not clear what's happening, religiously you can't do that, you will end up in hell. Everything that's unclear, that's scary. If your land is stolen from you, of course you have a 100% right, legally, humanly, internationally, religiously, etc. you are right. It's your land, you are allowed to defend it. Like anyone sitting in his home today, if a thief comes into your home, you can defend yourself. But if a group attacks me, and we confront each other in my neighbour's home, it becomes more complex. I won't participate in anything that is unclear.
>
> (Aziz, Lebanon)

On the other hand, increasing complexity can weaken one's commitment to a group, as Nidhal's quote illustrates

> You know…I saw the media news about chemical attacks in Syria, the scenes and stuff. And the fact that Hezbollah was actually fighting alongside the Syrian army…against…now there are complexities of course…but I started asking, what if…what are we doing there?
>
> (Nidhal, Lebanon)

It is as if a characteristic of radicality was the loss of a certain degree of complexity and, ironically, criticality, which, as McManus (2017) suggests, is one of its essential components. A difference can certainly be identified between interviewees with a certain political maturity that has been built over many years and those who engage in PIM or PIV mostly out of a short-term emotion or for the thrill and adventurism it may procure. But, it is true that the narratives, perhaps by essence, have to simplify reality, especially when it refers to the past. In this sense, grievances also resonate with the arguments laid out in the introduction to this book, regarding the essence of violence and the importance of our own gazes in making violence enter our consciousness. In the case of grievances, certain forms of injustice and violence are emphasised over others and embedded in a narrative that provides clarity and gravity. While this seems to be a natural tenet of grievances and narratives, it can of course be exploited using specific framing for specific purposes, as will be discussed below.

Grievances are actively co-constructed

Part II provided a detailed elaboration on the various types of grievances that were identified throughout the narratives. These grievances, relating to causes,

conflicts, situations and events in the Arab World, provide us with an understanding of the underlying drivers of engagement for a particular cause. Grievances are inherently tied to any form of politico-ideological mobilisation and violence. In their essence, PIM and PIV are political reactions to perceived or actual dysfunctionalities in the world. The narratives collected in this study demonstrate this and corroborate the pertinence of the grievance-based approach. Grievances are the core of PIM and PIV.

Nevertheless, grievances are subject to processes of social construction. The findings that have been presented thus far also indicate that grievances are far from rigid, objective facts that individuals may choose to tap into or not. Rather, they are constantly constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed; they are actively formulated and reformulated; they are engaged with, re-engaged with or disengaged from throughout interviewees' trajectories; they are, in short, subject to various forms of what may be considered *social performances*. Throughout the analysis and the research process over several years, it has become clear that one of the major reasons for public refusal and reluctance to engage properly with grievances is the accusation that grievances are fabricated, overemphasised or instrumentalised. This is a valid concern that is, *per se*, very compatible with social constructivist approaches to human behaviour. Despite or perhaps precisely because of this malleability of grievances, an in-depth engagement with the various ways in which they are acted upon is all the more necessary.

In a way, the following chapters present an understanding of so-called radicalisation processes strictly from the point of view of grievances. While grievances are maintained as a central element in these processes, the way interviewees come to engage with them may vary significantly. Thereby, the position and relevance of grievances in interviewees' trajectories vary from one individual to another. They may be the trigger of the engagement for or interest in a particular cause, but they may also gain relevance only at a later stage of individuals' engagement. Grievances may also be engaged with in different ways throughout an individual's trajectory: they may be the spark of one's interest in a particular cause, but later also be intentionally instrumentalised by the same individual to construct a narrative around the necessity for engagement that targets others. The next part on *performing grievances* aspires to highlight and shed light on this complexity.

Note

1 Original in French, author translation.

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Part III

Performing grievances

9 Identification

Naming the injustice

If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention.[1]

For grievances to emerge, an injustice needs to be identified in the first place. In essence, what is or is not unjust is an inherently subjective definition, and there are endless debates as to the meaning of justice or injustice, respectively. There may be some universal consensus that certain forms of behaviour, situations or events constitute injustices (both individual and collective), such as the oppression of a people by a dictator, a physical assault on a child or an older person or the incarceration of an innocent person. However, depending on the context, the parties involved and the information at hand, a situation, event or behaviour may be considered as an injustice by some and not by others. In what follows, it is the *perception* of an injustice that is at the core of the discussion. I will make sure to provide as many details as possible regarding the actual event or situation that tends to be portrayed as an injustice, but readers should recall that, ultimately, injustice is treated here as an inherently (co-)constructed, subjective and evolving object. Nevertheless, it is this object and the meaning attributed to it by interviewees that is of central importance for the narratives and trajectories under study.

There are various factors that play a role when it comes to the identification of the injustice. Factors that play a role in the identification of the injustice include moral shocks that are directly or vicariously experienced and collective memories of pain that are remembered as part of a collective identity formation process. Certain actors may play a role in provoking moral shocks or recalling collective memories of pain in order to achieve a certain strategic goal. They can be considered as *grievance entrepreneurs* who engage in various forms of *emotional weaponisation*. Moreover, this section also discusses the formation of enemy images which are closely tied to the identification of an injustice. Finally, the section presents findings on why these interviewees choose to care about the various causes they are engaged in as well as on the emotions tied to the identification of injustices.

'Boiling blood': The lasting impacts of moral shocks

Moral shocks can be defined as a 'vertiginous feeling that results when an event or information shows that the world is not what one had expected, which can sometimes lead to articulation or rethinking of moral principles' (Jasper, 2011, p.289). The concept is useful for an understanding of how macro-level grievances come to affect individuals at the micro-level as Jasper himself had suggested when writing that 'an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action' (2008, p.106). Moral shocks are also linked to what has been called moral panic, as suggested in Martin's (2015) analysis of the Australian public's reaction to asylum seekers in the age of the War on Terror. Stanley Cohen (1972) proposed the concept of *moral panic*, which denotes the active promotion or even the manufacturing of information that is emotionally unsettling for the public, and serves to define a condition, episode, person or group of persons as a threat to society. Moral panic can thus be read as the result of manufacturing moral shocks (Martin, 2015).

Moral shocks (and the inherent analysis of injustice) elicit what Jasper (2011) calls *moral emotions*, such as moral indignation and outrage. They can lead to political action as a form of redress and they have helped recruit people to various causes ranging from animal rights to antiracist movements (Jasper, 2011). Using imagery and speech, they may also further entrench the commitment of existing members. On the other hand, moral shocks may have the opposite effect and drive people away from the cause, something Jasper (2011) calls the 'Janus Dilemma' (p.292). In the Northern Ireland context, Ferguson et al. (2008) found something that resonates with moral shocks, and which they refer to as 'critical incidents' (p.133), to be a central moment in individuals' adoption of violent tactics or joining of paramilitary groups.

Moral shocks may function as triggers of a so-called *cognitive opening*, i.e., the point at which an individual comes to care about a certain cause (Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Ratelle & Souleimanov, 2017). Moral shocks are also frequently referred to by both non-violent activists and violent militants as an important driver of their commitment to the cause. In the French context, for instance, Crettiez and Anine (2017) found that young men incarcerated for terrorism-related offences refer to moral shocks as being at the origin of their indignation about certain socio-political issues and their growing interest in groups such as AQ and IS, and Lafaye (2017) found ample evidence pointing towards the importance of moral shocks in the process towards left-wing PIV.

Although moral shocks were part of the interview grid, there were no specific prompts at the beginning of the interview as to what moral shocks may have played a role in the interviewees' trajectories. Rather, moral shocks came up organically and turned out to form an integral building block of narratives about politico-ideological mobilisation. Moral shocks were relevant for all interviewees. Prompted to talk about the beginnings of their engagement, individuals systematically point to an event or a situation that shook them profoundly and that led them to ask questions and seek answers. Interviewees seem to make sense of their

engagement by referring to moral shocks without my really intentionally pushing them for it. Moral shocks seem to function as a narrative element that lends logical coherence to a trajectory of engagement.

The relationship between grievances and moral shocks revealed itself to be more complicated than initially expected. In fact, moral shocks, while integral parts of the narratives of engagement, are confined to a narrower timeframe than grievances. Grievances are recurring and represent prolonged feelings and thoughts about a particular form of injustice, usually built, as demonstrated earlier, on fundamental political disequilibria and prolonged or recurring situations and incidents of neglect and abuse. Moral shocks, on the other hand, concern one specific event or situation that is witnessed or learned of. They spark engagement and go on to be an essential part of individuals' narrative, but they do not constitute the main pillar that grievances rest upon. Moral shocks in that sense can be thought of as episodic and anecdotal evidence that the dysfunctionality or the injustice that grievances are concerned with have significant validity. Grievances and moral shocks also differ in terms of the emotions they elicit: While grievances are often narrated in a much more detached and rationalised manner, descriptions of moral shocks are closely accompanied by vivid expressions of moral outrage.

Across the narratives, moral shocks tend to refer to events and situations of extreme violence and brutality. Most of them refer to events that do not affect the interviewee directly. They can be considered as moral shocks by vicarious victimisation. The suffering that results from this violence is immense in terms of human casualties and fatalities. Moral shocks refer to situations that are usually highly mediatised and reach audiences all over the world. Interviewees learn about them through images and video material, on TV – before the spread of access to the internet – and more recently through social media. Given the importance of visual material for moral shocks, the present section will include pictures of the events that interviewees refer to. Usually, these are the very same images that produced the moral shocks. The use of these powerful and often disturbing images is also intended to facilitate readers' engagement with the impact of visual violence on interviewees.

Given the focus of the study on the Arab World and the consequential choice of interviewees and forms of engagement, moral shocks frequently relate to the Palestinian context. One of these examples is the picture of Faris Odeh throwing a stone at an Israeli tank during the second intifada. The picture is mentioned by interviewees in all three countries. It symbolises the Palestinian civilians' struggle against the Israeli army by capturing the power disbalance in a 'David vs. Goliath' fashion.

Souhail recalls watching the news of the first Palestinian Intifada, and being confronted with this image in his early adolescence

> What really left a mark on me was this shocking image…while watching the news with my parents…this image of total inequality between that young boy holding a stone, facing that Israeli tank. I think that strong image is what deeply troubled me and shook me in my young spirit.
>
> (Souhail, Switzerland)

Aziz similarly recalls seeing that picture and the symbolism behind it

> I think…that maybe most people have this picture in mind. The picture of the kid who is carrying a stone. In my mind, this is the most impactful picture in political terms. A small kid facing a tank with a stone. Developed technology against what people who have barely anything and who have to fight with stones. If you want to oppose a big power, everyone will be your enemy.
>
> (Aziz, Lebanon)[2]

In February 2020, another video started circulating around the world, capturing once again the brutality and inhumanity of violence in this conflict. It was reposted by several of my interviewees in Canada and Lebanon. On 23 February 2020, 27-year-old Muhammad Al Na'im was killed by the Israeli army on the border of the Gaza Strip. The IDF claimed that Al Na'im was suspected of planting an improvised explosive device. The video that was released on social media and garnered worldwide attention shows a group of Palestinian boys running towards the bulldozer, guarded by an Israeli tank, to retrieve the body, but are shot in their legs and run away. The bulldozer then starts lifting up Na'im's body and carrying it away (Gross, 2020). The drawing by Palestinian activist Ghassan Atawneh accompanied the image of the bulldozer carrying the corpse.

Another image and video that remained strongly ingrained in the collective memory related to the Palestinian conflict is the killing of Muhammad Al-Durrah by the Israeli military. The scene was filmed by a *France 2* Cameraman and images of Muhammad and his father trying to shield him from the bullets travelled around the world (BBC, 2000). Ziad, e.g., refers to the Al-Durrah image when he speaks about his first instances of engagement for the Palestinian cause (see Chapter 7).

Another example of a moral shock does not relate immediately to the Palestinian conflict, but also involves the IDF. A small village in Southern Lebanon, *Kfar Qana*, was haunted in both 1996 and 2006 by large-scale killings of civilians by IDF artillery. In 1996, the IDF shelled a UN compound, which led to the killing of over 100 civilians. One of the most shocking images shows a soldier carrying a killed infant with Fijian UNIFIL soldiers watching in the background.

During the war between Hezbollah and the IDF in July 2006, a building in Qana was shelled again, this time killing more than 60 civilians, more than half of them children. In this case, the image of a man carrying a child out of the rubbles sent shockwaves through the world.

The massacres of Qana are strongly ingrained in the collective memory of Hezbollah sympathisers, and Southern Lebanese in general. Nidhal recalls growing up learning about the massacre of Qana, and connects it with attacks against Palestinians in Gaza and the West bank

> One of the turning points that I grew up to…it was the massacre of Qana 1996. And the Israeli hypocrisy that came with it. You know this story that they are friendly…that they don't want war… and Hezbollah are the enemies

and they want war etc. that's something that really makes me angry. And what happens in Gaza and the West bank. The shellings and stuff. It's something that infuriates me.

(Nidhal, Lebanon)

Hezbollah sympathisers were also impacted by the images emerging from the Syrian civil war. Samir's quote illustrates this well. Of particular interest is his observation that images of extreme violence were still easily accessible and uncensored at the beginning of the war

I mean the media, in 2013 the official media wasn't working anymore it was mostly Facebook, social media … The pictures were clear. Back then, Facebook would not blur the pictures and warn you and stuff, no…it was accessible to anyone. Videos, you could see them. The Free Syrian Army, in Daraa, a guy he pulled out a heart and ate it, and then they threw it away, these are things you don't forget of course … .These massacres, until now they are in my mind […] the massacre that affected me most was the massacre of Hatla[3]. At the beginning. It was a Shia town. An older man, they killed his wife and his children in front of him. And his son, they killed him in front of him and then they killed him. This massacre, I can't forget it until now. I remember back then, I wrote something it came from the depth of my heart. I was crying whenever I thought about these pictures. The people that get massacred. Children, women.

(Samir, Lebanon)

For individuals who joined the Syrian conflict to fight against Bashar Al-Assad, pictures and videos of civilian killings and torture at the hands of the Syrian military, and of chemical attacks against children were central to their growing grievances and their feeling that they had to intervene to defend the innocent in this conflict. Max, for instance, recounted that in the period leading to his departure for Syria to join IS, he was watching a lot of videos emphasising the massacres committed by the Syrian regime on the Syrian population, although it becomes clear in the quote that he is struggling to transport himself back into the mindset of the time

Actually, the injustice I was perceiving was clearly mistaken, but in my head at the time, it was an injustice that I couldn't bear. […] I was telling myself, regarding all that was happening, when I see people that get totally…of course it was totally biased, because those were propaganda videos and not the reality, but I was influenced by that so when I saw that the people were being massacred and all these atrocious things…But then, how could you know who started it?

(Max, Switzerland)

For the Islamists from Tripoli, moral shocks were mostly experienced by watching TV or videos on social media. They concern mainly the Syrian context, but

occasional references are also made to Palestine, Iraq, Yemen and Myanmar (formerly Burma). These moral shocks were mainly evoked in relation to engagement in foreign fighting, i.e., in the Syrian civil war. The narration of these moral shocks is frequently also action-oriented, for it is followed by the expression of a willingness or need to go defend the people who are suffering. This, of course, is primarily relevant for moral shocks that relate to situations and events in the present and not in the past. Here is an extract from the interview conducted with Mansour from Tripoli

AA: How did you hear about those things?
Mansour: I remember videos, and extracts, Sunni people, being killed, burned, and I saw a video of a woman who was killed and raped. That's where the hatred started.
AA: What are the emotions when you watch a video like this?
Mansour: I wanted to go there to get out what was in my heart, I was like a monster that wanted to eat people, I didn't necessarily want to blow myself up, I wanted a rifle and grenades and fight these people there who were killing women and children.

Bader, towards the end of the interview, in a rather sudden fashion and without being specifically prompted, recalls seeing scenes of attacks on Rohingya in Myanmar. He is visibly upset, because he recently watched a video on social media

> For example, the people in Burma…When you see that, doesn't it burn your heart, doesn't it make your blood boil? How can you stay cold? They are butchering them, burning them alive! I am ready to go now, I swear I would go now, for this…to defend the Muslims there…I would go now. Syria and Iraq, no, but Burma, I would go now! I was watching something on Facebook, I wanted to break my phone, I was so upset!
>
> (Bader, Lebanon)

Similarly, Nassim recalls images and videos when asked what affects him most about the Syrian conflict:

> What upsets me most is when I see them kill people … when they torture them and tell them to say that their God is Bashar, when they kill kids, rape women … you know … many channels would show these things.
>
> (Nassim, Lebanon)

It also becomes clear throughout the narratives of this specific group that these are mainly examples of Sunni Muslims suffering, in line with observations made above on the idea of *Madhloumiya* of Sunni Muslims being oppressed and in need of solidarity and defence.

For this type of moral shocks – vicarious and globally oriented – the role that social media plays is crucial. Through images, people can be transported into

a conflict zone, on an emotional level. As Meriem (Canada) suggests cogently, social media has led to a 'globalisation of suffering'. In fact, they are the main sources of information through which these individuals have learned about political events and injustices, whether they are related to domestic or global situations. Similarly to collective memory, the pertinence of moral shocks produced by information received through media or social media lies not in its truthful representation of world events, but in their lasting emotional impact, which comes to the fore through the narrated expressions of grievances. These images can be very unsettling, especially when one is told bits and pieces about the background story to them. They capture enormous human suffering, especially of non-combatant civilians such as the old, women and children, in tragically powerful ways. They spark moral outrage and indignation and tend to remain lastingly engrained in the viewers' memory.

Besides globally oriented moral shocks referring to situations and events that do not impact them personally in objective terms, interviewees also evoke moments of moral shocks that refer to their immediate environment. These are instances of extreme violence against them directly, their friends or family members or where they themselves are witnessing situations of extreme violence and human suffering. In this respect, there is a clear experiential difference between interviewees who are living in impoverished zones where conflict occurs repeatedly and interviewees from a safer background. Even the interviewees who grew up under difficult circumstances in the Swiss or Canadian context, do not mention situations of extreme violence such as the ones narrated by interviewees from Tripoli.

The narratives of the young men from Tripoli all include moral shocks, of which most refer to attacks against families and friends. Compared to stories of past suffering or suffering occurring elsewhere, interviewees ascribe particularly important effects to the witnessing of the suffering with their own eyes

> When I was young already, I heard the stories of the massacres of the Syrian regime, but what affected me more was seeing, with my own eyes, someone being hurt in front of me who is innocent…That's what would drive me crazy. I couldn't leave these people. Even if I die, I will stay here. Even if I die. It's a red line.
>
> (Walid, Lebanon)

Similar to moral shocks resulting from vicarious suffering, but to a much greater extent, these locally oriented moral shocks directly affecting the interviewees involve a strong impetus for action. The narratives usually mention moral shocks to explain not only engagement for a cause on a more intellectual level, but, in this context of ongoing conflict, physical engagement in the fighting that was taking place. At least in part, these narratives have certainly evolved over time to function as a storytelling tool about why somebody would engage in fighting, especially since that participation is strongly criminalised. Halim describes how

an injury suffered by his mother was the moment he decided to participate in the fighting

> In 2010, my mother was shot. I didn't care about the sniper; I ran towards her and we managed to get her to the hospital. From that day on, I started participating in the fighting. Before that, I was participating, but mostly helping people getting food, securing passages. But when that happened, I started fighting. The sniper could have killed her. Before that, I had some ideas about the Jabal, but at that moment I had huge hatred against them.
>
> (Halim, Lebanon)

Similarly, Naseem, from Jabal Mohsen, recalls that the day his father lost his eyesight after being hit by a bullet coming from Bab-el-Tabbaneh, he decided to pick up a weapon and fight

AA: What exactly led to your engagement?
Naseem: My father. When I saw how his eye apple fell out of his head, I was so shocked and angry, I took a weapon and started fighting.

Sometimes, these attacks on friends and families happened in the course of the army's involvement in the fighting, which feeds into the grudge the residents of BT hold against the security forces

> My cousin was killed – because a rocket killed him on the balcony, he died immediately. That was the army! Because they thought we were all terrorists! The army killed so many people who had nothing to do with it.
>
> (Zakaria, Lebanon)

An event that literally shook the entire neighbourhood of Bab-el-Tabbaneh was the bombing of two mosques, Al-Taqwa and Al-Salam, on 23 August 2013. Two minutes after the first car bomb went off in front of the Al-Taqwa Mosque, a second car bomb exploded next to the Al-Salam mosque in the port area, outside the area of fighting between BT and JM. The death toll rose to almost 50, while hundreds of citizens were injured. Two individuals from Jabal Mohsen were brought to justice and sentenced to life, but there is a widespread belief in Bab-el-Tabbaneh says that the Syrian regime and their proxies in Lebanon were behind the attack, especially since it involved some sophisticated logistical preparation.

   This tragedy is recalled by many interviewees from BT as the point when they became ready to kill and sacrifice their lives. The interviews conducted in Tripoli with people from different backgrounds provide evidence that after the bombing, many young men from the neighbourhood reportedly went to the sheikhs who were recruiting fighters and told them they wanted to go fight in Syria. Among them were several interviewees. Some of them were minors at the time and therefore prevented from participating. Nassim describes his experience of the bombings as follows

We got to the mosque, it was blown up, there were corpses everywhere…
When I saw that, I almost lost consciousness…I was standing there, crying,
but my blood was boiling. And while we were standing there, the second
explosion happened. We heard it and the ground shook. […] At this point,
it was completely anarchy. […] I was walking through the streets and when
I saw the army, I would shoot at them. I am surprised how I am still alive
today. […] I didn't care about anything. I wanted to die.

(Nassim, Lebanon)

It should be noted that many young people went to the mosque to help and were
therefore inevitably faced with the direct manifestations of the two explosions.
Experiencing such horror first-hand causes enormous individual and collective
trauma. The way the explosion is commemorated today will certainly ensure that
it becomes part of the collective memory of suffering that will be passed on to
future generations.

Also, although such extreme violence is not common in the Swiss and Canadian
context, the findings and quotes presented earlier illustrate that to many interviewe-
es, direct moral shocks refer to encounters with state violence, such as Richard's
arrest and detention because of his participation in a demonstration, Daniel's arbi-
trary arrest while sitting with a group of friends outside, or Kevin's encounters
with police violence (see Chapter 7). These events lead to a sort of awakening
that includes a sense of betrayal, especially if they happen for the first time. These
emotions will be explored more extensively below.

In sum, a number of observations can be made regarding moral shocks. As the
findings of this study demonstrate, moral shocks can relate to both vicarious and
direct victimisation. When it comes to vicarious victimisation, especially events
that happened in the past, the role of images is central. Images provoke strong
emotions and lead to moral outrage and indignation about the injustice commit-
ted. When it comes to direct victimisation, including harm suffered by friends
and family, or within one's neighbourhood, the emotions involved are, unsurpris-
ingly, much stronger and of a more acute nature. In this sample, interviewees
who experienced moral shocks described them as the moment they had to engage
in fighting. In fact, immediate moral shocks are more frequently associated with
involvement in PIV, whereas individuals engaged in PIM and primarily non-vio-
lent tactics, rarely experience situations of extreme physical violence.

Although there are significant differences between grievances and moral
shocks, as discussed earlier, the events and situations that are the object of moral
shocks display similarities to the objects of grievances discussed earlier. Moral
shocks also refer to situations that, in a sense, lack complexity; situations, where
the perpetrators and the victims can be clearly identified. Again, the victims are
usually defenceless, non-combatants, elderly, women and children, and they suf-
fer unjustified and enormous harm, usually at the hands of a much more powerful
entity.

Apart from violent emotional reactions, including moral outrage and indigna-
tion, moral shocks are accompanied by what can be described as an impetus to act.

This may simply be part of human nature and an ordinary sense of justice, where the witnessing of great injustice usually incites men and women to either prevent further suffering or bring perpetrators to justice, or even seek revenge. Hence, moral shocks seem to have a significant power to *mobilise* for action.

Wounds that never heal: Collective memories of pain

Daphi and Zamponi (2019) claim that 'collective memory has become a fundamental tool in advancing our understanding of social movements' (p.400). In his analysis of engagement in ethnic conflict, Rydgren (2007) highlights the importance of 'collective memory', which Paez and Liu (2011, p.105) define as 'widely shared knowledge of past social events that may not have been personally experienced but are collectively constructed through communicative social functions'. In other words, memory is not simply individual but co-constructed through social processes and interactions, particularly through a fragmentary narrativisation of the past. It has therefore also been referred to as *shared* or *social* memory (Candau, 2017). Collective memory is, at best, an assemblage of individual memories. More often, however, it is merely a social representation expressed through metaphors such as national, familial, common or cultural memory without much concern for its empirical foundations. It can therefore be instrumentalised for various political purposes, including creating rifts between groups with competing collective memories, when the question becomes about who suffered in the past at the hands of whom (Candau, 2017). In the process of social construction that is inherent to the formation of collective memory, certain episodes from the past have a more prominent place in the collective memory, a fact reminiscent of Kahneman et al.'s (1982) theory of *availability heuristic*: Significant events are remembered more easily and more widely than insignificant events. Unsurprisingly, then, the suffering inflicted on a community, people or nation is likely to be part of the collective memory. Genocides, massacres, assassinations, slavery, systematic oppression, segregation and exclusion are often prolonged experiences of widespread and brutal violence that are stored in collective memories and continue to nurture feelings of injustice, victimisation as well as a desire for restoration, revenge and justice.

When it comes to mobilisations related to the Arab World, it has been argued that the collective memory of European colonialism and imperialism is particularly vivid, especially since conflicts in that region persist and involvement by some of the original colonising powers remains contentious (Abi-Hashem, 2004; Mohamedou, 2018; Burgat, 2016; Falk, 2017). William Polk reaches even further back, into the *deep past*, and points to the experience of the Christian crusades as still being engrained in the collective memory of the Muslim World

> Collectively, these and other events constitute a holocaust as formative to Muslim action as the German holocaust has been to Jewish action […] Even if we, as northerners, choose to ignore this story, the victims' descendants will not. Muslims, like Jews, increasingly probe into and publicize their

holocaust. The 'deep past' already played a significant role in the growth of Muslim sentiment toward the Christian north. It will play an important role in international affairs far into the future. Memory of it accounts at least in part for the growth of Muslim hostility today in such movements as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban, al-Qaida, various movements of Salafiyah and more recently the Islamic State.

<div align="right">(Polk, 2018, pp.64–65)</div>

In another context, Paez et al. (2008), surveying students from 22 nations, found collective remembering of WWII to be positively correlated with a willingness to fight for one's country. Collective memories may also contain interpretations of historical events that provide 'a specific repertoire of possible action' (Ruggiero 2005, p.11), including violent or non-violent resistance and political emancipation. These may influence individuals in what they perceive as noble, justifiable and necessary action repertoires for their own struggles in the present.

Collective memory can operate as a continual re-activator of grievances across generations (Marsella, 2004), which may explain why younger generations sometimes hold grievances related to the suffering of previous generations within the collective that they identify with (Pollak, 1993). Thus, though individuals may not suffer any direct victimization, they can feel *vicariously victimised* by witnessing or learning about the suffering of others (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020). Through collective memory, then, grievances are kept up over long periods of time, when the initial suffering has long disappeared from the individual memories of the majority (Jasper, 2011; Marsella, 2004; Ruggiero, 2009). It is important to note that the pertinence of collective memory lies not in the memories' historic veracity, but in their potential to significantly influence future generations in their emotions, attitudes and their *Weltanschauung*. The practice of remembering and reactivating past suffering recalls the concept of *chosen trauma*. Turkish–American Psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan coined the term *chosen trauma* to describe the process of intentionally evoking a painful memory of collective suffering and placing it in the present to ascribe historic significance to it. Volkan argues that this process may work in a *reparative* way in order to strengthen the group's unity and solidarity, or in a *destructive* way which focuses on vilifying a real or imagined enemy and focusing on revenge for past wrongdoings (Volkan, 2001).

Since collective memory is the result of a collective reconstruction and recounting of history, it may be subject to the influences of *memory entrepreneurs* (Pollak, 1993) who, analogously to moral entrepreneurs (Becker, 1963), 'create shared references and monitor respect for them' (Pollak, 1993, p.30). Because memory needs *social appropriation* in the present to gain relevance at the personal level for what is happening in the present, various actors can engage in *memory work,* that is, a conscious and strategic construction and reconstruction of history into a cohesive memory that has relevance for the present (Daphi & Zamponi, 2019). Memory entrepreneurs may be elites, social movement leaders and charismatic individuals who use narratives and stories to 'connect a group's collective past to

their present situation' (Della Porta, 2008, pp.226–227), sometimes to mobilise people emotionally and behaviourally. Polletta and Jasper (2001) argue that collective memories are the 'cultural building blocks' (p.299) of *collective identities*.

In the context of Algeria, Zeraoulia (2020) demonstrates how political elites have been using the memories of the *Black Decade* of the 1990s, in combination with the Syrian civil war, to dissuade the people from challenging established powers. In relation to the South African transition process, Hemson (2012) suggests that memories of violence can be 'transmuted into a conviction for nonviolence' (p.27). In the context of the Crimean Tatar National Movement, Uehling (2004) explains that the *power of memory* could only be grasped if one realises that the collective memory consists of *memories of power* and resistance: 'Based on their narratives […], the Tatars framed a very specific ideological terrain, from which to resist' (p.135). She also described how the act of 'remembering the movement endorsed became a form of collective action' (p.135) in and of itself.

Within the field of terrorism and radicalisation research, the past is frequently brought into discussion via the idea of a *Golden Age*, i.e., a period in the past during which the group of reference supposedly enjoyed economic and political glory. Various ideological orientations draw on the idea of a *Golden Age* and stress the importance of re-establishing the prosperity of the group (Abi-Hashem, 2004; McCauley, 2018; Jackson, 2019). In the case of Salafi-jihadism, the idea of a *Golden Age* of medieval Islam is strongly present, although this form of nostalgia is also widespread across the Arab-Muslim World and therefore part of the repertoire of a variety of Islamic political movements (Abu Rumman, 2014; Shayegan, 2014).

From moral shocks to collective memories

Across the three contexts, collective memories were found to be highly relevant for mobilisation processes. They are also closely connected to moral shocks. Through the images and stories commemorating a large-scale event of collective victimisation, moral shocks become part of collective memory. This is the case, for instance, regarding the massacres of Qana, the Palestinian struggles, or, though more recent, the twin bombings in Tripoli. By being integrated into collective memory, the moral shocks are perennialised and can be continuously reactivated and create a sense of continuity between present and past suffering. Hence, collective memories frequently refer to tragic events that affected a particular group, usually one the individual feels affiliated to. Importantly, the overarching collective memory that is attributed to an abstract, seemingly cohesive global community, is often complemented by many more individualised collective memories, e.g., stories of suffering that are specific to one's family, although they can be put in relation to a more general suffering occurring at the same time. These multifold collective memories that are more defined and more individualised serve as evidence that the larger collective memory has validity.

Justin, for instance, refers to the killings of his family members during the civil war, to talk about the general targeting of Christian communities in Lebanon

> My mother is from Baalbek…her father, my grandfather was with the Kata'ib in Hermel Baalbek…and in 1978, the Syrians came and took 26 men from the village Al-Qaa'. They tortured and killed them and threw them into the valley. Among them my father. My mother was 16 years old…that's something that remains really strongly ingrained in my mother's memory. And you see it until now, in her behaviour. She is very scared…when you go anywhere, to a place where there are a lot of Muslims…[…] But you know, it's a general fear, that's our main cause here in Lebanon, the one we are fighting for…because since the 6th century, we have been persecuted by the Byzantine emperor and we fled into the Lebanese mountains and have defended ourselves ever since…And we let the Arabs enter, because we needed them to defend us against the Byzantians, but then they turned out to be worse.
>
> (Justin, Lebanon)

The collective memory includes, again, instances of enormous suffering that serve to maintain the image of an enemy who poses an existential threat. There is a clear narrative and intellectual continuity between the suffering of Christians throughout history, and the current need to arm and be ready to defend the Christian Maronite community in Lebanon.

The young men from Tripoli also learn about the massacres committed by the Syrian regime, this time in Bab-el-Tabbaneh during the 1980s. Most of them did not witness them themselves, although practically all of them remember the presence of the Syrian Army in their neighbourhood. These stories, which all of them are confronted with, contain acts of immense brutality, great pain and enormous suffering. They create a grudge and hatred against the Syrian regime and, *in extenso*, anyone that seems to be supportive of it, in particular the people of JM, who are generally sympathetic to the Syrian regime.

Walid and Zakaria, for instance, refer to the massacres

> They wanted to take the gold of a woman so they cut her hand. Or they would go in and throw someone from the balcony from the third floor. Do you see what I mean? All these stories, we grew up hearing them.
>
> (Walid, Lebanon)

> In 6 hours, there were 300 dead, that's what they told us about the massacres! These memories are still here and present. And we remember that when they came, we used to hide […] they committed massacres out of hatred.
>
> (Zakaria, Lebanon)

Sometimes, positive memories are enmeshed with negative ones. However, any reference to the time of their parents will point to the massacres and to the enormous suffering. Nassim explains the feelings associated with hearing those stories

> I was sitting with the elders of the neighbourhood, and they would tell us their stories, they were nice stories. It was nice, but at the same time, there is a lot

of pain in these memories. People who killed each other. Women who were raped in front of their husbands, their brothers. There are women who are still alive who were raped. How could I love them [the people of JM]? Imagine it's your mother? If not your mother, then the mother of your friend, or else? Here in BT, we all know each other. Many have suffered. Others committed suicide after they were raped. Others got crazy; others died. These are painful stories. These are deep wounds that are hard to heal.

(Nassim, Lebanon)

It is important to note that there is frequent reference to the suffering of women, especially to acts of rape. In a context where the honour of the woman is given particular importance and on which the honour of the entire family is often believed to depend, the greatest moral humiliation is to sexually abuse and rape a woman. This aspect will be further discussed in the context of combat masculinity.

