

Politico-ideological violence: Zooming in on grievances

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journals.sagepub.com/home/euc**Ahmed Ajil** 

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Abstract

Most studies on politico-ideological violence (PIV) recognize the importance of socio-political and economic grievances, but they rarely analyse them in depth. I argue that this is symptomatic of a tendency of depoliticization in radicalization research in the post 9/11 context and suggest that the study of PIV may benefit from putting greater emphasis on the element of grievance. A grievance-based analysis allows for critical and reflexive consideration of structural and systemic factors pertinent for engagement in PIV and may thereby contribute to demystifying and re-politicizing the current debate on PIV. I propose three ‘ideal types’ of grievances (racial, ethnic and religious; socio-economic; political), which may be locally or globally oriented or inspired, and suggest that a combination of those is likely to be present in most forms of PIV. I conclude with a few methodological reflections and potential implications for policymaking.

Keywords

PIV, politico-ideological violence, grievances, radicalization, terrorism

Introduction

In Europe today, the debate on politico-ideological violence (PIV)¹ remains highly topical. In recent years, various European countries have adopted *National Action Plans* to prevent and counter ‘radicalization and violent extremism’ in areas ranging from integration over education to the criminal justice system. These action plans place a lot of emphasis on promoting fundamental and practical research into so-called root causes and processes towards violent engagement. Although research into the causes of ‘radicalization’ is being encouraged, certain epistemological challenges have been identified concerning the way the phenomenon has been studied so far. The notion itself has been named a ‘catch-all’ concept, since definitions of radicalization usually encompass the vague and highly contested notions of ‘radical’ and ‘extreme’ (Bonelli and Carrié, 2018;

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Ducol, 2013; Mandel, 2009; Schmid, 2013) and because it tends to create an amalgam between violent acts and radical opinions, which has led to worrisome attempts to criminalize thoughts and ideas (Pilkington and Acik, 2019; Taylor, 2018). The term 'radicalization' is translated literally into different languages (for example, French *radicalization* or German *Radikalisierung*), whereas what is associated with the term differs from one context to another (Belissa, 2006). It has been pointed out that knowledge production on radicalization is heavily Western based and policy oriented (Ducol, 2013; Neumann and Kleinmann, 2013; Silva, 2018). Research on radicalization tends to place emphasis on the individual and the group, while ignoring the wider socio-political causes (Ahmad and Monaghan, 2019; Kundnani, 2012; