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CHAPTER 1
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Non-Radicalisation under a Magnifying Glass

A Cross-European 'Milieu Perspective' on Resistance to Islamist Radical Messaging

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Introduction

Radicalisation can be described as a complex dynamic process involving a collection of tendencies including (socio-)psychological distancing from society, adoption of a 'radical' alternative viewpoint considered by others to be incompatible with societal norms and values and increasing willingness to use violent means to bring this radical viewpoint to the attention of relevant representatives in society.

For the past two decades, Europe and North America have witnessed a surge in interest in so-called Islamist radicalisation following the September 11 attacks of 2001. In the interests of national security, the attacks prompted a significant shift towards a more prevention-focused approach, which included, among other measures, a thorough consideration of the process that had led the perpetrators to commit their horrendous acts and the factors that were involved in this process. In line with this shift in focus, policy analysts, think tanks and academics stepped up their efforts to analyse the process through which individuals make the transition from 'normal' young citizens, and, in the case of the 9/11 perpetrators, of considerable wealth and education levels, to self-perceived holy warriors willing to kill themselves in the service of a higher socio-political cause. A great many models have since been developed describing this process, the potential steps involved and the trigger factors that make violent extremism appear as a way to advance one's cause.

However, as policy makers and practitioners considered the practical implications of these models, some anomalies have come to the fore. Perhaps the 'elephant in the room' has been the fact that the vast majority of people for whom surveillance and intervention programmes might be designed, were not radicalised, would be unlikely to become radicalised and might actually radicalise as a result of exposure to such programmes (Kundnani 2012; Ragazzi 2017). Emblematic in this context is the critical reception of the UK Prevent programme, the preventative arm of the Counter Terrorism strategy implemented through social institutions to address grievances and misperception among at-risk youth. The implementation, involving a variety of community workers, teachers and so on, has been criticised for promoting a sense of stigmatisation and polarisation rather than redressing radicalisation (Stanley, Guru and Gupta 2018; Abbas 2019). Thus, our understanding of radicalisation and violent extremism, and our ability to act on this understanding, may be considered currently incomplete and ineffective.

As implicit in the brief overview of the evolution of our understanding of radicalisation above, this incompleteness and ineffectiveness may be attributed in part to a design problem. Specifically, the security angle that has driven the interest in radicalisation has been based on a thorough analysis of perpetrators but has failed to take into account that a significant proportion of the population, indeed the vast majority, has no affinity with radicalisation. Moreover, the process-tracing method that starts from acts of terrorism in order to identify risk factors of radicalisation in earlier life stages of the perpetrators has failed to take into account the pathways of those who, at one point or another, had taken a different direction despite identical 'early-warning' indicators (Sarma 2017). This design problem can be described as a case of 'base-rate neglect' (Yang and Wu 2020), that is, a neglect of the phenomenon of non-radicalisation. This has been recognised in recent scholarly work, which has noted that we should not only aim to understand radicalisation, but also to understand non-radicalisation (Cragin 2014; Schuurman 2020). A stronger version of this argument might be that we can only understand radicalisation to the extent that we can understand it in relation to non-radicalisation and vice versa.

However, developing an understanding of non-radicalisation comes with considerable challenges. This chapter seeks to contribute to the emerging interest in non-radicalisation by further reflecting on the complexities of studying trajectories through radical milieus that do not lead to violent extremism. After a discussion of the challenges this brings, the chapter seeks to provide some, preliminary, answers as to how we overcome them by outlining the 'milieu approach' adopted in this study (see

also the Introduction to this volume) and the insights it has generated for understanding the phenomenon of radicalisation. Specifically, in this chapter, these insights are drawn from extensive ethnographic work and in-depth interviews conducted in what we call 'Islamist extremist milieus' across Europe and some neighbouring countries.

The Challenges of Studying a 'Non'

Why is it challenging to study non-radicalisation? The main difficulty is that a thorough understanding of a phenomenon is based on empirical research, but non-radicalisation, similarly to other 'non-phenomena', does not exist and we cannot empirically investigate phenomena that are not empirical. Hence, in order to study it, a non-phenomenon needs to be described based on its relation to a phenomenon that does exist and a model that specifies the relevant dimensions on the basis of which the phenomenon and non-phenomenon can be related and compared. In the context of radicalisation and non-radicalisation, we need to specify the relevant dimensions based on which non-radicalisation might be contrasted with radicalisation, in order to arrive at an account of the factors that contribute to either non-radicalisation or radicalisation. To complicate matters, there are no objective standards for relevant dimensions.

In the case of radicalisation, one focus has been on the dimension of violence, that is, the understanding of the difference between those who engage in violence and those who do not engage in violence (McCauley and Moskalenko 2017). As several models of radicalisation prescribe, however, active support for a violent group without active engagement in violence can still be considered indicative of radicalisation (Moghaddam 2005; Storer cited in Shainin 2006). One may then turn to the difference between those who are sympathetic towards a violent extremist organisation and those who are not; although the heterogeneity of the latter group is of such magnitude that it (i.e. the 'non-group') loses its usefulness as a comparison group. For example, when studying Islamist violent extremism in Europe, identifying the most appropriate 'non-radical' comparison group becomes highly subjective due to the significant heterogeneity among the vast group of those who are not Islamist violent extremists, since this group constitutes the vast majority of citizens in Europe. The choice of comparison group, moreover, will shape our subsequent understanding of what constitutes 'non-radicalisation'.