Another crucial aspect of collective memories is that they become entangled with collective identity. They become essential building blocks of a collective identity. Unsurprisingly, some members who care strongly about that collective identity may feel compelled to police the way history is taught. The narratives reveal very strong reactions to what is perceived as historical revisionism. Justin's quote is a good case in point

There are phases where I can discuss things. And on other occasions, I don't feel like discussing. I have a hard time understanding. I hate Bashar Al Assad. Somebody said something, like I had to understand things…be open-minded etc. I completely lost it. But look, I have two red lines: The existence of Christians in Lebanon. And the history… if somebody comes and wants to distort my history, anyone, as saying that they are the victims and you are the one who wronged them. Then, I don't have any understanding. Because there is history, there are facts. There is no yes or no. In relation to this, I am a little bit extreme.

(Justin, Lebanon)

This feeling that historical revisionism needs to be fought is a crucial aspect of an individual's engagement with a cause that is relevant to their collective identity. The collective memory of suffering and victimhood is elevated to a sacrosanct level, because the martyrs died for that cause, often unjustly. It, therefore, has to be defended against outsiders. The narrative of past victimhood needs to be maintained to justify today's engagement. This is also in particular the case for the Palestinian cause. Many interviewees worry that the Palestinian Nakba will one day be forgotten, e.g., Aziz

It's not far-fetched to say that my children will forget one day that there is anything called Palestine. And that is very scary to me.

(Aziz, Lebanon)

Finally, collective memories evoked by interviewees also contain elements that refer to political struggles, their failures and the pains connected with that. Collective memories can thereby shape the worldviews of individuals even generations later, through the stories that continue to be told. Daniel sums this up as follows

> I am a son of political exiles. I have grown up in stories of political struggle, militancy, seeking refuge, frustrations over failed projects and destroyed dreams. This idea of fragility has been passed on to me very strongly.
>
> (Daniel, Switzerland)

Grievance entrepreneurs and emotional weaponisation

As mentioned, *memory entrepreneurs* may actively shape collective memories, by highlighting certain episodes and proposing or imposing a certain view and understanding of the past. In that process, they are engaging in something that has been referred to as *framing*. Ideological constructs, typically, contain *frames* and prisms through which memories and events are interpreted and the world is explained and understood. As Goffman (1974) argues, frames provide us with 'schemata of interpretation [to] locate, perceive, identify, and label' events (p.21). Any information we are confronted with is framed in a particular manner, which we might often be oblivious to. Thus, collective memory as well as information and imagery that have the potential to provoke moral shocks are often framed, wittingly or unwittingly by the narrator or presenter, in a way that makes injustices salient (Crettiez, 2011).

The narratives collected for this book also reveal that collective memories are the products of social construction. Many of the memory narrators have themselves personally experienced what they are talking about. In fact, family members, people with a certain authority, or even simply elders in the neighbourhood can be considered as *memory entrepreneurs*, for they manage memories, pass on what they believe should be remembered and perhaps neglect some other aspects that were lass salient to their eyes or personal experience. The process of remembering also contributes to simplifying and clarifying past episodes, which is important for the memories to be received and passed on. The stories that family members (and other people with a certain degree of authority and experience) share with the interviewees from an early age on, including the way they frame them, contribute to shaping their worldview and designating enemies and perpetrators even in the present.

To the interviewees, the fact that the generation before them was involved in fighting and had experienced the suffering at the hands of the Syrian regime provides the impression of continuity. There is a narrative that says that the fighting from back then was only slumbering and is now flaring up again. Those who are fighting today are therefore not only retaliating against a perceived or actual attack; they are also able to take revenge for what happened yesterday. Mansour and Zakaria make this point very clear

> But…you know, in the 80s, our parents would tell us…that they came down to destroy mosques, commit all these massacres, humiliate us, rape our women…and now…the same thing…exactly the same thing is happening now!!
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

> I heard the stories of massacres. So, I hated them, because their blood is blue, because they are kuffar. I had many friends at JM, but in 2008, the fighting started, I knew that between us there was only killing. They had to die. This guy is here to kill us, to destroy the Sunna, the Muslims.
>
> (Zakaria, Lebanon)

An important figure in the recruitment of people for fighting in Syria has been the religious cleric, the sheikh. There were a few in Tripoli who were well-known to be affiliated with JAN and IS from 2007 on. They were preaching in different mosques and rallying people around them and sending them to Syria. The sheikhs fulfilled both the role of *memory* and *moral entrepreneurs*. They would engage what some of my interviewees have called *emotional weaponisation* by recalling the painful memories of the Syrian massacres, but also by telling stories about the suffering of the Syrian people at the hands of Bashar Al-Assad, thereby creating *moral shocks* and granting religious legitimacy to the act of fighting in defence of suffering Muslims

> Even our Sheikhs they started saying go fight in Syria. But they tell you to go fight there, and that its sharia etc. in the end, they tell you you're an unbeliever. […] You go to the sheikh, and he makes you cry. 'They raped our women, now they are raping our children, etc.' of course, you will want to go fight jihad for them. I started hating anything associated with the Alawite sect. They make you hate everything. They manipulate you emotionally.
>
> (Amir, Lebanon)

When sheikhs use such grievances to motivate people to join their cause and respective groups, this is often very uncontroversial in the beginning. Anyone is allowed to suffer for other people. Sometimes they would also use political stances that are in themselves legitimate, such as dislike of Hezbollah, to present uncontroversial entry points for people to join their sermons:

> The sheikh came and started talking to me, and at first, he was mostly talking against Hezbollah, saying that the Shia are kuffar, which I agreed with especially after what happened on 7 May 2008, so I thought we were fighting against Hezbollah, but then he got affiliated to AQ and IS.
>
> (Abdelaziz, Lebanon)

A similar form of emotional weaponising was operated by Ahmed Al-Aseer who was rallying people from Saida around the Syrian cause and the fight against

Bashar Al-Assad. Rashid, who was recruited by Al-Aseer, recalls the way the Sheikh stirred upset among his followers

> After 2011, when the Syrian conflict broke out…he started talking more and more about the pains of the Sunni people. To me, that's where the mistakes started already. He started talking about our brothers in the religion, that they had to be protected in Syria…The thing is, there was no talk of Palestine or Burma before…why now Syria? He said that as Lebanese we had a special responsibility, because we were just next door and this conflict would affect us anyway…So there was this emotional weaponisation, but in the beginning, there was no effective call to arms. But to me, that was already problematic. Because people get very emotional, very upset, and they want to do something about these pains. But he kept telling them to be patient. So, he fuelled the emotions, but did not act upon them. Obviously, people would get upset and things would derail at some point.
>
> (Rashid, Lebanon)

It follows that emotional weaponising can be understood as a social process where actors with a certain authority and legitimacy expose individuals to moral shocks and to painful collective memories. Thereby, they are creating the grudge and the frustration that build up in individuals, especially young men, who naturally feel that they need to act upon the injustice that is presented to them.

Across the narratives, there are many figures that can be qualified as *grievance entrepreneurs*, beyond merely being memory or moral entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs are family members, relatives, friends and people with charisma, legitimacy and a certain authority, including religious clerics. The example of the sheikhs' role in 'weaponising' youths emotionally is indicative, for instance, of the fact they mobilise collective memory alongside moral shocks relating to domestic and global instances of injustice and suffering. In addition to that, grievance entrepreneurs can provide a certain intellectual frame to understand the suffering, provide analysis of a particular situation, designate enemies and propose ways to act. They can also, importantly, either through their very existence or through their values and attitudes, shape the sense of collective identity of a young man, by reminding him of his cultural or religious heritage or suggesting that he is part of a particular collective. Given their somewhat transversal role – across memory and identity formation and the framing of moral shocks – we could envisage the role of such key figures as *grievance entrepreneurs*. Sheikh Ajouz, living in Switzerland and of Lebanese origin, describes this process as follows

> What these people do is that they exploit situations of injustice that exist in the world. There are many of them! For example, the Palestinian cause, the Iraq invasion, especially since Iraq didn't have anything to do with 9/11…But it was clear, that they wanted to destroy the culture of Iraq. And if you want to destroy your enemy, you destroy their culture. The most dangerous thing for your enemy is when you are educated…And see, these things, if you

talk about them, any young man will feel strongly about it…how can these Americans come and destroy our land and leave with impunity? And the same thing with Palestine, itself is an axis of injustice, I mean just now, a disabled young man, you go and shoot him[4]. What, seriously, you were thinking he had a gun?? What is this? So, these things, anyone will be moved by them. I for example, since I was a kid, I was always considered as a support for the weak. I would also want to defend them. And there are many young men who are like me. Now, when there is no education, aha, that is the problem! They can be deluded into thinking that they can be the fighters for injustice, you give them weapons, one or two Ayat, Hadith, and Jihad. And then…he will enter a group that has nothing to do with religion.

<div align="right">(Sheikh Ajouz, Switzerland)</div>

The influence of grievance entrepreneurs is greater when individuals consider them uncritically as infallible figures of authority who hold the real truth. Rashid considers this as the 'easy way out'

> To me…there is one form of unreal extremism…which is simply what people label those who are very pious, who have long beards and gowns and whose wives are completely covered…the real extremism in my view is those who don't accept any kind of criticism of their ideas. They would not accept that Aseer [Ahmed Al-Aseer] was wrong in anything for example. It was almost some form of sacralizing his person…which is wrong…even when it comes to the prophet, this is something you should not do. It's a cognitive rigidity which switches off the mind…which is something wrong. There is always an enemy…you're maintaining that image of the enemy. But I repeat that extremism is not restricted to any religion. The people I know who are still extremist in their thinking are those who are not well-educated and who have little knowledge of religion…what they do is…they cede their responsibility to understand religion to a person who seems more knowledgeable. It's the easy way out.

<div align="right">(Rashid, Lebanon)</div>

It is worth noting that social media may have played an important role in giving increased exposure to figures that can be considered as grievance entrepreneurs. Video material can circulate faster and more widely than ever before, allowing for grievance entrepreneurs to reach audiences worldwide.

'They gave up their humanity': Defining and dehumanising the enemy

Definitions of injustices seem to naturally include definitions of enemies. The narratives illustrate that wherever an injustice is described with expressions of moral outrage and indignation, a perpetrator of the injustice is defined as well. Enemies tend to be entities that are powerful economically or militarily

speaking, or influential in political terms. Given the context of the inquiry, Israel, more specifically the Israeli military, frequently occupies the position of the powerful and evil Other in the narratives collected here. It is not surprising that this enemy also tends to be dehumanised. The following longer excerpt of the interview with Aziz is worth quoting in full, because it illustrates well how Israel is constructed as the enemy and dehumanised because of their military actions in Palestine

> If you want to liberate Palestine, you will hurt Israel, and Israel is also human beings. And you shouldn't hurt human beings. But the difference is the story of the injustice. A human being loses his humanity when he does injustice to someone else, when he lets someone else lose his humanity. When Israel entered Palestine, they took away the Palestinian's most basic rights. The greatest injustice ever committed is the Palestinian occupation. It's worse than all the things that happened in Russia, Hitler, Mussolini, etc. the biggest tyrants…they are not even a percentage of what Israel did. You are killing people, innocent people who are in this country. I told you, I always consider situations from a personalized point of view – I try to imagine 'what if this happened to me?'…if Lebanon was taken away from me? If an oppressor came to my country? If I was a young kid, when all these things happened. How many young boys had to leave because of the oppression, and they remember their friends from school? …How much does this make you hate Israel? Not the Jews – Jewism is one of the heavenly religions, we acknowledge them. Islam is one of them. But the Zionist, he is a human who gave up his humanity and lost the slightest bit of human feelings he might have had.
>
> (Aziz, Lebanon)

Salim makes a similar explanation regarding the Israeli enemy, explaining which actors may be deserving of violence

> I am very strongly against violence that targets civilians…but you have to define civilians first. To me, a woman…although she is a woman…when she wears a miniskirt and carries an AK-47 on her back…she is not a civilian anymore. As soon as she is armed, she can be attacked.
>
> (Salim, Canada)

Fahad demonstrates a similar understanding of who may be a legitimate target of violence. Interestingly, he also engages with the label of terrorism, demanding that nuances be maintained when designating someone as a terrorist

> Be careful, not all terrorism is terrorism, not all which they call terrorism. For example, someone fighting US soldiers in Iraq is not a terrorist, someone using explosives against the army is not a terrorist. A terrorist is someone who starts fighting against innocent civilians. That's injustice.
>
> (Fahad, Lebanon)

Other groups of humans that are constructed as enemies throughout the narratives are Shia Muslims and Alawites which are associated with the Shia sect by the Salafi-jihadist interviewees; Daesh and Jabhat Al-Nusra, of course, which have become, in the eyes of most interviewees, incarnations of evil and brutality; Islam and Muslims in general, in the eyes of right-wing Christians Maronite activists; or Western powers such as the United States or France. Regardless of racial or religious traits, representatives of the state that engage in abuse and violence are also portrayed as enemies. Anti-police activists consider police officers as dehumanised the moment they put on their uniforms. Kevin's statement in this respect is illustrative of this

> I am profoundly anti-authoritarian…I hate police officers who allow themselves to beat up the poor…even when you try to humanise them, it is still the same to me…We often joke that police officers would probably not pass the Turing test, which tests whether you are a person or a computer. To me, the police officers follow orders, don't think and are therefore not human.
>
> (Kevin, Canada)

Defining an enemy provides a target for the grudge and the frustration felt by interviewees who identify with a cause and suffering. Because most situations in the world are extremely complex and hard to be broken down in black-and-white fashion, the designation of enemies always operates as a simplification of reality. Enemies are, also to justify violence against them, often dehumanised and portrayed as purely evil. It is important to note, however, that constructing a collective as an enemy as such is always tied, narratively, intellectually and emotionally to great acts of violence and injustice committed by members of the collective. Hence, although the designation is simplistic, it is not arbitrary in the sense that enemies are solely constructed based on their affiliation. There is always a justification for the hatred directed towards them by evoking their responsibility and complicity in causing great and unjustified human suffering.

'Why should I care?': Resisting against apathy

As human beings in an era of high-speed connectivity and social media, we are likely to be confronted to a plethora of causes and situations of suffering and injustice every day. But what makes some individuals connect with certain causes more than with others? Why, in fact, do individuals care about causes that do not concern them, at least physically, in the first place? Where do individuals choose to *look* and why?

In their biographical study of different cases of political violence, McCauley and Moskalenko (2011), concluded that 'what moved [them], while others who shared their convictions did nothing, seems to have been an unusual capacity to care[5] about others' (p.76). Cohen (2016) in his study of politico-religious self-sacrifice, found that perpetrators of suicide attacks displayed 'heightened awareness and sensitivity to social and/or political grievance' (p.751) and tend to be

characterised by an 'over-identification with the collective' (p.751). Accusations of *hyper-* or *over-sensitivity* are also frequently directed at those engaged in militancy, e.g., for feminist or anti-racist causes, especially when they correspond to the group that is perceived as being disadvantaged (West, 2019).

When it comes to PIM and PIV, 'collective problems become personal problems', as Lee (2019) argues, 'and for this reason, no study of violence is complete without the study of society and societal dynamics' (p.85). Whether through vicarious victimisation (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020), the 'psychology of attribution' (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011, p.19), the transformation of one's social identity (Rydgren, 2007), or the 'enlargement of personal identity' (Benford & Snow, 2000, p.632): Individuals who invest themselves emotionally, intellectually and physically for a certain cause feel that they are part of a collective. They connect to their suffering, and they feel responsible to defend the imaginary collective and act on its behalf.

Being confronted by moral shocks and collective memories of suffering, either via social media, through friends and families or within the social environment that one grows up with, are the main drivers of identifying injustices. These are the first stages of the emergence of grievances for individuals who go on to engage in PIM and PIV. As mentioned, identifying injustices can be supported by so-called *memory* or *grievance entrepreneurs* who present individuals with moral shocks and collective memories of pain to influence them, garner them for a cause, or simply for their personal political interest. The findings also demonstrate that moral shocks and collective memories of suffering are closely intertwined with designations and constructions of enemies, who are dehumanised and against whom retaliatory or vengeful violent action is justified or even necessary to do justice.

However, since it can be reasonably claimed that everyone has at some point in their lives been confronted with situations of injustice, even collective injustice, abuse, and neglect, whether personally, through witnessing them, or by learning about them via stories and images, one has to ask why these individuals come or choose to *care* while many others don't or don't feel as compelled to do something about it. What do their narratives tell us about *why* they care about something so much, and why they come to sacrifice their lives for a certain cause?

One finding is that individuals come to care about social and political issues through their socialisation. In a sense, sensitivity, is then, learned. Souhail and Richard were both influenced by their parents in this regard

> My father was a social worker in the French banlieues, working with the generation of immigrants. Today, he helps out refugees. My mother works in education and a lot with disadvantaged children. Social issues have always been something that mattered to them.
>
> (Souhail, Switzerland)

> Politics, I have bathed in it since I was a kid. My father was very politically engaged. […] Politics has always been of great importance at home. I was interested in what was happening in the world.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

Jaafar makes an interesting connection between the context one grows up in, the general sense of security and one's propensity to get involved in politics. His view is representative of Lebanese interviewees' views on politicisation and its inevitability in the Lebanese context

> In my family, we have political figures. So, you get affected, obviously. For example, my father…when he met friends, it was mostly about politics. The family plays a huge role. But the university also played a huge role…See, there is something you need to know. That Lebanon's life is always about politics. It is always hot and loaded. Any Lebanese citizen, whether he wants it or not, politics is imposed on him. Wherever you go, you will see that everyone talks about…at least once per day…about politics, or 70% of them. At least! Because Lebanon is a generator of political crises. And the whole region of course is hot. There is Israel, there is petrol. It is always a place for conflict…so, you are not in a country that is completely secure. There are always crises. There is no real stability…For example, imagine…had I grown up in Canada. Why should I care about politics? There is everything provided in terms of security. Even if you are a student, you get an income, in Sweden for example. You live in peace and you can enjoy your life. In general, the atmosphere is not politically charged constantly […] here, because every conflict has a direct impact on the citizen. You have to participate.
>
> (Jaafar, Lebanon)

Several individuals point to their childhood or adolescence as the period when they realised that they felt strongly about injustice and inequality and tried to do something about it. Souhail, for instance, recalls this as follows

> I've always been very sensitive to injustice. When I was 4 or 5 years old and we went on vacation, I cried when I saw the boys of my age working on the street, while I was there on vacation. I think that certainly played a role. The fact of always having seen this inequality. It definitely influenced me.
>
> (Souhail, Switzerland)

Richard similarly recalls what his parents told him about his character when he was a young boy

> My parents always told me that as a boy, I strongly disliked injustice. At school, I spoke up against teachers when I thought something was wrong. I was kind of a troublemaker as a kid. When I saw something that seemed unjust, I was not afraid of pointing it out. That's what my parents have always told me.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

Sabri also remembers that he has always resisted injustice, even at smaller scales

I think that I have always had a hard time accepting injustice around me**.** You know at school, there is a lot of violence in our school system in Syria…and I never thought this was right. When most of my schoolmates were laughing when the teacher made fun of a student, I never laughed. I refused to. I thought this was disgusting.

(Sabri, Canada)

Salman also points out that it is simply in his nature to react strongly when he sees someone who is oppressed

I fought to defend the weak and the oppressed, not for the politicians, like many others did. There were a lot of wrongs being committed, a lot of exploitation in this civil war. Many of us were tricked into joining. But to me, it is simply…that I can't see someone suffer and not want to help that person.

(Salman, Lebanon)

There are various indications that these interviewees do indeed themselves feel that they have a particularly heightened sensitivity which distinguishes them from others. As a methodological comment, I shall add that this question (*Do you feel like you are particularly sensitive to injustice?*) was often asked quite directly, towards the end of the interview, when a certain connection with interviewees had been established and they had talked abundantly about their engagement and commitment. The question was always well received and well understood, because these interviewees were very aware that they *did* distinguish themselves from the common man or woman through their engagement, commitment and radicality. At the same time, one should keep in mind that these individuals want to be committed politically and see strong feelings about injustice as a virtue, which certainly influences the way they present themselves.

While individuals may have a personal predisposition to being particularly sensitive to injustices, they also believe that this should be the general attitude of a normal human being, to care about human suffering. This is also supported by frequent references to the fact that the causes they are engaged in are *human* causes. Across the narratives, interviewees from very different orientations stress the fact that they are engaged for *humanity* and not for a particular collective.

Also, the narratives clearly point to the fact that there is a sort of moral obligation to *care* and that the right choice is the choice to care. There is a sort of resistance against what is perceived as *carelessness* or even as *apathy* on the part of those who remain idle in the face of injustice

When it came to political causes, I could be very violent, verbally. When I saw injustice and I couldn't understand how people could *not* react [emphasis added]. In those cases, I really felt great anger.

(Souhail, Switzerland)

In the Swiss context, there are indications that values of caring are defined against a vague idea of *Swissness*. Swiss interviews express frustrations with perceived Swiss *apoliticality* – 'People pretend to be apolitical and objective. […] To me, it always seemed more like they didn't want to get involved and change things' (Daniel, Switzerland) – and calmness or even nonchalance: 'I think we were trying to distance ourselves from the "calm Swiss", to define ourselves against that' (Souhail, Switzerland).

Kevin's description of his sensitivity reveals his struggle to do anything else but care, it's a sort of compulsive empathy, with a clear undertone that one *has to care* if things are going that badly in this world

AA: How do you see your future?

> My future…I can't see my future, I can't conceive it, because THE future is bad. The question about my personal future becomes superfluous. I cannot be happy if the world is doing so bad…this capitalism is eating us up. I can't be in a relationship with anyone, I can't pretend to be satisfied when others are suffering, when in the country next to mine, children are dying in concentration camps… […] This affects me a lot. Even when I cannot understand something, I try to do my best and to get involved. I can't take those people who want to remain in their comfort zone, I simply can't.
>
> (Kevin, Canada)

Overall, the sensitivity to injustices is something that is inherently human. An ordinary human being wants to prevent or remedy the unjustified suffering of others. However, depending on one's context and environment, one may be rarely directly confronted to injustice and suffering, therefore not inevitably *seeing* violence and suffering. In an era of mass media, social media, instant information flows and hypoconnectivity across the globe, living in society includes being at least exposed to some extent to information about suffering and violence elsewhere, without, however, necessarily needing to. People living in safe environments can choose to look the other way, or they can choose to look and choose to care. Individuals who engage in causes and conflicts around the world make a conscious decision to care, and to care again and again. They see their caring not as exceptional in terms of human character traits – regarding that, they generally acknowledge that human beings do normally care about suffering – but they do see themselves as exceptional in terms of their *act of caring*. Given that most people will not engage politically as much as they do, they know that their engagement is to a certain extent radical. And an essential part of their radicality is the *act of caring* itself, which is a defiance of the dominant tendency towards *apathy*; radically caring translates into a moral indignation about carelessness, about people's unwillingness to leave their comfort zone and look at the ugly side of the world. It is a strikingly consistent theme throughout the narratives: Radicality is, to a large part, a visceral reaction to the apathy of this world.

Feeling the injustice: Betrayal and a complicated relationship with emotions

Politico-ideological engagement, mobilisation and violence include, as has been discussed so far, intensive moral and emotional engagement with the things that happen in the world. Grievances themselves translate, in fact, into an emotional state, a prolonged one that is embedded in a narrative of analytical rationality. Emotions are therefore inherent to the study of grievances, sometimes to such an extent that it may be tempting to overlook them. Trajectories of radicality are also trajectories of dealing with and handling often overwhelming and unsettling emotional states, such as resentment, rage, anger, numbness, helplessness, sadness and despair.

For a long time, emotions were relegated outside the realm of academic inquiry in the social sciences because of their association with a sort of irrational passion. Human beings were considered as 'patients' and not 'agents' of their emotions (Kaufmann & Quéré, 2020, p.9). Scholarship has since evolved significantly to allow for a comprehensive engagement with emotions as an essential aspect of social interactions, conceding also their malleable and co-constructed nature. As Kaufmann and Quéré (2020) argue, emotions are of the 'interactive kind' rather than the 'indifferent kind' (Hacking, 1999, p.104) – they are not indifferent to discursive performances and social construction (Jasper, 2011). Hence, while there are psychological and physiological processes that are somewhat universal to emotional reactions, emotions must be understood as socially constructed, according to the specificities of the time and the cultural context in which they take place (Hacking, 1999).

It follows that emotions are inherently tied to cognition. As Jasper (2012) puts it: 'Humans are driven by both passion and purpose' (p.38). Similarly, Ortony et al. (1990) suggest that conceptualising 'a situation in a certain kind of way' (p.2) can create the potential for a particular kind of emotion, and Petersen (2002) argues that cognition tends to precede emotion in ethnic conflicts. While it is beyond the scope of this book to thoroughly discuss cognition and emotion in relation to PIM and PIV, we shall recall that there tends to be a constant interplay between thinking and feeling, particularly when it comes to grievances.

Emotions are crucial to understanding how individuals move their self-perception from the *micro*- to the *macro*-level (Scheff, 1994). For engagement in PIM and PIV, both individual and collective emotions are at play. However, the ontological difficulty of grasping emotions is exacerbated when moving from the individual to the collective level: How can emotions, which are, by essence, occurring at the individual level, be felt at the level of the collective? Does the notion of 'collective emotions' refer to the fact that a collective experiences emotions or the fact that these emotions are actually of a different nature? In other words, does the term 'collective' function as a 'subject' or as an 'attribute' of emotions? (Kaufmann & Quéré, 2020, p.14). These questions are not easily resolved, but they point to the complexity of theoretically and empirically engaging with emotions.

Emotions must also be analysed in terms of their temporality. Experiencing moral shocks, learning about injustices framed in a particular way and relating to a suffering collective both in the present and the past, are likely to elicit strong *moral emotions*, i.e., feelings of approval or disapproval based on moral intuitions and principles (e.g., pride, shame, guilt, indignation, outrage, compassion) (Jasper, 2011, p.287). These emotions are different from so-called *reflex emotions* such as anger, in that they tend to build up and persist over a longer period of time, in the face of injustice, but also impunity[6]. Petersen (2002) suggests three types of emotions that he found to be dominant in ethnic conflict, namely *fear* (prepares the individual to act for safety), *hatred* (resulting from historic grievance) and *resentment* (prepares individuals to address status/self-esteem discrepancies). While fear and resentment operate in a more restricted timeframe, hatred can be associated with antipathies and hostile attitudes that persist over a longer period of time. In relation to PIM and PIV associated with causes and conflicts in the Arab World, these may include Anti-Americanism (Marsella, 2004; Türkmen, 2010), Anti-Westernism, Anti-Imperialism and Anti-Colonialism (Burgat, 2016; Mohamedou, 2018).

Politico-ideological mobilisation and acts of politico-ideological violence are hardly ever spontaneous, but the result of a process of reflection that can take years to lead to actual engagement. Sometimes, however, grievances may not be clearly articulated to the individuals engaging in PIV themselves. They may not relate to immediate or direct suffering. It may therefore even be difficult for individuals engaged to clearly state the goals and objectives of their engagement (Hamm, 2012). In order to understand how individuals react in the *present* to grievances that may have built up over many years, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* provides some insights. Bourdieu suggested *habitus* as the physical embodiment of cultural capital, habits, feelings and skills that are accumulated over a lifetime (Bourdieu, 1977). In her compelling analysis of the 2011 British riots, Akram (2014) suggests that grievances produced through memories and experiences collected over a life course are in some way stored in the *habitus* and may be at play in violent action. In the context of the Black Power movements in the United States, Morris (2019) similarly writes that 'grievances are not static. Sometimes they lie meek and dormant like raisins in the sun. At other times, they fester, exploding into organised, creative, collective action' (p.133). The goal of social science research is, then, to 'examine grievances, articulate the sources of their passivity, and understand the transformation process through which they become the fuel for overturning the old regime' (p.133). This accumulation of grievances and feelings over time is tellingly captured by an account of what Missak Manouchian, a French resistance fighter during the WWII, is reported to have said

> There is no cause or feeling that is born suddenly. It is always the result of a more or less long history. The first image that came to my mind when I engaged in action was that of my father, who died during WWI, and that of my mother, who died from hunger shortly after that. I really got the impression

that they were coming out of their tombs, telling me that I had to act: 'You're not doing anything bad; you are simply killing killers'.

<div align="right">(Malayalam, 2019)</div>

Finally, emotions can provide an impetus towards action, including towards PIV (Ducol, 2013; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011). Since emotions are, as discussed, socially constructed, the way certain issues or events are framed may have an impact on the emotional response that is provoked. Certain *frames* can channel feelings of *just rage* about injustices (Crettiez, 2016; Della Porta, 2008; Gamson, 1992; McCauley, 2017). The energy produced by emotions has been termed 'emotional energy', i.e., a 'mood of excitement and enthusiasm, generated in interaction rituals and successful strategic engagement, that encourages further action' (Jasper, 2011, p.287). While that energy may pull an individual into different directions – towards or away from action – 'emotional liberation' (Flam, 2005) signifies the replacement of 'action-blocking' emotions with 'action-enabling' emotions: E.g., anger replacing fear, hope replacing despair and indignation replacing shame. In a slightly different context, Liebling and Williams (2018) identify *political charge* (i.e., anger and alienation over unjust treatment) as creating an environment conducive to the formation of resistance identities, which can lead to the outbreak of prison riots. Cowlishaw (2004) notes that 'a particular kind of agency derives from injury' (p.60). The act of remembering and acknowledging the suffering of injustice, instead of denying it, can in itself be understood as an expression of unwillingness to accept the injustice and thereby as a first step towards opposing it, 'answering back' (Cowlishaw, 2004, p.68).

The emotions that accompany the descriptions of moral shocks and of painful collective memories are of great intensity. The narratives are riddled with facial and tonal expressions alternating between genuine disillusionment and utter indignation. A major observation that is that at the beginning of a process of engagement, a feeling of betrayal is identified by the interviewees, usually in relation to a moral shock. The feeling of betrayal is central to a trajectory of radicalisation away from the mainstream towards the margins. Radicality starts with a first dissociation from what can be considered, in Gramscian terms, as hegemonic knowledge (Gramsci, 1971). Moral shocks induce a sense of betrayal, because the hegemonic knowledge one has grown to believe and which is considered as so normal, natural and corresponding to not only *a* truth, but *the* truth, turns out to be complicit in injustice and suffering. The structure of hegemonic knowledge, maintained by a dominant narrative in a given society, a given context, at a particular moment in time, crumbles in the eyes of these individuals, leaving them strongly alienated. Not only does the betrayal lead to grudge and frustration with hegemonic knowledge, it also opens up possibilities for new and alternative worldviews to be adopted. Moral shocks lead to a loss of trust in the state and the justice system, in the international community and international institutions, Western countries which are thought of as beacons of democracy and freedoms, as well as neighbours, members of the same imagined community, or human beings more generally. Moral shocks, whether direct or vicarious, reveal not only the fallibility of

these actors that are granted axiomatic legitimacy; they also reveal their ability to inflict great human suffering, whether maliciously or neglectfully, thereby questioning their moral authority. This moment of realisation, this *epiphany*, is accompanied by moral indignation not only about the inflicted suffering and the injustice itself, but about the *hypocrisy* of these actors, namely the fact that they benefit from a hegemonic narrative that presents them as legitimate, right, and good.

As a general observation on emotions, the study reveals that interviewees have a somewhat ambiguous relationship with emotions. On the one hand, moral indignation about injustices is expressed and presented as a very natural and logical human reaction. On the other hand, interviewees also make sure that their engagement is not seen as only an emotional subjective reaction: They make visible efforts to replace their individual emotions regarding a particular injustice with a larger analysis of injustice that is based on rational arguments and where emotions are downplayed. Frequently and somewhat ironically, interviewees claim that they are *not emotional people,* that they are not guided by emotions but by a rational analysis of injustice and dysfunctionality. In a way similar to the role of religion, the role of emotions is downplayed. This repeated narrative emphasis is testimony to the fact that these individuals are forced to justify their engagement throughout their lives. They have grown used to explaining what they are engaged for, why, and why they sacrifice so much. By embedding their engagement in a rational and logical narrative, they are shielding themselves from accusations of subjectivity, emotionality, partisanship and irrationality. Following are a few examples to illustrate this

> I am not a very emotional person; I get to my position through reading and through arguments. For example, I decided to read Amin Rubenstein's book about Zionism to understand what kind of dehumanising and racist ideology this is.
>
> (Nooreddine, Switzerland)

> I think a lot before I get involved emotionally. I try to rationalise and understand before I get too involved.
>
> (Sobhi, Lebanon)

> I am very open-minded about most things, but some things I simply can't discuss them. For example, normalisation with Israel. It's not that I am very angry or anything, but I would first need to pull you out of your deep hole to be able to discuss with you…So I always try to be rational about things…My father is very similar. He always tells us stories about the things that happened during the civil war, but he does not get involved emotionally…he just states the things as they were.
>
> (Nidhal, Lebanon)

The findings also reveal that there are strategies that interviewees resort to in order to deal with strong emotions such as indignation, rage and despair. Some of these strategies overlap with the way interviewees narrate and rationalise

their engagement. The narrative about their engagement, collected at a specific moment in time, is of course a product of an iterative process between reflecting about their engagement, being engaged and talking about their engagement. This process is likely to contribute to an evolving posture over time, to which a snapshot obtained through an interview, can hardly do justice. However, if one looks at Battoul's way to engage with her anger, this gives us some indication as to what led others to arrive at a narrative that is largely emotionally detached

AA: How do you handle the destructive impacts of anger and rage, of these strong emotions that come with indignation? How do you transform them into something more constructive?

Battoul: [Smiles and thinks for a few seconds] it's very hard, really. What really helps me is trying to find resources, political analyses, things, writings that put words on what I am feeling. They provide logical answers and a vocabulary…and I need those to be able to have evidence for my arguments…to justify why I am feeling so upset about something.

