

11 Responsibilisation of self and others

Addressing the injustice

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

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

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

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

‘Nobody is doing anything’: Filling a revolutionary void

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

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

(Jaafar, Lebanon)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For example: my bike was stolen for the third time, so I went and stole one myself. In a way, I said to myself, they steal my bike, I will steal one. It is a gradual process. You disconnect from the society you live in. Add to that the people who tell you certain things: how to react, how to act, brainwashing you in a way. We started being kind of apart, because we didn't accept any other norms than ours.

(Max, Switzerland)

Ziad makes a similar argument, yet nuances it by making it clear that illegality should not be an end in itself

Although electoral politics can be a way...it doesn't mean that legal means are the only ones that you need to use...well in the long run it is actually

technically illegal to call for the overthrow of the state right [laughs] but I do call for the overthrow of the state right...it's just a question of like...what illegal things you're going to do that matter and what things just make you feel good right.

(Ziad, Canada)

Instances of moral shocks or learning about the states' crimes or failures to intervene reinvigorates the scepticism that interviewees have against state actors and authorities. The narratives also reveal that engaging in foreign fighting, for instance, can be considered as a form of *exported political contestation*, where fighting abroad is partly seen as a defiance of the respective states and their laws. This argument is supported by the fact that individuals seem to consider their engagement in foreign fighting as an extension of a generally defiant posture towards the state and international institutions.

The feeling of *nobody is doing anything* is also connected to one of the main aspects of grievances, namely the fact that they remain unpunished. However, in contrast to the post-hoc orientation of the notion of *impunity*, the perception of a revolutionary void is more strongly anchored in the present and is also at least partly oriented towards the future. Nobody protects that particular collective that is being attacked, therefore one needs to intervene not only to punish the perpetrators but also to prevent further suffering. In that sense, it evokes the notion of *urgency*, which is an essential narrative component. The fact that a major injustice is happening, and nobody is intervening means that there is a strong sense of urgency that *something must be done, and it must be done quickly*. It also relates to the perception of a major *existential threat*: This collective needs to be defended otherwise the perpetrators will either subdue, oppress or even eliminate them. For instance, Hezbollah sympathisers justify Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian conflict based on the assumption that Daesh would come for Lebanon after conquering Syria. A similar feeling was motivating young Shia males from all over Iraq to join the Popular Mobilisation Forces. Sunni Muslims who joined rebel factions in the Syrian conflict felt that the Sunni population would be decimated if Bashar Al-Assad was not stopped, or that the population of Bab-el-Tabbaneh would be annihilated. As the following quote illustrates, the idea of *post-hoc* self-defence is sometimes mixed with expressions of *ante-hoc* defence, that is, pre-emptive defence against a threat; one that is usually framed as existential:

Had we not defended ourselves, our street would have disappeared. In a neighbourhood next to ours, the army was supposed to protect the people. But under their watch, they came and stole everything and burned the houses. Had we not defended ourselves, the same would have happened to us.

(Adnan, Lebanon)

Similar feelings of existential threats can also be found among recruits for the Kurdish cause or right-wing Christian groups. The narrative of an existential threat is inherent to justifications of violent defence. Even when it was not stated

explicitly, for example, when it seemed like the individual was expressing irrational hatred, the underlying justification was always associated with a sense of righteousness

Of course, we want peace and security. But if we are sitting here now, and someone comes in and wants to fight us. What do you tell him? You want to live in security? You will defend yourself. Kill him before he kills you. Right? You won't tell him 'come slap me, come shoot me'.

(Bader, Lebanon)

Regarding the phenomenon of Salafi-jihadism and sympathies with so-called IS, several interviewees in the Lebanese context stress that Sunni Muslims 'don't have nobody' to represent them and defend their interests. They feel that ever since the killing of former Prime minister Rafic Al-Hariri, they are lacking a major Sunni figure in Lebanese politics that they feel represents them. As a result of this void, figures like Ahmed Al-Aseer or Salim al Rafi'i have been able to rally many young Sunni Muslims around them and gain their political loyalty. Following the calls of these figures, many young men joined them in their military activities locally or in Syria. Interestingly, in the case of Lebanese Sunni Muslims, the feeling of *nobody stands up for us* seems to be a continuation of the feeling that *nobody protects Sunni Muslims in general*. Thereby, a narrative continuity is established between local political grievances and international political grievances related to the feeling of *Madhloumiya*.

Globally, the attraction of major jihadist groups such as AQ and IS rests to a large extent on the fact that they are perceived as *filling the revolutionary void*. In the eyes of jihadist sympathisers around the world, they are seen as doing something against major powers that commit injustices in the world, stepping up to the plate where many others remain idle. Non-jihadist interviewees were asked about their views on the jihadist phenomenon. Since they are also engaged for causes in the Arab World, often share ethnic or cultural characteristics, and do not automatically defer to state-centric positions, their analysis tends to be less contaminated than that of external spectators who are too disconnected from the region and the phenomenon. A major recurring theme in their analysis was, as Richard put it cogently, that '*they would not have needed to end up there, with these groups*' (Richard, Switzerland). At the basis of their engagement are preoccupations that are widely shared by all interviewees. Many other groups could have offered a revolutionary agenda that would have been less racist, fascist, not indiscriminately violent and damaging to the Arab-Muslim World more generally. Non-jihadist interviewees express a certain sadness about the fact that those who wanted to do something were lost to groups affiliated with AQ and IS. These groups were simply more effective at presenting themselves as the main purveyors of a radical anti-imperialist agenda that promised to push back existential threats and enact real and lasting change. Sabri commented that, in light of the *revolutionary void*, it is particularly telling that many of the first regions in Syria from which IS were able to garner recruits were those that had formerly been

hotbeds of the socialist movement. Ziad similarly notes that there is a demand for radicality in the Arab World, and, to many sympathisers, that demand was met by AQ and IS

The rage is still there, in the Arab World, but where can it go? The revolutionary answer in the Arab World is still Islamism.

(Ziad, Canada)

There was no other group, and there still does not seem to be a group, that offers a convincingly revolutionary agenda. It feels like there is no credible radical alternative, as Khaled puts it

A question of like...what at the end of the day...will feel like a credible alternative...I think a radical alternative...at this point I don't know that's going to be...what they say...I think you know...you see this in US politics...you see this not just in the Arab world...I think it's a global thing...the fact that the centre no longer holds, you know.