In one of the very few attempts to formulate a model of non-radicalisation, Kim Cragin (2014) determines a set of factors that reduce the appeal of, or likelihood of membership in, violent extremist organisations of

various ideological currents, including jihadists, but also Maoists, Marxists and separatist groups. She states that, in her model, 'the term non-radicalization is used synonymously with the phrase resistance to violent extremism. It does not consider individuals who have never been exposed to, or considered, radical ideologies or violence' (Cragin 2014: 342) and focuses specifically on organised forms of radicalisation, as opposed to lone-wolves and self-radicalised individuals. Cragin modestly describes her model as a first step, based on an analysis of newspaper articles, reports and academic papers describing cases of non-radicalisation. The model identifies instrumental, social and moral factors that are considered to reduce the number of recruits to an organisation and increase the number of members who leave the organisation. Potential recruits are assumed to refrain from joining for four main reasons: (1) joining would come with too high personal costs (as a result of repression, leaving behind one's social life or moving to another place); (2) the organisation is assumed to be ineffectual in achieving its, and the recruit's, aims; (3) there are no social ties to connect the potential recruit to the organisation; and (4) the organisation's deeds are too morally repugnant to affiliate with. Members are considered as likely to leave the organisation for a similar set of instrumental, social and moral factors, described as: (1) perceived costs (repression, family obligations, mistreatment and loss of inducements); (2) perceived organisational ineffectiveness (feelings of burnout and disillusionment); (3) loss of social ties connecting the individual to the organisation; and (4) empathy for others.

Cragin's model brings to mind linkages to the literature on collective social action, that is, action by a collective to raise awareness and redress collectively felt grievances. The concepts used in the model can, for instance, be considered the inverse of factors identified by Van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears (2008) in their influential social identity model of collective action. This integrative 'SIMCA' model posits social identification, perceived efficacy and perceived injustices as the key drivers of mobilisation of a collective to engage in action for a group-related cause. Comparing the SIMCA model of collective action with Cragin's model of non-radicalisation, we can see considerable similarities between 'social identification' of the former and 'social ties' of the latter, and between 'perceived efficacy' of the former and 'perceived ineffectiveness of the group and personal cost' of the latter. Perhaps 'injustices' of the former and 'moral repugnance and empathy with others' are slightly different in connotation, but they may also be considered inversely related; once one empathises with others, one is likely to be considerably less concerned with the injustices committed to oneself or one's group. Moreover, the perception of being unjustly treated can be considered a moral justifica-

tion for the use of vengeful violence, indeed as an opposite to the notion of 'moral repugnance'.

To a certain extent, the similarities between Cragin's model and the SIMCA model can be considered a corroboration of Cragin's model. Terrorism is in many, and particularly in its most disruptive, expressions a form of collective action (e.g. della Porta and Diani 2015) and thus factors opposite to those predictive of collective action are likely to be predictive of non-engagement in terrorism. However, collective action implicates a far broader repertoire of action to advance a collective cause than the use of or threat to use violence. To understand non-radicalisation as opposed to collective inertia, we need to adopt a more fine-grained and differentiated perspective alongside addressing the heterogeneity problem discussed earlier.

The Potential of a Milieu Approach

A central claim of this chapter is that the milieu approach may contribute to the inclusion of this more fine-grained and differentiated perspective on radicalisation in the analysis of non-radicalisation and help to contextualise some of the heterogeneity that prevents a thorough study of non-radicalisation.

Essential to the milieu approach is the focus on a contextualised understanding of radicalisation and non-radicalisation. These phenomena are viewed as best understood when we zoom in on the lives and the experienced context (i.e. life space) of the people who are confronted with radical messages. The milieu approach seeks to identify the complex and dynamic interactions and processes involved in the appeal or rejection of these messages. Within the milieu approach, people who are exposed to radicalising messages are not considered passive victims of these messages but active agents with their own views and understandings of their lifeworld and with their own role in shaping their (social) environment. Those exposed to radical messaging should be recognised as active agents who have their own understanding of the world in which they live and who actively contribute to the shaping of their world on the basis of this understanding. In this sense, the milieu approach recognises the importance of emic (circumstances as perceived by the subject) as opposed to etic (circumstances as perceived by outside observers) factors in the emergence of radicalism and rejection of radicalism.

Focusing on the dynamic, situational, social and interactional qualities of radicalisation enables a more fine-grained understanding of the various expressions of radicalisation as they occur in very similar conditions, enabling the analysis of meaningful variance (i.e. differences in

expression of radicalisation/non-radicalisation) while reducing unwanted heterogeneity (i.e. reducing variability in conditions under which radicalisation and non-radicalisation are observed). Moreover, by assuming dynamism, hence variation over time, we may also be able to develop a better understanding of the various stages of radicalisation, alongside stages of non-radicalisation. In addition, we can relate in situ dynamics to parallel dynamics occurring at macro (societal), meso (social) and micro (individual) levels. Finally, if we are to give serious attention to agency, then it is essential to focus on the lived experience of the people involved, taking into account the meanings that subjects themselves assign to particular experiences, message content and events (e.g. what is morally repulsive, and what is not, in the eye of the beholder). This, as discussed later, has important implications when considering policies and practices to address radicalisation.