(Battoul, Canada)

This observation is crucial: Analysis, solid arguments, evidence and compelling writings provide a basis on which the feverishness of indignation can settle and cool down. Analysis provides distance, emotions can become secondary because the injustice is there, factually and objectively, for everyone to see. When individuals operate that rupture from hegemonic knowledge, they enter a phase of *constant struggle against that hegemonic knowledge*, against a crushing dominant narrative that delegitimises, pathologises and criminalises radicality. In that struggle, analysis and rational arguments become a precious currency that provides relief to individuals who are engaged.

Another strategy consists of adopting what Trotskyists call the *long view of history*, as Khaled explains compellingly

I think for me…I think my political training…this is gonna sound like 1970s Trotskyist something you know it's going to be bad…but like I think for me like the way I was politically trained…sort of like that long view of history… you know you can live in periods where nothing happens for a very long time and many things happen very quickly and the world changes […] …there are moments yeah it's extremely emotional you know I think especially like I've had moments there where when I've been in Palestine …you know the level of emotion is really frustrating…and I could imagine what it would be like to actually have to total reality forever…signs of arrogance and powerlessness that like…that just…all of a sudden you would be trying to feed some chickens and then…Israeli out of nowhere come and shut down your well…you know the fact that you watch people's whole lives be governed by a series of 18 year old kids with high powered weaponry to maintain all of their privileges nothing else…it's angering…you can't. […] because it can be so illogical…it's like…despite everything…all of these things continue,

right?…like water flowing downhill…you know like it just doesn't stop […] despite everything that we've witnessed you think at some point…it would just become a normal place…but it doesn't…and our people can have like the same dreams and aspirations and hopes…or begin to develop a search of trajectory…but it just like it continuously is blocked again and again […] I think it makes it so critical to change those powers of production right…and like having some sense out the long run that you're like going to be doing this for a very long time…and…Moral anger and moral indignation is just that it's normal…but is it yeah it's normal… but it's not going to change anything too…that like you know if you walk up and down the street and just yell at the end of the day it's not going to… well it's not going to change anything it's not going to win people over…who you want to be involved to change something to fight those grievances.

(Khaled, Canada)

Though clearly understanding the emotions involved in engagement, Khaled also relegates moral emotions and *ad-hoc* instantaneous emotional mobilisation to a secondary position, over which proper analysis and building the structures that can actually change power dynamics in the long run should take precedence. The long view of history, embedded in analysis and continuous work though without the expectation of immediate gratification, can calm the spirits and give hope. Ziad who also subscribes to the long view of history and emphasises rational arguments for engagement, in a way similar to Khaled acknowledges the importance of rage, but cautions against letting rage take over

I've always been motivated by rage I know like people say that it's not healthy but for me it's like if you don't feel that rage yeah you can't really…can't really fight effectively for what you're fighting for…but obviously you can't let it take over you have to be able to think things through and build.

(Ziad, Canada)

Finally, regarding the emotionality of the narratives, another observation is worth mentioning. In fact, it appears that the more one moves away from conflict-ridden contexts, the more the narratives seem to sound rational and explain engagement as a result of political reasoning. The narratives are less endowed with honest expressions of rage and anger about violence and suffering, in the case of interviewees in Switzerland and Canada or even many in Beirut. The important distinguishing factor seems to be the privilege: the less someone is directly impacted by violence and conflict, the more distance the narratives also create between the narrator and the cause, in terms of emotions. Another factor that distinguishes most of my interviewees in Switzerland, Canada or Beirut from those in Tripoli, e.g., is their political maturity and education. Education and intellect seem to be playing a role in dealing with emotions in a different way, or at least presenting oneself as cultivating a more 'rational' relationship with emotions.

Notes

1 Tweet by Heather Heyer, a legal assistant from Virginia, about the events in Charlottesville in August 2017, shortly before she lost her life in the protests, when a vehicle drove into a crowd of protesters (Independent, 2017).
2 Beyond the imagery, an aspect that none of the interviewees refers to, but which may have contributed to its worldwide spread, is the fact that Faris Odeh was killed by the Israeli army ten days after this picture was taken. I was personally not aware of it until I conducted some research into this image, and I felt that this additional information gave the image greater weight and importance.
3 The Hatla massacre was the killing of 30 to 60 Shia villagers by Syrian opposition fighters and members of Jabhat Al-Nusra on 11 June 2013 (van Tets, 2013).
4 He is referring to an incident of a young disabled man being shot in Jerusalem by Israeli forces on 30 May 2020, which sparked outrage across the Arab World (https://www.aa .com.tr/en/middle-east/mentally disabled-palestinian-shot-dead-in-jerusalem/1858804).
5 The notion of care has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Scholars like Gilligan (1977) have suggested a departure from traditional male-dominated universalist understandings of the notion of 'ethics' towards an *ethics of care*, which lays the foundations for *care politics* as a guide for social organisation. Exploring this debate is beyond the scope of this book, but the understanding of *care* that is maintained throughout the following pages is closely associated with a political conviction regarding an obligation to care. See Gilligan, C. (1977). In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and of morality. *Harvard educational review*, *47*(4), 481–517.
6 As Beanfield suggests, referring to the 1919 Chicago riots: 'Here the rioters are moved by indignation at what they regard rightly or wrongly as injustice or violation of mores that is likely to go unpunished. Their indignation is partly at the wrongfulness of the act and partly at the wrongfulness of its going unpunished' (Beanfield, 1970, p.190).

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10 Appropriation
Owning the injustice

From an imagined past to imagined selves

Identity remains an elusive concept. As Hall (1997) argues, modernity has resulted in identities becoming increasingly fluid and malleable, with individuals assuming different – and sometimes contradictory – identities at different times. Nevertheless, identity does seem to matter, especially when it comes to collective mobilisations: 'People collectively identify themselves and others, and they conduct their everyday lives in terms of those identities' (Jenkins, 2004, p.9). Our small and big actions are influenced by how we perceive ourselves and our place in the world: 'Action is wedded to identity [and] we seek to corroborate our identity – I act in accordance with who I think I am – and […] we aspire to certain identities – I act to realize a certain desired self' (Presser, 2016). *Collective identity* has been put forth as an essential vehicle through which individuals connect to a particular collective and feel the urge to stand up for it (Ferguson & McAuley, 2020; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Ruggiero, 2005). Movements frequently use or construct a collective identity to mobilise members for a cause and strengthen solidarity between them (McAdam et al., 2004).

Anderson (1983) theorised nation-states as relying on the idea of an *imagined community*, whose members perceive themselves as linked through a 'deep, horizontal comradeship […] which makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, but to die for such limited imaginings.' (p.7). It is at least partly due to the power of imagined communities and collective identities that massive mobilisation for the two world wars or various civil and ethnic conflicts throughout the 20th and 21st century was possible. Sacrificing one's life for a cause seems to be linked to individuals feeling connected to a great common shared identity.

Yet, which collectivity do individuals connect with and why? Do national, linguistic, ethnic or cultural variables matter, or is the ability to *suffer with and for others* more universal in nature? Rydgren (2007) argues that the ethnic factor of convergence becomes salient in a context where 'the allocation of resources and rights – and risks – hinge [*sic*] on ethnic category belonging' (p.227). Cojanu (2014) proposes to consider 'ethno-symbolism as [a] legitimising mechanism of identity feelings and collective rights' (p.217).

Regarding mobilisations for the Arab-Muslim World, there has been much talk about individuals' self-perception of belonging to a global Muslim nation or community and the role that sense of belonging plays in mobilising them to join battlegrounds to defend what they arguably see as brothers and sisters in the religion (Abi-Hashem, 2004; Lakhani, 2014; Piscatori, 2019). Pan-Arabism has also long been a companion of Pan-Islamism, although the relationship continues to be conflictual. There is also a dominant narrative linking Arab identity to Sunnism more specifically, outcasting Shiism as Persian and therefore antithetical to Arab (Childs, 2011). The perception of a transnational Arab identity and community, while effectively based on a shared official language and many cultural references, is also the product of cultural efforts by media and television to forge and maintain the collective imaginary of an *Arab World* (Ouassini & Ouassini, 2020).

In his study on the actual and imagined identities of Salafis in Jordan, Abu Rumman (2014) finds that Salafi militancy needs to be analysed not in relation to its ideology but to the sociology of identity. He argues that in the context of the continuous failure of pan-Arab initiatives and regimes, Salafism emerged as one of the forms of political Islamic activism with a declared aim to remedy social and societal ills by returning to the perceived origins of the religion. Interestingly, Abu Rumman argues that the identity of Salafis in Jordan is based on an overemphasised sense of Otherness that is used as a vehicle to demarcate themselves. As such, their identity is therefore not oriented towards general recognition, but towards exclusion, as suggested by Amartya Sen (2007). Abu Rumman's analysis is based on theories around identity developed by Iranian philosopher Darius Shayegan, who argues that religion-based identity, i.e., Islamic identity, has evolved to become the common denominator of Muslim-majority countries and thus a strong unifying factor for Muslims around the world (Shayegan, 2014). Similarly, yet more pessimistically, Kundnani (2014) argues that extremist violence in Europe, whether within the jihadist or the right-wing spectrum, is based on an 'apolitical, conspiratorial and narrowly identitarian' (p.285) and therefore totally uncritical worldview, in which all societal ills are attributed to an identified and demonised Other. Regarding Hezbollah, Childs (2011) observes that the group has managed to reactivate a transnational Shia identity and link it to the general ideology of resistance (*muqawama*) and thereby maintaining domestic and some international legitimacy. This idea of a specifically Shia transnational identity has also manifested itself in the rise of Iraqi militias following the country's invasion by Daesh in 2014 (Al-Rawi & Jiwani, 2017).

Since collective identity is frequently linked to the past, it must be understood as inherently intertwined with collective memory. Candau (1998) also emphasises the link between the two, while cautioning against holistic assumptions about collective memories: Collective or social memory is fragmentary, malleable and does not exist outside individual memory. Rather, he suggests, memory needs to be analysed and contextualised in terms of its local genesis and manifestations, to understand how it comes to shape identity formation processes. Either way, *memory work* thus frequently overlaps with *identity work*, meaning that the performance of narrating the past is often linked to an ambition to shape collective

identity (Candau, 1998; Candau, 2017). Hence, beyond linguistic and ethnic characteristics, any collective identity must be analysed as a social construction inscribed in a specific moment and context. Nevertheless, brought back to the individual level and the relationship with action, it seems that whatever the objective *raison d'être* of their collective identity, individuals who consider their grievances as *collective* have a (for the least, implicit) understanding of what that collective is, what defines it and why they see themselves as belonging to it.

Adopting and negotiating collective identities

One factor that is relevant for this understanding is the way individuals identify themselves with those that are seen to be suffering. Interviewees feel vicariously victimised. They feel that what is happening to those who are suffering could be happening to them as well. Although this may hold true in many respects, they still undergo a specific mental process of reformulating the victimisation they are witnessing as something that does, or rather must, affect them personally as well.

Across the narratives, interviewees identify themselves with the collectives that correspond to their personal identity, which they have inherited from their families or their context of upbringing. Hence, individuals feel drawn towards Hezbollah and identify with the suffering of Shia Muslims in the Arab World because they are from a Shia family. Christian activists feel particularly concerned by the persecution of and violence against Christian communities. Sunni Muslim interviewees are more strongly impacted by the suffering of Sunni Muslims at the hands of those who subjugate and criminalise them because of their associations with Daesh or the Muslim Brotherhood. For instance, when the Syrian Civil War broke out, the residents of BT showed great solidarity with the revolutionaries

> Because BT was the first place that went down to the street with the flag of the Free Syrian Army, we all went down. We went down to show solidarity. Once they captured Syrian fighters here, and we went down, we would protest so they set them free, and put a lot of pressure on them.
>
> (Bader, Lebanon)

Kurdish interviewees identify more strongly with the plight of Kurdish minorities throughout the Arab World. Finally, individuals identify with a collective because of their living environment in a country or region: People from Tripoli identify with the suffering of Tripolitanians, and people from South Lebanon identify strongly with the suffering of Shia Muslims and Christians at the hands of Israel. Fahad points to the solidarity between Tripolitanians

> In prison, they used to call us Tripolitanians unbelievers, but then we became greater in number, reaching 250 and you couldn't say anything about us anymore, because there is a strong bond of solidarity between us.
>
> (Fahad, Lebanon)

Similar themes can be found in the narratives of Alawite fighters

> They said come and smoke argeela [waterpipe], we don't have anything to
> do with them. I said I can't. When you see an Alawi be shot or injured, you
> have to fight.
>
> (Yahya, Lebanon)

At an overarching level of identity, and especially in relation to the Arab World,
one's identification as Arab or Muslim can strongly contribute to feeling con-
cerned about what is happening to Arabs and Muslims throughout the world in the
age of the Global War on Terror

> Yes, there was a feeling of collective injustice. Especially when people see
> things like the invasion of Iraq or the Syrian civil war. The Muslim commu-
> nity here in Quebec gets very strongly affected by these things, although they
> happen thousands of miles away.
>
> (Meriem, Canada)

This collective Muslim identity that is present in many narratives corresponds
sometimes to the idea of being part of a global struggle against Western powers.
Interviewees see connections between their own fighting and struggles by pre-
dominantly Muslim groups in other contexts

> We were always following the news of the US, of the Russians, Chechens,
> etc. I had downloaded videos of operations and anthems etc. So, they thought
> that because I was watching these videos, I was certainly with terrorist organ-
> isations. They took my phone and they saw all of these things.
>
> (Nassim, Lebanon)

Also, as mentioned above, especially in the Western context, interviewees also
identify as 'from the South', non-white, non-European, and therefore express soli-
darity with all the peoples who have suffered the impact of European imperial-
ism. Other forms of negative identification include refusing to be considered as
Western and emphasising pride in one's Arabness or non-Westernness; or refus-
ing to be considered Arab in the case of some Kurds or Christians (Christian
Maronite Lebanese conservatives emphasise their supposedly Phoenician genetic
heritage). Daniel explains the link between his internationalist engagement and
his otherness in the European context as follows

> My political engagement is essentially focused on internationalist struggles.
> I take my role of an internationalist to heart now. I think the fact that I am a
> second-generation immigrant…it makes it difficult to feel like I am home…I
> feel home nowhere and at the same time anywhere. This internationalist posi-
> tion suits me because it corresponds to my identity…simply put. That's why

> I am supporting the struggles for independence, national liberation, like the Kurds or the Mapuche.
>
> (Daniel, Switzerland)

These vectors of identification do not invite, however, to essentialisation, for several reasons. First, interviewees repeatedly stress, as has been mentioned, that their cause is a human cause and that they feel strongly about injustices that happen to other collectives as well. They also make efforts to convey that anyone should feel strongly about the cause that they care about, because the suffering and the injustice are of universal relevance. Nidhal explains this as follows

> To me, the resistance does not necessarily have to do with Islam, with Shia… the resistance happens everywhere. Soviet in Afghanistan, Stalingrad, Nazis, Vietnam, Che Guevara, these resistance movements, wherever they are taking place, as long as they are causes of justice, I am with them.
>
> (Nidhal, Lebanon)

Second, in line with all the preceding findings, the trajectories of activists must be understood as inherently fluid, constantly changing, and strongly influenced by their environment, including their family, their friends, the school they visit and the neighbourhood they grow up in. Hence, these individuals come to identify with a particular collective because of their socialisation. They learn to identify with a specific collective. As a result, the suffering of that collective becomes more salient and more relevant to their trajectories. It is therefore not their identity per se, whether ethnic, religious or else, but the result of a co-constructed identity formation process that has an impact on their collective identity.

Finally, not only do individuals identify with a collective as a result of a process of what seems to be a process of *positive socialisation*, i.e., feeling drawn towards a collective, they also identify with a collective because they experience *negative socialisation*, i.e., being pushed away from a collective. This also includes environmental as well as historical factors, such as particular crises during which violence becomes more commonplace. Crises tend to force people into choosing one identity over another, especially if these identities are involved in a conflict at the macro level. By negative socialisation, I am referring to their being forced into a particular role or identity because they are repeatedly made to feel that they are different, not accepted as part of the place or society they grow up in. As a result of these processes of *othering*, they choose to embrace their *Otherness* more assertively. All interviewees that are engaged politically and for specific causes, display very strong confidence regarding their identity, although that identity is always one that is *Othered.* Politico-ideological engagement includes this reconciliation, at some point, with one's identity. This process may be accompanied by feelings of frustration, but the end result is usually a positive one, in terms of personal gratification and inner peace. Given that these interviewees are met at a later point of their engagement, they are usually already significantly settled in their identities, but their narratives reveal that throughout their trajectories, there

has been a point or moment of rupture, a sense of betrayal, an epiphany where they started seeing behind the dominant narrative, finding a sort of truth to which only a few have access, and a sense of regaining strength in that new identity.

This identity, which is the result of a process of reconciliation with oneself, is generally a positive driver of engagement. It supports identification with those who are considered to be part of a similar collective and drives engagement for more justice and equality. However, exclusive over-identification with a single collective can also breed new forms of racism and othering, if the basis for the identification is a narrowly identitarian one. In fact, it is when these individuals themselves essentialise their identity, and exclude and *other* others based on it, that identity formation processes can become drivers of new injustices.

Framing violence: From self-defence to doing justice

As I mentioned earlier, politico-ideological violence is, by essence, defensive in nature, conceived of as a *counterattack*, and therefore perceived as inherently *moral* (Abu Rumman, 2014; Lakhani, 2014). Colvin and Pisoiu (2020) found that *denial of the victim* is frequently performed by framing the act of violence as defence, deterrence or retaliation. To explore possible ways of making sense of and justifying violence, it is worthwhile briefly discussing the notions of *resistance, self-defence*, *retaliation*, *revenge* and the idea of *doing justice*.

Experiences of violence and injustice may lead to the formation of what has been termed *resistance identities* (Liebling & Williams, 2018), *rebellious identities* (Hafez & Mullins, 2015) or *imaginaries of resistance* (Crettiez, 2011). Operating out of a stance of 'resistance' is likely to imbue actions and actors with a sense of righteousness. Groups, movements and organisations engaging in and promoting political violence tend to perceive and declare themselves as engaged in resistance, struggle, opposition, protest, rebellion or revolution. Mansbridge and Morris (2001) define this as *oppositional consciousness*, a sentiment fuelled by anger over injustice and prompted by personal indignities and harms suffered. Oppositional consciousness rests on *oppositional identity,* which results from 'identifying with an unjustly subordinated group, recognizing the injustice in that group's position, opposing that injustice, and recognizing a group identity of interest in ending that injustice' (Mansbridge & Morris, 2001, p.240). Ruggiero (2005) found oppositional consciousness to be of particular relevance for the emergence of the *Brigate Rosse* in Italy. One also notes that the vocabulary employed in academic research alludes to the notion of resistance, via terms such as 'violent resistance', 'contentious politics' (McAdam et al., 2004), 'political contestation' (Villiger, 2013), or 'oppositional protest movements' (Burgat, 2016). For the Western post-9/11 carceral context, Some argue that Islam has become the 'religion of the oppressed' (Hamm, 2007, p.7), the 'new underdog religion' (Liebling et al., 2011, p.58), and therefore particularly suitable as an ideology of collective resistance. Beyond the carceral context, the attraction of Islam as a religion of resistance is an essential tool for understanding jihadist sympathisers and actors. Like freedom fighters in the past, such as those fighting in the

context of decolonisation, they invoke the religious vocabulary to give a sense of grandiosity and profundity to their struggle and 'espouse the same ideals of revolt and insubordination' (Geisser et al., 2017, p.198).

We may therefore consider the notion of resistance as being tied to a self-perception built over a longer period with a significant impact on identity formation processes. The notion of *self-defence* is, in contrast, more operational, for it determines more clearly that a violent act is *legitimate* in response to a specific act of *aggression*. This principle has been codified into the criminal laws of modern nation-states by positing legitimate defence as primarily non-criminal and deserving of lenience, and international treaties such as, for instance, the UN Charter which states

> Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of collective or individual self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.
>
> (Ch. VII, Art. 51)

The idea of self-defence is therefore far from alien to human nature. It translates the age-old principle of *lex talionis*, which suggests that reacting to aggression using proportionate means is a legitimate course of action. An important issue with self-defence is temporality: Until when is a counterattack justified? At what point does an act of self-defence turn into retaliation or revenge, because the original attack lies simply too far in the past, outside the timeframe within which self-defence can legitimately take place? If we look again at international law, we realise that the notion of self-defence has been stretched not only horizontally (from individual to collective self-defence), but also temporally, to a vaguely determined (and contentious) timeframe before a presumed or expected attack (also called *anticipatory or pre-emptive self-defence*) and, importantly, *after* the attack (Franck, 2001), which is then, arguably, to be considered as retaliation or, more cynically, revenge. By way of example, the doctrine of *pre-emptive* self-defence was the basis (although not sanctioned by the UN Security Council) for the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Greenwood, 2003). The US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, on the other hand, demonstrates the idea of *post-hoc* self-defence, which essentially amounts to retaliation or revenge (Greenwood, 2003).

This brief excursion into international law and affairs merely serves to illustrate the universality of the notion of self-defence and the possibilities of extending it both horizontally (to others, not directly impacted) and temporally (before and after an act of aggression). This process provides a logical framework to morally justify acts of retaliation and revenge, something that can frequently be found in rationalisations of PIV (Grace, 2018). If put and framed in a convincing way, acts of violence can come to be perceived as reasonable, necessary or even noble. It is based on such logics that one may, for example, come to condone the 9/11 attacks, or, likewise, the subsequent US-led escalation into the GWOT, including drone assassinations, unlawful offshore detention and torture. Hence, acts of immense

and often indiscriminate violence, essentially acts of revenge, can come to be considered as *doing justice*. As Kaliayev[1] says in Camus' play *Les Justes*, after he participated in the assassination of the Grand Duke: 'What crime? I only remember an act of justice' (Camus, 1950, p.116) or as Nizar Qabbani, poet and former Syrian diplomat, wrote, referring to the Israeli–Palestinian context: 'I am with terrorism, if it is able to free a people from tyrants and tyranny'[2]. Grace (2018) notes that 'revenge is universal, existing in most societies as some form of payback or infliction of pain on a perpetrator to minimize one's own pain, restore justice, and stop harm' (p.250). Political violence is frequently framed as retaliatory action or revenge intended to restore justice (Marsella, 2004; Silke, 2004). Terrorist groups justify their actions as retribution for military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq (Grace, 2018; Mohamedou, 2018). Ratelle and Souleimanov (2017) found that retaliation and revenge are key incentives in the violent insurgency in the North Caucasus. Lankford and Hakim (2011) found revenge to be an essential motivating factor for rampage shooters as well as terrorist groups.

It is also important to note that although there may be some consensus on *lex talionis*, perceptions of what constitutes an attack or aggression are likely to be more variable, depending on individual, cultural and contextual factors. Thus, the way a situation or event is framed can be particularly impactful. If a situation is diagnosed (in Benford's & Snow's (2000) terms) as being unjust or wrong and constituting an attack, that understanding is likely to have an impact on what is seen as justified in response. In a similar vein, Akers and Silverman (2014) argue that individuals may learn attitudes that justify violence in pursuit of certain political objectives: 'The "framing" of the conflict teaches the terrorists definitions of the situation and when, where, and how often, it is morally right or justified to engage in political violence' (p.27).

'I will always be a troublemaking bastard': Rebellious underdogs

> Everyone wants to be the underdog. But nobody wants to be the underdog of the underdog.
>
> (Khaled, Canada)

A major theme that has crystallised throughout the narratives as a key aspect of collective identity is the figure of the *underdog*. The word underdog denotes a less powerful person, group or thing that struggles against a more powerful person, group or thing. The collective that individuals identify with is usually perceived and portrayed as the *underdog*, as David who is struggling against Goliath. This underdog narrative is both consistent and powerful because it can, at least narratively and intellectually, sustain engagement as a just and righteous cause, for it is oriented towards the defence of the weak against the greater evil. It is through their identification with the figure of the underdog that interviewees come to identify with the most heinous acts of violence. The following excerpt from the interview with Nassim indicates that the interviewee's approval of Osama Bin Laden

emerges essentially from his admiration for the figure of the underdog being able to strike at the heart of the perceived oppressor

> I loved Osama. I was following him. What he did in the US, I was proud of it. Or I liked Khattab Al Shishani, because he fought against the Russians and he hurt them, although they were living in the mountains. That is something a Muslim is proud of. Most of us are like this here. Even though we were perhaps not even praying. To see that American machines were being destroyed, we enjoyed that. It was the only reasonable thing to do: to hate the US and Israel.
>
> (Nassim, Lebanon)

Interestingly, Nassim also alludes to a presumed link between the idea of jihad and religiosity. Thereby, he is responding to the widespread idea that jihad is somewhat the result of religiosity 'pushed to the extreme'. By stating that 'they were not even praying', his intention is to stress the fact that this idea of defence and retaliation does not have much to do with a particular religious orientation, but with a universal human instinct, in line with the findings presented above.

Given its struggle against hegemonic narratives and attitudes, the underdog identity is also, in a way, an outsider mentality. By detaching themselves from what is perceived as normal, interviewees consciously adopt a radical and rebellious identity. Interviewees can not only thrive as outsiders but may have difficulty changing an identity with which they have become so familiar, as this quote by Kevin strikingly illustrates

> I can't just stop. This is who I am. This will always be my struggle because it's the only thing that makes sense to me. I will always be a troublemaking bastard […] You know, even if I just smoke a cigarette, the cops will come and beat me up. So I prefer to do something to at least justify their violence.
>
> (Kevin, Canada)

The 'troublemaking bastard' translates to a defiant and rebellious posture. *Rebelliousness* is closely related to the figure of the underdog. It is a positive and assertive stance that, on the one hand, emerges naturally from the rupture with what is perceived as the norm. On the other hand, it corresponds to an aspect that will be further explored below, namely the fact that although interviewees identify with the underdog and adopt a discourse of victimhood, they refuse to give in to victimisation and injustice. Rebelliousness means that one refuses to sit through the oppression and idly wait for it to end, but actively opposes and fights it. This stance is crucial to radicality. This adoption of a rebellious underdog identity is well illustrated by Nooreddine, after I ask him whether he and his friends accept the label 'radical Muslims' with which they are frequently confronted

> I mean, what does it mean to be radically Islamic. The media definitely sees us this way. It is very interesting that one of the first instances of outcry about us was when we refused to shake hands with women during an official

meeting. They made a huge fuss about it and called us radical. We might discuss whether this is really radical or not…But given our position and the way we were attacked, we certainly had to be reactive to a certain extent. We were, I would say, rebelliously Islamic.

(Nooreddine, Switzerland)

The link between rebelliousness, a refusal to idly endure injustice, and the figure of the underdog are also strongly present in the narratives of Hezbollah sympathisers. The group has always maintained the figure of the resistant underdog against a more sophisticated and more powerful military opponent, and it was through that figure that they gained so much popularity among the Lebanese people. The liberation of southern Lebanon in 2000 and the pushback of the Israeli army in the 2006 July War were especially important to the image of Hezbollah because their military victory was not any military victory, but the triumph of the underdog, of David over Goliath. It is interesting to note that the image of the underdog continues to nurture the narratives of Hezbollah sympathisers who frequently refer to their regained strength after decades of oppression

I remember the liberation very clearly. I was young and I was nine and I remember that we got stronger, because we had worth now…before that we were oppressed, occupied, our families were being spat at, kidnapped, etc. these things. When we went to the South…we were a minority. Now we have the power, the pride, that we can defend ourselves.

(Thulfiqar, Lebanon)

After the Islamic revolution in Iran, it was like a new generation was built. Shia more specifically, but the oppressed in general, in Iraq, the Shia was always oppressed. And in Lebanon, Hezbollah brought the pride of Shia back. With Hezbollah, the time of the weak Shia is definitely over.

(Samir, Lebanon)

The second day of the war, Sayyed Nasrallah said they would attack the naval missile. Nobody believed it until immediately afterwards they put the live stream of the attack. Against all expectations. No one was expecting Hezbollah to have the military technology to drown an Israeli naval ship. This was maybe a turning point …we realised we are strong, we can win this.

(Nidhal, Lebanon)

In the region… Hezbollah has a standing now. Everyone knows now that Hezbollah cannot be easily defeated.

(Jaafar, Lebanon)

This *comeback mentality*, the idea of the eternal underdog finally achieving victory over the wrongdoer is a powerful narrative, which creates a strong sense of solidarity within the collective that identifies with the role of the underdog.

Pride, dignity and self-worth are restored through military victories in the case of Hezbollah, but this mentality can be found in all forms of radicality. Because the figure of the underdog is oppressed, coming back by attacking, fighting and defeating the more powerful oppressor is seen as a righteous act and therefore empowering for the individual and the group.

The following excerpt from the interview with Aziz illustrates the way the collective identity of *Arabness* is also associated with an underdog identity, especially in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian struggle. It is also interesting to note that he posits religiousness and faith as conditions of the rebellious and righteous Arab identity that defends the oppressed

> Nobody…especially in the Arab world…denies the fact that Israel is very well developed. You have to respect them in terms of politics and military. You see…we don't have anything but our Arabness, our will to fight. We don't have, perhaps even collectively, as Arabs, the military power of Israel. But we have something that distinguishes us which is our faith and our fighting spirit. And this will hopefully bring us victory […]…people who are atheists, and I told you I was with them for a while, but then I realized no, the atheist thinking is changing my understanding of myself as an Arab, someone who fights for the emancipation of the oppressed, the atheist framework made these things vanish. It told me to get away from all these things.
>
> (Aziz, Lebanon)

Never enough: Guilt and Solidarity

Furthermore, there are two emotional states that accompany collective identification processes. On the one hand, the narratives reveal that *solidarity* is a major driver of continuous engagement, not only at an intellectual but, and perhaps more importantly, at an emotional level. The interviewees describe moments where they experienced the solidarity as joyful, rewarding and strengthening their convictions to continue their engagement for a particular cause. In that sense, politico-ideological engagement seems to respond to a fundamental need to feel supported and feel that one can support others, especially in the struggle against injustice. Both these feelings combine to form a positionality of *underdog solidarity* which is consistent throughout the narratives

> When we went down to the Libyan border, there were these refugees and we were helping them, it was a collective effort by all the activists involved, especially those from the South. There was this beautiful solidarity, I really appreciated that.
>
> (Battoul, Canada)

Solidarity is also an important factor for engagement specifically in the Arab World. There is a sort of orientalist fascination with the solidarity and the importance given

to the collective when it comes to the peoples living in the Arab world, whether Arabs, Muslims or Kurds. This is particularly relevant for those interviewees living in Switzerland and Canada, who connect with the region from a certain distance.

Another recurring theme when it comes to emotional states in relation to collective identity and political engagement is *guilt*. Guilt is rarely expressed as such but transpires throughout the narratives. Guilt is a major driver of continuous engagement, of feeling that one has to continue fighting for justice when it comes to the victimisation of that collective. The sources of this guilt are frequently associated with material privilege and possibilities. Interviewees express guilt about the material comfort they are enjoying in their lives. Therefore, the theme is more prominent in the narratives of individuals from Canada and Switzerland but can equally be found in different ways among the more materially privileged interviewees in Lebanon. Sometimes the guilt is the result of feeling that one should be there on the ground to fight with the collective for their cause: Battoul felt guilty about not being able to contribute to the revolution in Tunisia. In Randa's and Zahid's case, their guilt referred to their privilege of being in Canada and not with the revolutionaries in Sudan. Daniel and Richard who went fighting with the Kurdish YPG felt that they abandoned them and wished they could help them on the ground. There is a similar feeling of guilt when Palestinian activists like Asif, Salim or Souhail talk about their investment in the Palestinian cause, which is not always easy to sustain from a distance.

Feelings of guilt are further exacerbated through the repeated comparison between one's own lifestyle and that of the collective one sees as being oppressed and in need of support

> I remember going to Egypt… I was like 13 or 14 and I think it was really the question of…poverty and I think…like having an understanding or like why…why is my life so vastly superior? and everybody here like in the sense like I need to go back to Canada and everything will be yeah…and all of these people live in such poverty…because my mom grew up in which is like a popular sort of you know working-class area…and so like a lot of the times would like you know would go downstairs to play football…go downstairs get ice cream and I would be feeling this…almost a sense of guilt but without being able to really express it.
>
> (Khaled, Canada)

In Aziz' case, it's the possibility to go study abroad that is a source of guilt. His quote also shows how guilt is frequently expressed in terms of caring and taking responsibility for *one's people*

> Since I am a medicine student, I hope that my future will be in this domain. Because you can never be sure here. I hope that I will get a chance to help people. If I get a chance to study abroad, I would go and come back. Because I care about my people, my country, I want to come back and serve my people.
>
> (Aziz, Lebanon)

Another source of guilt is the feeling of not being and doing enough, compared to what members of that collective should supposedly look like or how they should behave. In Pasha's case, this feeling of guilt arose with him feeling that he was not a *good Muslim*, not the way a good Muslim would behave

> You know…although I did get some shots during my childhood…the family was stable…My father is a well-known person in the Muslim community, very religious etc. But I was always rebelling against my parents…because of that identity conflict…I was not living the way I was supposed to be...I didn't match the expectations.
>
> (Pasha, Canada)

This feeling of guilt is strongly present in the narratives of Muslim interviewees. I can also attest to it through my personal experiences living outside the Muslim world as a son of Muslim parents: There is certainly a constant internal debate about whether one is pious enough and sufficiently respectful of traditions and culture. Although the question of how to handle one's roots is certainly relevant for all migrant populations, in the case of Muslim emigrants, this feeling is frequently expressed in terms of religiosity. Caring about tradition and culture is substituted, in a sense, by religiousness.

