17 Implications for research and policymaking

This book has demonstrated that grievances are at the root and the core of the process towards violent action. Although challenging epistemically, methodologically and analytically, the grievance-based approach to the phenomenon allows for an in-depth engagement with the main motives that drive individuals who mobilise for political and ideological reasons. It is their way of engaging with grievances that can have a significant impact on the outcome, if the contextual factors present a favourable environment for mobilisation with a group of like-minded individuals. However, the fact that grievances are at the core of politico-ideological mobilisation does not preclude their instrumentalisation for political purposes or individualistic desires linked to thrill-seeking or bravado. In fact, the taste of radicality is such that the engagement takes place within a tension field between rational justifications and emotional drivers; it is a result of an interplay between them. Grievances can be instrumentalised to recruit individuals for a cause or to conceal one's own desire for adventure, escapism or heroism. This does not stand in contradiction to the fact that engagement still rests primarily upon and revolves around political grievances about major injustices. Grievance-based engagement and violence must be understood as moral forms of action imbued with a sense of righteousness (Katz, 1988). At the *core* of the phenomenon, as Derfoufi (2020) suggests calling the typical and most frequent forms of radicalisation, individuals are not seeking to inflict suffering on innocent human beings. Rather, they are fighting what they and many others see as a major injustice, using any means necessary. They adopt a posture and identity that is associated with this struggle, one that emphasises the importance of rebelliousness and resistance against a hegemonic power seen as unjustly oppressing a group of underdogs. Individuals who choose to act upon their grievances by mobilising and perhaps resorting to violent tactics, see themselves as rebellious underdogs fighting for justice.

Importantly, the fact that grievances play a role in individual processes towards violent action – even the fact that they are invoked by terrorist groups themselves – does not justify downplaying, delegitimising or even criminalising them. It is problematic that 'any political militancy or social dissidence that turns violent runs the risk of earning the label "terrorism"; becoming an open-and-shut matter of delegitimisation, as the assignment of that term ensures the non-discussion of

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the issues raised by the given group' (Mohamedou, 2018, p.11). Grievances cannot and must not justify the killing of innocent human beings, as the Secretary-General of the United Nations stated very clearly, by declaring that 'there can be no acceptance of those who would seek to justify the deliberate taking of innocent civilian life, regardless of cause or grievance. If there is one universal principle that all peoples can agree on, surely it is this' (United Nations, 2001). Nevertheless, grievances refer to feelings of injustice that are widely shared by collectives across the globe and cannot simply be dismissed because they may lead to an outbreak of violence. On the contrary: For engagement with the so-called root causes of terrorism to be effective, it must consider grievances lest they continue to feed into the narratives of the most violent groups. Criminalising grievances and treating them as risk factors is tantamount to political silencing and oppression of dissidence, which is likely to foster new grievances. This is particularly problematic since, in the age of the GWOT, it is specifically the grievances voiced by Muslim individuals or groups that have been treated as grounds for concern and construed as gateways to violence (Abbas, 2019; Kundnani, 2014; Nagra & Monaghan, 2020; Pilkington & Acik, 2020). The hierarchisation of grievances that dominates public and scholarly discourse and the justice system about what causes are legitimate causes for indignation, and which are not, is hypocritical and extremely detrimental in terms of social equality and peaceful coexistence. Constructing the expression of grievances, for example, related to the negative repercussions of the War on Terror, as 'risky behaviour' (Hamm, 2013) is likely to hamper socio-political integration and participation of concerned groups who will feel observed, scrutinised and problematised (Jarvis & Lister, 2013; Turner, 2013) and may lay the very foundation for individual acts of terror (Kundani, 2014). Instead, truly engaging with grievances requires working on the sources of grievance, i.e., the structural dysfunctionalities and injustices nurturing them, while fostering critical thinking and media awareness to equip the youth in particular with the necessary tools to deconstruct ideas and narratives they will inevitably be exposed to via social media, the public discourse or influential individuals in their environment.