Islamist Non-Radicalisation in Europe from a Milieu Perspective

A critical requirement for the successful application of the milieu approach are sufficient time and research effort to secure a profound in situ understanding of radicalisation and non-radicalisation processes, based on extensive observation and in-depth interviews with those directly exposed to radical messages. This was possible in this case due to the initial research design of the Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality (DARE) project, which provided for time and space to generate a sufficiently rich data set to afford inferences about the nature and origin of 'Islamist non-radicalisation' in Europe (Dechesne 2021). The DARE project enabled the ethnographic study of milieus in ten countries across Europe and its neighbouring territories. Although the sites of ethnographic study varied across the countries, the research was designed with a shared emphasis on places where young Muslims meet (physically and online) and encounter radical messages (again, physically or online) that trigger a response (see the Appendix to this volume for an overview of the milieus). In some of these milieus, the dominant response was non-radicalisation whereas in others the response was radicalisation.

In France, for instance, the ethnographers studied young prisoners many of whom had been convicted for terrorism-related offences (Conti 2020). In Turkey, the focus was on civil society organisations with increasing Islamist influences; organisations which were studied at a time that many of their members had had a more or less extended period of involvement in the Syrian civil war, just across the border (Kurt 2020). In

many countries, the research focused on specific areas in major cities, known for their high incidence of radicalisation (or at least their portrayal as such) alongside poor social and economic circumstances. In Belgium, the research focus was on young people with direct exposure to radicalising messages in the 'poor crescent' area of Brussels (including Molenbeek) (Benaïssa 2021). In the Netherlands (Dechesne and Van der Valk 2021), Germany (Nanni 2021) and the UK (Hussain 2021), the focus was on particular areas in large cities with a high presence of first- or second-generation immigrants from Muslim majority countries, often poor social and economic circumstances and a known presence of Islamist influences. In Tunisia, the focus was also on areas known for their poor socio-economic conditions and the rapid rise of Islamist influences in recent years (Memni 2021). In Russia, second-generation immigrants to northern Russian cities from the North Caucasus region were studied (Poliakov and Epanova 2021). The fieldwork in Norway and Greece also touched upon the often difficult social and economic circumstances of urban Muslim youth, but here the focus was more specifically on networks and their meeting places. The Greek ethnographic work zoomed in on young Muslims attending non-official Islamic prayer houses in Athens (Sakellariou 2021). The Norwegian research studied young Muslims who had been involved in two Norwegian Islamist social media platforms (Vestel and Ali 2021). The studies of the various locations have yielded a data set of approximately two hundred in-depth interviews with young people, numerous other interviews with experts and family members and additional ethnographic material.

One of the common conclusions of the varied milieu studies is that non-radicalisation and radicalisation come in various shapes and sizes. Radicalisation may be found in the tendency to turn away from society and stop participating in it and to adopt an alternative lifestyle. But that is quite different from adopting a new identity and actively engaging in a relationship of conflict with society and the state in particular. Moreover, even if one adopts this conflict mind-set vis-à-vis society, this does not necessarily imply that one will engage in violence to advance one's cause. Indeed, many of the existing models of radicalisation take note of various stages or 'steps' in the radicalisation process, which do take into account these distinctions. Sprinzak's (1991) Linkage theory of political delegitimisation, for instance, highlights the importance of distinguishing between a crisis of confidence (an initial loss of confidence in state leadership), a conflict of legitimacy (a loss of confidence in the state) and a crisis of legitimacy (a hatred towards anything and anyone affiliated with the state). More directly related to Islamist radicalisation, in his analysis of Salafist radicalism in Europe, Wiktorowicz (2004) emphasises the

importance of distinguishing between apolitical Salafists, political Salafists and jihadi Salafists (with only the latter group considering violence as a way to advance their cause). We should highlight that, unlike 'staircase models', we have not observed a 'conveyor belt' of radicalisation whereby an individual gradually moves from one phase to another, with violence as an inevitable outcome of the process.

In outlining below the insights afforded by the milieu approach adopted in DARE, a distinction is made between those insights that resulted from a comparison between those who did show indications of radicalisation and those who did not show these indications, on the one hand, and the investigation of those who chose a path of radicalisation (in some form) and eventually turned away from radicalism, on the other. For different expressions of radicalisation – turning away from society, adopting a conflict frame and engaging in violence – we were able to identify several critical factors that distinguished between those respondents who might be considered 'non-radicalised' and those who might be considered 'radicalised'.

Turning Away from Society

Across the fieldwork sites, we found that the feeling of loss of control was a common factor among those who, at some point, turned away from society while those who did not radicalise in response to exposure to radical(ising) messages often displayed the mental control, or social or religious resources to interpret and compartmentalise such messaging such that it did not impact on their life as a whole. This is consistent with, for instance, psychological theorising by Hobfoll (2012) regarding the importance of cognitive, social and material resources in the ways people cope with stress in life and perspectives in crisis management on social capital as a critical factor in resilience to natural or man-made disasters. A difference between 'non-radicals' and 'radicals' lies in the ability of the former to leverage cognitive, social and religious resources to cope with stress in life. The latter, lacking these resources, will seek these resources outside of society and sometimes find them in radicalism.

If we are to believe some of our 'non-radical' respondents, non-radicalisation is, to a certain extent, a matter of mental control. For instance, a respondent in Germany believed those who joined ISIS lacked such mental control, describing 'these radical Islamists' as 'destroyed individuals even before they go there'. In some cases, these individuals, the respondent continued, had suffered a 'difficult childhood', but their defining characteristic was that 'they're broken junkies. All of them. Broken junkies, fucked-up junkies or whatever, who had no stability in their

lives'. In Russia, we found a similar perspective, shared by Said,[1] who stated, 'I think when it concerns religious and Islamic people, extremist Muslims, I think such people are having a brain failure …. That's the only way I can understand it'.