(Khaled, Canada)

During my interview with Sheikh Ajouz, I realised how he himself demonstrated the existence of that revolutionary void. While denouncing the use of violent tactics to do something about the grievances that Arab-Muslims hold regarding the devastating impacts of interventionist projects in the region, he himself struggles to come up with a credible alternative that would at least seem like it's bold and effective. After asking him what alternatives he would propose to those who advocate for violence, he replied

We are for an equal society, a just society, ruled by just leaders. And then we can work on things. For example, in my home country, we want to fight corruption. But you voted for them! You elected them! All these leaders! [...]
We want to start slowly, working from the grassroots, with the society.

(Sheikh Ajouz, Switzerland)

While of course reasonable, such alternatives do not satiate the desire for radicality, which is inherent to the ambition to fundamentally change the *status quo*. At some point during my research stay in Canada, but as part of my general reflections on the research topic and ongoing analysis of the interviews, I realised that there seemed to be a demand for radicality that could not be sufficiently met by democratic societies and that therefore groups with radical promises would always find some popularity

There's a paradox in society. The most radical groups appeal to individuals who are dissatisfied with the status quo, there is a demand for radical programmes. But since mainstream electoral politics often does not offer that and remains confined within the boundaries of mainstream possibilities, the groups that are

most radical or the most violent end up having a more convincing offer. Society should therefore consider the importance of having radicality within the margins of what may be called mainstream politics. The problem is, however, that no group that is closely located at the centre of mainstream politics will allow for too much radicality, since that radicality is likely to threaten its very existence.

(Fieldnotes, 18 February 2020)

Jusqu'au-boutisme: *The quest for authenticity*

Seeing and wanting to fill a revolutionary void is an essential element of the mechanism of responsabilisation of the self and others. Another (and perhaps the) major aspect, strongly present throughout the narratives, is the *quest for authenticity*, i.e., the process of aligning one's actions with one's words. In the context of defending the oppressed and seeking justice, this means not only calling out injustice, but also doing something about it. After one of the many small talk discussions I had with people during my research stay in Lebanon, I realised that the quest for authenticity is, in its fundamental essence, an uncontroversial and widely shared phenomenon. During a discussion with a Christian Lebanese woman, we came to talk about the role of the United States in the region, and she expressed strong Anti-American sentiments. I noted that

When we are all united by the same sentiments, for instance, Anti-Americanism...if we agree at the basis of what is seen as being wrong...Then one of the determining factors of engagement is, paradoxically, the courage and the will to actually do something (agency)...The most violent, then, may be driven by this feeling of being the most courageous and determined and those who sacrifice the most, those who are being real.

(Fieldnotes, 30 June 2019)

If a general narrative identifies a certain injustice and perhaps the perpetrators of that injustice, then the question will be one of authenticity: Who wants to keep talking the talk and who is willing, ready and courageous enough to walk the talk? The theme of the quest for authenticity is a major component of narratives about politico-ideological engagement. It is a feeling that can be broken up into logical fragments such as

they all know what should be done,
but they are cowards,
nobody is being real about it,
I must be real about it.

This idea of *being real or going all in* is well captured by the French expression *jusqu'au-boutisme* (literally: 'to-the-end-ism'), translated as 'brinkmanship', but also – ironically – as 'extremism'. It is often very clearly identifiable in the narratives

What annoyed me was that it was all just talk...And I needed deeds, action. [...] If I engaged in something like this, I would go through with it to the end. I don't do things half-way. So, I called up this friend and told him that I wanted to leave for Syria.

(Max, Switzerland)

Some interviewees further expressed that by travelling to a conflict zone to join the fighting, they were trying to examine their own *ability to go all in*

It started titillating me, I wanted to know...whether...was I ready to go myself? [...] that's something that I clearly said to myself. I wanted to test myself. Was I ready to do like they say in the books, to pick up a weapon and go fight? [...] Leaving for combat is also a way of asserting one's willingness to leave behind the European petit-bourgeois comfort.

(Richard, Switzerland)

The quote by Richard sums up well that seeking authenticity also means accepting and, in a way, embracing discomfort. Because to many foreign fighters especially, there is a conviction that fighting for justice requires courage to give up that comfort in the first place. Seeking authenticity means making sacrifices along the way. It means accepting discomfort and renouncing a life of comfort provided by the environment that many of the interviewees live in. This does not necessarily involve active engagement in fighting. Political activism more generally is a costly and time-consuming project that rarely leads to immediate gratification. Committing one's life to a cause takes a willingness to make many sacrifices. The connection between *jusqu'au-boutisme* and the inevitability of making sacrifices is present throughout the narratives and particularly well captured in the following excerpt by Nooredine

When I do something, I do it properly. As soon as I decided that Islam was the religion I wanted to commit to, everything happened very quickly. I married according to Islamic law. If I do it, then I do it right. For example, when my boss back then, around the beginnings of my engagement for the Palestinian cause, told me that I had to stop...that I had to stop making my engagement so public...otherwise he would have to fire me...I told him very clearly that there was no way I would trade in my engagement for Palestine for a job. Not for this job. For no job.

(Nooredine, Switzerland)

The self-sacrificing attitude is present in most interviewees' narratives and self-sacrifice is generally presented as a noble characteristic and act, a virtue that they admire and aspire to. For instance, Max affirms that he has a particular tendency to sacrifice himself for others

I've also had...I've always had an extremist need to sacrifice myself for the people I loved. I would do anything for a person. I could dedicate my body

and soul to something if that could alleviate even a tiny bit of that person's pain.

(Max, Switzerland)

The quest for utmost authenticity seems to be inextricably tied to assertions of self-sacrifice, including a willingness to expose oneself to the risk of dying in combat, causing pain to family members or risking social and economic setbacks or even legal consequences. Richard comments that these sacrifices are necessary if one wants to be real and serious about one's engagement to a cause

My mother went through a depression because I left for Syria. But that couldn't stop me either. No [...] Even if I have a kid. That won't keep me from fighting. [...] because you know...I've also changed my point of view on prison. Prison is not the end. It's perhaps an inevitable phase when you are engaged like this.

(Richard, Switzerland)

On a similar note, he expresses his admiration for those he encountered in the battlefield and who had travelled from other places to join the war efforts

These were people who had a trajectory like ours. They were people who had no obligation to be there. They had *chosen* [emphasis by interviewee] to come here.

(Richard, Switzerland)

The notion of *choice* is central: Individuals *choose* to leave their comfort behind and decide to do the right thing, standing up for justice. The way Richard expresses this reveals two things: His self-perception of having chosen to leave the comfort behind, at least for a defined period of time, and therefore his achievement of a certain degree of authenticity. On the other hand, the way he expresses this, whether wittingly or not, operates a hierarchisation between those who are on the ground fighting and those who come from other places to support them. Kevin makes this clear in a different way, by voicing his annoyance about those who simply join protests for the fun of it, and distancing himself and others who are *being real* about their engagement from them

It was in 2011, during Occupy, that I realised that being radical could be cool. I had been in the streets for a long time and all of a sudden, I saw all these people...many of them from a bourgeois background. Ahh, now that the cameras are here, you show up! Interesting...But it's upsetting to us...we have an honest and sincere involvement in this...to see those people come and benefit from us and then be protected by their bourgeois privileges. But many of them are also afraid of me, because they consider me a 'full rad', as in a really radical guy...which makes them think I am dangerous.