This sense of guilt is a major factor for those aiming to recruit individuals for jihadist causes in the Arab World. Khalil, in his experience with Muslim youth in the Canadian context, argues that

> Daesh played on this feeling of guilt…they used that to target Europeans and Americans…they said you have the capabilities, you have the passports, the means…there is a cause for you out there… you can help your brothers and defend a righteous cause.
>
> (Khalil, Canada)

In light of the discussion on authenticity below, it can already be said that the power of guilt in driving engagement is heightened by the fact that acting upon the feeling of guilt works in the same direction as increasing one's authenticity. One feels less guilty because one corresponds more neatly to the ideal image of what *one should be doing.* At the same time, seeking authenticity also means working towards an ideal and *real* state of engagement and mobilisation. Hence, engaging and mobilising tend to respond to two major social pressures at once: The need to reduce feelings of guilt and the need to achieve authenticity.

Notes

1 The member of the Russian Social-Revolutionary Combat Organization who preserved his real name in Camus' play.
2 Year unknown. Retrieved from http://www.salaheddine.tripod.com/nizar_terrorism .html.

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11 Responsibilisation of self and others
Addressing the injustice

> Nothing will stop me going, even if you take my passport off me, I will still find a way to go. I cannot sit at home and watch people getting fucking butchered because it's another country.[1]

An essential aspect of understanding politico-ideological mobilisation and violence concerns engaging with the ideologies that underlie engagement. Based on the various findings presented above, ideology can be said to fulfil a number of functions: Ideology informs the way in which narratives and stories are framed: What is the injustice? Who is responsible for the suffering? Which actors are described as the perpetrators and which as the victims? How is the situation or dynamic of oppression and injustice made sense of? In that sense, ideological frameworks provide lenses to read reality in a particular way. This function, which can be considered as descriptive and explicative, plays an important role in the identification of injustice, discussed above. Beyond that, however, ideologies also lend a *normative* character to the narratives, suggesting not only what is right and wrong, but also how things *should be*, and what remedies may help counter and relieve the suffering. Finally, ideologies are also normative in the sense that they tell *me as a person* how I should be and act in this world. These explicative and normative functions of ideologies come particularly to the fore through narrative elements on the rationalisation and justification of politico-ideological mobilisation and violence. An *ideology of responsibilisation* is at the core of these rationalisations.

The narratives reveal processes and rational arguments that are put forward in a systematic manner to highlight the need to do something about the wrongs that have been identified. This chapter explores the major aspects of this ideological foundation of engagement, by presenting findings on the *revolutionary void* – i.e., the perception that nobody is doing anything about the injustice and that action by non-conventional actors is therefore necessary – and the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, that is, a narrative about *authentic* or *real* engagement that should be pursued by those who declare themselves as radical. The chapter also presents two major concepts that have been found to be based, to a large extent, on the logics

of *jusqu'au-boutisme* and the revolutionary void, namely *combat masculinity* and *jihad*.

'Nobody is doing anything': Filling a revolutionary void

PIV cannot be understood without proper acknowledgement of what I would suggest as the *revolutionary void*. In fact, it seems like engagement in PIV is somewhat tied to the perception that there is no strong entity that can ensure the rights of the oppressed collective. This may concern one's own collective and the feeling that 'nobody will protect us' and therefore we have to protect ourselves. It often refers to another collective, which is seen as unable to protect itself and therefore in need of external support. In all justifications for politico-ideological mobilisations that involve violence, e.g., engaging in fighting in a conflict zone, the observation that 'nobody is doing anything' is a major recurring theme. The quote by James above could be placed into virtually all narratives and fit perfectly with the motives that are expressed by the interviewees themselves. It is a transversal aspect of politico-ideological engagement regardless of the ideology that the engagement is framed upon. The revolutionary void refers to suffering and injustice that is not being addressed by politicians, heads of state, the international community or non-state actors. The Syrian conflict is a case in point: The international community was unable to intervene because of a deadlock in the UN Security Council, and the reticence of the US administration marked by two military interventions in the Middle East that are seen as having largely failed to bring peace and democracy as expected. Another example is the formation of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (*Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi*) in Iraq to confront the invasion by Daesh when the Iraqi security forces turned out to be unable to defend the northern provinces. Jaafar refers to this in the following excerpt:

> But it's also natural that in the case that the country is not able, it is normal that the citizens take matters into their own hands, like the Hashd al-shaabi did in Iraq for example. In order to defend the land, and liberate it... In Lebanon, until now, the state is not able to protect the country. So, it is an unnatural state, that Hezbollah is armed, of course, I admit that. But it is necessary.
>
> (Jaafar, Lebanon)

Jaafar also refers to the major justification for Hezbollah to keep their weapons, namely their claim that the state would be unable to ensure the protection of the Lebanese people, especially in the South, should there be another invasion by Israel. The perception of a revolutionary void is in fact often connected to a lack of trust in the state and sentiments of what has been termed *legal cynicism*.

Experiences of injustice and moral shocks may lead to *legal cynicism*, that is, a loss of faith in the legitimacy of conventional systems, norms and entities, such as the law, the state or the police (Sampson & Bartusch, 1998). Legal cynicism denotes an embracing of rule-breaking behaviour because of an

adaptation to persistent experiences of injustice, disadvantage and alienation (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011). Legal cynicism is also related to Merton's theory of anomie: Sampson and Bartusch (1998) themselves describe legal cynicism as 'anomie about law' (p.778). Bell (2017) suggests that the precepts of legal cynicism may be captured more usefully through the concept of *legal estrangement*. In her view, the traditional conceptualisation of legal cynicism does not do justice to the fullness of anomie theory, which goes beyond individual and subjective feelings of concern, although Kirk and Papachristos (2011) suggest in fact an ecological dimension to legal cynicism by embedding it in a cultural framing thesis: 'Individuals' own experiential-based perception of the law becomes solidified through a collective process whereby residents develop a shared meaning of the viability of the law to ensure their safety' (p.1201). Bell (2017) suggests legal estrangement as a cultural and systemic mechanism both within the individual and beyond individual perceptions: it is a combination of anomie about law and state institutions and other marginalising and dispossessing structural conditions such as poverty, fragile legal status, racism or sexism, which leads to the detachment and alienation from the law and the entities supposed to enforce it. Realising that dominant national or international powers can sometimes break rules with impunity, that the state does not treat all citizens equally, or that security forces can engage in disproportionate violence, can lead to a rejection of the dominant system of norms altogether and play a role in engagement in politico-ideological violence. Hagan et al. (2016) found that, in post-2003 Iraq, legal cynicism was fostered by the US coalition and Iraqi state forces' acts of brutality against civilians and drove sustained violence by insurgent groups.

Legal cynicism can develop enough to be amplified into 'strategies of action' (Hagan et al., 2016), including justifications for violent action. Legal cynicism is also likely to lead to a legal void which may be filled by systems of norms that deviate from conventional ones and may be more favourable to violent action or reaction. The concept is pertinent for the study of PIM and PIV because it supports justifications of conventional law-breaking behaviour, in line with reflections suggested by Sykes' and Matza's (1957) neutralisation theory. Ruggiero (2005) found that neutralisation techniques were frequently employed by former members of the *Brigate Rosse*. According to neutralisation theory, law-breaking behaviour can be justified narratively by resorting to so-called *neutralisation techniques*, which include (Sykes & Matza, 1957)

denial of responsibility (e.g., 'it wasn't really my fault, I was drinking'),
denial of injury (e.g., 'nobody was really harmed'),
denial of the victim (e.g., 'he brought it on himself', 'he deserved this'),
condemnation of the condemners (e.g., 'who are you to tell me that this is wrong', 'I might be bad, but you are worse'),
appeal to higher loyalties (e.g., 'I am doing this for a greater good').

As Colvin and Pisoiu (2020) argue, one major issue with the original neutralisation theory is that it postulates the existence of a *status quo* norm and a view of the

offender as essentially accepting it. They call this an *encultured* view of the offender, and propose a subcultural view of an offender which argues that the offender does not *disavow* deviance, but *avows* it, because it is compatible with a different system of norms, which he or she subscribes to. This interpretation corresponds to subcultural theories on offending (Cohen, 1955). Larsen and Jensen (2019) recall that modern subcultural theorists have operated a break from early subcultural theory: Offenders are not seen as merely criminal and pathological, but as engaged in a process of cultural resistance against the existing social order perceived as unjust. They propose a reading of jihadism as a subculture that provides a social response to a shared experience of Islamophobia and Othering. In their study of narratives of violent offenders in the far-right spectrum, Colvin and Pisoiu (2020) found that a mixture of *encultured* and *subcultural* neutralisation techniques is often at play. Interestingly, one may find the five elements of neutralisation theory in the counterterrorism discourse as well, for instance, dominant powers' failure to acknowledge their responsibility for the emergence and existence of oppositional violence or the justifications of the human suffering caused by the GWOT in the name of national security.

A common theme is interviewees' view that since the conventional actors who hold the monopoly over violent means do not act in the face of injustice, they must be considered as either complicit, unwilling or unable to react. Either way, the result is a feeling that these conventional actors, namely states and state institutions including the laws that govern them cannot be relied on when it comes to defending people against unjust violence or even defending their own people. Add to this that when violence is envisaged and employed, the narratives justifying it usually contain apocalyptic visions of the world, one that is going down if we do not act effectively and radically. Such apocalyptic visions delegitimise the laws that are in place because they are seen as doomed to perish. In the desired world, the one that the fighting and violence seek to achieve, people are governed by virtues and principles of equality and justice, sometimes of divine nature. Legal cynicism and alienation from conventional norms can open a vacuum that is then filled by other norms, sometimes influenced by influential peers. Max describes this process as follows

> For example: my bike was stolen for the third time, so I went and stole one myself. In a way, I said to myself, they steal my bike, I will steal one. It is a gradual process. You disconnect from the society you live in. Add to that the people who tell you certain things: how to react, how to act, brainwashing you in a way. We started being kind of apart, because we didn't accept any other norms than ours.
>
> (Max, Switzerland)

Ziad makes a similar argument, yet nuances it by making it clear that illegality should not be an end in itself

> Although electoral politics can be a way…it doesn't mean that legal means are the only ones that you need to use…well in the long run it is actually

> technically illegal to call for the overthrow of the state right [laughs] but I
> do call for the overthrow of the state right…it's just a question of like…what
> illegal things you're going to do that matter and what things just make you
> feel good right.
>
> (Ziad, Canada)

Instances of moral shocks or learning about the states' crimes or failures to inter-
vene reinvigorates the scepticism that interviewees have against state actors
and authorities. The narratives also reveal that engaging in foreign fighting, for
instance, can be considered as a form of *exported political contestation*, where
fighting abroad is partly seen as a defiance of the respective states and their laws.
This argument is supported by the fact that individuals seem to consider their
engagement in foreign fighting as an extension of a generally defiant posture
towards the state and international institutions.

   The feeling of *nobody is doing anything* is also connected to one of the main
aspects of grievances, namely the fact that they remain unpunished. However, in
contrast to the post-hoc orientation of the notion of *impunity*, the perception of
a revolutionary void is more strongly anchored in the present and is also at least
partly oriented towards the future. Nobody protects that particular collective that
is being attacked, therefore one needs to intervene not only to punish the perpe-
trators but also to prevent further suffering. In that sense, it evokes the notion of
urgency, which is an essential narrative component. The fact that a major injus-
tice is happening, and nobody is intervening means that there is a strong sense of
urgency that *something must be done, and it must be done quickly*. It also relates to
the perception of a major *existential threat:* This collective needs to be defended
otherwise the perpetrators will either subdue, oppress or even eliminate them. For
instance, Hezbollah sympathisers justify Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian
conflict based on the assumption that Daesh would come for Lebanon after con-
quering Syria. A similar feeling was motivating young Shia males from all over
Iraq to join the Popular Mobilisation Forces. Sunni Muslims who joined rebel
factions in the Syrian conflict felt that the Sunni population would be decimated
if Bashar Al-Assad was not stopped, or that the population of Bab-el-Tabbaneh
would be annihilated. As the following quote illustrates, the idea of *post-hoc* self-
defence is sometimes mixed with expressions of *ante-hoc* defence, that is, pre-
emptive defence against a threat; one that is usually framed as existential:

> Had we not defended ourselves, our street would have disappeared. In a
> neighbourhood next to ours, the army was supposed to protect the people.
> But under their watch, they came and stole everything and burned the houses.
> Had we not defended ourselves, the same would have happened to us.
>
> (Adnan, Lebanon)

Similar feelings of existential threats can also be found among recruits for the
Kurdish cause or right-wing Christian groups. The narrative of an existential
threat is inherent to justifications of violent defence. Even when it was not stated

explicitly, for example, when it seemed like the individual was expressing irrational hatred, the underlying justification was always associated with a sense of righteousness

> Of course, we want peace and security. But if we are sitting here now, and someone comes in and wants to fight us. What do you tell him? You want to live in security? You will defend yourself. Kill him before he kills you. Right? You won't tell him 'come slap me, come shoot me'.
>
> (Bader, Lebanon)

Regarding the phenomenon of Salafi-jihadism and sympathies with so-called IS, several interviewees in the Lebanese context stress that Sunni Muslims 'don't have nobody' to represent them and defend their interests. They feel that ever since the killing of former Prime minister Rafic Al-Hariri, they are lacking a major Sunni figure in Lebanese politics that they feel represents them. As a result of this void, figures like Ahmed Al-Aseer or Salim al Rafi'i have been able to rally many young Sunni Muslims around them and gain their political loyalty. Following the calls of these figures, man young men joined them in their military activities locally or in Syria. Interestingly, in the case of Lebanese Sunni Muslims, the feeling of *nobody stands up for us* seems to be a continuation of the feeling that *nobody protects Sunni Muslims in general*. Thereby, a narrative continuity is established between local political grievances and international political grievances related to the feeling of *Madhloumiya*.

Globally, the attraction of major jihadist groups such as AQ and IS rests to a large extent on the fact that they are perceived as *filling the revolutionary void*. In the eyes of jihadist sympathisers around the world, they are seen as doing something against major powers that commit injustices in the world, stepping up to the plate where many others remain idle. Non-jihadist interviewees were asked about their views on the jihadist phenomenon. Since they are also engaged for causes in the Arab World, often share ethnic or cultural characteristics, and do not automatically defer to state-centric positions, their analysis tends to be less contaminated than that of external spectators who are too disconnected from the region and the phenomenon. A major recurring theme in their analysis was, as Richard put it cogently, that '*they would not have needed to end up there, with these groups'* (Richard, Switzerland). At the basis of their engagement are preoccupations that are widely shared by all interviewees. Many other groups could have offered a revolutionary agenda that would have been less racist, fascist, not indiscriminately violent and damaging to the Arab-Muslim World more generally. Non-jihadist interviewees express a certain sadness about the fact that those who wanted to do something were lost to groups affiliated with AQ and IS. These groups were simply more effective at presenting themselves as the main purveyors of a radical anti-imperialist agenda that promised to push back existential threats and enact real and lasting change. Sabri commented that, in light of the *revolutionary void*, it is particularly telling that many of the first regions in Syria from which IS were able to garner recruits were those that had formerly been

hotbeds of the socialist movement. Ziad similarly notes that there is a demand for radicality in the Arab World, and, to many sympathisers, that demand was met by AQ and IS

> The rage is still there, in the Arab World, but where can it go? The revolutionary answer in the Arab World is still Islamism.
>
> (Ziad, Canada)

There was no other group, and there still does not seem to be a group, that offers a convincingly revolutionary agenda. It feels like there is no credible radical alternative, as Khaled puts it

> A question of like…what at the end of the day…will feel like a credible alternative…I think a radical alternative...at this point I don't know that's going to be…what they say…I think you know…you see this in US politics…you see this not just in the Arab world…I think it's a global thing…the fact that the centre no longer holds, you know.
>
> (Khaled, Canada)

During my interview with Sheikh Ajouz, I realised how he himself demonstrated the existence of that revolutionary void. While denouncing the use of violent tactics to do something about the grievances that Arab-Muslims hold regarding the devastating impacts of interventionist projects in the region, he himself struggles to come up with a credible alternative that would at least seem like it's bold and effective. After asking him what alternatives he would propose to those who advocate for violence, he replied

> We are for an equal society, a just society, ruled by just leaders. And then we can work on things. For example, in my home country, we want to fight corruption. But you voted for them! You elected them! All these leaders! […] We want to start slowly, working from the grassroots, with the society.
>
> (Sheikh Ajouz, Switzerland)

While of course reasonable, such alternatives do not satiate the desire for radicality, which is inherent to the ambition to fundamentally change the *status quo*. At some point during my research stay in Canada, but as part of my general reflections on the research topic and ongoing analysis of the interviews, I realised that there seemed to be a demand for radicality that could not be sufficiently met by democratic societies and that therefore groups with radical promises would always find some popularity

> There's a paradox in society. The most radical groups appeal to individuals who are dissatisfied with the status quo, there is a demand for radical programmes. But since mainstream electoral politics often does not offer that and remains confined within the boundaries of mainstream possibilities, the groups that are

most radical or the most violent end up having a more convincing offer. Society should therefore consider the importance of having radicality within the margins of what may be called mainstream politics. The problem is, however, that no group that is closely located at the centre of mainstream politics will allow for too much radicality, since that radicality is likely to threaten its very existence.

(Fieldnotes, 18 February 2020)

Jusqu'au-boutisme*: The quest for authenticity*

Seeing and wanting to fill a revolutionary void is an essential element of the mechanism of responsibilisation of the self and others. Another (and perhaps the) major aspect, strongly present throughout the narratives, is the *quest for authenticity*, i.e., the process of aligning one's actions with one's words. In the context of defending the oppressed and seeking justice, this means not only calling out injustice, but also doing something about it. After one of the many small talk discussions I had with people during my research stay in Lebanon, I realised that the quest for authenticity is, in its fundamental essence, an uncontroversial and widely shared phenomenon. During a discussion with a Christian Lebanese woman, we came to talk about the role of the United States in the region, and she expressed strong Anti-American sentiments. I noted that

> When we are all united by the same sentiments, for instance, Anti-Americanism...if we agree at the basis of what is seen as being wrong…Then one of the determining factors of engagement is, paradoxically, the courage and the will to actually do something (agency)…The most violent, then, may be driven by this feeling of being the most courageous and determined and those who sacrifice the most, those who are being real.

(Fieldnotes, 30 June 2019)

If a general narrative identifies a certain injustice and perhaps the perpetrators of that injustice, then the question will be one of authenticity: Who wants to keep talking the talk and who is willing, ready and courageous enough to walk the talk? The theme of the quest for authenticity is a major component of narratives about politico-ideological engagement. It is a feeling that can be broken up into logical fragments such as

> they all know what should be done,
> but they are cowards,
> nobody is being real about it,
> I must be real about it.

This idea of *being real or going all in* is well captured by the French expression *jusqu'au-boutisme* (literally: 'to-the-end-ism'), translated as 'brinkmanship', but also – ironically – as 'extremism'. It is often very clearly identifiable in the narratives

> What annoyed me was that it was all just talk…And I needed deeds, action. […] If I engaged in something like this, I would go through with it to the end. I don't do things half-way. So, I called up this friend and told him that I wanted to leave for Syria.
>
> (Max, Switzerland)

Some interviewees further expressed that by travelling to a conflict zone to join the fighting, they were trying to examine their own *ability to go all in*

> It started titillating me, I wanted to know…whether…was I ready to go myself? […] that's something that I clearly said to myself. I wanted to test myself. Was I ready to do like they say in the books, to pick up a weapon and go fight? […] Leaving for combat is also a way of asserting one's willingness to leave behind the European petit-bourgeois comfort.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

The quote by Richard sums up well that seeking authenticity also means accepting and, in a way, embracing discomfort. Because to many foreign fighters especially, there is a conviction that fighting for justice requires courage to give up that comfort in the first place. Seeking authenticity means making sacrifices along the way. It means accepting discomfort and renouncing a life of comfort provided by the environment that many of the interviewees live in. This does not necessarily involve active engagement in fighting. Political activism more generally is a costly and time-consuming project that rarely leads to immediate gratification. Committing one's life to a cause takes a willingness to make many sacrifices. The connection between *jusqu'au-boutisme* and the inevitability of making sacrifices is present throughout the narratives and particularly well captured in the following excerpt by Nooreddine

> When I do something, I do it properly. As soon as I decided that Islam was the religion I wanted to commit to, everything happened very quickly. I married according to Islamic law. If I do it, then I do it right. For example, when my boss back then, around the beginnings of my engagement for the Palestinian cause, told me that I had to stop…that I had to stop making my engagement so public…otherwise he would have to fire me…I told him very clearly that there was no way I would trade in my engagement for Palestine for a job. Not for this job. For no job.
>
> (Nooreddine, Switzerland)

The self-sacrificing attitude is present in most interviewees' narratives and self-sacrifice is generally presented as a noble characteristic and act, a virtue that they admire and aspire to. For instance, Max affirms that he has a particular tendency to sacrifice himself for others

> I've also had…I've always had an extremist need to sacrifice myself for the people I loved. I would do anything for a person. I could dedicate my body

and soul to something if that could alleviate even a tiny bit of that person's pain.

(Max, Switzerland)

The quest for utmost authenticity seems to be inextricably tied to assertions of self-sacrifice, including a willingness to expose oneself to the risk of dying in combat, causing pain to family members or risking social and economic setbacks or even legal consequences. Richard comments that these sacrifices are necessary if one wants to be real and serious about one's engagement to a cause

> My mother went through a depression because I left for Syria. But that couldn't't stop me either. No […] Even if I have a kid. That won't keep me from fighting. […] because you know…I've also changed my point of view on prison. Prison is not the end. It's perhaps an inevitable phase when you are engaged like this.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

On a similar note, he expresses his admiration for those he encountered in the battlefield and who had travelled from other places to join the war efforts

> These were people who had a trajectory like ours. They were people who had no obligation to be there. They had *chosen* [emphasis by interviewee] to come here.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

The notion of *choice* is central: Individuals *choose* to leave their comfort behind and decide to do the right thing, standing up for justice. The way Richard expresses this reveals two things: His self-perception of having chosen to leave the comfort behind, at least for a defined period of time, and therefore his achievement of a certain degree of authenticity. On the other hand, the way he expresses this, whether wittingly or not, operates a hierarchisation between those who are on the ground fighting and those who come from other places to support them. Kevin makes this clear in a different way, by voicing his annoyance about those who simply join protests for the fun of it, and distancing himself and others who are *being real* about their engagement from them

> It was in 2011, during Occupy, that I realised that being radical could be cool. I had been in the streets for a long time and all of a sudden, I saw all these people…many of them from a bourgeois background. Ahh, now that the cameras are here, you show up! Interesting…But it's upsetting to us…we have an honest and sincere involvement in this…to see those people come and benefit from us and then be protected by their bourgeois privileges. But many of them are also afraid of me, because they consider me a 'full rad', as in a really radical guy…which makes them think I am dangerous.
>
> (Kevin, Canada)

Daniel describes a situation which is particularly revelatory of the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme*. During his journey to Syria, he had stopped, together with other foreign combatants, in a third country with the Kurdish group that was responsible for the logistics. He stayed there for a couple of days. One evening, he was asked by an older man to go to a local café frequented by many Kurdish young men. He described the incident as follows

> He didn't tell us in the beginning, he just took us there. But later he told us that he wanted to put some pressure on these young Kurds. We'll show them these Swiss guys who will go to Kurdistan and fight while they stay here, smoking pot. You see, he used us! [Laughs] The young Kurds quickly realised who we were, they all hid their joints below the table! [Laughs]. It was really funny, we hadn't asked for anything. In the end, they put the pressure on themselves. I think the old man was right to do that…you know, they are comfortable here in Europe. They can smoke pot in cafés. That event reminded them a little bit…that if you claim to be a proud Kurd all year long, there comes a time when you have to step up to the plate. So, we went there and crushed the mood! [Laughs] When we left, it was a ceremony. They all stood up to shake our hands.
>
> (Daniel, Switzerland)

Daniel's approving posture is also revelatory of his own adhesion to the idea that people who are affected, whether through their membership in a particular community or country or their witnessing of injustice, have an inherent responsibility to step up to the plate. What's more, Daniel reveals his approval of actively using the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme* to remind people, especially young men, of their responsibility to fight for the rights of their collective.

Also indicative of their willingness to accept and embrace discomfort, interviewees describe how they endured duress and difficult conditions, clearly visible in Max' descriptions

> We expected to take a sleeping bag and sleep on the street. We were really in war mode. Of course, I didn't believe we were going to be in a five-star hotel, sipping cocktails.
>
> (Max, Switzerland)

Similar elements can be found in the Max' account of his time in prison in Syria and Turkey

> It was rough in the beginning because the food was absolutely dreadful, the covers were musty and there was no hot water. When I got there, it was January. First week, I got sick immediately. But then, you get used to it. You get used to it [laughs].
>
> (Max, Switzerland)

In line with the idea of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, interviewees express great admiration for those who give everything, including their lives. They are considered as *martyrs* across all political and ideological orientations

> I have always admired people who give everything. […] I admire these peo-ple for their sacrifice. People who leave the individualism behind, who tran-scend it. 'I am going to dedicate my life to others'. That gesture, I admire it immensely. […] Martyrs are people who show you the way, because they chose to sacrifice everything.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

In fact, martyrdom seems to be the logical culmination of *jusqu'au-boutisme.* If one is authentic about his or her fight against injustice, then even one's life shouldn't be worth more than the lives of those who are oppressed. There is a lot of glory attached to the idea of martyrdom. As Nizar sums it up

> Giving one's life for a cause is the greatest form of sacrifice.
>
> (Nizar, Lebanon)

Salim, who was formerly fighting alongside Palestinian factions against the Israeli military, clearly expresses his frustration about not being able to give what the real revolutionaries are sacrificing

> When I took this stone for the first time, as a young boy, and threw it at the Israeli tank…I was scared, but I was proud…I was a fedayi, I was a resistance fighter…my father was proud of me. I was doing what was right. But then… the older I grew, the less I could dedicate myself to the cause…I was never sacrificing enough, never sacrificed as much as the others, the real fedayeen did.
>
> (Salim, Canada)

Actually, the word *fedayi* (perhaps better known in its plural form *fedayeen*) goes back to the word *fida'* (فداء), which can be translated as sacrifice. The idea of sacrifice is inherent to notions of resistance, defence of others and seeking justice. Note also that Salim evokes feelings of guilt about not being *enough*, as discussed above. The fascination for martyrdom is a recurring theme in the narratives. It is closely tied to politico-ideological engagement. The fascination does not, how-ever, in most cases, seem to be of a particular pathological nature. Rather, it is logically embedded in the narrative of *jusqu'au-boutisme*: If you want to be real about your engagement for a cause, then you have to demonstrate that by dedicat-ing yourself to the cause, by going *all in*. And *all in* means risking your life along the way. In a way, martyrdom is the symbolic and physical culmination of authen-ticity, of giving everything to the cause. Within the parameters set by the ideology of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, martyrs are ideal heroic figures, because they not only gave

their minds, hearts and bodies to fight – they sacrificed their entire lives for the cause. They are, in a way, the utmost incarnation of the idea of defending others.

Interestingly and importantly, the interviewees who joined conflict zones and carried weapons reported that the difficulty was not overcoming fear of death, but overcoming the *fear of killing someone*, as the quote by Daniel captures

> It's not as hard to accept the idea of dying as it is to accommodate the fact that you might kill someone.
>
> (Daniel, Switzerland)

Apart from a few exceptions, such as Salman, who was, according to practitioner Sara, suicidal when he was planning to launch a suicide attack, interviewees clearly distinguish between suicide and martyrdom. It is generally acknowledged to be wrong, not only among jihadists but also among leftist foreign fighters, to seek death. Rather, one has to avoid death but face it when the time has come. The following excerpt from the interview with Mansour illustrates the nuances in this regard

> *AA*: If the situation changed, if your family was safe, if you could make sure you wouldn't hurt innocent people, could you give your life? Commit suicide?
> *Mansour*: I got to that point, yes. But in my head, and in no religion, suicide is admitted. You don't get into paradise if you commit suicide. Also…martyrdom is not always accepted. You can't go and become a martyr because you are done with your life and fed up. That's like suicide. But if you go for a reason, and you are fighting for a cause…then that's martyrdom. For example, you're going to Jerusalem, to fight against Jews, that's martyrdom, but not if you just want to give up your life. But many people are doing that now, they are going to Syria, because they are fed up with life in the here and now.
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

The way martyrdom is celebrated by Hezbollah, according to the interviewees who are all sympathisers with close connections to fighters, is particularly illustrative of the way martyrdom can become associated with a collectively celebrated virtuous commitment. Martyrdom of a son or husband leads to posthumous social advancement for family members who are left behind. Martyrs are venerated for their heroic commitment. The following excerpts illustrate how martyrdom is celebrated and even sought in the Lebanese pro-Hezbollah culture. Samir explains how martyrdom is ingrained in the culture of pro-Hezbollah environments

> There were many who were prohibited from joining…Strictly prohibited. But their mothers would sometimes come to Sayyed Hussein and say that she wanted him to go fight. That's the culture we have here. When a son dies fighting, the mother would say my son sacrificed himself for Sayyeda Zaineb, he is not worth more than other young men. Like Sayyeda Fatima who sacrificed her son for the religion. That's the culture we have here. Again, there

was no need to brainwash. This generation came out and it was already convinced of the cause.

<div align="right">(Samir, Lebanon)</div>

When the politico-ideological engagement itself is embedded in a religiously tainted narrative, martyrdom and self-sacrifice are frequently associated with heroic figures who gave their lives in defence of their people and their religion. The following excerpt of the interview with Jaafar also connects the idea of martyrdom to religion and early figures of Islamic history like Imam Hussein

> The religious conviction, it plays a huge role. You go to defend a religion. Not fanatically about religion. […] But the religious conviction, especially Ashura, is a huge spiritual factor in making people less afraid of dying. The idea of martyrdom. The conviction that you don't lose anything through martyrdom. And you hear the story of Ashura, the Hussein who stood alone and was killed, and he fought the enemy and the entire army was in front of him, and he sacrificed himself for reforms and not for the sect or political objectives, because he wanted reforms. The religious conviction plays a big role, as a personal motivator. And the story, is there. The story and the causes are there.
>
> <div align="right">(Jaafar, Lebanon)</div>

The way Jaafar talks about *the story* is very telling. Unwittingly, he is referring to a cultural narrative that he has been socialised into and into which individuals can tap. As a young man, I can be like the Imam Hussein, with all his virtues and his courage: I can make my story to look at least a bit like this glorious story that is repeated so often. Because *the story is there*, as Jaafar says, the ideological components of mobilisation are there, too, which facilitates young men's actual mobilisation. Pushed to the extreme, martyrdom can become a collectively sacrificial attitude, where parents want their sons to become martyrs. Nidhal explains this, trying to emphasise the absurdity of this phenomenon

> Some time ago…I had a friend who got injured…His father was receiving congratulations, that his son got injured on the front. So one of them…the man is very *Hezbi*…one of them said to him, hopefully next time you will have the great joy (الفرحة الكبيرة)…he was like...yes inshallah...do you see what I mean? [emphasising the absurdity of the gesture]…that's the mentality… My parents don't have this mentality. I know people who went and their friends died and the operation succeeded, and the person tries his best not to die. But he comes back sad. Sad about the fact that they got shahada and he didn't…and this mentality…my parents prefer their children alive; others want the shahada. It's…for them it's the ultimate goal.
>
> <div align="right">(Nidhal, Lebanon)</div>

In a similar vein, the narratives reveal that resistance to oppression is celebrated and that resistance fighters are venerated. This holds across different ideologies

and contexts. Palestinians are, especially in most of the Arab World, acknowledged as engaged in a noble resistance against Israeli oppression and colonialism. They are held up as symbols of resistance across the world, and by the interviewees. This adulation can become very problematic because the narratives tend to essentialise Palestinians and impose a particular way of acting on them. They are dehumanised and romanticised at the same time, as Amal explains cogently

> […] or people over-romanticising that…yes we…our men are dying and they are gonna go to heaven…so there is a lot of binary thinking…two extremes …either people completely dehumanising Palestinians…either in Lebanon or in Palestine. Or on the other hand people say 'yes they should die for their cause'…in an extreme sense you know…which is…I feel it is also dehumanizing. Not saying that people shouldn't resist…but they say it in a way like 'we will not help them because they should die for their cause'.
>
> (Amal, Lebanon)

The Palestinian cause is frequently instrumentalised for political purposes without proper consideration of the needs of Palestinians or active contribution to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To Hezbollah sympathisers, for instance, the Palestinian suffering is a major justification for its continuous vilification of Israel. At the same time, many Lebanese interviewees lament that Hezbollah only instrumentalises the cause and does not care much about the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon.

This celebration of resistance proposes an ideological framework that justifies violence in the face of oppression. It also provides an action repertoire by pointing to different stories and events of individuals who have bravely defied oppression, such as the stories about Imam Hussein and Karbala. Sometimes they also include very specific actions of violent resistance and retaliation, as another quote by Daniel illustrates:

> It was an act of retaliation. The army had mutilated two of their friends. They dragged them through the streets, burned them and then dropped them in their neighbourhood. It was a very incisive moment. Those were close friends of my father. So, they decided to take revenge by sieging a bank and taking hostages.
>
> (Daniel, Switzerland)

Souhail, for instance, recalls his parents telling him stories of his great grandparents fighting against colonialist powers in their home country or helping smuggle refugees into Switzerland during WWII. He also recalls stories of his father organising protests. Apart from familial historical accounts, he has also been confronted with collective memories of resistance and a history of political struggle knit into the social and political environment he grew up in

It's also the fact that the region that I grew up in went through a struggle for independence [points to a poster on the wall commemorating the achievement of independence]. Of course, at our level, less bloody. But it's something important that you hear about regularly. […] When my parents arrived there, it was already independent, but I like to discuss with parents and grandparents of my friends who are from here. For this cause, I am more committed than most of my friends. I think that history played an important role [for my activism].

(Souhail, Switzerland)

Interviewees in Quebec, Canada, made similar observations regarding the political history of Quebec and the importance of political struggles for independence. Randa, for example, recalls that when she arrived in Montreal, she found fertile ground for continuing her activism

Resistance is somehow part of the environment here. It is in the collective identity. And it's very complex: They may scream Free Palestine and No Hijab in the same sentence! [Laughs.]

