

### 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

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

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 interview is counted per interviewee. In the core categories PIM and PIV, 41 interviews 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 videoconferencing 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).<sup>1</sup> 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 distribution of the languages in which interviews were conducted:

The distribution between the languages was very similar in the case of peripheral 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)

<i>Country/Languages</i>	<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>German/Swiss German</i>	<i>Grand Total</i>
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 beforehand. 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 preoccupied 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 mentioned 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 mobilisation more generally, whether it leads to violent outcomes or not. Hence, the overview 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 category. 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.

**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.

**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.

**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 Saïda. Was attracted by the group around Ahmed Al Aseer and started proselytising in Saïda, 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

**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.

**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'.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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 Saïda 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.

**Suhaïb (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)**

**Nooredidine** (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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

## 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**Maysam** (26) grew up in the refugee camp Ein El Hilweh and lives in Saïda now. She works at the same studio as Zafer and is very invested in the Palestinian cause.

**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.

**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.

**Yandar** (36) works with UNICEF at the refugee camp Ein El Hilweh in Saïda. When he was younger, he was an active defender of the Palestinian cause.

**Yamin** is a researcher at a think tank affiliated with Hezbollah.

**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.

**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.

**Yara** (19) grew up in the refugee camp Ein el Hilweh. She volunteers with an NGO active for the Palestinian cause.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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 Saïda. 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.

**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.

**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.

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

**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.

**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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