(Kevin, Canada)

Daniel describes a situation which is particularly revelatory of the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme*. During his journey to Syria, he had stopped, together with other foreign combatants, in a third country with the Kurdish group that was responsible for the logistics. He stayed there for a couple of days. One evening, he was asked by an older man to go to a local café frequented by many Kurdish young men. He described the incident as follows

He didn't tell us in the beginning, he just took us there. But later he told us that he wanted to put some pressure on these young Kurds. We'll show them these Swiss guys who will go to Kurdistan and fight while they stay here, smoking pot. You see, he used us! [Laughs] The young Kurds quickly realised who we were, they all hid their joints below the table! [Laughs]. It was really funny, we hadn't asked for anything. In the end, they put the pressure on themselves. I think the old man was right to do that...you know, they are comfortable here in Europe. They can smoke pot in cafés. That event reminded them a little bit...that if you claim to be a proud Kurd all year long, there comes a time when you have to step up to the plate. So, we went there and crushed the mood! [Laughs] When we left, it was a ceremony. They all stood up to shake our hands.

(Daniel, Switzerland)

Daniel's approving posture is also revelatory of his own adhesion to the idea that people who are affected, whether through their membership in a particular community or country or their witnessing of injustice, have an inherent responsibility to step up to the plate. What's more, Daniel reveals his approval of actively using the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme* to remind people, especially young men, of their responsibility to fight for the rights of their collective.

Also indicative of their willingness to accept and embrace discomfort, interviewees describe how they endured duress and difficult conditions, clearly visible in Max' descriptions

We expected to take a sleeping bag and sleep on the street. We were really in war mode. Of course, I didn't believe we were going to be in a five-star hotel, sipping cocktails.

(Max, Switzerland)

Similar elements can be found in the Max' account of his time in prison in Syria and Turkey

It was rough in the beginning because the food was absolutely dreadful, the covers were musty and there was no hot water. When I got there, it was January. First week, I got sick immediately. But then, you get used to it. You get used to it [laughs].

(Max, Switzerland)

In line with the idea of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, interviewees express great admiration for those who give everything, including their lives. They are considered as *martyrs* across all political and ideological orientations

I have always admired people who give everything. [...] I admire these people for their sacrifice. People who leave the individualism behind, who transcend it. 'I am going to dedicate my life to others'. That gesture, I admire it immensely. [...] Martyrs are people who show you the way, because they chose to sacrifice everything.

(Richard, Switzerland)

In fact, martyrdom seems to be the logical culmination of *jusqu'au-boutisme*. If one is authentic about his or her fight against injustice, then even one's life shouldn't be worth more than the lives of those who are oppressed. There is a lot of glory attached to the idea of martyrdom. As Nizar sums it up

Giving one's life for a cause is the greatest form of sacrifice.

(Nizar, Lebanon)

Salim, who was formerly fighting alongside Palestinian factions against the Israeli military, clearly expresses his frustration about not being able to give what the real revolutionaries are sacrificing

When I took this stone for the first time, as a young boy, and threw it at the Israeli tank...I was scared, but I was proud...I was a fedayi, I was a resistance fighter...my father was proud of me. I was doing what was right. But then... the older I grew, the less I could dedicate myself to the cause...I was never sacrificing enough, never sacrificed as much as the others, the real fedayeen did.

(Salim, Canada)

Actually, the word *fedayi* (perhaps better known in its plural form *fedayeen*) goes back to the word *fida'* (ءادف), which can be translated as sacrifice. The idea of sacrifice is inherent to notions of resistance, defence of others and seeking justice. Note also that Salim evokes feelings of guilt about not being *enough*, as discussed above. The fascination for martyrdom is a recurring theme in the narratives. It is closely tied to politico-ideological engagement. The fascination does not, however, in most cases, seem to be of a particular pathological nature. Rather, it is logically embedded in the narrative of *jusqu'au-boutisme*: If you want to be real about your engagement for a cause, then you have to demonstrate that by dedicating yourself to the cause, by going *all in*. And *all in* means risking your life along the way. In a way, martyrdom is the symbolic and physical culmination of authenticity, of giving everything to the cause. Within the parameters set by the ideology of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, martyrs are ideal heroic figures, because they not only gave

their minds, hearts and bodies to fight – they sacrificed their entire lives for the cause. They are, in a way, the utmost incarnation of the idea of defending others.

Interestingly and importantly, the interviewees who joined conflict zones and carried weapons reported that the difficulty was not overcoming fear of death, but overcoming the *fear of killing someone*, as the quote by Daniel captures

It's not as hard to accept the idea of dying as it is to accommodate the fact that you might kill someone.

(Daniel, Switzerland)

Apart from a few exceptions, such as Salman, who was, according to practitioner Sara, suicidal when he was planning to launch a suicide attack, interviewees clearly distinguish between suicide and martyrdom. It is generally acknowledged to be wrong, not only among jihadists but also among leftist foreign fighters, to seek death. Rather, one has to avoid death but face it when the time has come. The following excerpt from the interview with Mansour illustrates the nuances in this regard

AA: If the situation changed, if your family was safe, if you could make sure you wouldn't hurt innocent people, could you give your life? Commit suicide?

Mansour: I got to that point, yes. But in my head, and in no religion, suicide is admitted. You don't get into paradise if you commit suicide. Also...martyrdom is not always accepted. You can't go and become a martyr because you are done with your life and fed up. That's like suicide. But if you go for a reason, and you are fighting for a cause...then that's martyrdom. For example, you're going to Jerusalem, to fight against Jews, that's martyrdom, but not if you just want to give up your life. But many people are doing that now, they are going to Syria, because they are fed up with life in the here and now.

(Mansour, Lebanon)

The way martyrdom is celebrated by Hezbollah, according to the interviewees who are all sympathisers with close connections to fighters, is particularly illustrative of the way martyrdom can become associated with a collectively celebrated virtuous commitment. Martyrdom of a son or husband leads to posthumous social advancement for family members who are left behind. Martyrs are venerated for their heroic commitment. The following excerpts illustrate how martyrdom is celebrated and even sought in the Lebanese pro-Hezbollah culture. Samir explains how martyrdom is ingrained in the culture of pro-Hezbollah environments

There were many who were prohibited from joining...Strictly prohibited. But their mothers would sometimes come to Sayyed Hussein and say that she wanted him to go fight. That's the culture we have here. When a son dies fighting, the mother would say my son sacrificed himself for Sayyeda Zaineb, he is not worth more than other young men. Like Sayyeda Fatima who sacrificed her son for the religion. That's the culture we have here. Again, there

was no need to brainwash. This generation came out and it was already convinced of the cause.