(Randa, Canada)

Ziad, on the other hand, suggests that the history of Quebec's resistance is suppressed by political elites and history books because it provides a powerful action repertoire for grassroots resistance and its ability to enact lasting change. Ziad's quote also illustrates the indignation at historical revisionism discussed earlier

they don't want us to know about this and one example of that is actually their own history. Actually, they don't just do this to our history [history of Arab socialism], they did this to their own history! In 1972 in Québec, people usually talk about the FLQ crisis in 1970. But in 1972 […] so they went on strike and they had a demonstration in the streets of Montreal […] the cops shot a 14 year old girl and she died and the MPs …the liberal MPs in parliament […] were laughing and said if you don't want your kids to be hurt… don't bring them to protest! so the strike exploded…after that it became a general strike… nonunionized workplaces went on strike right and it spread across Québec so they arrested the three later leaders of the main unions in a Democratic country they put them in jail um for striking… you know…like in a Democratic country! […] the strike like doubles basically right…you had places like Trois Rivieres where they actually took over the town they drove their police outside of the town lines and drop them off it was crazy like it was a revolutionary general strike, hundreds of thousands of people were involved! between 200 in 1970 and hundreds of thousands in 1972…like which one is a more important historical event? […] which one is more important in history right, but which one teaches you the slaves more about rising up right? So, to them, it's important to bury these things.

(Ziad, Canada)

In some cases, there are also stories of resistance that interviewees reappropriate for themselves and their own fights and struggles. When they recall them, they seem to enjoy these memories for they provide stories of their parents that make them proud. The heroic description of Zakaria's father is telling in this respect

> My father was with us during the fighting, he had already participated in the fightings in the 80s. He was a Syrian soldier, but at night he would fight against the Syrian regime. Many people knew who my father was. He attacked many checkpoints and saved many people. The massacres were huge at the time. In the end, they tried to kill him.
>
> (Zakaria, Lebanon)

The quest for authenticity, the admiration for courage and resistance, for sacrifice and martyrdom are all part of the narrative of *jusqu'au-boutisme.* Understanding the centrality of the logic of *jusqu'au-boutisme* is indispensable to understanding how individuals radicalise into further commitment to a cause. Because once an individual agrees to the basic premises of the cause, i.e., the injustice that is identified and that needs remedy, then the feeling of *doing something about it* is common to human nature. That, in my analysis, is the real *slippery slope*: Namely that once an individual is drawn into a group and adheres at least to the basic contentions and grievances, the argument of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, of *being real*, becomes a simple and potent driver for further engagement. The logic goes: If you agree that something is wrong, then what explains that you're not doing anything about it other than your desire for comfort and your cowardice? The power of recruiting for various causes lies in the fact that the narrative puts individuals in a position where they are questioned morally, for their lack of standing up for justice. The narrative plays into feelings of guilt, of failing to act as an upright and justice-seeking human would. The narrative of fighting for justice is particularly powerful because there are few credible alternatives of fighting effectively for justice. This is frequently experienced by interviewees themselves. Mansour, for instance, who was brutally attacked by police and military officers during a routine traffic control and let go after being told that they had mistaken him for someone else, realised the impossibility of seeking justice against representatives of the state. The heavily bureaucratic nature of the criminal justice system makes it so difficult to even get justice when one has been wronged, that a feeling arises that there is no legal or supposedly legitimate way to react anyway. He describes this as follows

> They make it so complicated to get through to them, the whole bureaucratic process. It makes it impossible and they tell you it won't lead to anything anyway. All this makes you feel like you want chaos so you could finally get done with them. There are so many things and stories that accumulated through this.
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

More generally, the promise of democracy is that anyone may reach a position of power to change the status quo through democratic and peaceful means. As a result, using violence to enact political change becomes anti-democratic, because there are, according to the narrative, many non-violent ways to change the system. Yet this promise is a lie at least to some extent because the process to enact societal change is tedious, time-consuming, usually expensive and tends to achieve an acceptable, yet not ideal, result. There is frustration and desperation that accompanies the realisation that the system in place inevitably favours the status quo. Tactics that defy the system and the laws in place then become a rationally and logically defensible means, to at least work *authentically* towards a desired outcome. Violence gives the impression that all means are mobilised and that no compromises are made from the outset.

'Being a real man': Combat masculinity

An important aspect that requires discussion at this point is masculinity. Given that ideas associated with masculinity also shape a particular worldview and propose appropriate lines of action and reaction, they are explored here as ideological constructs. Masculinity (or masculinities) refers to a group of historically and culturally available, recognised and legitimate themes which are associated with certain aspects of being a man in a given society, as suggested by Gilmore (1990) and Carlsson (2013). Masculine identities are the result of a continuous repositioning of self and others, whether in relation to other men or women. In fact, Gilmore (1990) argues that *manhood* is defined in relation to other men rather than women. In a life-course analysis of 25 male offenders, Carlsson (2013) finds that both their desistance and persistence processes are contingent upon their performance of masculinity and influenced by gendered social norms about what it means to be a man in Western society. Eichler (2011) similarly argues that any society can be analysed with respect to the *gender order* it proposes. Historically, the prevailing gender order has postulated that men bear arms and fight and that 'women and children are in need of protection' (p.6). A notion of *militarised masculinity,* Eichler argues, centrally underpins the state's coercive power to defend its sovereignty. In her analysis of Russian involvement in the Afghan and Chechnyan Wars, she demonstrates how former soldiers associate the military with the ability to take on responsibility in society, and that stigmatisation of men who refused to fight was common.

Leone and Parrott (2018) argue that the dominant perspective linking masculinity to crime and aggression is *hegemonic masculinity*, an ideology that postulates the defence of values associated with *manhood* in order to ensure men's superiority over 'non-males'. Ferber and Kimmel (2008) argue that engagement in PIV should be understood as a reaction to humiliation and *emasculation*, i.e., as an attempt to restore hegemonic masculinity. In her study of Dutch soldiers, Sion (2007) identified *combat masculinity*, a set of values that postulates that, for example, 'men stand up against injustice' or 'men defend and protect their country, their people' and 'men endure the toughness of combat'. Kimmel refers

to such statements as characterisations of manhood (Kimmel, 2003, p.58). Norms of hyper-masculinity put pressure on young people to prove themselves (Abbas, 2019). Archer (2003) suggests that expressing approval of and admiration for martyrdom should be seen as performing and invoking a particularly potent form of masculinity. Benslama (2016) and Crettiez and Ainine (2017) found that young Frenchmen who joined or sympathised with IS seem to define themselves in opposition to Frenchmen that they accuse of weakness and cowardice. In her study on Scottish youths of Asian origin, Archer (2003) also found support for such negative identification against men who are members of the dominant majority and perceived as weak or cowardly. Choudhury (2007) and Lakhani (2014) suggest that masculine ideologies should be considered alongside religiously tainted justifications of violence.

In a compelling review of case studies on women involved in violence in the Middle East and North Africa region, Adra et al. (2020) found that dominant masculinist gender norms put pressure on women who participate in conflicts to 'masculinise their behaviour in order to be accepted' (p.6). Similarly, men who refuse to engage in combat face stigmatisation for failing to comply with dominant gender norms. The authors argue that 'masculinist domination enables the exercise of violence across a variety of contexts, which, in turn, reproduces and normalises dominant notions of masculinity as associated with violence' (Adra et al., 2020, p.6). The women in their study also argue that the increased militarisation of society, political authoritarianism and militarised masculinities go hand in hand with violent conflict and violence against women. In the Arab context, a study by the NGO Abaad suggests that men are tempted to engage in the neighbouring Syrian conflict because their engagement responds to their dual role of being a protector as well as a provider. Also, when men see themselves as failing to provide financially for their families, they may be tempted to emphasise and invest in their role as protectors through their engagement in fighting (Keedi et al. 2017). Hence, ideas and values associated with masculinity influence the collective imaginaries associated with notions of responsibility, defence and militaristic violence.

The narratives collected here suggest *combat masculinity* as a main underlying ideological construct that combines a set of values in line with the general ideology of responsibilisation. Many of the quotes presented thus far illustrate, often subtly, that interviewees are guided by assumptions about what it means to be a *real man*. The image of an ideal man transpires through the narratives when it comes to justifying why it is important to act against injustice, and why it is important to take responsibility even when that injustice is happening elsewhere. Whether it is because of centuries of socialisation or decades of Hollywood movies: The image of the freedom fighter who struggles for liberation and defends the oppressed is a male-dominated one. The findings suggest that the responsibility to protect and defend the oppressed, which is inherent to the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, is incumbent mainly upon men who continue to correspond to the figure of the warrior and fighter more intuitively than women, in most collective imaginaries across the globe.

The narrative of combat masculinity docks on to the logic of *jusqu'au-boutisme* by suggesting that a real man stands up against evil and injustice, protects and defends his land, his people, especially women and children, is courageous, embraces pain, suffering and discomfort in the quest for justice and is honest and authentic. It is also the object of a gendered twist that is particularly powerful: Since the grievances frequently relate to violence suffered by women and children, such as sexual abuse, exploitation and rape, the narrative of responsibilisation concerns men more specifically, who are asked to fulfil their roles as protectors. Like questioning authenticity and courage and thereby evoking feelings of guilt that can support radicalisation, gendered narratives question the manliness and masculinity of men. Nizar, who joined the Popular Mobilisation Forces in Iraq, responded, very intuitively, that, as a man, when his country was invaded by Daesh, he was obliged to act like any normal man who has *gheera* (غيرة): the term, which can be translated as 'jealousy' in its primary meaning, also refers to the quality of a person, especially a man, who has the courage to stand up against injustice and sacrificing his life to defend his land, his people and his family. It is closely tied to socially negotiated understandings of self-respect and honour, which are particularly prevalent in the Arab World. The social fabric itself then comes to provide the ideologies and narratives that can be associated with combat masculinity and that drive mass mobilisation for combat.

Importantly, the narrative is often perpetuated by both men and women. An interesting example is provided by a quote I noted down during one of the trial observations in Switzerland. The defendant living in Switzerland was accused of inciting his wife in Lebanon to launch a suicide attack on American troops. According to the prosecution, he discussed this, with his brother over the phone, saying

> Yesterday I was talking to her. She was telling me that US troops were trying to open a military base near her city in Lebanon. She said she wanted to do a suicide attack. I told her that I agreed and that I gave my permission. She should blow herself up. She was complaining that men are not doing enough, they are too busy with the here and now, they don't think about death and the afterlife. Very few among those who are protected by God are busy with Jihad.
>
> (Fieldnotes, Switzerland, Federal Criminal Court,
> 9 September 2020)

Ideas associated with combat masculinity are sometimes very clearly expressed by interviewees. See for instance the following quotes, one by Nidhal in Lebanon, and one by Max in Switzerland, which illustrate very clearly how the expectation of being a real man is tied to his courage and willingness to engage in combat

> There is a quote that summarises my point of view…it says: walk a mile to avoid a fight, but when someone starts, don't back down an inch. That's my view also. Being a coward is not noble…our greatest example is Imam

Hussein. He could have run away and left the Khilafa to Ibn Yazid. But instead he showed up with 76 men. Against 30,000. It was a lost battle, he knew it. Ahl-al-bayt, they are very important. I believe in the concept of being a coward and being a real man. Or a real human, it also applies to women.

(Nidhal, Lebanon)

What upset me most was seeing that the people were incapable of defending their own country […] I was a young man and to me, I really had that kind of value of the man that had to go fight, to defend his country and his values. The fact that you abandon your wars and countries is what forces people who are not even from there, not from that country or religion, such as me, to go fight there. So, I had a lot of anger for these people. Even in prison, I continued to feel that way, telling myself that it is because of people like you that I have to go fight. […] For example, I met a guy who had left his wife and his kids behind to flee… I thought this was so cowardly! As a man, you dare flee and leave your family behind?

(Max, Switzerland)

In a way similar to the connection that the more religiously inspired interviewees make between sacrifice and religious narratives, the image of a man that emerges from combat masculinity often fits a religious understanding as well. The following answer is given by Justin after I ask him, towards the end of the interview, *What does it mean to you to be a man?*

First, a real man has to respect God. He has to have faith. Then, he has to be a provider…provide for himself and his family. And defend his dignity and honour…and that of his family…if necessary, with his life. At the same time, he strives to be better every day, to improve himself.

(Justin, Lebanon)

Hakan, in his work with youth who display sympathies for jihadist causes, states that he noticed that many of these young men are guided by a *mis*understanding of what masculinity is, namely feeling that violence is a viable means to impose oneself

These young people are reacting to a stigmatisation, which they are experiencing. They create a new sort of identity out of this. And to the boys especially...they are confronted with an image…an idea of masculinity that is misunderstood. It makes them inclined to accept violence to fight for certain demands.

(Hakan, Switzerland)

Across the narratives, values and attitudes associated with combat masculinity appear to be constructed in opposition to perceived attributes of 'non-masculinity'. These oppositional or negative definitions are very frequent throughout the

narratives and include for example: *caring* vs. *apathy*; taking *responsibility* vs. *idleness*; *authenticity/jusqu'au-boutisme* vs *hypocrisy*; *courage* vs. *cowardice*; embracing *discomfort* vs. reliance on *bourgeois comfort*; *collectivism* vs. *individualism*. It should also be noted that combat masculinity provides a value repertoire that is far from being exclusive to men, as illustrated by the admiration of some interviewees for fellow female fighters

> Imagine the strength you need to have to be a woman and to go to a place where you are encircled by fifteen male fighters to convince them that what they are doing is wrong? That was one of the most impressive things I saw over there.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

Thus, the traits associated with combat masculinity are not necessarily specific to men but should rather be considered as gendered stereotypes available to both men and women that provide guidance on the *right way to act* in the face of perceived injustice. In line with this image of the ideal man, combat masculinity also shows in men's narratives through references to combat sports, military training, weapons, and physical strength. Since they present a slight departure from the core rationality of combat masculinity, which is closely oriented towards the fight against oppression, this aspect will be treated below (see Chapter 12).

'We love jihad': Defending the oppressed as a religious doctrine

> If I could just express Hezbollah in one sentence it's 'fighting for justice through religion'. Nobody in the world sees it this way. This is weird.
>
> (Thulfiqar, Lebanon)

Public and political discourse tends to simplify the notion of jihad as mere hatred of unbelievers. This simplification obscures the complexity not only of the concept itself but, more importantly, what it means to those who adhere to it. Quite problematically, the simplistic understanding facilitates mere vilification of the so-called jihadists and hampers our proper engagement with the motives that drive them. Also, when jihad as a concept is used by representatives of the state and the criminal justice system to confront these individuals, it tends to alienate them because in an almost systematic manner, little consideration is given to the ways they negotiate and understand jihad themselves. At the Swiss Federal Criminal Court, I observed this in various trials. While interrogating the defendant, the judges ask for specific answers regarding his or her understanding of jihad, while struggling to account for the diversity of meanings that may be attributed to the term. The following excerpt is from my observation of a trial and illustrates strikingly how different understandings of jihad are competing with each other. After playing an audio file of a sermon that had been found on the computer of the defendant, the judge asks him a series of questions about the sermon

Judge: In this sermon, the sheikh says that all Muslims have to do jihad. And that unbelievers must be killed. What do you think about this?

Defendant: I don't agree with this
Judge: What do you think about jihad?
Defendant: I believe in jihad. The way I raise my children at home, that is jihad,
    for example.
Judge: [Long pause] That means jihad to you?

(Fieldnotes, Switzerland, Federal Criminal
Court, 25 August 2020)

The findings in this study clearly demonstrate that *jihad*, in its essence, translates
as a desire to defend people who are oppressed and suffering at the hands of
tyrants. Thus, when interviewees claim that they like or love jihad or even when
they are fascinated by certain jihadist groups, they usually mean that they want to
be courageous and brave enough to defend people who are oppressed. The idea
of military jihad refers to logics of individual and collective defence and there-
fore rationalities of *lex talionis* that are familiar to human reasoning and to major
international institutions, as discussed earlier. To take another example before the
Federal Criminal Court, the following excerpt from an FCC judgment illustrates
the connection between jihad, justified defence, courage and bravery well. These
are quotes of the defendant that were included in the judgment verbatim

> The group Jabhat Al-Nusra is righteous because their objectives and activities
> in the battlefield are aimed at liberating the people who are oppressed by the
> regime of Bashar Al-Assad and by ISIS who is killing their brothers in Islam,
> among them the fighters of Jabhat Al-Nusra. [...] A Muslim cannot deny
> the armed jihad, since that would be an act of disbelief, because the Coran
> (which must be followed to the letter, since it is the will of God) explains
> how and when the armed jihad can be waged, for example in the world in
> which Muslims are oppressed [...] according to the doctrine, even the act of
> fighting, the armed jihad, can become an act of adoration [...] Contrary to
> what ISIS is doing, namely waging attacks in Europe and the world, the bat-
> tle zone for armed jihad are countries like Syria and Iraq where Muslims are
> oppressed and where it is necessary to help liberate the population, because
> in Islam it is a right and an obligation to defend oneself and others against
> oppressors, exactly like Jabhat Al-Nusra is doing.
>
> (*Tribunale Penale Federale, Sentenza del
> 18 agosto 2017,* SK.2017.39)

Among the interviewees, the notion of jihad was most prominent in the narratives
of sympathisers of Salafi-jihadism, Hezbollah or Islamist ideologies more gener-
ally. Although embedded in a religious lexicon, the political nature of arguments
associated with jihad is undeniable. Armed jihad proposes a religious vocabulary
for a political doctrine of interventionism and collective defence. More impor-
tantly, jihad as an ideology, or religion more generally, draws on the concepts
of the *revolutionary void*, *jusqu'au boutisme* and *combat masculinity* to empha-
sise the necessity for any honest man or human being to do something about the

violence suffered by innocent civilians. Although narratively presented as a universal obligation, the proponents of jihad maintain a rather selective focus on the members they associate with their collective, whether Muslims more generally, or Sunni and Shia Muslims, respectively. The following excerpt illustrates the way jihad rests on a combined understanding of politics and religion and collective memory

> The whole story, to be honest, is about Israel as the enemy. Because we are targeted, by Israel and US, they are on one side. So, it's up to us to defend ourselves. How? By preparing yourself religiously, understanding the rationale for your fight, get ready militarily. In order to defend your land, you have to make religion enter the debate. They start with the first part which is 'somebody is entering your land' and then it's 'Imam Hussein taught us how to defend yourself, your land, your family'. It's not my duty, but if you want to join the resistance… you do. It's not a duty, Jihad. It was to defend that I entered the Hezb…that was the rationale. So, the thing they fill our brains with most is that it's all about defending your religion.
>
> (Thulfiqar, Lebanon)

Samir, another Hezbollah sympathiser, provides another example of the connection between collective memory, military defence and jihad

> Even recently, I had this strong feeling that I should be there with them. They are fighting for the cause and I am here. And I have a Masters and I could go on to do a Doctorate, but Subhan Allah, that's how things are...we have this feeling. This feeling…. maybe that's something for us…when we think about Imam Hussein, maybe that's what nurtures this love for jihad, love to defend our land, we had this maybe always, and Hezbollah came and increased this.
>
> (Samir, Lebanon)

The notion of *jihad* is central to the way interviewees from Tripoli justify their engaging in fighting. The obligation of jihad as humanitarian interventionism is usually evoked in relation to fighting abroad. Walid's quote illustrates the complexity of the interplay between moral shocks, political grievances, religion and the criminalisation of jihad

> If you switch on the TV…and I mean, we know many people across the border. There are people who came here, who were massacred by the regime. And I swear had I had the chance; I would have gone. The people here wanted to do jihad, to defend Muslims, to defend the Sunna, and those who went, it was for that. […] All the types were around, but many had a jihadi thinking. And that's what people retained about our neighbourhood. But jihad is part of our religion. But jihad is also against the right people. Not going and blowing up people who have nothing to do with it. Our goal was clear, that

we are against the regime. We weren't against the Christians or anything. But specifically, against the regime.

(Walid, Lebanon)

The idea of jihad has a component of critical self-improvement, working on oneself to become a better person, which is considered the Greater Jihad, while the armed component, defending the oppressed, is considered the Smaller Jihad. The following quote captures this idea. Bader also refers to the concept of *Shari'a*, which is similarly simplified in public discourse as signifying laws that proscribe corporal punishment and executions by lapidation. In fact, the dominant meaning that is attributed to Shari'a in the narratives is very similar to jihad, namely an ideal that suggests how to act in the face of suffering

> The regime started killing people. Here, we started thinking that we had to fight for the oppressed. Now, in our understanding of Shari'a, you have to defend your Muslim brother, whatever their nationality. […] Yes, I like jihad. Yes, I like to defend my Muslim brothers. And I love to give the poor if I had. Islam is not only jihad. Mohammed PBUH was not only fighting; he was helping the poor and the needy. We have to help each other. Jihad is not just fighting anywhere. Its only if someone attacks you. Even if it's a Jew, you can't just attack them. It's not just anything, there are rules. And before I go fight jihad, I have to work on myself.
>
> (Bader, Lebanon)

Also, if several interviewees regret having engaged in fighting, their regret does not concern the fact of having engaged in the defence of suffering people. At no point, did interviewees question their adherence to the concept of jihad. At the end of our interview, I asked Nassim whether there was anything he regretted, and he answered

> I don't know…[takes a long break] I feel there are mistakes that I made that I would not repeat. But I don't regret a second that I defended someone. You have to defend them in the name of God, any Muslim who is suffering.
>
> (Nassim, Lebanon)

The narratives of these interviewees invite us to rethink jihad as essentially a doctrine of legitimate defence of self and others. The criminalisation of jihad or sympathies with jihad then becomes a counterproductive endeavour, because it conveys the impression that the very ordinary and universally accepted notion of self-defence or collective defence is only legitimate when employed by non-Muslim actors, first and foremost Western states who have regularly resorted to the doctrine over the past decades. Also, the way jihad is treated in counterterrorism efforts by the criminal justice system makes it clear that a certain meaning of jihad is imposed on individuals associated with terrorism, whereas their own understandings of jihad are delegitimised. The Black and Brown Other,

which is usually the one facing accusations of terrorism in the Western context, thereby sees his own voice silenced and has to endure and accept the understanding that is imposed by the legal representatives of a White European majority. Unequivocally, this form of epistemic violence is a vestige of imperialist hubris.

Recap: Naming, owning and addressing the injustice: Breathing life into grievances

This part aimed at providing an analysis of the different ways in which grievances are *performed*: How do grievances arise? What facilitates their emergence? Who plays a role in the identification of grievances? How do individuals come to appropriate grievances and make them relevant to their own lives? Why do they see themselves as responsible to take action in order to provide a remedy to these grievances? What are the ideological and narrative constructs that underlie their engagement? Analysis of the narratives provided different answers to these processes and several themes emerged in relation to the social constructions which are performed upon grievances and into which, alternatively, grievances are incorporated. The analysis has crystallised three overarching categories, namely *identification*, *appropriation* and *responsibilisation*.

First, there is a, usually initial, phase of identification: While there is a plethora of suffering in the world, specific situations and events become particularly relevant to individuals, in a given context at a particular time in their lives. The findings point to the importance of moral shocks, collective memories, memory and grievance entrepreneurs and their use of emotional weaponisation in driving identification processes through an emphasis on certain contexts and events. Identifying injustices is also related to a particular sensitivity that seems to be vocalised through interviewees' narratives. This sensitivity seems to be significantly driven by a general defiance of and resistance to what is perceived as apathy. Finally, identifying injustices also provokes strong emotional reactions which contribute to individuals' continuing engagement with the cause and to their political and militant trajectories. The analysis of these emotions has shown that the confrontation with injustice tends to provoke a moment of epiphany, which is usually connected to a sense of betrayal. This epiphany is an important component of the rupture that these individuals operate between themselves and the mainstream or hegemonic narrative, in order to construct their new identities as radicals. The relationship between emotionality and rationality in the narratives about engagement is, however, complex. Emotionality, though an inherent aspect of narratives about suffering and pain, tends to be relegated to a secondary level. It seems like politico-ideological engagement can be narrated more coherently, when the motives can be put in the context of objective information and factual evidence.

Second, grievances develop because a particular context of suffering and injustice becomes relevant to the individual on a personal level. One aspect that supports this process of appropriation is the collective identity that individuals associate themselves with. Importantly, interviewees negotiate collective identity in different ways: Although collective identity is often connected to one's

perceived ethnic, religious or cultural identity, the narratives reveal interviewees' efforts to emphasise that they are concerned about injustices anywhere, when they affect innocent people. In terms of identity formation, it is interesting to note that politico-ideological mobilisation tends to be accompanied by an identification with the role of the underdog: An individual or collective struggling against a powerful oppressor, rebelling and resisting hegemonic narratives and dominant structures. In the process of appropriation, feelings of guilt and solidarity play an important role. Both contribute to the consolidation of the link between the individual and the collective.

Third and finally, grievances are also subject to narratives and processes of *responsibilisation* of self and others. From an ideological point of view, grievances normally provoke individuals who generally refuse to give in to apathy to do something about the injustice. Therefore, the notion of the revolutionary void is crucial: Situations of injustice against which no credible action is taken are likely to mobilise non-state actors who resort to violent means in order to defend those seen as suffering. Responsibilisation is further based on a logic of *jusqu'au-boutisme,* i.e., of seeking authenticity, courage and honesty when it comes to one's engagement with the cause. Where grievances are shared by many people in a certain context, there is a general understanding that something is profoundly wrong with the current state of affairs and that, ideally, something needs to be done to right the wrong. It then becomes a question of authenticity, and of going *all in,* that distinguishes those who limit themselves to denouncing the injustice and those who mobilise to do something about it. The logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme* is the core element of the narratives about politico-ideological mobilisation. It is the main ideological construct that makes sense of grievances and contains a strong impetus towards action, whatever that action may be. It is also the narrative that justifies martyrdom and explains the fascination that many interviewees have for martyrs. *Jusqu'au-boutisme* represents an ideal that any human being should aspire to. However, given that the ideal is frequently associated with armed resistance against oppression, the ideal is strongly masculinised. In that regard, the concept of combat masculinity is a useful lens to engage in an understanding of masculinity and the role it plays in mobilising men for combat. The narrative and idea of combat masculinity proposes certain values and attributes that are associated with what it means to be a *real man.* These values are in fact closely tied to the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme.* The same thing has been found in relation to the concept of *jihad*: As a narrative, a rationale and an idea, it is essentially the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme* embedded in a religiously tainted lexicon. When it comes to religious concepts as informing ideological constructs, the idea of jihad is first and foremost formulated around the idea of stepping up to the plate and taking responsibility for the protection and defence of those considered as weak and oppressed. More generally, when Islam is brought up as a religious or cultural reference or ideology, it is always done in a way that suggests that an Islamic way of governing society stands would provide a remedy to the life that individuals are living at the moment, which is perceived as miserable. In other words,

Islam is seen as a way to improve the socio-economic and political conditions for everyone, and to get people out of the miserable state of oppression and injustice that they are lamenting. This is how strong adherence to Islam should be understood, especially in a context where socio-economic and political grievances are widespread.

Note

1 Quote by a British man named Aidan James who went to fight against IS in Syria and Iraq and was found guilty of terrorism offences (*The Guardian*, 2019).

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PART IV

Mobilisation, violence and disengagement

12 The taste of radicality

Thrill-seeking and adventurism

> It was a sort of freedom. Freedom of doing whatever you want – is there anything more beautiful than that?
>
> (Adnan, Lebanon)

Several authors have suggested that engaging in PIV, whether locally or by travelling to a conflict zone, is accompanied by an excitement for adventure and a sense of bravado (Crettiez, 2016; Githens-Mazer, 2014; Sageman, 2011). These ideas correspond to theories of thrill-seeking in criminology and sociology, where offending is seen as performing a break from the mundaneness of everyday life by creating 'magical environments' (Katz, 1988, p.54) and where excitement is derived from the ability to defy conventional norms. Ferrell (1999) described this as 'intense and often ritualised moments of pleasure and excitement [that] define the experience of sub-cultural membership and, by members' own accounts, seduce them into continued subcultural participation' (p.404). Katz (1988) similarly argued that people who engage in deviant activities are not necessarily involved for a particular end product, but also for the excitement of escaping from normal, mundane lives, a phenomenon that has also been described as 'escapism' (Crettiez, 2016). Others point out that, while mainly ideal-driven, young individuals who develop an interest in groups that engage in PIV are also motivated by glory and thrill (Sageman, 2011; Sieckelinck et al., 2015).

Expressions of joy and enthrallment, thrill-seeking, juvenile exaltation, feelings of satisfaction, bravery and adventurism are common themes throughout the narratives. Engaging with them through the prism of grievances is difficult because they are generally downplayed and tend to be disconnected from the actual grievances that are at the basis of engagement. This makes them hard to identify and explore during the interviews: It almost seems like they are too egocentric, too individualistic and too narcissistic, in a way, to fit the narrative of an altruistic engagement for collective justice. It is important to briefly present them nevertheless since they seem to have transversal relevance for politico-ideological mobilisation within various spectra. These feelings are usually gratifying and can contribute to maintaining engagement.

A very common theme in the narratives is the interviewees' fascination for combat, the military, rebels and militias, martial arts and heroic fighters. Max, for instance, explains

> I've always been fascinated by combat. I have always loved this, martial arts, the historic films on wars.
>
> (Max, Switzerland)

This fascination is very compatible with the rational foundation of combat masculinity. However, the emphasis on personal enjoyment presents a subtle yet important departure from the virtue-based narrative of taking responsibility to defend the collective.

For some interviewees, an admiration for militias was around since their childhood. In many ways, militias were the epitome of brave resistance against powerful invaders and oppressors, and the image of the victorious underdog seems to be particularly attractive to some. Bader, for instance, tried to join Palestinian factions in his teens already

> I just knew I didn't want to become an engineer, I wanted to become a military officer [laughs]…I went to a camp. After Hariri was killed, and then July War, etc. I went to the camp…Al-Badawi…the Palestinians who were there would call me that the militias were exposing, doing a military exhibition, so I would go up there…I liked the militias! I went to join them. All the Palestinian factions. But because I am Lebanese, after what happened in the camps, only Palestinians were allowed to join.
>
> (Bader, Lebanon)

Apart from this general fascination for combat, experiences of success produce feelings of pride and self-esteem. Several interviewees describe feelings of excitement during protests or political campaigns, some of which they co-organised, others in which they merely participated. For Ziad, the experience of organising mass protests, and witnessing the power of the masses, was in itself greatly inspiring to him, regardless of the outcome. It opened him up to the possibilities of mobilisation, while cementing his belief that a more sophisticated political organisation was required to enact lasting change

> There was a lot of excitement…there were demos every Saturday…and I remember it hitting like 150,000 at one point…so there was a lot, of lot of excitement. you know, people really felt that they might be able to prevent it or something like…I didn't think we'd be able to prevent it, you know… I mean like I was I was raging…but I was like they're not going to listen, right…like it would take a lot more than just demonstrations to make them listen…but I still took it as very inspiring that that many people were coming out…it showed that there was rage against this war… it showed that nobody believed the lies that that were behind it right… so it was a big deal

for me…the possibility that mass action can happen right…and you know it made me want to like work even harder to like well…we need to organize right it's one thing for this kind of like spontaneous outpourings of mass anger to come out…but if they're not channeled…then they can't, they can't break the ruling class and force a change.

(Ziad, Canada)

Ziad's quote reveals his critical posture regarding the fact that many people may be in for the excitement and the adventure of mobilisation in the streets, without sufficient consideration for the necessity of strategic thinking and organisation. In fact, the narratives reveal that protests and clashes with the police are exciting, especially to the more seasoned activists who have gotten beyond the first moral shocks of experiencing state violence first-hand. Interviewees were usually among the ones clashing with security forces and their accounts clearly demonstrate their enjoyment of the action and the violence

We organised the protests, things were busting and moving, it was cool! We were young and we were able to move things, we were happy. When it was a big mess and everything, I liked that.

(Richard, Switzerland)

Describing a situation where he and a group of friends faced an intervention by the police, Daniel describes the excitement he felt during the clashes

The cops entered through the windows and we started fighting with them. It was funny. They tried to come through the windows, so they came one by one and we were ten on the other side. A big fight, it was quite funny! And then they chased us through the streets during the whole night!

(Daniel, Switzerland)

Daniel also described another situation where he joined a protest abroad in joyful anticipation of the clashes that were going to happen

We were a group of five. We organised a trip to join this protest. Like 'going to combat'. To go fight, in fact. And it was really cool!

(Daniel, Switzerland)

Richard's description of his journey into the conflict zone in Syria reveals a similar form of excitement

It was tough. We were in commando mode, on the river, knowing that the [soldiers] were ready to shoot at us anytime. Walking through the mud, for eight hours […] then we passed the border in commando mode, it was quite funny.

(Richard, Switzerland)

While it may seem counterintuitive, such descriptions of tough conditions are all narrated with joy and excitement. In fact, attraction for the roughness of combat or similar situations appears to be mixed with bravado and adventurism, and often a sense of pride. I found this somewhat juvenile exaltation about combat to resonate strikingly with a French ethnographer's soberingly honest self-appraisal of conducting field research on Syrian fighters engaged in the civil war

> This terrain provides this inebriation of an uncertain adventure, of joining these men who give their lives for a cause they consider just. In a way, there is this excitement of peril and the unusual. War produces a whole series of experiences, many of which do not fail to excite. The most decisive one is, without a doubt, that of being with these men whose actions will determine the future. To that, add the morbid curiosity of experiencing bombings, its manifestations and effects. Finally, there is probably also this pride of being courageous and accepting to experience these critical situations at the risk of one's own life.
>
> (Huët, 2015, p.46)

Elements of thrill-seeking were present in the narratives, often in ways reminiscent of combat masculinity. The thrill is related to the very action during combat operations, carrying weapons or escaping from enemy fire. This excitement was also sometimes put in relation to a feeling of freedom and autonomy, which would probably not have been around in peacetime

> During the fighting, nobody was commanding me. Whatever was forbidden, it was allowed for me. It was a sort of freedom. Freedom of doing whatever you want – is there anything more beautiful than that?
>
> (Adnan, Lebanon)

At other times, it was combined with expressions of sacrifice, even of relationships with family members. This may be seen as what I suggested earlier as being a dedication to the idea of *jusqu'au-boutisme*

> It was a lot of enthusiasm, excitement. We could do whatever we wanted. We had lot of energy we wanted to get out. I mean, I was young…yes. In the end, my father didn't have any control over me anymore. He told me either this house or Osama Mansour [the gang leader]. I told him Osama Mansour. I had so much energy, I wanted to get rid of it.
>
> (Zakaria, Lebanon)

In the following quote, the excitement joins an expression of appreciation for the clarity provided by being involved in the fighting

> When I was over there, I didn't feel like coming back. Because it's epic! Because you don't have the same problems. I never asked myself questions

about money, accommodation or even the purpose of my life. Really. Like the purpose of my existence. It was clear. There was this clarity: you go sleep there, eat there, and you are here for this.