In this context, it seems of pertinence that radicalisation is also very much a youth phenomenon, being primarily observed among adolescents and young adults. As noted by the classic theorist of development, Erikson (1968: 17), this age group is particularly faced with challenges related to identity formation and ego development. Dealing with these critical and strenuous challenges potentially leads to what Erikson labelled a 'loss of ego identity', that is, in his words, an impairment in 'central control over themselves for which, in the psychoanalytic scheme, only the "inner agency" of the ego could be held responsible'. Consistent with this statement, we found many of our respondents turned away from society and towards an exploration of religion in response to an identity crisis.

Yet, the experience of identity crisis or a general incapacity for self-control were not the critical factors distinguishing radicals from non-radicals. To understand this distinction, we also need to take the receptiveness and support of the social environment into account. To continue using Hobfoll's terminology, the social environment can be a critical resource to deal with stressful life-events and the absence of social bearings brings the magnitude of existential challenges to the fore. One of the Dutch respondents, for example, told us about his experiences after converting to Islam:

> I felt disappointed to see that I was not accepted. You often hear about people losing touch with old friends but my friends distanced themselves from me. We always went to Germany with a group of friends. After I had converted I said, I want to go, but no pork and no alcohol. Then, the group turned against me. They said, 'We are going to Germany to be away from those Muslims around us'. They knew my history, they came to visit me while I was in foster care. It was hard for me that they did not support me. Even when I got married, they thought it was strange. … Now I still have the same problems, but I did not know how to deal with them then, I had no one to ask for advice. We felt alone. We started to feel out of place, and we stopped studying and working.

The absence of a supportive social network was a common thread through the stories of these respondents and concerned not only the absence of friends. We also often encountered accounts of the strained relationships that many of the more radical respondents had with their parents. In line with what Khosrokhavar (2021: 233) has termed the 'headless patriarchal family', we found several expressions of this lack of

social support by one's parents. This social syndrome may be expressed in the absence of parents (as alluded to by the Dutch respondent cited above), or as observed by Nanni (2021) in her German field study, in the sense that parents are lacking in their provision of moral guidance. It may also be expressed in a family situation where a child only has an affective relationship with the mother, but not with the father. Across the fieldwork sites, it was observed that the absence of a father, as a result of his death, criminal conviction or inability to relate to his wife and children, constituted a risk factor for radicalisation. In contrast, a supportive family environment constituted, in many cases, a factor contributing to the rejection of radical messaging.

Conflictual relationships among the more radicalised segments of our respondent set were also found in other domains of social life. For instance, some respondents reported a lack of social connection at school or work. In his fieldwork in France, Conti (2020) interviewed Adrian, an immigrant with, initially, no knowledge of French who went on to develop an excellent command of the language and an interest in studying linguistics, but who was sent to a technical college against his wishes and eventually dropped out of education. In relation to school, a fairly common theme in the narratives of the more radical respondents was the experience of rejection when applying for an internship. This was the case for Adrian as well as for the following Dutch respondent, who characterised his radicalisation trajectory as being a result of:

> Coincidence, meeting someone, it is not only that you have lost someone or you want to deepen your knowledge, it is also coincidence, circumstances. No internship, a lot of time on your hands, you meet someone when you are vulnerable; if I had found an internship I would have been busy and it would have been different.

The workplace was another social environment where many of the respondents found little support. The experience of discrimination and lack of acceptance of Muslims was quite commonly reported. The wearing of the headscarf was considered problematic, as a Greek respondent Eleftheria, for instance, told the researcher: 'No matter how much you study, a girl wearing a headscarf finds it difficult to be hired by anyone. They might put you in the laundry, they might take you on somewhere to clean, so you will not be front of house'. Norwegian respondent Omar recounted another story about the lack of social support that resonates for many young Muslims throughout Europe. Omar studied journalism, but dropped out, and found a job at a restaurant chain (which involved grilling pork meat). He recalled that one night he was approached by senior staff:

> Then one of them says, 'Don't you feel well? … I feel sorry for you'. I say, 'Why?' He says that the US had just bombed the Taliban and so on, so many people have died. And I think, 'Huh, why is he telling me this? What's that got to do with me?' So, then the head chef comes up, smiling a kind of icky smile. 'What's up, our little jihadist?' They made a laughing stock of me … And suddenly I got the shift list. He had put me on all the night shifts – the least wanted and the most unpopular shifts.

On the basis of these experiences, at home, at school or at work, young Muslims turn away from society and find their own identification. The 'neighbourhood' was often mentioned as a basis for social connection and identity. In France, respondent Paul described the value of neighbourhood identification:

> Because they're confusing people, they're lumping terrorists and Muslims together, they're lumping Muslims, thieves and black people together … then they wonder why you don't like the police, why you don't like anybody, then they wonder why you don't like all that. … in our neighbourhoods, nobody comes to piss us off, we are quiet, we don't piss anybody off, we are among ourselves, we know each other. … We are in our little village, we have everything we need in our village. In the neighbourhood there is everything we need – food, the bakery, everything. Why should we leave our quarter? To do what?