(Samir, Lebanon)

When the politico-ideological engagement itself is embedded in a religiously tainted narrative, martyrdom and self-sacrifice are frequently associated with heroic figures who gave their lives in defence of their people and their religion. The following excerpt of the interview with Jaafar also connects the idea of martyrdom to religion and early figures of Islamic history like Imam Hussein

The religious conviction, it plays a huge role. You go to defend a religion. Not fanatically about religion. [...] But the religious conviction, especially Ashura, is a huge spiritual factor in making people less afraid of dying. The idea of martyrdom. The conviction that you don't lose anything through martyrdom. And you hear the story of Ashura, the Hussein who stood alone and was killed, and he fought the enemy and the entire army was in front of him, and he sacrificed himself for reforms and not for the sect or political objectives, because he wanted reforms. The religious conviction plays a big role, as a personal motivator. And the story, is there. The story and the causes are there.

(Jaafar, Lebanon)

The way Jaafar talks about *the story* is very telling. Unwittingly, he is referring to a cultural narrative that he has been socialised into and into which individuals can tap. As a young man, I can be like the Imam Hussein, with all his virtues and his courage: I can make my story to look at least a bit like this glorious story that is repeated so often. Because *the story is there*, as Jaafar says, the ideological components of mobilisation are there, too, which facilitates young men's actual mobilisation. Pushed to the extreme, martyrdom can become a collectively sacrificial attitude, where parents want their sons to become martyrs. Nidhal explains this, trying to emphasise the absurdity of this phenomenon

Some time ago...I had a friend who got injured...His father was receiving congratulations, that his son got injured on the front. So one of them...the man is very *Hezbi*...one of them said to him, hopefully next time you will have the great joy (الفرحة الكبيرة)...he was like...yes inshallah...do you see what I mean? [emphasising the absurdity of the gesture]...that's the mentality... My parents don't have this mentality. I know people who went and their friends died and the operation succeeded, and the person tries his best not to die. But he comes back sad. Sad about the fact that they got shahada and he didn't...and this mentality...my parents prefer their children alive; others want the shahada. It's...for them it's the ultimate goal.

(Nidhal, Lebanon)

In a similar vein, the narratives reveal that resistance to oppression is celebrated and that resistance fighters are venerated. This holds across different ideologies

and contexts. Palestinians are, especially in most of the Arab World, acknowledged as engaged in a noble resistance against Israeli oppression and colonialism. They are held up as symbols of resistance across the world, and by the interviewees. This adulation can become very problematic because the narratives tend to essentialise Palestinians and impose a particular way of acting on them. They are dehumanised and romanticised at the same time, as Amal explains cogently

[...] or people over-romanticising that...yes we...our men are dying and they are gonna go to heaven...so there is a lot of binary thinking...two extremes ...either people completely dehumanising Palestinians...either in Lebanon or in Palestine. Or on the other hand people say 'yes they should die for their cause'...in an extreme sense you know...which is...I feel it is also dehumanizing. Not saying that people shouldn't resist...but they say it in a way like 'we will not help them because they should die for their cause'.

(Amal, Lebanon)

The Palestinian cause is frequently instrumentalised for political purposes without proper consideration of the needs of Palestinians or active contribution to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To Hezbollah sympathisers, for instance, the Palestinian suffering is a major justification for its continuous vilification of Israel. At the same time, many Lebanese interviewees lament that Hezbollah only instrumentalises the cause and does not care much about the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon.

This celebration of resistance proposes an ideological framework that justifies violence in the face of oppression. It also provides an action repertoire by pointing to different stories and events of individuals who have bravely defied oppression, such as the stories about Imam Hussein and Karbala. Sometimes they also include very specific actions of violent resistance and retaliation, as another quote by Daniel illustrates:

It was an act of retaliation. The army had mutilated two of their friends. They dragged them through the streets, burned them and then dropped them in their neighbourhood. It was a very incisive moment. Those were close friends of my father. So, they decided to take revenge by sieging a bank and taking hostages.

(Daniel, Switzerland)

Souhail, for instance, recalls his parents telling him stories of his great grandparents fighting against colonialist powers in their home country or helping smuggle refugees into Switzerland during WWII. He also recalls stories of his father organising protests. Apart from familial historical accounts, he has also been confronted with collective memories of resistance and a history of political struggle knit into the social and political environment he grew up in

It's also the fact that the region that I grew up in went through a struggle for independence [points to a poster on the wall commemorating the achievement of independence]. Of course, at our level, less bloody. But it's something important that you hear about regularly. [...] When my parents arrived there, it was already independent, but I like to discuss with parents and grandparents of my friends who are from here. For this cause, I am more committed than most of my friends. I think that history played an important role [for my activism].

(Souhail, Switzerland)

Interviewees in Quebec, Canada, made similar observations regarding the political history of Quebec and the importance of political struggles for independence. Randa, for example, recalls that when she arrived in Montreal, she found fertile ground for continuing her activism

Resistance is somehow part of the environment here. It is in the collective identity. And it's very complex: They may scream Free Palestine and No Hijab in the same sentence! [Laughs.]

(Randa, Canada)

Ziad, on the other hand, suggests that the history of Quebec's resistance is suppressed by political elites and history books because it provides a powerful action repertoire for grassroots resistance and its ability to enact lasting change. Ziad's quote also illustrates the indignation at historical revisionism discussed earlier

they don't want us to know about this and one example of that is actually their own history. Actually, they don't just do this to our history [history of Arab socialism], they did this to their own history! In 1972 in Québec, people usually talk about the FLQ crisis in 1970. But in 1972 [...] so they went on strike and they had a demonstration in the streets of Montreal [...] the cops shot a 14 year old girl and she died and the MPs ...the liberal MPs in parliament [...] were laughing and said if you don't want your kids to be hurt... don't bring them to protest! so the strike exploded...after that it became a general strike... nonunionized workplaces went on strike right and it spread across Québec so they arrested the three later leaders of the main unions in a Democratic country they put them in jail um for striking... you know...like in a Democratic country! [...] the strike like doubles basically right...you had places like Trois Rivieres where they actually took over the town they drove their police outside of the town lines and drop them off it was crazy like it was a revolutionary general strike, hundreds of thousands of people were involved! between 200 in 1970 and hundreds of thousands in 1972...like which one is a more important historical event? [...] which one is more important in history right, but which one teaches you the slaves more about rising up right? So, to them, it's important to bury these things.