(Daniel, Switzerland)

Their self-perception as virtuous, brave and fearless fighters was also expressed by several interviewees, including their ability to manipulate weapons and their sophistication in battle and tactics, as well as their lethality in combat. This is expressed by both Adnan and Amir

And then things developed. I could throw 10–15 grenades without even looking. I learned this over months, from one fight to the next. Each time, I learned something new. It started with the jift (a rifle), then we got grenades, rifles, PKC, etc.

(Adnan, Lebanon)

But I was one of the main fighters, and I was one of the most dangerous, I would be very hurtful. I would hurt them a lot. Because they would hurt us also. Our families, the people from our neighbourhood. They had no mercy with us, so we had no mercy with them.

(Amir, Lebanon)

Justin also expresses a certain form of bravado, when he explains, with a smile, that he has experience handling weapons

I've been shooting for a long time. with pistols. I know how to use them. That's something that's widespread here. You know here in the country, there are a lot of weapons. And of course, the fear is greater at the moment. I won't deny that.

(Justin, Lebanon)

In a similarly gratifying manner, some interviewees express pride regarding the sense of fear that their warrior-like appearances instil in people

When we the guys, the Islamists, who have some extreme thinking, came here for the first time, the people were shocked, they were afraid. We didn't do anything, but they were afraid. Even a guy from the Jabal said they were afraid.

(Bader, Lebanon)

Evocative of the same idea, Salim expresses his regret that nowadays, people do not fear the Palestinian resistance fighters anymore

In 1987, when you were in Tel Aviv, as a Palestinian…the moment you had your hands in your pockets, the entire street would be empty within

seconds…Nowadays, nobody cares. Nobody fears Palestinians anymore. That's the result of the Oslo accords.

(Salim, Canada)

Some interviewees also described a sense of bravado expressed by those who went to Syria to join the fighting. When they would mention it, their narration would be accompanied by a disapproving undertone, as if one was not supposed to go fight in Syria to be able to boast, but because of a sincere conviction of the need to fight

> In the end, I thought it was important to fight here first. Why should I leave my neighbourhood? And I was asking the guys here all the time: Why are we going to Syria? I told them the goal shouldn't be financial, or so you can boast with having been to Syria.

(Walid, Lebanon)

Overall, there is undeniably a particular taste for radicality, especially around physical mobilisation and engagement in combat. This *taste of radicality* – the thrill-seeking, the adventurism, the excitement – is a transversal theme across the narratives and must therefore be considered *per se*. However, it constantly competes with the rational arguments put forward for engagement, of which most revolve around responding to grievances. A grievance-based approach will struggle to shed light on the variety and complexity of the feelings involved in the taste of radicality and might benefit from other concepts associated with thrill-seeking and adventurism. However, it is important to avoid a voyeuristic lens that focuses exclusively on the taste of radicality. All the narratives clearly demonstrate a complex relationship between excitement and a sense of responsibility and genuine grievances. Expressions of thrill-seeking and adventurism are only a minor part of an extensive interview during which interviewees present mainly arguments based on political and ideological convictions for engagement. However, it is natural that there are also individuals who are driven mainly by these feelings and less by ideological convictions. There is an important risk of romanticising violence and hiding activism and mobilisation, especially physical, under the guise of political narratives. This risk is particularly pronounced when it comes to mobilisation in the streets or travelling to combat zones. Interestingly, with respect to the fact of travelling to a conflict zone in the Arab World, in the narratives of several interviewees from Canada and Switzerland, an orientalist worldview can be identified, where the Arab World and the Middle East are thought of as exciting and exotic. Whether this is due to perceptions of the role of the community in the Arab World, the role of religion or the social and political upheavals, the narratives sometimes display a naïve romanticisation of the Orient. Hence, although the study of thrill-seeking is difficult and somewhat contradictory to a grievance-based approach, a holistic understanding of PIM and PIV will need to engage with the variety of motives that are driving and maintaining engagement.

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13 The logics of violence

'Bring back the chaos'

A recurring theme that emerged as an unintended and unexpected finding from the study concerns the various ways in which violence itself is justified and rationalised by interviewees. There are many examples of very graphic violence in the narratives. The fact that interviewees condone, support or even commit such violence begs the question of how generally sane and rational individuals can come to justify such acts. This aspect can be considered as a result of a purely inductive analytical process, for no preconceived concepts and theories surrounding the justification of violence were imposed on the data in this regard.

The graphic nature of violence includes attacks on people that cause severe injury and death, sometimes multiple deaths at once. Salim, for instance, describes his complicity in a suicide bombing on Israeli soldiers with enthusiasm

> I was arrested several times…but that time it was because I had collaborated in an attack. The attack took place afterwards…Believe me, it was amazing. It was an amazing operation. The group Islamic Jihad executed it and it killed…maybe 15 soldiers. They used the double suicide attack tactics…you know where the first one goes in and blows himself up…then when everyone has gathered around that place, the second goes and blows himself up… Back then, these operations were successful because there was unity between the people…we were professionals. Now they are all sell-outs. They start working with the Israeli intelligence service. The son of your country easily becomes a traitor these days.
>
> (Salim, Canada)

Mansour states that, following the attacks on the two mosques in Tripoli, he wished there would be more violence against Jabal Mohsen

> At that time…I was hoping that more people would go and blow themselves up, up there. But there was no one I could trust…And sometimes, I still feel like that. Like I want to get my rifle, go down to the street and kill two soldiers. Do you see what I mean? Or go up to the Jabal and shoot at a café. But at the same time, I feel like I can't do that because these people might not have anything to do with it. So, in a way, I feel like I want chaos,

so I can kill them. So, I can kill again, to get off my heart what is so stuck in it.

<div align="right">(Mansour, Lebanon)</div>

Violence as a necessary evil

Although the descriptions of these acts of large-scale violence are sometimes accompanied by emotions that seem out of place or even pathological, such as enthusiasm, generally speaking, violence is described as a necessary evil. Interviewees insist that they would not be fighting if the circumstances were different, if it weren't to prevent suffering and protect the innocent, or if they weren't directly threatened

> I try to avoid the anger and the rage as much as possible. Because I have a family…the conditions are difficult. Nobody likes the war, believe me. We were forced to fight.
>
> <div align="right">(Walid, Lebanon)</div>

Violence as a necessary evil is a common theme. However, it must be analysed in the light of the persistent tendency to downplay enjoyment, thrill-seeking and adventurism for the sake of emphasising the rational need for and the ultimate inevitability of violence. The narratives on violence as a necessary evil also include self-critical appraisal of the use of violence

> That's the term: Necessity. I don't like combat; I won't look for violence. I have never liked that. But I want to be ready. And to be able to use it if necessary. There is a very pragmatic side to this. To me, finding myself in combat and not being ready, that's too late. We live in a society where there is violence. […] But you have to be self-critical. It's all very exciting, being in these situations. They're incredible sometimes. But it shouldn't be violence just for the sake of it. […] If you are just guided by your own desires, it merely becomes another manifestation of self-centredness.
>
> <div align="right">(Richard, Switzerland)</div>

Strategic violence

Here, Richard also alludes to the dangers of falling into a narcissistic and self-centred use of violence and action, an aspect discussed above. A common theme among the interviewees who resort primarily to non-violent action is the need to be strategic when it comes to violence. Although not refusing violent tactics *per se*, they should be avoided when they don't serve the struggle in the long run and only satisfy a personal desire for action. Ziad explains this as follows:

> the perspective of the Marxist was like…look: Individual terrorism in this context only really helps the state and oftentimes it is actually an agent

provocateur backed by the states encouraging you to do it…but first off what is violence? like I don't consider that violence it's like you know it's property destruction and the state really likes to equivocate that with when for example they took out the eyes of multiple kids in Montreal in 2012…that's real violence! these kids lost their eyesight…that's real violence…there's no comparison between that and a couple, of couple of misguided kids breaking things or burning a car because a cop undercover told them to…and made it sound cool you know. I will never put those on the same equivalence but at the same time we shouldn't be doing things the cops want us to do.

(Ziad, Canada)

Also, in light of careful and strategic handling of violent tactics, interviewees who are at some distance from contexts affected by conflict tend to argue for controlling one's anger and rage, and using it more constructively than simply through individualistic violence

I still feel that rage, but I use it in a more positive way.

(Souhail, Switzerland)

In Daniel's case, being strategic about violent action has meant that he had to change his engagement and support for the cause. It is sometimes more important to build the structures to support revolutionary change in the long run, than to engage in the fighting oneself

I see the logics of agitating, of making noise. But I also see the importance of building something for the aftermath. That doesn't mean I am abandoning violence. I am financing the efforts over there, and part of that is violence, of course. If it's necessary that I do it myself, I will do it with pleasure. I get up every day asking myself whether to go back or not. The only reason I'm not going is that they told me I have another role to play. They've told me a thousand times. We don't want you to die over there, we have enough young men. No, we need the structures, the synergies, the solidarity, that can be useful in the future. That's a real need, and even if I don't like it, even if it's less glorious…if I want to be effective, that's what I have to do. That's my engagement today. In a way, I have abandoned the violence myself to support it more effectively. I am not denying the violence, on the opposite: I want to intensify it. But to intensify it, I need to detach myself from it, in a way.

(Daniel, Switzerland)

The quote of Daniel above illustrates very clearly how the non-violent personal engagement is competing with the violent engagement, which he associates with *glory*, that is more appealing on an emotional level. There is a constant tension between rationality and emotionality when the use of violence is discussed by individuals who are engaged in revolutionary causes but choose to do so from a position of relative privilege. Proper analysis of Daniel's narrative reveals that he

is trying to convince himself that giving up immediate participation in combat is the rational thing to do, although, emotionally, he is longing for the battlefield. It is telling that, as I found out later, a few months after our interview, Daniel travelled back to Syria.

Violence as self-defence

While violence is presented as a necessary evil, the main rationale for actually using violence is systematically structured around notions of *self-defence* and retaliatory action. Violence is then seen as a form of *doing* justice, when nobody else would step in to do justice, when there is a *revolutionary void*. Because of a previous attack, a present attack or a likely imminent attack, violence is justified as a means of self-preservation. This is the main rationale that is closely tied to the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, the revolutionary void, combat masculinity and jihad. Grievance-based politico-ideological action is in itself, by essence, framed and understood in retaliatory terms. Defence, however, as has been touched upon earlier, is an elastic notion. While violence is certainly a social fact and a phenomenon that affects human beings in the most direct ways, the perception of what is an attack that merits a counterattack is the product of a highly subjective appraisal. Who exactly is the attacker and therefore a reasonable target for a counterattack? Until when is a counterattack justified? Who and what determines whether an attack is imminent? The elastic notion of defence and retaliation, especially regarding the time and the potential targets, can be subject to abuse and manipulation. However, this applies equally to state and non-state actors. It is not reasonable to expect precision and restraint when it comes to non-state actors' construction of what a self-defensive attack is, if it is acceptable that states engage in the very same action, with substantial vagueness as to timing and targets (see Chapter 10).

Violence as revenge

There is, as the findings demonstrate, a very thin line between self-defence and revenge. Sometimes, the same act can be framed as self-defence or as *revenge*. Crucially, however, the two notions can be placed once again within the tension field between rationality and emotionality: While self-defence is a rational and widely accepted concept, revenge is understood as highly emotional and the outcome of blind anger and uncontrolled rage. Both are understood as defensive and as righteous violence, but revenge is less easily justified as a reason for violent action.

For instance, Halim, whose mother was shot and injured in front of his eyes, explains his desire for revenge

> there was Abu Omar for example, he was teaching us. I told him I wanted to become a sniper. I really wanted that, I downloaded games on my phone to train as a sniper. He asked me why. I said I wanted to do to them what they

did to my mother, I was hoping one day. I was ready to kill. When I started shooting, my only thought was that I wanted to take revenge.

(Halim, Lebanon)

Revenge is sometimes used to deal with sadness in a more action-oriented manner. By providing a sense of agency as well as bravado, taking vengeful action can convey a feeling of being able to do something about the pain, as Adnan and Yahya explain

> Another boy was hit while he was sitting on a chair. In our neighbourhood. The whole street was crying. I came down and I motivated everyone…to fight. I said we can't keep crying. Instead of crying let's go get our revenge. And we went and God gave us success with five…dead. From the group that shot them. We knew them.
>
> (Adnan, Lebanon)

> This was my friend…my closest friend…we were together all the time! We spent all our time together. I missed him a lot when we died. So, when he died, I had to go and fight. To take revenge…Yes, when I would kill someone, I could be at peace.
>
> (Yahya, Lebanon)

Revenge can also refer to actions that lie far in the past. The same mechanism that enables vicarious victimisation, i.e., feeling impacted by the suffering endured by others, is at play when it comes to taking revenge on behalf of others. In Tripoli, for instance, interviewees feel like they can take revenge for what their parents and their relatives had endured during the civil war. Asked whether he ever felt remorse, Zakaria answers

> No [very quick answer]. No, never. I was convinced of what I was doing. I mean, our elders told us what they had done to the people here in BT, how they had tortured and killed the kids, and how they raped the women. And of course, we wouldn't allow this to happen again. And don't think that now… because the fighting is over, everything is forgotten. It was over once, and it came back. And we will be down in the streets again. It is in our blood now.
>
> (Zakaria, Lebanon)

Similarly, Justin feels like he is still fighting to avenge the suffering that Maronite Christians had endured during the Lebanese Civil War and even before, during centuries of living as a minority in the region, or Daniel's involvement in armed internationalist solidarity is a form of continued retaliation against the suffering endured by Chileans under dictatorship. Their identification with a collective identity and collective memory, and the fact that their narratives display a connection between past suffering and present engagement, provide the rational foundations for revenge on behalf of others who suffered in the past.

Violence as emotional liberation

The emotional driver behind violence as a form of revenge for injustice suffered can also be found in another framing of violence, namely *violence as emotional liberation*. In this form, violence resembles a Fanonian understanding of violence, where violence itself becomes a cathartic, purifying and liberating process for the colonised and oppressed, as it is a means to restore dignity and self-determination (Fanon, 2002). Especially in Tripoli, but also in other places, where interviewees are not directly impacted by armed violence, violence is sometimes explained as an emotional outburst, the only way to break out of the oppression they are facing personally or the grievances they are experiencing in relation to people suffering elsewhere. This dimension is not as much justified rationally as it is presented as a natural human reaction to the suffocating condition of oppression. It is also described as the culmination of a gradual process, as Nassim explains

> And if we go back: It was all because of the injustice. Had there not been injustice, there would have been no need for a revolution. But with the injustice, you start blowing me up until I explode and want to take revenge. In the end, you either destroy your house or hurt your wife or someone else.
>
> (Nassim, Lebanon)

As this quote indicates quite clearly, the emotional liberation, when impossible to direct against those perceived as the cause of the suffering, may end up hurting those people that are closest and dearest. Some interviewees explain how the fighting could become an outlet for grievances related to the Syrian conflict

> The Syrian story had a huge impact on Lebanon, especially BT. When someone was angry, he would go down and shoot.
>
> (Bader, Lebanon)

The link between the Syrian and the local suffering and the way it increases the emotional pressure on individuals to the point of wanting to hurt others or themselves is well captured by the following quote

> My heart inside is so swollen from the pain inflicted by Bashar al Assad and Rifaat Eid. Until now, now as I am talking to you, I have pain in my chest [points to his chest with his fist], I swear. There is something squeezing my heart. I don't know what it is. I feel like I have to smash my head into something. I feel like I have to get my anger out.
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

When individuals feel stuck in a situation of oppression that they cannot escape using legal means, violence becomes liberating because one feels like not having to simply endure the violence and humiliation, as Kevin explains well. His quote also reveals the rebelliousness elaborated on earlier (see Chapter 10)

It's true…when I hit a police officer, I feel a sense of liberation…because you feel that constant mental charge, that weight…you feel like you can empty it somewhere…and also, you're not obliged to simply endure this violence, you can do something about it…you don't simply have to accept your victimisation, you don't allow them to play you as they like. This feeling is powerful. It's as if somebody wanted to rob your wallet and instead of saying 'yes take it', you say 'no, I'm not giving it to you'. That feeling. Only that here it's the state, so you have to justify yourself.

(Kevin, Canada)

This feeling of emotional liberation as a means for personal catharsis in the way explained by Kevin is frequently expressed in relation to state violence. In the context of Tripoli, the environment is so heavily securitised that many interviewees say they would prefer it if chaos broke out again. Because in peacetime, security forces could act with impunity and one could not attack them. During wartime, however, people could regain a sense of agency, safety and freedom because they are able to react to injustice instead of having to keep their mouths shut and swallow their indignation. The following excerpts illustrate this well

Sometimes, I wish there would be fighting, there would be chaos. Because at least I was eating. I didn't get a salary. But we weren't afraid as much as we are now. During the chaos, we would feel more secure than now. We would at least know we protect each other. I swear. There was even more work!

(Bader, Lebanon)

I swear, if I have to die, so be it, but I have to stand up against this. I can't let myself be humiliated anymore. […] Because, in the end, the fighting might even be better. So, let the fighting come back. People can't do anything here. They can't work, they live in poverty, they can't get treatment. They humiliate you. At least, when there is fighting, there is some autonomy and freedom.

(Walid, Lebanon)

Violence as teaching a lesson

A theme that I encountered less frequently, at least in the explicit manner demonstrated below, is the idea of *violence as teaching a lesson*. Underlying that theme is the perception that violence is effective. Compared to the other forms of rationalising violence, which are all defensive, this one is more explicitly offensive. It may well be that this dimension is more frequently present in interviewees' minds but not mentioned because it may have less narrative appeal since it is less connected to grievances. Punitive rationalisations of violence are, however, likely to be present, especially during the phases of fighting. Fahad describes this as follows

During my incarceration, my religious beliefs changed. I read a book, the one which impacted me most, which is the 'politics of the prophet Mohammed PBUH' it shows how acute Mohammed was politically – for 13 years, he wouldn't raise the sword in Mecca, only after 13 years he would start using force. It's like with a child, you have to explain for a long time without violence, but at some point, force is necessary.

(Fahad, Lebanon)

In a similar manner, but in a different context, Kevin also explains that his use of violence makes sense to him because he sees it as effective

It's true, I often use violence, because it carries results. That's my experience. For example, with toxic people, infiltrators…if you beat them up, they run away. Once, we attacked a police station and I realised that we were really able to scare them. They realised we had the means to intimidate them. I could see the fear in the eyes of the police officer. I saw a police officer get beaten up, a door bashed, the fire run through the station, windows shattered, police officers cry…in that moment you realise that violence can be effective.

(Kevin, Canada)

A moral codex

In sum, physical armed violence is usually presented as a necessary evil, and as an inevitable human reaction to great injustices. It is primarily framed in defensive terms. The notion of self-defence is sometimes blurred with expressions of revenge, and with descriptions of violence as a means of emotional liberation. The tension between rational and emotional arguments for violent action, a theme that is recurring throughout the narratives and other aspects related to grievances discussed above, can be identified in the narratives. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that, in principle, the interviewees tend to condemn indiscriminate violence against civilians. There seems to be a moral codex that guides fighters even in the harshest of times when they are most blinded by rage, which dictates that women and children, or old and unarmed men must not be attacked, or that you must not steal, for example. As Naseem claims, virtuous behaviour is important during wartime as well

I killed many people, hurt many people, I haven't left anything undone, but I never stole nor raped anyone. But there were people who were stealing. But we didn't do this. […] I never had the heart for that. Three-quarters of the people here like me a lot, because they know I am righteous.

(Naseem, Lebanon)

Adnan describes a situation where he refused to steal money and explains that under his command it was not allowed to attack non-combatants

> Once, a guy was injured in a ranger in front of me. It was clear that he was dying [imitating how he could barely breathe]. I put him in the trunk. The guy had 24 million LBP in the ranger. The guy next to me said let's take the money and nobody will notice. […] I refused…We didn't touch any of it. […] I mean, tomorrow this may happen to me. We had red lines in our street. No woman, child, or old man, or unarmed man was allowed to be shot. That was a red line that no one crossed in my street.
>
> (Adnan, Lebanon)

Similarly, Nidhal describes the different profiles of Hezbollah fighters that he knows personally, of whom some are too guided by rage and thereby forget to stick to moral principles

> Listen there are really different profiles. There are those who go who want to fight the terrorist and you know…he beheaded people, and destroyed the tombs...and you confront him, you might be driven by your hatred and your rage. And there is the other one who sticks to the principles, for example, I hear about people who when they see injured people from Daesh, people from Hezbollah…they shoot at them, because the hatred wins over their hearts, another one just leaves them, and another one brings them to the hospital. The mentalities are really different. Depending on how much you can control yourself, how much is in your head, how you can adapt to the situation.
>
> (Nidhal, Lebanon)

Following the bombings of the two mosques, a group of people from BT planned a suicide bombing attack on JM. Mansour was part of the group and the discussions, but he described that there was a clear rift between those who would accept to kill innocent people and others who would not

AA: So, that was the plan [the suicide bombing]?
Mansour: Yes, but be careful, I didn't agree. Because I don't want to kill people who don't have anything to do with it. I accept to kill people who want to kill me. Or someone who hates me. But I am against killing anyone randomly. That's what Rifaat Eid did. Not us, I was against their ideas. There was a lot of arguing, even with the guys who went an ended up blowing themselves up. They would consider us as unbelievers, traitors. We're not traitors, but we don't want to kill people who don't have anything to do with this! Why should we do what our enemies are doing?

On the other hand, Halim, who wanted to take revenge for the injuries that his mother suffered, explains how he came to justify even killing unarmed women, old men and young boys. This example also indicates, however, that when such logic was suggested, it was closely tied to a form of blind rage resulting from great pain, in Halim's case the fact that his mother was shot at and injured

Figure 13.1 The logics of violence

> I thought to myself: the kid, he will become old and shoot us as well. And the old man? He was probably fighting us in the 80s. They were doing the massacres. And the women? They are giving birth to the kids. So, everyone! [he starts laughing, noticing that this sounds a bit absurd. But then he says in a more serious tone:] because when they shot my mother, they didn't make a difference either. They didn't think about the fact that she was old, that she could barely walk.
>
> (Halim, Lebanon)

In sum, the different logics of violence can be summed up and illustrated as follows (see Figure 13.1). It is important to remember that these are not rigid categorisations and that these logics often overlap. However, they all explain – individually or in combination – the rationale for employing (or not) violence to a degree that can cause injury or even death, sometimes of unarmed civilians.

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14 The importance of context

Places, people and biographic availability

A range of contextual and situational factors may prevent or facilitate actual engagement in action. It is important to reiterate that the majority of individuals who experience grievances will remain idle, and it is often a matter of coincidence and context whether grievances actually translate into further action or not. Also, the context may draw them into social circles where they are confronted with different narratives that may emphasise certain grievances. This chapter will therefore discuss three factors – places, people and biographic availability – and their importance for both engagement and non-engagement.

Scholarship has discussed the importance of situational and contextual factors such as networks of friends or places of social interaction for engagement in terrorist networks (e.g., Ducol, 2013; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Kruglanski et al., 2017). The collective action and the foreign fighter literature also place emphasis on the importance of social networks, places and contexts in processes of radicalisation towards physical engagement for a cause (Malet, 2013; McAdam et al., 2004; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011). As Coolsaet (2016) writes in his paper *All radicalisation is local*: 'Rather than targeting ideology or narrative one has to look into the local context in order to identify the specific underlying factors, conditions and motivations for why groups and individuals protest, radicalise and sometimes turn to extremism and violence' (p.46).

As Carlsson et al. (2019) found in a cross-phenomenon life-course study of former extremists, their propensity towards certain ideas and their social interactions were inextricably linked. An individual's access to a group is a major gateway to adopting dominant ideas in this group and gradually breaks with previous affiliations that may not be considered authentic anymore. The medieval scholar Ibn Khaldun theorised social cohesion in tribal societies long before the period of European enlightenment. Ahmed (2005) suggests that Khaldun's concept of *asabiyya*, a form of social organisation based on solidarity and honour, is less relevant in modern societies where social organisation in urbanised spaces is influenced by neoliberal logics of individualism, where the collective is valued less, or at least differently. He argues that the social and political challenges in the postcolonial Arab World have led some groups to fight for a return to traditional structures, a phenomenon he calls *hyper-asabiyya*.

Another contextual element that is frequently put forward in the collective action and extremism literature is the notion of *biographical availability.* McAdam (1986) suggests that 'biographical availability can be defined as the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities' (p.70). In this sense, biographical availability recalls social control theories in criminology and the notion of 'stakes' (Hirschi, 1969). The higher the stakes, the more difficult it tends to be for an individual to engage in a risky and time-consuming activity. In terms of biographical availability, studies have also pointed to the importance of young age and the absence of parental responsibilities (Bosi & Della Porta, 2012; Crettiez, 2016). In the same way, biographical availability may play a role in engagement processes, gradual biographical *un*availability can lead to disengagement from a cause or group (Windisch et al., 2016).

Places

The place in which an individual grows up, i.e., the larger region, the country, the city, the neighbourhood, provides a repertoire of cultural and narrative references that can become relevant for politico-ideological trajectories. During my fieldwork in Lebanon, I realised the importance of the social and political context. Through my immersion in the Lebanese context, it quickly became clear to me just how present the memories from the civil war still are, how sectarian differences keep shaping every day of the entire country and how politics is literally knit into the bones of every single individual I met. The more I learned about the modern history of Lebanon and, especially, the events after 2000 which were relevant for the generation I was interviewing, the more obvious and, often, legitimate, the various grievances would come to seem. The same applies to the Swiss interviewees: Knowing the political events that shaped their lives, the role of alienating political campaigns and perhaps, also, perceptions of Swiss cultural stereotypes of calmness and apoliticality is essential to understanding their trajectories. Similarly, learning about the different political forces at play in Canada, and especially Québec, has been useful to contextualise the narratives I was confronted with.

On the one hand, the context in which one grows up provides cultural master narratives. These narratives shape the worldviews of individuals living in that context, they provide understandings of justice and injustice and they transmit social norms about what means are legitimate to fight for justice. Hence, the places are the social and political environment in which political ideologies develop. The dominance of certain political orientations or groups has a major impact on which ideologies are seen as acceptable or noble, and which are ostracised or sidelined. This is very marked in the Southern Lebanese context, for instance, where Hezbollah continues to enjoy enormous popularity. Not only are many of the resistance fighters from the South, and the South is majoritarily Shia, but the legacy of the civil war and the 2006 July War continues to maintain the image of Hezbollah as the liberators and protectors of Lebanese southern lands. In Beirut,

even the neighbourhood one grows up in tends to influence the collective identity and political affiliations: Someone growing up in *Dahyeh*, a Hezbollah stronghold, will grow up among very different narratives than the one of someone who is born and raised in *Tareeq Jdeeda*, a majority Sunni neighbourhood. The neighbourhood Bab-el-Tabbaneh provides an entirely different repertoire of narratives, values and grievances than Jabal Mohsen. Whereas posters of Bashar Al-Assad are all over Jabal Mohsen, one couldn't dream of seeing one a few streets away in Bab-el-Tabbaneh. Growing up in JM facilitates sympathising with Hezbollah, whereas the social, political and cultural context of BT makes it uncontroversial to sympathise with Salafi-jihadist groups. Although there are efforts to move beyond these sectarian schisms, they continue to persist and shape the identities and minds of younger generations. In contrast, growing up in a much less overtly conflict-ridden setting such as Switzerland or Canada, the narratives regarding political activism, the ways to do justice or the relationship with global politics are very different. Generally speaking, the ways of achieving justice which are socially accepted include mainly non-violent means and instruments of democratic participation. In the Swiss context, there is a dominant narrative of neutrality that trickles down to the micro-level to influence the perception that the Swiss have regarding international politics, and results in apolitical and isolationist tendencies. In these contexts which are largely seen as peaceful, political activists, especially if they are engaged for causes in the Arab World, tend to be resisting a purified narrative of non-violence and demand a more critical engagement with the foreign policies of Western countries and more consideration for the human suffering in the Arab region.

On the one hand, the place also plays an important role in logistical terms. The proximity of Lebanon to neighbouring Syria has greatly facilitated the participation of Lebanese foreign fighters in the Syrian Civil War. In a place like Dahyeh, many young men have already participated in the Syrian conflict and may therefore instruct others who are thinking about leaving for combat. In Switzerland, there have been hotspots of recruitment for the Syrian Civil War, such as Winterthur or Geneva. In those cases, specific places such as mosques or sports gyms have played an important role. Switzerland is also not as far away as the Canadian context and travelling to the conflict zone is therefore often less complicated. The foreign fighters usually travel to an intermediary country in order to take a flight to Turkey or Iraq. In terms of political mobilisation on the streets, the more politicised a city is, for instance, the more likely individuals are to at least come into contact with protests or demonstrations. In the Canadian context, for instance, Montreal seems to provide a much more politically active environment than Toronto when it comes to causes that relate to the Arab World. This has helped many of the Canadian interviewees sustain their engagement.

People

Personal relationships constitute the most important contextual factor. In all the narratives, the role of significant others is highly important at all stages of

involvement and engagement. They include family members, i.e., parents, brothers or sisters, uncles and grandparents, existing and new peers, as well as influential and charismatic figures in the immediate environment. These social actors play different roles. They can facilitate the first confrontation with grievances and grievance-based narratives that emphasise moral shocks and collective memories of pain and suffering. In terms of identity, family members also play an important role when it comes to conveying collective identities and thereby confronting the individual with the situation and perhaps the hardships of that collective. In this sense, their function consists of contributing to an environment that fosters engagement with various grievance-based narratives. Thereby, they are acting as what has been identified above as *grievance entrepreneurs.*

Social actors, especially like-minded peers, can also play important role in providing a community in which the individual can feel safe and thrive personally and politically. Sabri explains this well

> I have always tried to have many friends from various backgrounds. So, when I joined this group, it not only gave me an ideological home, but also a social and personal one. People had similar tendencies and ideas. They were also feeling like they did not belong in one way or another and they wanted to do something about injustices.
>
> (Sabri, Canada)

This ideological and emotional home is an important factor in maintaining a commitment to a cause. Not only does the individual feel an obligation towards the group, which may be reinforced by other group members; membership in the group also becomes an important part of the individual's social identity. Since most marginal politically minded groups will be struggling against some hegemonic narrative, the social identity of the defiant underdog is relevant here also. It can be very empowering to feel like one is part of a minority that is fighting for the right cause, against a dominant majority that connives over or is complicit in the injustice that is perceived.

Social actors such as family members or close friends can also be themselves inspirational, through their engagement in a particular cause. This engagement may be multifold: it may be a form of cultural and intellectual resistance, as was the case for Asif whose uncle is a well-known writer and activist for the Palestinian cause; it may be actual involvement in fighting, as was the case for Nidhal, for instance, whose uncle was fighting in the military and formerly alongside Hezbollah, or for many of the young men in Tripoli whose parents had been involved in fighting with or against the Syrian regime; or it may involve non-violent resistance such as Souhail's grandparents who were helping refugees enter the country during WWII.

Social actors are also instrumental in facilitating the actual logistics of engagement. Whether interviewees think about joining a protest or travelling to a conflict zone to provide humanitarian work or to engage in fighting, there were usually other individuals who walked this path before them or alongside them. This was

the case for all individuals from Switzerland or Lebanon who joined conflict zones. None of them decided on his or her own that they wanted to go and then went by themselves. The thought of engaging without the support and assistance of others would have been too frightening to many. The process towards mobilisation and of mobilisation itself is a collective process in which peers play a central role.

Finally, social actors fulfil tasks related to social control. Especially parents or older brothers have a very important say when it comes to engagement, as long as the relationship is more or less intact. They can, on the one hand, encourage engagement, by displaying agreement with the individual's engagement or even satisfaction and pride. This is especially relevant among pro-Hezbollah sympathisers but also among the fighters from Tripoli, whose parents know the context themselves and have been marked by it. This encouragement seems to be rather rare among sympathisers from Canada or Switzerland. On the other hand, however, they can effectively abort any plans for engagement. In the Arab World, especially, dominant social norms demand utmost respect for the wills of parents or older family members. Several interviewees stated that their parents were opposed to their political or military engagement, their joining a militia or their plans to travel to a conflict zone. They claim that the refusal of their parents was one of the main factors preventing them from going. Romantic relationships can also be gamebreakers, as the case of Richard illustrates, which ended up leaving for Syria only when the relationship broke apart

> I always told myself, I was in a relationship and I didn't want to do that to my girlfriend. […] at the beginning of the summer, we weren't sure anymore, and at the end of the summer we broke up. And then, I told myself, there is nothing holding me back anymore. I called up my friend and told him I'm going with him.
>
> (Richard, Switzerland)

Hence, familial and romantic relationships can both encourage and prevent engagement. It is important to note, however, that for many who were generally adhering to the narrative of engagement, but fearful of actually engaging, these reasons may also be used as welcome excuses not to engage.