In this quote, the neighbourhood is described as a provider of connection and social support in a positive way. The ethnographic research in Belgium and the UK also identified several cases of individuals having had profound encounters with radical messaging and also concluded that neighbourhood connection constitutes a safe haven and a factor in non-radicalisation. In Germany, Salih notes the importance of friends in non-radicalisation pathways:

> Even if inequality, even if there is inequality here, that is not so relevant. If I don't get into a club, what do I lose? And I think my friends are like that, I was against it from the beginning, so. For me it was far away and terrible how one can do something like that. If a guy like that would come to me and try to persuade me somehow, there would be no possibility from the beginning, because I take something like that with a smile and reject it [clicks] I wouldn't do something like that. But what is it now, what really stops me from doing that? [Gasps] My friends, I'd say.

Respondents in many of the fieldwork sites have noted that, in principle, Islamic faith can serve to bridge the sense of being different and being involved in society. In the Netherlands, a respondent emphasises that being a Muslim means taking on a role of responsibility in society:

> When you look at a true Muslim, he is very scared. Not scared, but
> afraid of himself, in the sense that, when he works, he wants to do
> a good job, because he gets paid for it. He views that as something
> very serious. He works long hours, because he really does not want
> to earn money that is forbidden money to us, when you say you work
> but actually, you don't. Actually, it is something very beautiful. He
> gives it the full 100%, because it is his cost. That is actually, what a
> real Muslim is. He would not lie and cheat to make his money.

A significant group of respondents in many of the fieldwork sites empha-
sised that their religiosity guides them and keeps them from social devi-
ance. They emphasise that Islam is a religion of tolerance and moderation
(although many Muslims also reject the externally imposed distinction
between moderate and extremist Islam), and point to religious scriptures
to underscore that Islam itself denounces radicalism and extremism. Of
particular prominence in the respondents' accounts is the story of the
Kharijites, a religious sect of the early times of Islam known for their
uncompromising stances and their compulsive following of rules. Many
of the respondents consider this sect an example of how religion should
not be practised.

This means that correct religious education is important for non-radi-
calisation, as one Dutch respondent explained. He emphasised that reli-
gious lessons help young people to become resilient and explained that
many of the young people in his surroundings who went to Syria and
joined ISIS lacked the commitment to take religious classes. He also be-
lieved religious teaching helped in distinguishing between truth and false-
hood and in taking a stance towards injustice in the world: 'God is going
to ask, "What have you done in a positive way?" He does not ask you to
take up arms but rather to deal with matters that affect you personally'.

The lack of opportunities for a thorough religious education emerged
from the stories of the respondents as a significant factor in their radi-
calisation trajectories. The Islamic religious world (at least in Western
Europe) is characterised by fragmentation and internal division. Islamic
institutions are often linked to specific ethnic groups, and this makes it
difficult for young people (also) growing up in a Western European con-
text to relate to the religious teachings and practices of these institutions,
not least because they have no command of the language. In this context,
the internet and religious 'bricolage' (self-invention) become the primary
foundation for religious identity development, culminating in an under-
standing of Islam that is quite far removed from the understandings of
those with a profound religious educational background.

Needless to say, the ethnographic data generated in this study are tre-
mendously rich, and any general statement on the nature of radicalisa-

tion and non-radicalisation fails to do justice to the many special cases observed and analytical insights developed by the case study researchers. However, we might tentatively conclude that self-control capabilities, social connection and thorough religious education on Islam are three critical factors in retaining young Muslims' participation in European societies, that is, our first component of 'non-radicalisation'. Low self-control, living in social disorder and rejection, and the absence of authoritative religious teaching, are all contributing factors to alienation and a move away from society.

Adopting a Conflict or Cooperative Frame

Alienation from society is, in itself, not an indication of (violent) radicalisation; turning your back on society is. The second essential component of radicalisation proposed here is thus the adoption of a conflict frame when confronted with social differences; in contrast, the adoption of a cooperative frame signals non-radicalisation. Before pursuing this argument, it should be stated that, in a democratic society, this second essential component of radicalisation is not necessarily problematic but creates the conditions under which a third essential part of radicalisation – the use of violence – is contemplated.

The conflict frame is central to the discussion of Islamist radicalisation, especially in relation to the issue of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*, a prescription of loyalty and love for the sake of Allah, but also renunciation, implying avoidance, disdain and hostility towards anything other than a purist interpretation of Islam (as discussed in Wagemakers 2012). In many of the interviews conducted in the course of this study, we found indications that the adoption of a conflict frame is an essential, constitutive part of the radicalisation process. The 'radical' not only experiences others within society as being different but that this engenders a competition over righteousness and legitimacy. This is experienced as a conflict over social dominance but against a stronger opponent (Obaidi et al. 2018). Despite feeling morally superior, the radical feels unjustly treated and 'wronged' by an authority they consider illegitimate. Non-radicalisation, then, consists, at least in part, in avoiding relational conflict over social dominance.

Indications of the presence of a conflict frame were reported in a number of fieldwork sites. In France, for instance, Conti (2020) records Romain remarking that, 'It's actually a war that's been going on for centuries. Between right and wrong. Between true and false … We're all part of this war. Even you, you're part of it [we laugh] … There's no neutral, you're either against or for'. When the interviewer asked whether

there would be a winner and loser in this war, Romain replies, 'Of course. We're the winners. Here and in the afterlife, we will be the winners'. In the Netherlands, we also found indications of this frame that pits the 'us' and the 'them' against each other, emphasising the conflictual nature of intergroup relations. One of the respondents told us:

> I no longer saw the other as an equal. I saw the unbelievers as the beasts, as the enemies of Islam. They kill Muslims elsewhere. They kill Muslims in our Islamic countries. They dehumanise those other people, so that they no longer see them as human beings. That's how I started to see the unbelievers too. Not as humans anymore.