(Ziad, Canada)

In some cases, there are also stories of resistance that interviewees reappropriate for themselves and their own fights and struggles. When they recall them, they seem to enjoy these memories for they provide stories of their parents that make them proud. The heroic description of Zakaria's father is telling in this respect

My father was with us during the fighting, he had already participated in the fightings in the 80s. He was a Syrian soldier, but at night he would fight against the Syrian regime. Many people knew who my father was. He attacked many checkpoints and saved many people. The massacres were huge at the time. In the end, they tried to kill him.

(Zakaria, Lebanon)

The quest for authenticity, the admiration for courage and resistance, for sacrifice and martyrdom are all part of the narrative of *jusqu'au-boutisme*. Understanding the centrality of the logic of *jusqu'au-boutisme* is indispensable to understanding how individuals radicalise into further commitment to a cause. Because once an individual agrees to the basic premises of the cause, i.e., the injustice that is identified and that needs remedy, then the feeling of *doing something about it* is common to human nature. That, in my analysis, is the real *slippery slope*: Namely that once an individual is drawn into a group and adheres at least to the basic contentions and grievances, the argument of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, of *being real*, becomes a simple and potent driver for further engagement. The logic goes: If you agree that something is wrong, then what explains that you're not doing anything about it other than your desire for comfort and your cowardice? The power of recruiting for various causes lies in the fact that the narrative puts individuals in a position where they are questioned morally, for their lack of standing up for justice. The narrative plays into feelings of guilt, of failing to act as an upright and justice-seeking human would. The narrative of fighting for justice is particularly powerful because there are few credible alternatives of fighting effectively for justice. This is frequently experienced by interviewees themselves. Mansour, for instance, who was brutally attacked by police and military officers during a routine traffic control and let go after being told that they had mistaken him for someone else, realised the impossibility of seeking justice against representatives of the state. The heavily bureaucratic nature of the criminal justice system makes it so difficult to even get justice when one has been wronged, that a feeling arises that there is no legal or supposedly legitimate way to react anyway. He describes this as follows

They make it so complicated to get through to them, the whole bureaucratic process. It makes it impossible and they tell you it won't lead to anything anyway. All this makes you feel like you want chaos so you could finally get done with them. There are so many things and stories that accumulated through this.

(Mansour, Lebanon)

More generally, the promise of democracy is that anyone may reach a position of power to change the status quo through democratic and peaceful means. As a result, using violence to enact political change becomes anti-democratic, because there are, according to the narrative, many non-violent ways to change the system. Yet this promise is a lie at least to some extent because the process to enact societal change is tedious, time-consuming, usually expensive and tends to achieve an acceptable, yet not ideal, result. There is frustration and desperation that accompanies the realisation that the system in place inevitably favours the status quo. Tactics that defy the system and the laws in place then become a rationally and logically defensible means, to at least work *authentically* towards a desired outcome. Violence gives the impression that all means are mobilised and that no compromises are made from the outset.

‘Being a real man’: Combat masculinity

An important aspect that requires discussion at this point is masculinity. Given that ideas associated with masculinity also shape a particular worldview and propose appropriate lines of action and reaction, they are explored here as ideological constructs. Masculinity (or masculinities) refers to a group of historically and culturally available, recognised and legitimate themes which are associated with certain aspects of being a man in a given society, as suggested by Gilmore (1990) and Carlsson (2013). Masculine identities are the result of a continuous repositioning of self and others, whether in relation to other men or women. In fact, Gilmore (1990) argues that *manhood* is defined in relation to other men rather than women. In a life-course analysis of 25 male offenders, Carlsson (2013) finds that both their desistance and persistence processes are contingent upon their performance of masculinity and influenced by gendered social norms about what it means to be a man in Western society. Eichler (2011) similarly argues that any society can be analysed with respect to the *gender order* it proposes. Historically, the prevailing gender order has postulated that men bear arms and fight and that ‘women and children are in need of protection’ (p.6). A notion of *militarised masculinity*, Eichler argues, centrally underpins the state’s coercive power to defend its sovereignty. In her analysis of Russian involvement in the Afghan and Chechnyan Wars, she demonstrates how former soldiers associate the military with the ability to take on responsibility in society, and that stigmatisation of men who refused to fight was common.

Leone and Parrott (2018) argue that the dominant perspective linking masculinity to crime and aggression is *hegemonic masculinity*, an ideology that postulates the defence of values associated with *manhood* in order to ensure men’s superiority over ‘non-males’. Ferber and Kimmel (2008) argue that engagement in PIV should be understood as a reaction to humiliation and *emasculat*ion, i.e., as an attempt to restore hegemonic masculinity. In her study of Dutch soldiers, Sion (2007) identified *combat masculinity*, a set of values that postulates that, for example, ‘men stand up against injustice’ or ‘men defend and protect their country, their people’ and ‘men endure the toughness of combat’. Kimmel refers

to such statements as characterisations of manhood (Kimmel, 2003, p.58). Norms of hyper-masculinity put pressure on young people to prove themselves (Abbas, 2019). Archer (2003) suggests that expressing approval of and admiration for martyrdom should be seen as performing and invoking a particularly potent form of masculinity. Benslama (2016) and Crettiez and Ainine (2017) found that young Frenchmen who joined or sympathised with IS seem to define themselves in opposition to Frenchmen that they accuse of weakness and cowardice. In her study on Scottish youths of Asian origin, Archer (2003) also found support for such negative identification against men who are members of the dominant majority and perceived as weak or cowardly. Choudhury (2007) and Lakhani (2014) suggest that masculine ideologies should be considered alongside religiously tainted justifications of violence.

In a compelling review of case studies on women involved in violence in the Middle East and North Africa region, Adra et al. (2020) found that dominant masculinist gender norms put pressure on women who participate in conflicts to ‘masculinise their behaviour in order to be accepted’ (p.6). Similarly, men who refuse to engage in combat face stigmatisation for failing to comply with dominant gender norms. The authors argue that ‘masculinist domination enables the exercise of violence across a variety of contexts, which, in turn, reproduces and normalises dominant notions of masculinity as associated with violence’ (Adra et al., 2020, p.6). The women in their study also argue that the increased militarisation of society, political authoritarianism and militarised masculinities go hand in hand with violent conflict and violence against women. In the Arab context, a study by the NGO Abaad suggests that men are tempted to engage in the neighbouring Syrian conflict because their engagement responds to their dual role of being a protector as well as a provider. Also, when men see themselves as failing to provide financially for their families, they may be tempted to emphasise and invest in their role as protectors through their engagement in fighting (Keedi et al. 2017). Hence, ideas and values associated with masculinity influence the collective imaginaries associated with notions of responsibility, defence and militaristic violence.

