

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 dysfunctions 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.

(Field notes, 29 March 2019)

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.

(Fieldnotes, 15 July 2019)

‘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 particularly telling because it illustrates the complexity of clearly distilling the reasons 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 generally, 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 something’ (Ziad, Canada). The enthusiasm was met with great frustration and disillusionment 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 movement 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 personally 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 everywhere 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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