As a result of the suspectification and criminalisation of grievances, alternative means of political expression and Islamic activism have been obstructed, leaving the camp to those with the most destructive agendas. Placed under the scrutinising gaze of security apparatuses, Muslim communities have become wary of getting involved in discussions that may sound too critical, too radical or too subversive. It is crucial that space be given to groups who propose programmes that may be radical and subversive, but reconcilable with values of democracy, equality and justice. It is precisely the sidelining and hence the scarcity of such radicality in mainstream politics or among civil society organisations that are at the heart of the issue. Groups and organisations with radical programmes which nevertheless emphasise the importance of respecting plurality and focus on non-violent tactics provide ways to act upon grievances, thereby filling the revolutionary void and diversifying the range of possible options for engagement (Baldoli, 2020; Kundnani, 2014). It is not by imposing apathy and silence in the face of injustice

that the problem of terrorism is solved, but by proposing and guaranteeing avenues for the expression of criticism and radicality. As Kundnani suggests

> What is needed is less state surveillance and enforced conformity and more critical thinking and political empowerment. The role of communities in countering terrorism is not to institute self-censorship but to confidently construct political spaces where young people can politicize their disaffection into visions of how the world might be better organized, so that radical alternatives to terrorist vanguardism can emerge. Radicalization—in the true political sense of the word—is the solution, not the problem.
>
> (Kundnani, 2014, p.289)

In line with this, radicalisation must be seen as being, in principle, a beneficial process of conscientisation and responsibilisation in the face of major dysfunctionalities that affect the weak and the poor and cause unjustified suffering, in line with the views of a minority of scholarship on radicalisation (Derfoufi, 2020; Kundnani, 2014; Reidy, 2018). The way radicalisation has been treated as an undesirable and exclusively problematic phenomenon is due not only to the field's state-centrism and has prevented us from grasping the phenomenon in a holistic manner, beyond moralistic and politicised discussions.

This book therefore invites us to rethink efforts, policies and practices that aim to combat terrorism and curb violent extremism. As critical scholarship in criminology, criminal justice and security studies has made very clear, measures that are deployed in the name of security 'can breed future insecurities and grievances, prompting vicious circles and malign feedback loops across time' (Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016, p.1193). The panoply of practices that are put in place in the name of security (understood as national security) can be very harmful at the level of the individual (Walklate et al., 2019). In order to evaluate the impact of security measures holistically, they should be considered in light of the repercussions they have at the level of *everyday security* (Ajil et al., 2020; Crawford & Hutchinson, 2016; Walklate et al., 2019). Actions conducted in the name of security, democracy and freedom in the post-9/11 era have included military invasions, expansive surveillance practices, sweeping suspectification, unlawful detention, unjustified deportations, torture, assassinations, exclusion, marginalisation and silencing (Bigo et al., 2008; Kundnani, 2014; Leman-Longlois, 2012; Mohamedou, 2018; Nagra & Monaghan, 2020). All segments of society have been co-opted into complicity in the so-called fight against terror, with schoolteachers asked to spot radicalisation among children and exclude them if necessary (Clement & Scalia, 2020). Hijacking the promise of security and freedom, these practices have ostracised and stigmatised innocent human beings, and responded in counterproductive ways to many of those who have been attracted by the promises of terrorist groups. The GWOT has severely damaged the legitimacy and credibility of states and the international community and alienated large portions of society which have grown cynical about the purported infallibility of conventional actors and their sense of entitlement and

righteousness. The grievances that drive those who engage in acts of terror are shared by many and they are the direct emanation of the dysfunctionalities of conventional responses to terrorism and the hypocrisy of the hegemonic narrative that justifies them. If we realise that the violence, the crimes and the human rights violations of states in the Global War on Terror are a main driver behind indiscriminate violence, then counter-terrorism efforts should be led with much more precision and consideration for their devastating byproducts or dehumanising 'collateral damage'. The fact that human rights violations are a byproduct of counter-terrorism then becomes not only problematic from a moral point of view, but an impediment to the very strategic goal of counterterrorism, which is, supposedly, to reduce terrorism.

Or is the goal a different one? Perhaps, it would be more sincere to admit that much of the fight against terrorism serves the hyper-masculinist and belligerent drive to seek revenge and kill in return. If that is the case, then, this is not a war *against* terrorists, but a war *between* terrorists; a war against terror fought by terror that produces new terror in an endless vicious cycle of destruction. This book has highlighted that terrorism is seen as an act of collective self-defence by the perpetrators themselves. Defence is an elastic notion. Until when is it justified and against whom? This elasticity bears the material necessary for justifications of pre-emptive violence, retaliatory violence and revenge. Terrorists use this elasticity to justify the most heinous acts of indiscriminate violence. Their logic goes: If they are killing our people, children and women and the weak, why should we spare theirs? This logic is fundamentally perverse and the source of great evil. But it is hypocritical to expect non-state actors to be outstandingly restrictive, meticulous and precise in their designation of the enemy and their attacks, when a lack of precision and 'collateral damage' are acceptable for state actors (e.g., Khan & Gopal, 2017; Khan, 2021). If we are sincere about our engagement with terrorism, then we should first acknowledge that as long as those who hold the legitimate monopoly of violence continue to abuse it, terrorism will be an inevitable feature of our existence.

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