The narratives collected here suggest *combat masculinity* as a main underlying ideological construct that combines a set of values in line with the general ideology of responsabilisation. Many of the quotes presented thus far illustrate, often subtly, that interviewees are guided by assumptions about what it means to be a *real man*. The image of an ideal man transpires through the narratives when it comes to justifying why it is important to act against injustice, and why it is important to take responsibility even when that injustice is happening elsewhere. Whether it is because of centuries of socialisation or decades of Hollywood movies: The image of the freedom fighter who struggles for liberation and defends the oppressed is a male-dominated one. The findings suggest that the responsibility to protect and defend the oppressed, which is inherent to the logics of *jusqu’au-boutisme*, is incumbent mainly upon men who continue to correspond to the figure of the warrior and fighter more intuitively than women, in most collective imaginaries across the globe.

The narrative of combat masculinity docks on to the logic of *jusqu'au-boutisme* by suggesting that a real man stands up against evil and injustice, protects and defends his land, his people, especially women and children, is courageous, embraces pain, suffering and discomfort in the quest for justice and is honest and authentic. It is also the object of a gendered twist that is particularly powerful: Since the grievances frequently relate to violence suffered by women and children, such as sexual abuse, exploitation and rape, the narrative of responsabilisation concerns men more specifically, who are asked to fulfil their roles as protectors. Like questioning authenticity and courage and thereby evoking feelings of guilt that can support radicalisation, gendered narratives question the manliness and masculinity of men. Nizar, who joined the Popular Mobilisation Forces in Iraq, responded, very intuitively, that, as a man, when his country was invaded by Daesh, he was obliged to act like any normal man who has *gheera* (غيرة): the term, which can be translated as 'jealousy' in its primary meaning, also refers to the quality of a person, especially a man, who has the courage to stand up against injustice and sacrificing his life to defend his land, his people and his family. It is closely tied to socially negotiated understandings of self-respect and honour, which are particularly prevalent in the Arab World. The social fabric itself then comes to provide the ideologies and narratives that can be associated with combat masculinity and that drive mass mobilisation for combat.

Importantly, the narrative is often perpetuated by both men and women. An interesting example is provided by a quote I noted down during one of the trial observations in Switzerland. The defendant living in Switzerland was accused of inciting his wife in Lebanon to launch a suicide attack on American troops. According to the prosecution, he discussed this, with his brother over the phone, saying

Yesterday I was talking to her. She was telling me that US troops were trying to open a military base near her city in Lebanon. She said she wanted to do a suicide attack. I told her that I agreed and that I gave my permission. She should blow herself up. She was complaining that men are not doing enough, they are too busy with the here and now, they don't think about death and the afterlife. Very few among those who are protected by God are busy with Jihad.

(Fieldnotes, Switzerland, Federal Criminal Court,
9 September 2020)

Ideas associated with combat masculinity are sometimes very clearly expressed by interviewees. See for instance the following quotes, one by Nidhal in Lebanon, and one by Max in Switzerland, which illustrate very clearly how the expectation of being a real man is tied to his courage and willingness to engage in combat

There is a quote that summarises my point of view...it says: walk a mile to avoid a fight, but when someone starts, don't back down an inch. That's my view also. Being a coward is not noble...our greatest example is Imam

Hussein. He could have run away and left the Khilafa to Ibn Yazid. But instead he showed up with 76 men. Against 30,000. It was a lost battle, he knew it. Ahl-al-bayt, they are very important. I believe in the concept of being a coward and being a real man. Or a real human, it also applies to women.

(Nidhal, Lebanon)

What upset me most was seeing that the people were incapable of defending their own country [...] I was a young man and to me, I really had that kind of value of the man that had to go fight, to defend his country and his values. The fact that you abandon your wars and countries is what forces people who are not even from there, not from that country or religion, such as me, to go fight there. So, I had a lot of anger for these people. Even in prison, I continued to feel that way, telling myself that it is because of people like you that I have to go fight. [...] For example, I met a guy who had left his wife and his kids behind to flee... I thought this was so cowardly! As a man, you dare flee and leave your family behind?

(Max, Switzerland)

In a way similar to the connection that the more religiously inspired interviewees make between sacrifice and religious narratives, the image of a man that emerges from combat masculinity often fits a religious understanding as well. The following answer is given by Justin after I ask him, towards the end of the interview, *What does it mean to you to be a man?*

First, a real man has to respect God. He has to have faith. Then, he has to be a provider...provide for himself and his family. And defend his dignity and honour...and that of his family...if necessary, with his life. At the same time, he strives to be better every day, to improve himself.

(Justin, Lebanon)

Hakan, in his work with youth who display sympathies for jihadist causes, states that he noticed that many of these young men are guided by a *misunderstanding* of what masculinity is, namely feeling that violence is a viable means to impose oneself

These young people are reacting to a stigmatisation, which they are experiencing. They create a new sort of identity out of this. And to the boys especially...they are confronted with an image...an idea of masculinity that is misunderstood. It makes them inclined to accept violence to fight for certain demands.

(Hakan, Switzerland)

Across the narratives, values and attitudes associated with combat masculinity appear to be constructed in opposition to perceived attributes of 'non-masculinity'. These oppositional or negative definitions are very frequent throughout the

narratives and include for example: *caring* vs. *apathy*; taking *responsibility* vs. *idleness*; *authenticity/jusqu'au-boutisme* vs *hypocrisy*; *courage* vs. *cowardice*; embracing *discomfort* vs. reliance on *bourgeois comfort*; *collectivism* vs. *individualism*. It should also be noted that combat masculinity provides a value repertoire that is far from being exclusive to men, as illustrated by the admiration of some interviewees for fellow female fighters

Imagine the strength you need to have to be a woman and to go to a place where you are encircled by fifteen male fighters to convince them that what they are doing is wrong? That was one of the most impressive things I saw over there.

(Richard, Switzerland)

Thus, the traits associated with combat masculinity are not necessarily specific to men but should rather be considered as gendered stereotypes available to both men and women that provide guidance on the *right way to act* in the face of perceived injustice. In line with this image of the ideal man, combat masculinity also shows in men's narratives through references to combat sports, military training, weapons, and physical strength. Since they present a slight departure from the core rationality of combat masculinity, which is closely oriented towards the fight against oppression, this aspect will be treated below (see Chapter 12).

'We love jihad': Defending the oppressed as a religious doctrine

If I could just express Hezbollah in one sentence it's 'fighting for justice through religion'. Nobody in the world sees it this way. This is weird.