With the firm embrace of this Manichean worldview, which pits the right against the wrong and the pure against the impure, there also emerges a desire to convert others to one's own side. The same Dutch respondent shared:

> When I radicalised, I started to tell my sisters to wear headscarves. At home, I started to instruct my mother about Islamic customs, because I thought I had the truth. I thought I had really found the path of Islam and that now, yes, I was going to teach my own family. I was a brat. Wet behind the ears, and then I wanted to lecture my own mother, yes, on how Islam should actually be.

This tendency to claim to be right, while others are considered wrong, was also mentioned by a number of respondents in other countries in the study (see, e.g., Conti 2020).

In considering the factors involved in the development of conflict frames, it is worth noting the emphasis placed on cultural context – in which males feel socially compelled to assert themselves and express their dominance over others – in understanding the radicalisation journeys in the Russian milieu studied (Poliakov and Epanova 2021; see also Poliakov, this volume). Whether understood as indicative of a 'toxic masculinity culture' (Poliakov and Epanova 2021) or 'honour culture' (Hatch 1989; Nisbett and Cohen 1996), what is identified is a culture characterised by a strong separation of male and female social life, with high value placed on female chastity alongside pressure on males to defend the honour of the family and the tribe. Here, growing up as a male means asserting oneself as a valiant defender of the honour of the family (female members in particular) or tribe as a whole. For males, it also means engaging in a struggle with any (potential) threat to family honour. The reflection of the Dutch adolescent noted above on how he, when still 'wet behind the ears', had started, nonetheless, to lecture his mother also fits this idea of toxic masculinity or honour culture.

It would be overly simplistic, however, to conclude from the foregoing observations that radicalisation is only to be analysed in terms of individual, cultural and religious characteristics. In general, we should be wary of falling into the trap of 'correspondence bias', as psychologists Gilbert and Malone (1995) call it, that is, the tendency to draw inferences about a person's (or in our discussion, a culture's or religion's) unique and enduring dispositions from behaviours. In the current discussion, the adoption of a conflict frame is not simply a matter of personal dispositions, or even cultural or religious dispositions, that exist and can be studied in isolation from the relationship with individuals and groups outside one's community. In understanding the dynamics of the adoption or rejection of a conflict frame, or more broadly of radicalisation or non-radicalisation, it is crucial to take relationships into account (Malthaner 2017; della Porta 2018)

Across the fieldwork sites, there were reports of grievance regarding the way Muslims are treated and especially the way in which counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation contribute to further rift and relational conflict. In the Netherlands, it is notable how often the term 'cat-and-mouse game' is used by respondents to describe the relationship between themselves and security agencies. However, the label 'game' appears to be applied euphemistically; a strong sense of persecution, deemed to warrant a response, is evident. Sakellariou (2021: 28), for instance, recounts how after Evgenia left the Orthodox church and converted to Islam, relatives and family members had started to refer to her as '*Turkosporos*' (of Turkish origin, a particularly insulting remark in Greece) and a jihadist. Based on her personal experience, she told the researcher, she understood why Muslims joined extremist groups and expressed her belief that followers of Islam are being persecuted and that the West is responsible for both the immigrant waves coming into Europe and violent reactions by Muslims.

While it is impossible to do justice here to the multitude of examples of ways in which responses towards Muslims contribute to a conflictual relationship, the views of Osman from Norway are indicative (see Vestel and Ali 2021). Osman highlights the role of politicians in creating an atmosphere of conflict:

> The thing is that they place so much focus, indirectly, on Islamic elements … I feel that it's a problem because people can't be themselves. People are slowly but surely attacking Islam. Because they're not talking about prohibiting the kippa, they're not talking about forbidding the turban. Usually it's about hijabs in the police, hijabs for children. And again, it's the media playing on that and the politicians fall into the trap. I feel that this is negative too because it will lead to

people saying: 'You know what? We don't want to have you here in
this country'.

Reports of security surveillance and counter-terrorism operations that
have contributed to distrust, and the adoption of a conflict mind-set, can
be found in reports from the UK to Turkey, from Norway to Tunisia, in-
deed in all reports. Summarising the experience of many across Europe,
Benaïssa (2021: 17) notes the reflections of a Belgian psychologist work-
ing in the area of Molenbeek on the profound impact of the 'targeting
and the global labelling of this district' on its population, an impact he
describes as 'traumatic'.