Biographic availability

In terms of the timing of mobilisation, various factors play a role. On the one hand, there is the timing of the macro-environment that determines whether there are causes and situations of injustice that call for intervention. The world would not have seen such a massive flow of foreign fighters to Syria had there not been a highly mediatised civil war. Without the Syrian Civil War, the Kurdish militias would not have become as internationally renowned, and not be able to attract recruits from all over the world for the internationalist battalion. Major events such as 9/11, the Iraq invasion, the killing of former Lebanese prime minister

Rafic Hariri, the 2008 clashes in Beirut, the 2009 Swiss vote on Minarets, the 2012 Quebec Student protests and others strongly impacted global and local politics in and shaped the repertoire of possible political action at the individual and group level.

At the micro-level, the notion of time in relation to politico-ideological mobilisation is best captured by the concept of biographic availability. The narratives and trajectories demonstrate that the social structure, in which an individual is embedded at the time when mobilisation is effectively envisaged as a course of action, plays a central role in determining the actual outcome. Having some form of more or less stable employment significantly raises the stakes of engaging in fighting. Even when individuals are convinced that the fighting is justified and see themselves as responsible to step up, commitment to work can ultimately discourage them from engaging. Especially in disadvantaged contexts like Northern Lebanon, being able to work might be the only way to provide for one's family and experience some form of stability. This applies also to the Swiss context, however, where there seems to be awareness among interviewees that work commitments can significantly impact one's availability for foreign fighting. The individuals who decided to engage in a radical form of engagement, whether physically joining a conflict zone or pursuing a radical political agenda, were all biographically available: They either sacrificed a stable situation of employment or education or they had already been in an unstable situation when engagement became an option. Some go even further, as the example of Daniel illustrates well, by intentionally structuring their lives in a way that allows for flexibility

> What helped me a lot…was that I had constructed myself professionally to be open to these kinds of opportunities. I didn't study, for example, was not involved in long studies. I was just doing work, like I am doing right now, where I can leave at any time without a problem. I am not putting a career at stake. I was working in a bar, that was easy to drop. I didn't lose anything that I acquired with a lot of effort. Had I had things I had needed to defend here, perhaps I would not have left.
>
> (Daniel, Switzerland)

In various cases, especially in the Lebanese context, being enrolled in a university was a major factor preventing mobilisation. Universities in Lebanon are expensive and usually, parents are covering the expenses. There is a greater burden upon those who have the privilege of pursuing their studies and they therefore face pressures not to lightheartedly sacrifice that privilege. Many mentioned their studies as the main reasons why they did not ultimately join Hezbollah for example. When recruitment for militias happens in a more or less structured way, at least through a process where the eligibility of the potential recruit is scrutinised, other factors can play a role as well. Several interviewees state, for instance, that they themselves or their friends were not allowed to join the militias because of their age. Others were not allowed to join because they were the only male

member of the family left and were therefore ordered to take care of their families instead of contributing to the military efforts of the group.

Again, it is important to note that these are mostly *post-hoc* justifications and that a major function of the narratives is to make sense of what happened in the past. For those who were unable to go for a variety of reasons, the studies and the lack of consent from parents is a convenient justification that is socially accepted. There are many indications of a sort of *post-hoc* narrative adaptation of the script regarding engagement based on the opportunity structures that were or continue to dominate their lives. The following excerpt shows well, however, how different forms of jihad are negotiated and compete with each other. Also, there are many forms to resist, for these interviewees, who are sympathisers of Hezbollah, and do in principle believe that the military jihad would be the ideal form of resistance. Thulfiqar makes it very clear that other forms of jihad are of course also noble, but in his view subordinate to the military jihad

> You know, I was almost crying yesterday, I get very emotional. Do you know why? Because I feel like I can't do anything for them, I can't help them militarily. The affiliation has passed for me. That makes me sad. That I will just be a supporter. That's what impacts me most. I want to give something to the cause. But you know…they say there are different forms of jihad, jihad al nafs [jihad as self-purification], jihad al'ilm [jihad through knowledge], caring about your family. All of this is jihad. Not everyone is made for the military jihad.
>
> (Thulfiqar, Lebanon)

Nidhal explains how his parents were a major factor in preventing him from joining the battlefield. He has embraced the idea of *jihad by knowledge* more seriously, through his regular activity on social media

> What prevented me from going…my parents, my studies, and death, of course. Martyrdom its ok and stuff [smiles] but it's still death. And war is not call of duty and you restart a level, no […] My parents they love Hezbollah…but they say stay away from weapons. Al Jihad through knowledge [laughs]… Many of my friends, my age, they went and fought, they were trained…They were even younger than me, around my age. The opportunity was there, I could have gone there, but I didn't, because I'd rather fight on Facebook. [Laughs] […] I think there is always at some point a necessity for armed resistance. If you have a terrorist or an Israeli, you cannot negotiate with them, at that point it's the armed resistance or nothing. But of course, my articles they try to discuss things and support things, that I care about a lot. I resist in the way I can, with the means I have.
>
> (Nidhal, Lebanon)

Finally, some individuals expressed their strict adherence to an ideology of non-violence. These are usually expressions that are made from a position of privilege

and require careful contextualisation: A middle-class young man living in Beirut does not have to make the same choices in terms of violent engagement as a man living in a poor neighbourhood in Northern Lebanon or a Palestinian growing up in a refugee camp. The same applies, evidently, to the Swiss or Canadian context. The panoply of choices in terms of non-violent or violent action repertoires is highly conditioned upon one's politico-economic position in the world.

In sum, it can be said that places and people play crucial roles at all stages of an individuals increasing commitment to a cause. The environment one grows up in leads to exposure to dominant narratives and ideals that inevitably go on to impact the individual's worldview. It can also facilitate the logistics of engagement, if it is located close to a conflict zone or if there are groups that are politically engaged and easily accessible. Peers and family members are by far the most important determining factor for actual engagement or non-engagement, beyond their potential roles as grievance entrepreneurs. These social actors may be a source of inspiration through their own engagement. Groups of peers can provide an ideological and emotional home, where individuals can adopt a new identity that is in line with their environment as well as their convictions. In very concrete terms, social actors may either facilitate actual engagement in logistical terms, they may encourage individuals to pursue a particular project or prevent them from doing so by imposing their social control. The timing of the mobilisation is influenced by both macro- and micro-factors: On the one hand, the geopolitical developments can open windows of opportunity, as was the case with the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, the Soviet–Afghan War in the 1980s or the Syrian Civil War from 2011 on. On the other hand, commitments to employment or studies raise the stakes of mobilisation and thereby discourage individuals from doing so. Alternatively, where these commitments are absent or fall away, the biographic availability makes it easier to pursue a radical and high-risk political project.

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15 Disengaging

'You have to give him love'

Scholarship on PIM and PIV increasingly seeks to understand why and how individuals come to disengage from politico-ideological mobilisation and violence (Windisch et al., 2016). Based on the narratives collected, there seem to be, in fact, many similarities between engagement, non-engagement and disengagement. Most of the aspects discussed previously in Chapter 14 apply to disengagement processes also, yet work in the opposite direction: Getting married, having kids or finding stable employment constitute sociodemographic changes that raise the stakes of engagement. These are common themes that explain why many interviewees disengaged when their engagement involved illegal tactics and therefore a risk of criminal punishment. Individuals also become less biographically available for high-risk activism as they get older, mostly because these circumstances of life change usually with age as well, as the desire for stability and comfort increases.

Apart from these contextual changes, there are cognitive and emotional changes that accompany and drive disengagement processes. A major theme is the interviewees' realisation of the complexity of a particular situation they have been fighting for and the futility of their engagement, Thereby, they abandon the dichotomic and Manichean worldviews that are often present during the engagement. In a way, the *decomplexification* that takes place when grievances form is reverted during processes of disengagement, where the views re-complexify. Amir describes this feeling over the futility of violence and suffering. The feeling is widespread among interviewees who were engaged in fighting in the Salafi-jihadist spectrum

> When I see his kids now, I look at them, I remember him. And I say to myself, for this stupid game, so many fathers died. For nothing. Is that not haram? And nobody is helping them, these families. […] You realise that your life isn't worth it in the end. When you die, they put up a picture of you the martyr and they give your family some compensation, but that's it. You're gone and nobody will ask for you. Do you see what I mean? In the end…you're dying for politicians. Not for your religion.
>
> (Amir, Lebanon)

This realisation of the futility and complexity of the conflict is exacerbated by their witnessing of how other martyrs are treated. They are not given the honour that they would expect them to be granted after they sacrificed everything to the cause, including their lives. As a result, an important ideological element that sustains engagement, namely the logic of *jusqu'au-boutisme* and the corresponding veneration of martyrdom, falls apart. In line with that, interviewees seem to realise that their role would probably not be as grandiose as they expected it to be. For some interviewees, this very same awareness seems to be present from the onset and therefore directing their decision not to engage in fighting. This interviewee, for example, is not, in principle, against the idea of taking revenge, but appeals to the idea of *jusqu'au-boutisme,* i.e., being 'real', and dismisses the fighting on that basis as a 'joke:

> I want to explain why I didn't participate. When we want to fight the people from JM, they will tell you the reason is sectarian. And then they tell you there is a collective memory of massacres. Ok, but then go up to them. Why do you stand behind these walls and shoot at the mountain? Is that fighting? It's a joke. There are houses, where did these bullets come from. They came from BT as well! From us, against us! They were just shooting randomly. You didn't kill any Alawite; you're just shooting at the building!
>
> (Rakan, Lebanon)

Some interviewees, especially those from BT who face significant scrutiny by security forces, indicate that they fear the repercussions that their engagement may have for their loved ones. Mansour picks up the idea of clarity of the cause, feeling that the Syrian or Iraqi context is simply too complex, because fighting is likely to hurt innocent lives

> But If I hurt this guy, more people will be hurt because of it. That's what makes me hesitant. Because while I am focusing on him and trying not to get others involved, he won't do that! He might hurt others around me […] I got to a point where I thought, in order not to do injustice to anyone in Syria, or here, you know where I would go? To Palestine! That's what was in my head. Palestine is clearer, there is an oppression of Arabs by Jews. It's clear. Here, it's not clear.
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

A process of re-complexification also manifests itself when the generalised and simplified image of the enemy starts being deconstructed with the benefit of a more humanising lens. Abandoning combat after years of fighting against an evil opponent becomes possible when the hatred towards the group associated with the opponent starts to dissipate because of new encounters and realisations that these are also human beings who suffer and bleed the same way. The NGO in Tripoli through which I gained access to the interviewees put a lot of effort into creating platforms and settings for amicable, or at least non-hostile, encounters, where

interviewees would simply listen to each others' stories. They were not forced to be there at any moment, but many of them chose to stay after realising that their stories were very similar. They became suddenly aware of the humanity of their sworn enemies, and the fact that they were often subject to the same strains and pressures

> In the beginning, we didn't talk to each other, we wouldn't eat with each other. But then, we started talking in a circle, and we realised everyone was suffering from the same stuff. The NGO really made a difference here. And then we realised…this is the only place where we can mingle! Before, it was just the prison.
>
> (Adnan, Lebanon)

The outcome and the sustainability of this fragile peace is judged differently by interviewees. While some, such as Yahya, claim they would not pick up a weapon anymore, others like Mansour are less optimistic about the lasting impact of the work done by the NGO and the space created for interaction and mutual acceptance

> Before, I couldn't even go down to Syria street, now we can mingle and have fun. Now, if the fighting comes back, I won't participate, even with stones! I saw the damage that it did. How many people died, how many women are widowed now.
>
> (Yahya, Lebanon)

> This NGO has allowed us to mingle and get to know each other. But when they leave, I am surely not someone to deny a friend who was there for me… but it's sure that the encounters would be less frequent. This is the place where we meet...I don't know where we would meet afterwards.
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

What is certain, however, is that seeing the human being behind constructed images of evil enemies also contributes to realising the nuances and complexity of a particular situation and thereby decrease the willingness to engage in fighting.

Another aspect related to the increase in complexity – as opposed to its reduction which is at play during grievance formation – is the decrease in the sense of urgency, as opposed to the emphasis on urgency during an engagement. Disengagement comes with a growing feeling that there is no urgency in engaging. There is no urgency to engage, because the situation is more complex than initially expected, with no particular group being the only victim of injustice and suffering. Or, there is no urgency because the injustice is very complex and fighting it might end up causing more harm and turn out to be counterproductive. As seen earlier, urgency is also reformulated by some activists to designate a long-term process of revolutionary change, where most of the immediate and individualist violence is counterproductive. This reformulation entails a critical

engagement with the use of violence. While not rejecting violence per se, it needs to serve the long-term project of fundamentally changing the status quo to provide more equality and justice for all.

Another theme that accompanies disengagement processes is distancing oneself from politics. Through *apoliticality*, some former activists feel like they can shield themselves from the affective impact of politics and grievances. This strategy includes avoiding news coverage and self-isolation from political discussions

> Now, I try to stay away from politics, I don't care about stuff anymore, don't watch TV. I try not to stay home too much, so I don't watch TV.
>
> (Marwan, Lebanon)

Finally, it's interesting to note that several interviewees disengaged from one cause to engage in another. Although they seem to have disengaged, their engagement has rather shifted, while the basic premises of mobilisation laid out above remain largely unchanged. Justin, for instance, has shifted from being a Hezbollah sympathiser to a right-wing Christian nationalist; Max was first engaged as a right-wing extremist before becoming interested in the Islamic State group; Pierre was a right-wing Christian nationist and then became a left-wing socialist; and Souhail disengaged from the Palestinian cause to engage more seriously with climate justice and environmental harm.

This finding on disengagement is important, because it is related to another overarching and promising observation. In fact, in many cases, individuals do not need to disengage *per se*, in order to untie themselves from more problematic affiliations, such as being a sympathiser or member of a nihilist racist-fascist group like Daesh or being in an ultra-nationalist group that promotes racial hatred. Forced disengagement is often problematic because the basic premises of mobilisation are uncontroversial, or even pro-social rather than anti-social. Caring about others, wanting to do something about injustice, and being sensitive to grievances are, in their purest form, pro-social attributes. Grievances are potent drivers of social change. A sense of moral indignation about injustice and suffering is what drives the radicals who give everything to fight for a more just and equitable world. Hence, imposing disengagement from the perspective of the state, which often equates to pushing for *apoliticality* or at least *selective apoliticality* (when Islamic political activism is particularly scrutinised, for instance), is problematic because it amalgamates positive attributes with negative ones, and demands rejection of what individuals have come to see as virtues essential to their identities. Asking for disengagement should therefore be a precise and careful exercise: What exactly are the problematic aspects of this specific type of mobilisation and what is actually an attribute that may be and perhaps should be preserved? For instance, the *logic of jusqu'au-boutisme*, i.e., the quest for authenticity and integrity, is something that is valued by most societies. Even *combative logics* of fighting are generally seen as positive in societies driven by spirits of competition, performance and excellence. Interviewees who disengage from violent activism can maintain these ideological drivers

throughout their disengagement and can use them to build their more conventional lifestyles. This becomes visible through the persistent use, after disengagement, of expressions such as combat or fight, even for seemingly mundane situations

> To me, my everyday life, it's a fight, a struggle. It may be work, school, my relationship with my family and friends. I am trying to be a better person every day. That's my fight now.
>
> (Max, Switzerland)

As seen above in cases of interviewees who did not end up engaging in military jihad, for instance, a similar reformulation can be observed. Jihad is then emphasised and embraced in its diversity, which includes anything from self-improvement over charity to activism on Facebook (see Chapter 11).

Finally, the narratives express critical postures regarding the way they are criminalised by the state and its representatives. In many cases, having been through the process of being labelled a terrorist, they have experienced the alienating pressures and dynamics and the crushing repercussions of the war against terrorism first-hand. Many of them are structurally marginalised because of their sympathy or engagement for a criminalised cause or group, because they cannot have stable employment or open a bank account, given the heavy stigma associated with terrorism. They realise the counterproductive result and sheer absurdity of counterterrorism practices because they are constantly squeezed into the role of the enemy and construed as a threat to society. Thereby, some argue, disengagement is effectively made impossible. Rather, a person will radicalise even further, as a reaction to the constant enmity by conventional actors. Several interviewees have been wrongly accused, arrested and detained, sometimes for several years. Some have even been convicted on very shaky evidence, both in Lebanon and Switzerland. As a result, counterterrorism efforts have, in many respects, served to create more terrorism. Mansour's following quote conveys powerfully how the impact could be many times more positive if those considered terrorists, jihadists and criminals were treated differently

> If my country told me, for example, 'yes, you're right there is a great injustice, but it's a shame…why do you want to go die there?'. That could be acceptable! But my country tortures me and tortures me until they are sure that you wanted to go to Syria and fight! That's where the hatred is born in your heart! Whether you want it or not! It would be different if they treated you differently, asking why you want to go fight, whether we can do something for you here in your country? What's so hard about that? If you as a country did that, what would be so wrong about it?
>
> (Mansour, Lebanon)

Interviewees insist a lot on giving individuals who are considered terrorists a real chance

we realized they were suffering from the same thing. As human beings, we are all the same, perhaps not as a religion, but we are the same. When I saw how they were…you know when you see Naseem, for example, how he became when somebody gave him a chance, he changed his life, he became a better person. He won't throw a grenade anymore to get 50,000 LBP. Because someone gave him a chance.

(Nassim, Lebanon)

Max is similarly critical about the way another young man is being treated by the security forces in Switzerland. It seems like that young man is increasingly unwilling to cooperate, and growing more and more resentful, because he feels like he is being treated unjustly

They always said that he indoctrinated me, but I always told them it was the other way around. I made him leave with me, and he was imprisoned and is in this position now because of me. So, I understand his anger…we have all done something in our lives, but not everyone is caught for it […] I feel very sorry for him because I know that he has a very good heart…They always say that he was radicalised…but he didn't do anything more than that. […] I think in our cases, you have to listen and accept. That is what I received and what helped me get through. Had I not had this, it would have been very difficult. They gave me a second chance. I hope they will be able to give him the same thing. He needs love. We all need love. […] There is no point in trying to punish at any price […] You have to try to help him. You have to give him love…'yes, you will pay for the things you did, but I still love you for who you are', that's what I mean. If you are always thinking that this guy is a piece of shit, a terrorist, that's what he will become. When I was a kid, I was always told that I was stupid, and I failed at everything. Now I am told that I can succeed, and I do. You have to believe in the person. You have to give him love.

(Max, Switzerland)

Overall, it can be said that disengagement processes consist, in part, of a reversal of many of the intellectual and emotional mechanisms at play during grievance-based mobilisation. Through re-complexification, humanisation and the reformulation of urgency, engagement in violent action becomes not necessarily unlikely, but simply a more nuanced process. Forms of politico-ideological mobilisation that take the complexity and the humanity into account are less likely to fall prey to new forms of exclusion, racism and hatred. Another important finding is that engagement often switches from one cause to another rather than ceases totally. In line with this, it is important to keep in mind that many of the ideological constructs at the basis of engagement do not have to be abandoned but can be put at the service of the new cause. This is a promising finding and should alert us to the importance of maintaining nuances when fostering disengagement and take into consideration that many of the attributes that lead to politico-ideological engagement are, *per se*, beneficial and pro-social. Sweepingly criminalising all aspects

of political engagement leads to alienation, further radicalisation and ultimately undermines the very purpose of prevention and disengagement. In line with this, it should be recalled that many of the driving factors of engagement are not necessarily to be located within individuals but in the structures that surround them. It is hypocritical and unrealistic to ask individuals to conform to rules and laws, and abandon violence, if the very actors who claim to be representative of law and order are themselves enactors of violence and injustice. Disengagement therefore has to be thought out and planned alongside critical engagement with the structural conditions that promote political violence, if efforts are sincerely aimed at holistic and lasting societal change for the better.

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PART V

Discussion and outlook

16 Towards a theory of grievance-based mobilisation

For the last decades, research on politico-ideological violence has been dominated by the studies that focus on jihadist terrorism (Schuurman, 2020), under the label of the so-called terrorism studies (Jackson, 2012). The field has been dominated by three major biases: First, it is a field that is built on expertise developed in Europe and North America that deals predominantly with regions and subjects that are Non-White and Non-European. This Western-centrism of academic research has been pointed out as problematic and is particularly relevant for the study of terrorism and political violence, because it supports existing orientalist stereotypes about the dangerous Black and Brown Other (Kundnani, 2014; Mohamedou, 2018; Mockaitis, 2003; Silva, 2018). Another important bias is the state-centrism of research on this phenomenon, since knowledge production is closely entangled with state departments, intelligence services and law enforcement (Ahmed, 2020; Jackson, 2012; Kundnani, 2014; Silva, 2018). The state-centrist bias makes it difficult to grasp the phenomenon in a holistic manner, given that the state is by essence reticent to acknowledge harms committed by the state. Finally, the field is also characterised by a tendency to depoliticise the phenomenon by emphasising individualistic and cultural-psychological motives for violence over political and structural factors (Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010; Lafaye & Rapin, 2017; Mohamedou, 2018). At least partly due to these major biases, grievances have been sidelined in the debate and research on politico-ideological violence since 9/11 (Ajil, 2022). This has obscured what is at the core of political violence, whether religiously inspired or not, namely a profound dissatisfaction with a status quo that produces pain and suffering.

This book sought to respond to that lacuna by investigating the notion of grievances and their importance for various forms of mobilisation and political engagement for causes and conflicts in the Arab World. Through a focus on grievances, a larger debate could become possible and jihadist violence could be demystified. Also, by focusing on conflicts and causes in the Arab World, the study covers the various forms of Salafi-jihadist mobilisation which have been the focus of the field, while at the same time avoiding an exclusive and exceptionalising focus by widening the sample to include various ideological strands and influences.

In the article *Politico-ideological violence: Zooming in on grievances* (Ajil, 2022) I argued that a focus on grievances provides an alternative to voyeuristic

approaches that focus predominantly on the violence itself, as well as on the politicised and therefore somewhat constrained lens of academic research on this phenomenon. Also, a focus on grievances allows for an investigation of socio-structural dimensions based on the perspectives of those involved, thereby providing a perspective 'from below'. It is, therefore, better suited to understand why and how actors themselves understand their acts as defensive and reactive. Grievances being universal to human beings around the world, such an approach allows also for a transversal study of political violence across different ideological orientations. Finally, taking grievances into account allows for a more holistic perspective on the phenomenon in the sense that it considers the ways in which efforts to tackle terrorism may themselves breed new grievances and violence.

To study grievances, this book has drawn on an innovative research method. The data collection consisted mainly of first-hand face-to-face interviews. Although the state of research has significantly improved over recent years, first-hand data collection continues to be rare when it comes to terrorism and political violence (Horgan, 2012; Silke & Schmidt-Petersen, 2017; Schuurman, 2020). Interviews were conducted over a period of two years in Lebanon, Switzerland and Canada. They covered a novel combination of research subjects, which include individuals who are or were politically engaged for causes related to the Arab World using mainly non-violent means (PIM) as well as individuals who resorted to violence or joined groups that used violent tactics (PIV), allowing for the comparison of violent with non-violent activists (Dornschneider, 2021; Obaidi et al., 2020). The sample allows for contrasting and comparing the views of people who hold similar grievances related to the Arab World but choose different ways to act upon them, in three different regions of the world.

In addition to these two core groups of interviewees, a third group consisted of peripheral actors including practitioners, policymakers, researchers, members of the community and families and friends of those engaged. Given the sensitivity of the research topic as well as the hard-to-reach nature of the research population, these interviewees provided valuable insights into the phenomenon.

The transversal analysis of the narratives collected in this specific design across Lebanon, Switzerland and Canada can be taken to a level of abstraction that speaks to the phenomenon more generally. While some of this abstraction has taken place in the discussion of the findings already, the formulation of the overarching theory presents an additional layer of integration and abstraction, in line with the precepts of Grounded Theory. The theory of politico-ideological mobilisation and violence that is presented here posits three major *social performances* through which grievances become linked to mobilisation, namely identification, appropriation and responsibilisation (see Figure 16.1). These can be read as *social performances* because grievances are the result of an iterative collective social co-construction. At the core of these social performances is an injustice, that is *named*, *owned* and sought to be *addressed*.

The three social performances highlight the complexity of the relationship between grievances and injustices: Grievances are long-term emotional and cognitive states of disillusionment, disenfranchisement and frustration with a particular
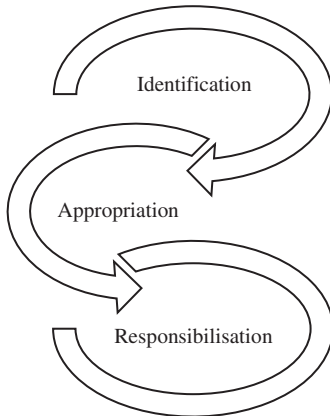
Figure 16.1 Three social performances in relation to grievances

situation that is considered unjust. For grievances to form and be acted upon, the three social performances are therefore central in crystallising an injustice and making it the core object of grievances.

Identifying injustices is an individual and collective process of sense-making of present and past witnessing and experiencing suffering and pain in the form of structural inequality and neglect or recurring aggression and oppression. Grievances are feelings that form over a long period and denote both attitudinal and emotional opposition to dysfunctionality and the entities seen as responsible for them. The findings confirm the importance of moral shocks (Crettiez, 2016; Jasper, 2011) and collective memories (Paez & Liu, 2011) of pain and suffering for the identification of injustices and therefore the grievance formation process. The instances of confrontation with extreme suffering via moral shocks provide a sort of empirical evidence and proof that illustrate the *raison d'être* of grievances. While grievances are a more complex and long-term feeling, they frequently refer to instances of extreme violence and moral indignation that are much more short-term in nature. Collective memory consisting of stories and episodes of pain and suffering informs a collective identity that revolves principally around the common suffering of members of a perceived collective. This idea resonates with Huët's (2015) reflections on the centrality of suffering for collective violent engagement, Paez et al.'s (2008) observation that the remembering of WWII is linked to increased willingness to participate in fighting among a Western sample, and with Pollak's (1993) suggestion that individuals tap into collective memories to construct their own identity and find coherent explanations for their own story and suffering.

Since grievances are the results of a collective process of social construction, *grievance entrepreneurs* can play a crucial role therein, by mobilising collective memory and narratives in the present to provoke moral shocks about a chosen

situation. Grievance entrepreneurs may act consciously and aim at mobilising individuals and groups emotionally and behaviourally. In this sense, grievance entrepreneurs combine the concepts of the *memory entrepreneur* (Pollak, 1993) and the *moral entrepreneur* (Becker, 1963; Lakhani, 2014). Through their conscious manufacturing of and recourse to moral shocks, they can be seen as contributing to *moral panic* in the sense proposed by Cohen (1972) – not as traditional leaders but as 'charismatic leaders' in the Weberian sense, as suggested by Joosse (2018). They may also act less consciously, by denouncing and highlighting what they see as injustice and thereby exposing others to them. Grievance entrepreneurs are usually individuals with a certain authority derived from their age, experience, engagement or status or individuals in the immediate environment such as friends or family members. Importantly, individuals who themselves are exposed to moral shocks can become grievance entrepreneurs themselves if they choose to highlight them and expose others to them.

Whether individuals are not only exposed but also receptive to moral shocks and likely to develop grievances is related to their sensitivity to social and political issues. It has been argued before that those who engage in political violence are particularly sensitive to injustice (Cohen, 2016; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011). To a certain extent, this has been found to be true in this study as well. However, the sensitivity to injustice can be significantly nuanced. It is not a sort of hyper-sensitivity that characterises individuals who mobilise, but a cognitive and emotional stance that can be described as an intentional and enduring *resistance against apathy*. Individuals make a conscious and recurring choice to look at injustice and to care about it, in a political sense reminiscent of the *ethics of care* (Gilligan, 1977). *They choose to see, and they choose to care*. Two main emotional moments are associated with the identification of injustices. One extraordinarily consistent one is a feeling of *betrayal*: Learning about an injustice means realising that the things one has believed so far – including the actors one has learned to trust – turn out to be a fallacy. This moment of betrayal includes a rupture from hegemonic narratives (Gramsci, 1971) about how the world works, including, importantly, the axiomatic legitimacy attributed to states and state actors. These moments of betrayal generally provoke strong negative emotions. More positive emotions accompany the second emotional moment, namely *epiphany*, which signifies the eye-opening that comes with that painful realisation, the feeling of being able to see behind the curtains, understand the true injustices that exist in the world and that most of the world simply glosses over day in day out. Both the negative feeling of betrayal and the positive feelings of epiphany can contribute to connecting an individual with a community of like-minded individuals who share these feelings and engage upon them.

To understand the *identification of injustice* and therefore one of the initial performances of grievances, it is crucial to get a grasp of the different types of grievances and their characteristics. Despite their variety and multifaceted nature, which has been laid out above, grievances can almost all be brought back to dysfunctionalities associated with states and the international community of states. The socio-economic grievances or ethno-racial grievances that have been

identified are linked to political grievances, which, in one way or another are linked to dysfunctionalities that are attributable to the state: The traditional purveyor of safety and security that holds the monopoly on violence. These dysfunctionalities include *hierarchisations* enacted by the state, where some lives are valued over others and treated less favourably; *hypocrisy* of the state, which engages in violence or causes social harms while benefitting from the veil of legitimacy, or connives over the wrongdoings of other states; and the *tyranny* of the state itself, which attacks and violates the rights of its own citizens or innocent human beings. All three dysfunctionalities can be found in the way states have engaged in the Global War on Terror, whether themselves, or as a collective of states (see Figure 16.2). The post-9/11 era and the infringement on civil liberties that ensued has produced grievances across the world, which contributed in many ways to the terroristic violence we are grappling with today and certainly in the years to come.

Grievances have a certain number of characteristics that seem to facilitate their persistence across time and their spread across space. Grievances are *historic* in the sense that they connect injustices in the present to injustices in the past. They refer to *large-scale* suffering affecting many people *across borders,* and they are oriented towards the *collective*. Grievances refer predominantly to the suffering of the *weak and the poor*. The injustice is *flagrant* in the sense that a more powerful entity is oppressing a much less powerful one, and, importantly, the injustice remains *unpunished*.

Taken together, these characteristics appear to be both products and ingredients of *three major transformations* that seem to make certain situations or events become encapsulated by grievances lasting across time and space. The first one is *collectivisation,* i.e., understanding and presenting the grievance as affecting a large, even global community and disconnecting it to a certain extent
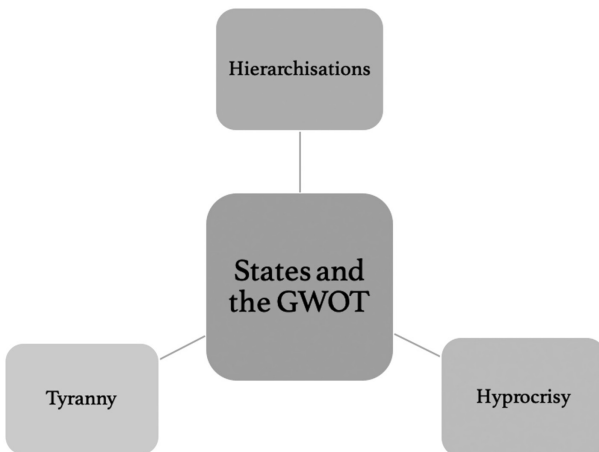
Figure 16.2 Major dysfunctionalities of states in the GWOT as main sources of grievances

from individual suffering; *glocalisation,* i.e., connecting between local and global situations, thereby establishing a narrative of continuity *across space*; and *historicisation,* i.e., connecting present situations to the past, by using fragmentary evidence of past suffering in order to build a narrative of continuity *across time*. The fact that activists resort to narratives of continuity has also been identified by Bosi and Della Porta (2012). These three transformations all serve one major objective which is *decomplexification*: For grievances to emerge, form, consolidate, spread and maintain themselves as valid pieces of analysis, at least from the point of view of those who hold them, they need to refer to a clear situation of flagrant and grave injustice. Perpetrators and victims need to be clearly established. The decomplexification lends *clarity* and *gravity* to narratives on grievances, which are essential to their existence and their survival. While the connection between locally oriented and globally oriented grievances has been pointed out before (Akbarzadeh & Mansouri, 2010; Geisser et al., 2017; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Kundnani, 2014; Mohamedou, 2018), the role that glocalisation plays specifically, on a narrative level, by decomplexifying reality in order to make grievances palpable and shareable, is a novel finding (see Figure 16.3.).

Besides being named and identified, injustices also need to be *owned* and therefore undergo a form of appropriation to gain relevance at the personal level. Individuals appropriate injustices for themselves, that is, conclude that they affect them or may do so, even if they may not directly impact their lives at the beginning of their engagement. Individuals come to appropriate an injustice often because of their cultural, ethnic or linguistic heritage or the environment in which they grow up, which connects them to a collective identity. The role of collective identity in politico-ideological mobilisation and violence has been amply explored by the literature (Anderson, 1983; Ferguson & McAuley, 2020; Mansbridge & Morris, 2001; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Jenkins, 2004; Ruggiero, 2005; Rydgren, 2007). What the findings of the present study may add to this literature is perhaps the
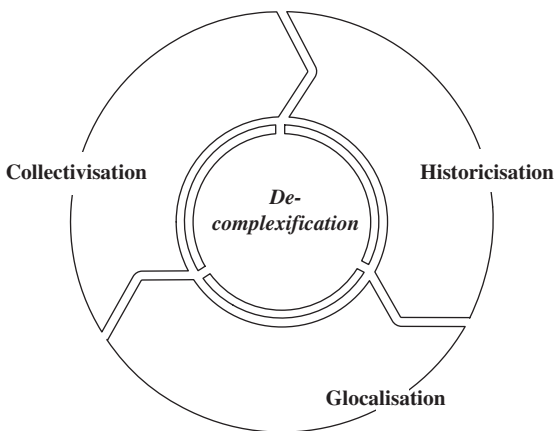
Figure 16.3 Transformations of grievances that serve decomplexification

way collective identities are adopted, namely not only through positive socialisation, but also through negative: The experience of othering and otherness, as well as deep societal cleavages that run along ethnic, cultural, religious or political lines, *force* individuals into collective identities, to feel tolerated and accepted for who they are. An aspect that has been present in the literature on jihadist forms of violent mobilisation is the notion of victimhood, notably the feeling that a global Islamic community is under siege (Abi-Hashem, 2004; Abu Rumman, 2014; Uehling, 2004; Lakhani, 2014; McCauley, 2018; Reidy, 2018). To a certain extent, this has been found to be relevant in this study as well but may be better understood and demystified via the notion of *madhloumiya*, namely a sense of transnational even global victimhood that is the result of systematic persecution and oppression of a particular group. It is relevant to all groups and ideological orientations, and therefore far from being anyhow specific to the idea of an Islamic *madhloumiya*, which is also grossly simplistic given that different forms of Islamic *madhloumiya* are often competing against each other, e.g., Sunni *madhloumiya* and Shii *madhloumiya*. *Madhloumiya* is a major attribute of the collective identity that plays a role in grievance-based engagement: Individuals associate themselves with a collective of *suffering*.