(Thulfiqar, Lebanon)

Public and political discourse tends to simplify the notion of jihad as mere hatred of unbelievers. This simplification obscures the complexity not only of the concept itself but, more importantly, what it means to those who adhere to it. Quite problematically, the simplistic understanding facilitates mere vilification of the so-called jihadists and hampers our proper engagement with the motives that drive them. Also, when jihad as a concept is used by representatives of the state and the criminal justice system to confront these individuals, it tends to alienate them because in an almost systematic manner, little consideration is given to the ways they negotiate and understand jihad themselves. At the Swiss Federal Criminal Court, I observed this in various trials. While interrogating the defendant, the judges ask for specific answers regarding his or her understanding of jihad, while struggling to account for the diversity of meanings that may be attributed to the term. The following excerpt is from my observation of a trial and illustrates strikingly how different understandings of jihad are competing with each other. After playing an audio file of a sermon that had been found on the computer of the defendant, the judge asks him a series of questions about the sermon

Judge: In this sermon, the sheikh says that all Muslims have to do jihad. And that unbelievers must be killed. What do you think about this?

Defendant: I don't agree with this

Judge: What do you think about jihad?

Defendant: I believe in jihad. The way I raise my children at home, that is jihad, for example.

Judge: [Long pause] That means jihad to you?

(Fieldnotes, Switzerland, Federal Criminal Court, 25 August 2020)

The findings in this study clearly demonstrate that *jihad*, in its essence, translates as a desire to defend people who are oppressed and suffering at the hands of tyrants. Thus, when interviewees claim that they like or love jihad or even when they are fascinated by certain jihadist groups, they usually mean that they want to be courageous and brave enough to defend people who are oppressed. The idea of military jihad refers to logics of individual and collective defence and therefore rationalities of *lex talionis* that are familiar to human reasoning and to major international institutions, as discussed earlier. To take another example before the Federal Criminal Court, the following excerpt from an FCC judgment illustrates the connection between jihad, justified defence, courage and bravery well. These are quotes of the defendant that were included in the judgment verbatim

The group Jabhat Al-Nusra is righteous because their objectives and activities in the battlefield are aimed at liberating the people who are oppressed by the regime of Bashar Al-Assad and by ISIS who is killing their brothers in Islam, among them the fighters of Jabhat Al-Nusra. [...] A Muslim cannot deny the armed jihad, since that would be an act of disbelief, because the Coran (which must be followed to the letter, since it is the will of God) explains how and when the armed jihad can be waged, for example in the world in which Muslims are oppressed [...] according to the doctrine, even the act of fighting, the armed jihad, can become an act of adoration [...] Contrary to what ISIS is doing, namely waging attacks in Europe and the world, the battle zone for armed jihad are countries like Syria and Iraq where Muslims are oppressed and where it is necessary to help liberate the population, because in Islam it is a right and an obligation to defend oneself and others against oppressors, exactly like Jabhat Al-Nusra is doing.

(*Tribunale Penale Federale, Sentenza del 18 agosto 2017, SK.2017.39*)

Among the interviewees, the notion of jihad was most prominent in the narratives of sympathisers of Salafi-jihadism, Hezbollah or Islamist ideologies more generally. Although embedded in a religious lexicon, the political nature of arguments associated with jihad is undeniable. Armed jihad proposes a religious vocabulary for a political doctrine of interventionism and collective defence. More importantly, jihad as an ideology, or religion more generally, draws on the concepts of the *revolutionary void*, *jusqu'au boutisme* and *combat masculinity* to emphasise the necessity for any honest man or human being to do something about the

violence suffered by innocent civilians. Although narratively presented as a universal obligation, the proponents of jihad maintain a rather selective focus on the members they associate with their collective, whether Muslims more generally, or Sunni and Shia Muslims, respectively. The following excerpt illustrates the way jihad rests on a combined understanding of politics and religion and collective memory

The whole story, to be honest, is about Israel as the enemy. Because we are targeted, by Israel and US, they are on one side. So, it's up to us to defend ourselves. How? By preparing yourself religiously, understanding the rationale for your fight, get ready militarily. In order to defend your land, you have to make religion enter the debate. They start with the first part which is 'somebody is entering your land' and then it's 'Imam Hussein taught us how to defend yourself, your land, your family'. It's not my duty, but if you want to join the resistance... you do. It's not a duty, Jihad. It was to defend that I entered the Hezb...that was the rationale. So, the thing they fill our brains with most is that it's all about defending your religion.

(Thulfiqar, Lebanon)

Samir, another Hezbollah sympathiser, provides another example of the connection between collective memory, military defence and jihad

Even recently, I had this strong feeling that I should be there with them. They are fighting for the cause and I am here. And I have a Masters and I could go on to do a Doctorate, but Subhan Allah, that's how things are...we have this feeling. This feeling... maybe that's something for us...when we think about Imam Hussein, maybe that's what nurtures this love for jihad, love to defend our land, we had this maybe always, and Hezbollah came and increased this.

(Samir, Lebanon)

The notion of *jihad* is central to the way interviewees from Tripoli justify their engaging in fighting. The obligation of jihad as humanitarian interventionism is usually evoked in relation to fighting abroad. Walid's quote illustrates the complexity of the interplay between moral shocks, political grievances, religion and the criminalisation of jihad

If you switch on the TV...and I mean, we know many people across the border. There are people who came here, who were massacred by the regime. And I swear had I had the chance; I would have gone. The people here wanted to do jihad, to defend Muslims, to defend the Sunna, and those who went, it was for that. [...] All the types were around, but many had a jihadi thinking. And that's what people retained about our neighbourhood. But jihad is part of our religion. But jihad is also against the right people. Not going and blowing up people who have nothing to do with it. Our goal was clear, that

we are against the regime. We weren't against the Christians or anything. But specifically, against the regime.

(Walid, Lebanon)

The idea of jihad has a component of critical self-improvement, working on oneself to become a better person, which is considered the Greater Jihad, while the armed component, defending the oppressed, is considered the Smaller Jihad. The following quote captures this idea. Bader also refers to the concept of *Shari'a*, which is similarly simplified in public discourse as signifying laws that proscribe corporal punishment and executions by lapidation. In fact, the dominant meaning that is attributed to *Shari'a* in the narratives is very similar to jihad, namely an ideal that suggests how to act in the face of suffering

The regime started killing people. Here, we started thinking that we had to fight for the oppressed. Now, in our understanding of *Shari'a*, you have to defend your Muslim brother, whatever their nationality. [...] Yes, I like jihad. Yes, I like to defend my Muslim brothers. And I love to give the poor if I had. Islam is not only jihad. Mohammed PBUH was not only fighting; he was helping the poor and the needy. We have to help each other. Jihad is not just fighting anywhere. Its only if someone attacks you. Even if it's a Jew, you can't just attack them. It's not just anything, there are rules. And before I go fight jihad, I have to work on myself.