Taken as a whole, these responses towards Muslims in societies
throughout Europe contribute to a sense of 'us' versus 'them' and the
idea that us and them are involved in a fight until the bitter end. For
many, the words of George Bush in September 2001 that 'you are with
us or with the terrorists' still resonate and have contributed to distrust
in Western democracy. Many of the respondents are caught in a spiral
of fear whereby the treatment of Muslims with suspicion by outspoken
politicians, the media, security agencies and the general public means
that Muslims feel threatened and suspicious of institutional actors, from
whom they expect unjust treatment. Moreover, as described by Pilking-
ton and Vestel (2021), 'anti-Islamist' actors use their own narratives and
imaginary to convince themselves, and attempt to convince others, of the
existential threat that comes with Islamic presence in Europe. Islamists,
meanwhile, have their own narratives that they are the ones who are be-
ing persecuted, not just in Europe but around the world, and are at risk
of extinction. Moreover, materials including videos that evidence this are
circulated, as Belgian respondent Primo describes:

> And so when I see these videos, I am shocked … They arrived in
> a mosque, because Bashar Al Assad's soldiers were helped by the
> Iranians … this video on YouTube is called 'more than fifty-one dead
> children in a mosque', the first image I see, a *padre*, a father, *meskin*
> [poor guy], he takes a girl and says 'O country of Arabs! Is this little
> girl old enough to die?' And you see the girl, her teeth, her jaw com-
> pletely ripped off, and a little boy who had his whole top part removed
> and you see his brain exposed … *Wallah*, the kid was four years old.

In this way, radicalisation consists in part of being absorbed into a
culture of fear (Dechesne 2015; see also Hobfoll 2018) where particular
anxiety-provoking events contribute to a state of fear of the other and
heightened vigilance of threats coming from the other. This survival
mechanism promotes an excessive focus on such threats while being
oblivious to anything other than the threatening situation and the threat-

ening others. Especially in the case of two parties being caught up in this spiral of fear, the risk of perpetuation and escalation of conflict is significant.

Non-radicalisation, it follows, consists partly of staying out of this spiral of fear and conflict. The above-mentioned factors of self-control, social connection and embedding and religious knowledge are likely to contribute to the ability to do so. There are, however, additional indicators involved in non-radicalisation. For one, in some cases there is an honour culture that promotes conflict, but in other cases there have also been indications of a culture of cooperation that diminishes conflict. In the UK, for instance, respondent Abu Abdullah mentioned the positive role that a mosque had played in coping with the devastating fire at Grenfell Tower:

> I mean after Grenfell, it's helped change people's perceptions – some people's perceptions. It's all about that contact. A mosque needs to have that contact and the contact comes through the people. So, the Prophet's biggest form of like call to Islam and stuff like that, was that one to one, that physical contact sort of thing. It's not by killing and stuff like that. So, the Prophet established that. And as Muslims, they say about two, three million Muslims live in the UK. If, for example, every Muslim spoke to every person that he met, within a month you would reach all seventy million people that live in the UK on a conversational basis. But, a lot of people give a bad perception of Islam, or a bad image. First impressions count man. A lot of Muslims are not holding up what Islam teaches them.

The perceived importance of establishing positive contact was also documented in other conversations, for instance in the Netherlands where one respondent told us about his way out of hatred, when a serious illness led to his hospitalisation and his treatment caused him to almost faint due to the pain. At that moment, a female surgeon had comforted him and he recounts how:

> I felt the tears running down my cheeks. It was the first moment that I realised what that ideology meant, and that I could kill her and her colleagues too. Because they are unbelievers. See what happened in Paris, see what happened in Nice. The people who were murdered there … among them, there may actually have been the surgeon who could have saved you some day, or the trainer who would have trained your children, or the community policeman who would have been there to help you and to bring you to the hospital and to try to keep you on the right track. That's what I realised for the first time, at that moment.

The same respondent subsequently wrote to the mayor of his hometown and, after a receptive response, the respondent became involved in ef-

forts to raise awareness of the impact of jihadism, which reached thousands of young people.

In these stories of non-radicalisation, we find opposite tendencies to those identified in the stories of radicalisation insofar as they pertain to the factors involved in adopting a conflict frame. In particular, where a culture of honour contributes to the adoption of a conflict frame, a culture of cooperation (as for instance in the case of the community activities of the mosque following the Grenfell Tower fire) contributes to non-radicalisation. Secondly, where repression is thought to contribute to, and exacerbate, conflict framing, an inclusive response (for instance by a mayor) can contribute to non-radicalisation. Thirdly, where a culture of fear contributes to further escalation of conflict, a sense of trust (as for instance suddenly found in the relationship between surgeon and patient) contributes to non-radicalisation.

Non-Violence versus Violence

The discussion above of the social and psychological aspects that contribute to the adoption or rejection of an extremist mind-set should not imply that such a mind-set necessarily leads to actual engagement in violence. For this aspect of radicalisation or non-radicalisation, that is, the actual engagement in violence or disengagement from it, to manifest, several situational factors need to be taken into account.

The proximity of an actual major conflict area is a very important factor in this. The ethnographic report on Turkey addresses involvement in violence in a much more direct way than, for instance, the Norwegian report where, for many, the idea of a global struggle does not translate into actual violent engagement. In many European countries, the outflow of young Muslims to the conflict areas of the Middle East has been a tragedy for all involved, and the numbers have been significant. However, it is very important to continue to reiterate that only a minute fraction of young Muslims have affinity with the jihadist cause. The situation is very different in Southern Turkey at the time of the war in Syria. Involvement in conflict zones makes one more likely to engage in violence because of necessity and the availability of weapons.