Apart from a collective identity that is mediated by ethnic, religious or cultural affiliations, appropriation also needs to be understood as a result of the rupture that is operated through the identification of injustice and the feelings of betrayal. When the radicalisation literature discusses breaks and ruptures, it usually refers to the fact that individuals who radicalise and turn to violence sever their ties to existing social circles or conventional norms (Akers & Silverman, 2014; Crettiez, 2016; Doosje et al., 2016; El-Said & Barrett, 2017). The importance of a rupture in this sense can, of course, not be understated. However, it is another rupture that is underlying this rather technical or logistical one, namely one of cognitive nature. Individuals who are confronted with major injustices through moral shocks experience a moment where their entire worldview is profoundly shaken and dismantled. In those moments, they operate a break from a hegemonic narrative that they have grown up to believe in. Hegemony is here understood in the sense proposed by Gramsci (1971), as an ideology and a narrative of 'common sense' that is propagated in a given society and serves to maintain a status quo. From the moment of their rupture, individuals radicalise in the sense that they enter a constant struggle against that hegemonic narrative that relentlessly delegitimises and criminalises what it considers as radicality. They adopt an identity which conforms to that positionality, which can be aptly described as one of *rebellious underdogs*. The importance of resistance and rebellious identities as well as the idea of the underdog have been discussed in the literature (Crettiez, 2011; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Hamm, 2007; Liebling & Williams, 2018; Liebling et al., 2011; Mansbridge & Morris, 2001). The collective identity that individuals tap into refers to a collective of the oppressed, which are struggling against a more powerful oppressive entity. This imagined community (Anderson, 1983) has the advantage of transcending ethnic, religious, cultural or linguistic attributes, and is therefore much more accessible. The rebellious underdog is an ideal figure

that is unjustly suffering but refuses to simply endure the suffering and stands up to fight against injustice and for justice. This tale-like imaginary makes it a very attractive and empowering figure. Rebelliousness through self-perception of being the underdog can therefore become a reason for radicality for its own sake. Importantly, the underdog identity can persist even throughout the comeback of the group and inform *post-hoc* justifications for the group's existence or privilege to retain arms, as continues to be the case for Hezbollah, for example (see also Childs, 2011; Norton, 2007).

Finally, two major feelings accompany the appropriation of injustice, namely guilt and solidarity. On the one hand, guilt has been dealt with in the social movement literature (Jasper, 2011), but has barely been put forward as an analytical category within research on political violence. Identifying with the suffering of others provokes strong feelings of guilt about one's privilege and relative safety. This feeling of guilt is played on in mobilisation and in recruitment for various causes. Experiences and moments of solidarity, on the other hand, work to solidify the bonds between those who engage for certain causes and any potential allies. This feeling is strongly associated with the collective identity of suffering and thereby comes to mean solidarity in the face of enmity and oppression. It is therefore a specific form of solidarity that is closely tied to the self-perception of rebelliously struggling against an oppressive force. Solidarity occupies a prominent role in the narratives on politico-ideological engagement, since it is evocative of a spirit of collectivism, of caring about a larger community, that defines itself against individualist isolationism. In that sense, it resembles Ibn Khaldun's notion of *asabiyya* (Ahmed, 2005).

Identification and appropriation of injustice lay the foundation for a process of responsibilisation, which constitutes the major link between grievances and action, whether violent or non-violent. After identifying the injustice and widely agreeing that the status quo is wrong and untenable, the question of what should and can be done to redress the injustice or punish the perpetrators is naturally prompted. At this point, two major elements play a determinant role. One of them is awareness of the limits of non-violent democratic means to enact political change. In line with legal cynicism (Kirk & Papachristos, 2011; Sampson & Bartusch, 1998) and estrangement (Bell, 2017) that result from learning about and witnessing or even experiencing the ways in which legitimate and conventional actors can cause harm and suffering, there is a certain cynicism about the false promise of democracy. By essence, democratic means have a limited capacity to promote and effect subversive and radical changes to the status quo. The process is usually tedious and the result is often far from ideal. Subversive and radical agendas bear in themselves the promise of precisely this change and respond to what we shall call a *desire for radicality*. The second element is the existence of a *revolutionary void*, namely the perception that nobody is doing anything against this injustice. The revolutionary void has been identified in relation to mobilisations for jihadist groups in the Arab World (Mohamedou, 2018; Kundnani, 2014). The attraction to Al-Shabaab is a case in point, as Kundnani (2014) shows

For young Somalis in Minnesota angry at US foreign policy in the war on ter-ror, and who want to give expression to their opposition, al-Shabaab seems to be the only show in town […] apart from al-Shabaab, there were no political groups attempting to pick up on those opinions and give them an organized expression, offering alternative forms of political activism to al-Shabaab's violent fundamentalism.

(Kundani, 2014, p.227)

The revolutionary void plays a crucial role: If a powerful entity is seen to be doing something effective to fight the injustice and provide relief for the suffering of innocent human beings, grievances are unlikely to lead to violent actions, such as direct armed intervention via non-state actors. The response to grievances is, in a way, delegated to actors who have some degree of legitimacy. In contrast, if nobody is doing anything and the suffering of innocent human beings continues under the watch of the international community, non-state actors will have ample material to justify their need to intervene, regardless of their political agenda or ideological orientation.

At the core of responsibilisation lies the concept of *jusqu'au-boutisme*. It is an ideological construct that posits the need to step up to the plate to achieve authenticity. Because if all agree that injustice exists, it is the ones who are most authentic, who not only talk the talk, but walk the walk, who will effectively do something about it. The quest for *authenticity* is encapsulated in this idea of *jusqu'au-boutisme,* of going all in, of being real. *Jusqu'au-boutisme* can also be seen as the primary explanation for the veneration of martyrs and martyrdom, for these human beings gave all they had, including their lives, to the cause they were fighting for. The rationale of *jusqu'au-boutisme* must be understood as the real *slippery slope*: Once we adhere to the basic premise of a wrong or a cause, actu-ally *doing* something about it becomes a matter of authenticity. On a logical and rhetorical level, this logic provides a strong impetus towards action. This under-standing is fundamentally distinct from the psychological theory of the slippery slope proposed by McCauley and Moskalenko (2011), which revolves around the fact that individuals do not resort immediately to extreme violence, but arrive at it through an incremental process, in which the individual steps seem harmless.

The need to step up to the plate, to fight against injustice, by any means nec-essary, is frequently associated with men, especially when it comes to armed action. The concept of combat masculinity (Sion, 2007) captures the set of values that is posited as being essential to manhood. *Real men* are not only courageous and brave, strong, and fearless; they are first and foremost authentic and sincere about their engagement. This perception of combat masculinity (with *jusqu'au-boutisme* at its core) is one of the main ideological constructs justifying and push-ing for mobilisation, especially violent mobilisation. These findings present a slight departure from gendered studies on terrorism, which argue that engagement in terrorism can be seen as a reaction to humiliation and 'emasculation', i.e., as an attempt to *restore* hegemonic masculinity (Ferber & Kimmel, 2008). Values associated with masculinity do not seem to be about restoring anything lost, but

about stepping up to the plate and bearing the hardships this entails. Thus, combat masculinity appears to be latently present in descriptions of the need to take responsibility, to defend and protect innocent civilians, in expressions of admiration for those who go *all in,* up to sacrificing their lives for a cause, and in the very attraction to combat and violence. The logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme* and combat masculinity can be used in different ways, among others also to disengage from violent groups and construct a prosocial and non-violent way of life. The fact that values associated with masculinity can support desistance processes has been identified before among juvenile offenders (Søgaard et al., 2016).

This book has not focused on the role of religion *per se*, but on the role that religiously inspired narratives can play in the way in which individuals engage with grievances. The goal was not to downplay the role of religion, as Dawson and Amarasingam (2017) lament regarding scholarship that focuses on structural factors, but to allow for a fresh engagement with religious concepts and narratives when it comes to violence, especially in the jihadist spectrum. This has allowed for concepts such as *jihad* or *shari'a* to be analysed based on the understanding of those who adhere to them and use them as a banner for their struggle. This allows for such concepts to be demystified and grasped in their sociological meaning, which is what ultimately informs mobilisation and action. Notably, the concept of *jihad*, which has been engaged with by Western terrorism scholars in a mostly superficial and romanticising manner, can and should be read in light of the concept of *jusqu'au-boutisme*. Outside theological debates, armed jihad is namely understood by those who adhere to it as a responsibility to protect and defend the oppressed and fight for justice. It resembles combat masculinity because this responsibility is seen as primarily incumbent upon men.

Crucially, the entire process of grievance-based engagement must be read and understood alongside a consideration of what can be called the *taste of radicality*. Fighting for justice with a group of rebellious underdogs is, as mentioned, an attractive image that corresponds to the values and imaginaries of heroes that are widespread across the world. The *taste of radicality* reassembles all the factors that stand somewhat in contrast to the rational grievance-based engagement: excitement, thrill-seeking, bravado, adventurism, escapism and, in fact, emotionality more generally. Most of these have been identified by the literature (Crettiez, 2016; Githens-Mazer, 2014; Katz, 1988; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011; Sageman, 2011). Undeniably, radicality, despite the hardships and difficulties it entails for the individuals involved, is exciting and fun, reminiscent of Roussinos' (2014) observation that 'the hidden awful truth about war is how much fun it is' (p.3). Grievances and politico-ideological motives can be instrumentalised to respond to this taste of radicality. The relationship between authentic and instrumentalised grievances is therefore complex, as is the tension between emotionality and rationality, within which engagement takes place. Grievance-based engagement cannot be pressed into either of these poles: Rather, individuals who see themselves as fighting for justice are constantly struggling (at their personal level but also within their group) to maintain a critical balance between emotionality and rationality, thrill-seeking and conviction, between

authentic engagement with grievances and their instrumentalisation. These fields of tension are essential to our understanding of politico-ideological mobilisation and violence.

An important finding that emerged from this book is the crucial role of contextual and situational factors in determining whether actual engagement takes place or not. There are, of course, sociological and psychological factors at the individual level that influence whether someone ends up engaging in grievances or not. However, apart from their extraordinary willingness to care relentlessly and to systematically resist apathy, individuals that act upon grievances up to the point of envisaging violence are in most ways very ordinary. The role of the environment the individual grows up in and the social constellation they find themselves in when grievances become salient and engagement is envisaged appears to play a much more important role. This is not a novel finding *per se*, as the importance of relational, contextual, situational, and temporal factors has been pointed out before (Bosi & Della Porta, 2012; Carlsson et al., 2019; Crettiez, 2016; Ducol, 2013; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Kruglanski et al., 2017; Malet, 2013; McAdam, 1986; McAdam et al., 2004; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011; Windisch et al., 2016). If this book contributes something in this respect, it is the importance of considering contextual factors specifically in relation to grievances. Whether individuals are confronted with specific collective memories or moral shocks, exposed to certain values and narratives or influenced by the role of particular political groups, depends almost exclusively on the environment in which they grow up. When exploring situational and contextual factors, it is therefore important to broaden the scope beyond aspects that are immediately linked to mobilisation and violence (e.g., how come this individual joined this group or committed this attack?) to cover the entire spectrum of grievance-based engagement. Related to this, the findings of this book point to the importance of structural factors and political dissatisfaction, in line with the argument that it is perhaps not as much the individual that 'tips' into radicality, but the context and situation that evolve to a degree that prompts mobilisation and violence (Ahmad & Monaghan, 2019; Lafaye, 2017; Liebling & Williams, 2018). Hence, overall, the importance of contextual factors in determining the outcome of a grievance-based mobilisation, including the turn to violent tactics and groups, cannot be understated.

Figure 16.4 is intended to summarise and illustrate the analysis of grievance-based engagement that has been presented here. At the centre of grievance-based engagement is an injustice that is identified, appropriated and sought to be addressed. The three social performances revolve around that injustice. The figure illustrates the most important concepts related to each social performance (e.g., moral shocks, rebellious underdogs) in rounded squares and associated subordinated concepts in elliptic shapes. Emotional states are presented in italics inside the grey areas attributed to the social performances. As explained, the entire process of engaging with injustices is accompanied and influenced by contextual and situational factors, as well as by an ongoing struggle with the taste of radicality and the three fields of tension that emerge from that struggle.
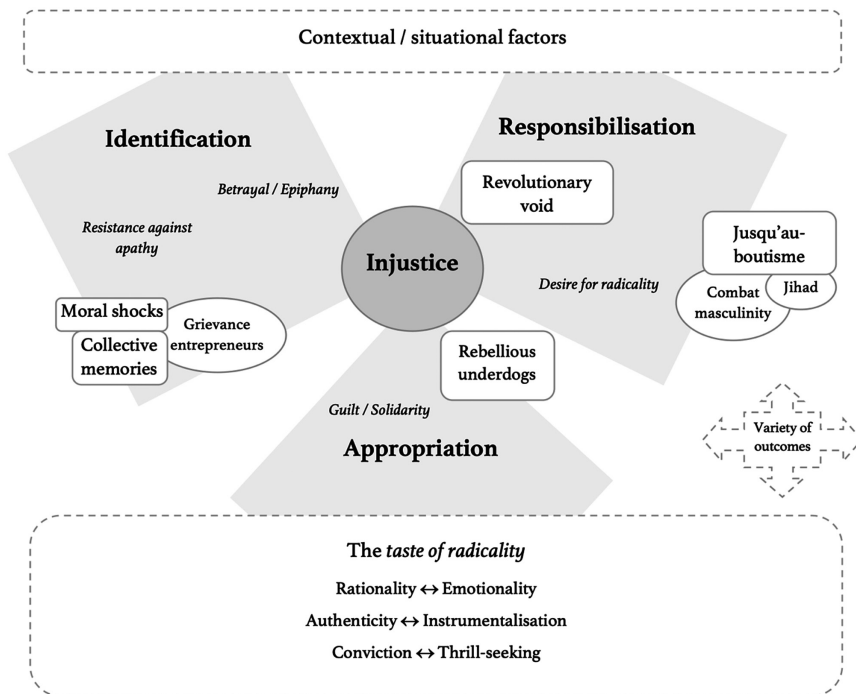
Figure 16.4 Integrated analysis of grievance-based engagement

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17 Implications for research and policymaking

This book has demonstrated that grievances are at the root and the core of the process towards violent action. Although challenging epistemically, methodologically and analytically, the grievance-based approach to the phenomenon allows for an in-depth engagement with the main motives that drive individuals who mobilise for political and ideological reasons. It is their way of engaging with grievances that can have a significant impact on the outcome, if the contextual factors present a favourable environment for mobilisation with a group of like-minded individuals. However, the fact that grievances are at the core of politico-ideological mobilisation does not preclude their instrumentalisation for political purposes or individualistic desires linked to thrill-seeking or bravado. In fact, the taste of radicality is such that the engagement takes place within a tension field between rational justifications and emotional drivers; it is a result of an interplay between them. Grievances can be instrumentalised to recruit individuals for a cause or to conceal one's own desire for adventure, escapism or heroism. This does not stand in contradiction to the fact that engagement still rests primarily upon and revolves around political grievances about major injustices. Grievance-based engagement and violence must be understood as moral forms of action imbued with a sense of righteousness (Katz, 1988). At the *core* of the phenomenon, as Derfoufi (2020) suggests calling the typical and most frequent forms of radicalisation, individuals are not seeking to inflict suffering on innocent human beings. Rather, they are fighting what they and many others see as a major injustice, using any means necessary. They adopt a posture and identity that is associated with this struggle, one that emphasises the importance of rebelliousness and resistance against a hegemonic power seen as unjustly oppressing a group of underdogs. Individuals who choose to act upon their grievances by mobilising and perhaps resorting to violent tactics, see themselves as rebellious underdogs fighting for justice.

Importantly, the fact that grievances play a role in individual processes towards violent action – even the fact that they are invoked by terrorist groups themselves – does not justify downplaying, delegitimising or even criminalising them. It is problematic that 'any political militancy or social dissidence that turns violent runs the risk of earning the label "terrorism"; becoming an open-and-shut matter of delegitimisation, as the assignment of that term ensures the non-discussion of

the issues raised by the given group' (Mohamedou, 2018, p.11). Grievances cannot and must not justify the killing of innocent human beings, as the Secretary-General of the United Nations stated very clearly, by declaring that 'there can be no acceptance of those who would seek to justify the deliberate taking of innocent civilian life, regardless of cause or grievance. If there is one universal principle that all peoples can agree on, surely it is this' (United Nations, 2001). Nevertheless, grievances refer to feelings of injustice that are widely shared by collectives across the globe and cannot simply be dismissed because they may lead to an outbreak of violence. On the contrary: For engagement with the so-called root causes of terrorism to be effective, it must consider grievances lest they continue to feed into the narratives of the most violent groups. Criminalising grievances and treating them as risk factors is tantamount to political silencing and oppression of dissidence, which is likely to foster new grievances. This is particularly problematic since, in the age of the GWOT, it is specifically the grievances voiced by Muslim individuals or groups that have been treated as grounds for concern and construed as gateways to violence (Abbas, 2019; Kundnani, 2014; Nagra & Monaghan, 2020; Pilkington & Acik, 2020). The hierarchisation of grievances that dominates public and scholarly discourse and the justice system about what causes are legitimate causes for indignation, and which are not, is hypocritical and extremely detrimental in terms of social equality and peaceful coexistence. Constructing the expression of grievances, for example, related to the negative repercussions of the War on Terror, as 'risky behaviour' (Hamm, 2013) is likely to hamper socio-political integration and participation of concerned groups who will feel observed, scrutinised and problematised (Jarvis & Lister, 2013; Turner, 2013) and may lay the very foundation for individual acts of terror (Kundani, 2014). Instead, truly engaging with grievances requires working on the sources of grievance, i.e., the structural dysfunctionalities and injustices nurturing them, while fostering critical thinking and media awareness to equip the youth in particular with the necessary tools to deconstruct ideas and narratives they will inevitably be exposed to via social media, the public discourse or influential individuals in their environment.

As a result of the suspectification and criminalisation of grievances, alternative means of political expression and Islamic activism have been obstructed, leaving the camp to those with the most destructive agendas. Placed under the scrutinising gaze of security apparatuses, Muslim communities have become wary of getting involved in discussions that may sound too critical, too radical or too subversive. It is crucial that space be given to groups who propose programmes that may be radical and subversive, but reconcilable with values of democracy, equality and justice. It is precisely the sidelining and hence the scarcity of such radicality in mainstream politics or among civil society organisations that are at the heart of the issue. Groups and organisations with radical programmes which nevertheless emphasise the importance of respecting plurality and focus on non-violent tactics provide ways to act upon grievances, thereby filling the revolutionary void and diversifying the range of possible options for engagement (Baldoli, 2020; Kundnani, 2014). It is not by imposing apathy and silence in the face of injustice

that the problem of terrorism is solved, but by proposing and guaranteeing avenues for the expression of criticism and radicality. As Kundnani suggests

> What is needed is less state surveillance and enforced conformity and more critical thinking and political empowerment. The role of communities in countering terrorism is not to institute self-censorship but to confidently construct political spaces where young people can politicize their disaffection into visions of how the world might be better organized, so that radical alternatives to terrorist vanguardism can emerge. Radicalization—in the true political sense of the word—is the solution, not the problem.
>
> (Kundnani, 2014, p.289)

In line with this, radicalisation must be seen as being, in principle, a beneficial process of conscientisation and responsibilisation in the face of major dysfunctionalities that affect the weak and the poor and cause unjustified suffering, in line with the views of a minority of scholarship on radicalisation (Derfoufi, 2020; Kundnani, 2014; Reidy, 2018). The way radicalisation has been treated as an undesirable and exclusively problematic phenomenon is due not only to the field's state-centrism and has prevented us from grasping the phenomenon in a holistic manner, beyond moralistic and politicised discussions.

This book therefore invites us to rethink efforts, policies and practices that aim to combat terrorism and curb violent extremism. As critical scholarship in criminology, criminal justice and security studies has made very clear, measures that are deployed in the name of security 'can breed future insecurities and grievances, prompting vicious circles and malign feedback loops across time' (Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016, p.1193). The panoply of practices that are put in place in the name of security (understood as national security) can be very harmful at the level of the individual (Walklate et al., 2019). In order to evaluate the impact of security measures holistically, they should be considered in light of the repercussions they have at the level of *everyday security* (Ajil et al., 2020; Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016; Walklate et al., 2019). Actions conducted in the name of security, democracy and freedom in the post-9/11 era have included military invasions, expansive surveillance practices, sweeping suspectification, unlawful detention, unjustified deportations, torture, assassinations, exclusion, marginalisation and silencing (Bigo et al., 2008; Kundnani, 2014; Leman-Longlois, 2012; Mohamedou, 2018; Nagra & Monaghan, 2020). All segments of society have been co-opted into complicity in the so-called fight against terror, with schoolteachers asked to spot radicalisation among children and exclude them if necessary (Clement & Scalia, 2020). Hijacking the promise of security and freedom, these practices have ostracised and stigmatised innocent human beings, and responded in counterproductive ways to many of those who have been attracted by the promises of terrorist groups. The GWOT has severely damaged the legitimacy and credibility of states and the international community and alienated large portions of society which have grown cynical about the purported infallibility of conventional actors and their sense of entitlement and

righteousness. The grievances that drive those who engage in acts of terror are shared by many and they are the direct emanation of the dysfunctionalities of conventional responses to terrorism and the hypocrisy of the hegemonic narrative that justifies them. If we realise that the violence, the crimes and the human rights violations of states in the Global War on Terror are a main driver behind indiscriminate violence, then counter-terrorism efforts should be led with much more precision and consideration for their devastating byproducts or dehumanising 'collateral damage'. The fact that human rights violations are a byproduct of counter-terrorism then becomes not only problematic from a moral point of view, but an impediment to the very strategic goal of counterterrorism, which is, supposedly, to reduce terrorism.

Or is the goal a different one? Perhaps, it would be more sincere to admit that much of the fight against terrorism serves the hyper-masculinist and belligerent drive to seek revenge and kill in return. If that is the case, then, this is not a war *against* terrorists, but a war *between* terrorists; a war against terror fought by terror that produces new terror in an endless vicious cycle of destruction. This book has highlighted that terrorism is seen as an act of collective self-defence by the perpetrators themselves. Defence is an elastic notion. Until when is it justified and against whom? This elasticity bears the material necessary for justifications of pre-emptive violence, retaliatory violence and revenge. Terrorists use this elasticity to justify the most heinous acts of indiscriminate violence. Their logic goes: If they are killing our people, children and women and the weak, why should we spare theirs? This logic is fundamentally perverse and the source of great evil. But it is hypocritical to expect non-state actors to be outstandingly restrictive, meticulous and precise in their designation of the enemy and their attacks, when a lack of precision and 'collateral damage' are acceptable for state actors (e.g., Khan & Gopal, 2017; Khan, 2021). If we are sincere about our engagement with terrorism, then we should first acknowledge that as long as those who hold the legitimate monopoly of violence continue to abuse it, terrorism will be an inevitable feature of our existence.

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Conclusion

This book has presented the findings of an in-depth qualitative study of narratives on politico-ideological mobilisation and violence in relation to causes and conflicts in the Arab World. Based on a study conducted in three countries with 58 individuals engaged in various forms of politico-ideological mobilisation and violence, and using the methodology of Grounded Theory, I have analysed the ways in which feelings of injustice emerge in the form of grievances that travel across space and time, and how they can come to mobilise individuals for action.

Crucial insights may be gained from engaging with the narratives of those who are the primary subjects and can best narrate their motives and their emotions, while critically analysing the narrative performances and constructions at play. The findings presented here shed light on the iterative processes at play when grievances emerge and individuals engage with them. They confirm much of the existing literature in relation to moral shocks and collective memory, the role of collective identity and combat masculinity, as well as thrill-seeking, adventurism and the importance of contextual and situational factors. Some novel aspects have been discovered such as the tension between the taste of radicality and ideological convictions for engagement, the role of rebelliousness and the figure of the underdog, the rupture that individuals operate from the hegemonic narrative after moments of betrayal and epiphany, and the central function of the logic of *jusqu'au-boutisme* in justifying, promoting and calling for mobilisation and violence.

While the ambitious design and scale of the study has brought with it the advantage of a transversal and cross-cultural/contextual lens on the phenomenon, focusing on one single context could have had the advantage of complementing the findings with a study of the contextual specificities, the history of the place and the role of social networks (both on- and offline), thereby allowing for greater depth. Future research might benefit from exploring various forms of grievance-based engagement in micro-settings such as Tripoli, while keeping a focus on grievances and the way they form and are acted upon. Furthermore, the tentative findings on the factors that play a role in disengagement processes could be further developed in the literature in this field, which remains underdeveloped. It would also be interesting to complement the interview-based approach with a more comprehensive and long-term immersion in the terrain under study, to

further triangulate and diversify the perspectives on the narratives that circulate and the ways in which they impact the formation of grievances and individuals' engagement with them.

Overall, the research findings invite us to rethink the way the phenomenon of radicalisation, radicality and politico-ideological violence is studied and engaged with. The largely punitive and vindictive reflexes that transpire through many of the policies that are put in place to deal with the phenomenon and individuals involved in it, are deserving of our utmost concern. They have proven to be counterproductive, and the narratives collected here demonstrate the lasting and devastating repercussions of the Global War on Terror, which continue to nurture grievances and create powder kegs that may sooner or later ignite and explode. Academia plays an important role in policymaking in the field of counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism. The orientalist, state-centrist and depoliticising tendency of this field of research has obscured much of the complexity of the phenomenon, for the sake of actionable and supposedly pragmatic recommendations on how to lead the fight against terrorism. The world and the academe are witnessing a critical moment in history. The events of 2020 have shaken many institutions and hopefully contributed to constructive discussions about the role of the social sciences in speaking truth to power, in highlighting dysfunctionalities and dynamics of oppression and, crucially, in recognising their own role in reproducing and perpetuating them. Many critical voices are being raised right now. And even if many of them may sound too loud or too aggressive; even though they may cause discomfort: It is perhaps the most important time to listen.

Appendix I

Detailed list of interviewees

n=no	H=Shiite militias	
y=yes	SJ=Salafi-jihadist	
A=PIV	P=Palestine-specific	
B=PIM	LI=Leftist/internationalist	
C=Peripheral actors	K=Kurdish groups	
CP=Practitioner	O=Other	
CC=Policy/politics	LB=Lebanon	
CR =Researcher	CH=Switzerland	
CB=Bystander	CA=Canada	

Pseudonyme	Country	City	Profile	Subprofile	Prison	Recorded	Language	Multiple interviews
Naseem	LB	Tripoli	A	H	n	y	a	y
Yahya	LB	Tripoli	A	H	n	y	a	
Waad	LB	Tripoli	A	H	n	y	a	
Bashar	LB	Tripoli	A	H	n	y	a	
Samir	LB	Beirut	B	H	y	y	a	
Nidhal	LB	Beirut	B	H	n	y	a	
Aziz	LB	Beirut	B	H	n	y	a	
Thulfiqar	LB	Beirut	B	H	n	y	a	y
Jaafar	LB	Beirut	B	H	n	y	a	
Pierre	LB	Beirut	B	LI	n	y	a	
Rafid	LB	Beirut	B	LI	n	y	a	
Rafiq	LB	Beirut	B	LI	n	y	e	
Amal	LB	Beirut	B	LI	n	y	e	
Sobhi	LB	Beirut	B	LI	n	y	a	
Justin	LB	Jounieh	A	O	n	y	a	
Rima	LB	Beirut	B	O	n	y	a	
Adam	LB	Beirut	B	O	n	y	a	
Nadir	LB	Beirut	B	O	n	y	a	
Baseel	LB	Beirut	B	O	n	y	a	
Abdeljaleel	LB	Tripoli	A	P	y	y	a	
Suhaib	LB	Saida	B	P	n	y	a	

Pseudonyme	*Country*	*City*	*Profile*	*Subprofile*	*Prison*	*Recorded*	*Language*	*Multiple interviews*
Aqeel	LB	Saida	B	P	n	y	a	
Halim	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	y	a	
Amir	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	y	a	y
Zakaria	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	y	a	
Nassim	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	y	a	
Mansour	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	n	y	a	y
Bader	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	y	a	
Adnan	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	n	y	a	
Walid	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	y	a	y
Rashid	LB	Saida	A	SJ	y	n	a	
Fahad	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	n	a	
Salman	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	n	a	
Abdelaziz	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	n	a	
Aamer	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	n	a	
Atif	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	y	n	a	
Noor	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	n	y	a	
Fakhreddine	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	n	y	a	
Ammar	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	n	n	a	
Ashraf	LB	Tripoli	A	SJ	n	n	a	
Thamam	LB	Tripoli	C	CB	n	n	a	
Mazen	LB	Tripoli	C	CP	n	n	a	
Marwan	LB	Tripoli	C	CP	n	n	a	
Sultan	LB	Tripoli	C	CP	n	n	a	
Rakan	LB	Tripoli	C	CB	n	y	a	
Bandar	LB	Tripoli	C	CB	n	y	a	
Bilal	LB	Beirut	C	CP	n	n	a	
Awwab	LB	Tripoli	C	CB	n	n	a	
Shibl	LB	Tripoli	C	CB	n	n	a	
Barah	LB	Beirut	C	CB	n	n	a	
Yandar	LB	Saida	C	CB	n	n	a	
Yara	LB	Saida	C	CB	n	y	a	
Zafer	LB	Saida	C	CB	n	n	a	
Maysam	LB	Saida	C	CC	n	n	a	
Yamin	LB	Beirut	C	CR	n	y	a	
Ritaj	LB	Beirut	C	CR	n	n	a	
Khatir	LB	Beirut	C	CR	n	n	a	
Hussein	LB	Joun	C	CR	n	n	a	
Jenny	LB	Beirut	C	CP	n	n	a	
Sara	LB	Beirut	C	CP	n	n	a	
Nassif	LB	Saida	C	CP	n	n	a	
Motaz	LB	Tripoli	C	CP	n	n	a	
Michel	LB	Jbeil	C	CC	n	n	a	
Antoine	LB	Beirut	C	CC	n	n	f	
Jacqueline	LB	Beirut	C	CC	n	n	a	
Jameyla	LB	Beirut	C	CC	n	n	a	
Arslan	LB	Beirut	C	CP	n	n	a	
Mizil	LB	Tripoli	C	CP	n	n	a	

Pseudonyme	Country	City	Profile	Subprofile	Prison	Recorded	Language	Multiple interviews
Nizar	LB	Beirut	A	H	n	n	a	
Lina	CH	Basel	C	CP	n	n	a	
Richard	CH	Geneva	A	K	y	y	f	y
Daniel	CH	Geneva	A	K	n	y	f	
Karwan	CH	St. Gallen	A	K	y	y	g	
Souhail	CH	Neuchatel	B	LI	n	y	f	
Nooreddine	CH	Bern	B	P	y	y	g	
Max	CH	Geneva	A	SJ	y	y	f	y
Sami	CH	Zürich	A	SJ	y	y	a	y
Mike	CH	Bern	C	CP	n	n	g	
Hanspeter	CH	Winterthur	C	CP	n	y	g	
Christoph	CH	Frauenfeld	C	CP	n	y	g	
Franz	CH	Zürich	C	CP	n	y	g	
Thomas	CH	Zürich	C	CP	n	y	g	
Hakan	CH	Bienne	C	CP	n	y	f	
Raseem	CH	Bienne	C	CP	n	y	f	
Jean-Luc	CH	Geneva	C	CP	n	y	f	
Frédéric	CH	Orbe	C	CP	n	n	f	
Alain	CH	Lausanne	C	CP	n	n	f	
Bruno	CH	Solothurn	C	CP	n	y	g	
Silvan	CH	Bern	C	CP	n	n	g	
Mouloud	CH	Lausanne	C	CP	n	y	a	
Ajouz	CH	Lausanne	C	CP	n	y	a	
Martin	CH	Zürich	C	CB	n	n	g	
Rainer	CH	Bern	C	CP	n	n	g	
Alisha	CH	Bern	C	CP	n	n	g	
Kevin	CA	Montreal	A	LI	y	y	f	y
Randa	CA	Montreal	B	LI	n	y	a	
Ziad	CA	Montreal	B	LI	n	y	e	
Khaled	CA	Montreal	B	LI	n	y	e	
Battoul	CA	Montreal	B	LI	n	y	a	
Raid	CA	Montreal	B	LI	y	y	a	
Zahid	CA	Montreal	B	LI	n	y	a	
Sabri	CA	Montreal	B	LI	n	y	a	
Salim	CA	Montreal	A	P	y	n	a	
Asif	CA	Toronto	B	P	n	y	e	
Khalil	CA	Montreal	C	CR	n	y	a	
Meriem	CA	Montreal	C	CP	n	y	f	
Fanny	CA	Montreal	C	CP	n	y	f	
Justine	CA	Montreal	C	CP	n	y	f	
Pasha	CA	Toronto	C	CP	n	n	e	

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