(Bader, Lebanon)

Also, if several interviewees regret having engaged in fighting, their regret does not concern the fact of having engaged in the defence of suffering people. At no point, did interviewees question their adherence to the concept of jihad. At the end of our interview, I asked Nassim whether there was anything he regretted, and he answered

I don't know...[takes a long break] I feel there are mistakes that I made that I would not repeat. But I don't regret a second that I defended someone. You have to defend them in the name of God, any Muslim who is suffering.

(Nassim, Lebanon)

The narratives of these interviewees invite us to rethink jihad as essentially a doctrine of legitimate defence of self and others. The criminalisation of jihad or sympathies with jihad then becomes a counterproductive endeavour, because it conveys the impression that the very ordinary and universally accepted notion of self-defence or collective defence is only legitimate when employed by non-Muslim actors, first and foremost Western states who have regularly resorted to the doctrine over the past decades. Also, the way jihad is treated in counterterrorism efforts by the criminal justice system makes it clear that a certain meaning of jihad is imposed on individuals associated with terrorism, whereas their own understandings of jihad are delegitimised. The Black and Brown Other,

which is usually the one facing accusations of terrorism in the Western context, thereby sees his own voice silenced and has to endure and accept the understanding that is imposed by the legal representatives of a White European majority. Unequivocally, this form of epistemic violence is a vestige of imperialist hubris.

Recap: Naming, owning and addressing the injustice: Breathing life into grievances

This part aimed at providing an analysis of the different ways in which grievances are *performed*: How do grievances arise? What facilitates their emergence? Who plays a role in the identification of grievances? How do individuals come to appropriate grievances and make them relevant to their own lives? Why do they see themselves as responsible to take action in order to provide a remedy to these grievances? What are the ideological and narrative constructs that underlie their engagement? Analysis of the narratives provided different answers to these processes and several themes emerged in relation to the social constructions which are performed upon grievances and into which, alternatively, grievances are incorporated. The analysis has crystallised three overarching categories, namely *identification, appropriation and responsabilisation*.

First, there is a, usually initial, phase of identification: While there is a plethora of suffering in the world, specific situations and events become particularly relevant to individuals, in a given context at a particular time in their lives. The findings point to the importance of moral shocks, collective memories, memory and grievance entrepreneurs and their use of emotional weaponisation in driving identification processes through an emphasis on certain contexts and events. Identifying injustices is also related to a particular sensitivity that seems to be vocalised through interviewees' narratives. This sensitivity seems to be significantly driven by a general defiance of and resistance to what is perceived as apathy. Finally, identifying injustices also provokes strong emotional reactions which contribute to individuals' continuing engagement with the cause and to their political and militant trajectories. The analysis of these emotions has shown that the confrontation with injustice tends to provoke a moment of epiphany, which is usually connected to a sense of betrayal. This epiphany is an important component of the rupture that these individuals operate between themselves and the mainstream or hegemonic narrative, in order to construct their new identities as radicals. The relationship between emotionality and rationality in the narratives about engagement is, however, complex. Emotionality, though an inherent aspect of narratives about suffering and pain, tends to be relegated to a secondary level. It seems like politico-ideological engagement can be narrated more coherently, when the motives can be put in the context of objective information and factual evidence.

Second, grievances develop because a particular context of suffering and injustice becomes relevant to the individual on a personal level. One aspect that supports this process of appropriation is the collective identity that individuals associate themselves with. Importantly, interviewees negotiate collective identity in different ways: Although collective identity is often connected to one's

perceived ethnic, religious or cultural identity, the narratives reveal interviewees' efforts to emphasise that they are concerned about injustices anywhere, when they affect innocent people. In terms of identity formation, it is interesting to note that politico-ideological mobilisation tends to be accompanied by an identification with the role of the underdog: An individual or collective struggling against a powerful oppressor, rebelling and resisting hegemonic narratives and dominant structures. In the process of appropriation, feelings of guilt and solidarity play an important role. Both contribute to the consolidation of the link between the individual and the collective.

Third and finally, grievances are also subject to narratives and processes of *responsibilisation* of self and others. From an ideological point of view, grievances normally provoke individuals who generally refuse to give in to apathy to do something about the injustice. Therefore, the notion of the revolutionary void is crucial: Situations of injustice against which no credible action is taken are likely to mobilise non-state actors who resort to violent means in order to defend those seen as suffering. Responsibilisation is further based on a logic of *jusqu'au-boutisme*, i.e., of seeking authenticity, courage and honesty when it comes to one's engagement with the cause. Where grievances are shared by many people in a certain context, there is a general understanding that something is profoundly wrong with the current state of affairs and that, ideally, something needs to be done to right the wrong. It then becomes a question of authenticity, and of going *all in*, that distinguishes those who limit themselves to denouncing the injustice and those who mobilise to do something about it. The logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme* is the core element of the narratives about politico-ideological mobilisation. It is the main ideological construct that makes sense of grievances and contains a strong impetus towards action, whatever that action may be. It is also the narrative that justifies martyrdom and explains the fascination that many interviewees have for martyrs. *Jusqu'au-boutisme* represents an ideal that any human being should aspire to. However, given that the ideal is frequently associated with armed resistance against oppression, the ideal is strongly masculinised. In that regard, the concept of combat masculinity is a useful lens to engage in an understanding of masculinity and the role it plays in mobilising men for combat. The narrative and idea of combat masculinity proposes certain values and attributes that are associated with what it means to be a *real man*. These values are in fact closely tied to the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme*. The same thing has been found in relation to the concept of *jihad*: As a narrative, a rationale and an idea, it is essentially the logics of *jusqu'au-boutisme* embedded in a religiously tainted lexicon. When it comes to religious concepts as informing ideological constructs, the idea of *jihad* is first and foremost formulated around the idea of stepping up to the plate and taking responsibility for the protection and defence of those considered as weak and oppressed. More generally, when Islam is brought up as a religious or cultural reference or ideology, it is always done in a way that suggests that an Islamic way of governing society stands would provide a remedy to the life that individuals are living at the moment, which is perceived as miserable. In other words,

Islam is seen as a way to improve the socio-economic and political conditions for everyone, and to get people out of the miserable state of oppression and injustice that they are lamenting. This is how strong adherence to Islam should be understood, especially in a context where socio-economic and political grievances are widespread.

Note

- 1 Quote by a British man named Aidan James who went to fight against IS in Syria and Iraq and was found guilty of terrorism offences (*The Guardian*, 2019).

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