Across the fieldwork sites, we found a parallel situation (although of much less omnipresence) for those involved in criminal milieus. Many of the respondents had been involved in criminal activities and through these activities had developed weapons skills. To illustrate, Benaïssa (2021: 24), who conducted field research in Belgium, describes the story of Primo:

His early socialisation into violence, delinquency and then robbery, and finally into the prison world, and later his confrontation with the traumatic experience of death, that of his childhood friends but also that of his little brother, can be cited among the deep causes of his entry into extremist political violence. Not to mention the fact that robberies and hold-ups project him into a world where the initiation to the handling of weapons becomes an obligatory passage, as attested to by the exchange I have with him about the entry into prison of one of his childhood friends who, with other acolytes, had robbed the town police station to recover uniforms, computers and, for one of them, a handgun.

In Russia, the ethnographers mention the story of Omar who says that, in Dagestan, 'it's cool to be bad among young people, fuelling crime gangs and a cult against the police'. According to Omar, there is a clear connection with Islamist radicalism, as 'the same bad guys', as he calls them, find 'in' or, more accurately, 'around' Islam a similar way of mobilising against the police and 'for war'. But engaging in violence out of self-interest or out of jihadist involvement are not the same. The violence perpetrated for a jihadist cause has a moral quality that criminal engagement lacks. For instance, the Belgian respondent Primo (quoted above) shares that:

I stole all the time, I only worked a little, otherwise I stole all the time, I wasted it on the *haram* [illicit] – discos, casino, trips. I said to myself that this is not life, I found myself many times saying to myself, 'Imagine dying in this condition…'. And then you end up being convinced and you say to yourself that those who are against jihad, who are Muslims, because there are many of them, we hear them speak on television and so on, they don't have as many arguments as those who are for jihad and who have arguments, they have hadiths, the Qur'an and so on.

In this sense, the actual use of violence for the Islamist cause is to a certain extent a matter of the necessity to use violence (in war zones) or having experience with the use of weapons (in criminal milieus) but also the moral justification for the use of violence. The arguments provided by the jihadists, that there is a global struggle between the right and the wrong, and that Muslims worldwide are under threat, propels many young people towards the conviction that it is justified to pick up arms, even though the fighting itself may not be particularly appealing to the higher side of human endeavour. This is explained by the following Dutch respondent:

It is war. But, we can't play it holy. America doesn't either. Performing executions. For example, the Kurds in Iraq, the court in Iraq,

> where the young people are now being convicted for what they have committed in Syria, they are all being murdered. Hung. Yes, that's bad too. We cannot say this is less bad and this is more bad. Do you understand? Both are bad.

At the same time there are respondents, falling into the category of 'non-radicals', who are quite vocal in disconnecting their religion from violence. As Greek respondent Pavlos summarises it:

> From all these [i.e. the teachings of Islam] it is easy for someone to see Islam's position on terrorism. Terrorism is a form of hostility during which innocent people are targeted in order to frighten the population. As a consequence, Islam's position on terrorism is related to the Islamic position on hostile acts. It is clear from the above that, even during war time, it is not permissible for Muslims to target civilians. … Murdering innocent people is a crime, even during war. Whoever intentionally murders innocent people is a criminal and should be punished for his crime. Terrorism is absolutely forbidden in Islam.

Considering the difference between those who engage in violence and those who do not, we find a difference, first, in access, or lack thereof, to conflict zones or criminal networks, providing experience with the use of weapons. Secondly, we identify a difference in the moral justification for the use of violence. Violence tends to be considered justified when it is carried out in defence of a cherished value or identity. Very rarely do people condone violence that is used to attack without a prior provocation.

Conclusion

On the basis of the study of the ten Islamist milieus reported on here, we have been able to identify a number of factors that allow us to differentiate between the lifeworlds of those moving into violent extremism and those resisting it. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the analysed elements of radicalisation and the factors that we have identified as contributing to non-radicalisation or radicalisation.

In our analysis, we have encountered variables that have been identified previously in Cragin's (2014) model. Like Cragin, we see social access, moral repugnance and considerations of costs and benefits as playing a role in radicalisation. However, whereas Cragin envisages radicalisation and non-radicalisation as a singular, planned behaviour (indeed, her model seems to fit well with Azjen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour), our, albeit preliminary, 'milieu' analysis stresses rather the

Table 1.1. Overview of factors contributing to non-radicalisation or radicalisation.

Elements of Radicalisation	Non-radicalisation	Radicalisation
Societal participation versus non-participation	Self-control	Lack of control
	Social connection	Isolation
	Religious education	Religious 'bricolage'
Cooperation versus conflict	Culture of cooperation	Honour culture
	Inclusive society	Repression
	Sense of trust	Culture of fear
Non-violence versus violence	Societal stability	Presence violence/crime
	No access to radical networks	Access to radical networks
	No justification for violence	Moral justification for violence

dynamic and interactive nature that creates a quite different perspective on radicalisation.

In closing, two points warrant reiteration. First, the hallmark characteristic of the milieu approach is its focus on localised dynamism. Non-radicalisation and radicalisation, from this perspective, are inherently relational phenomena that are assumed to emerge from social interactions that take place on multiple levels (see also della Porta 2018). As such, the milieu perspective avoids a correspondence bias (discussed above) that seems inherent to many of the current 'security' perspectives on radicalisation and non-radicalisation. Secondly, as alluded to in the introduction, avoiding this correspondence bias is especially important when implementing programmes to prevent and counter violent extremism. Rather than suggesting that radicalisation is a problem that is owned by 'them', the present approach comes with the potential of a shift to a more positive approach, highlighting the potential of any milieu to create an environment and find answers to challenges in a constructive and sustainable way.

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NOTE

1. Where names are attached to respondent statements, these employ pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

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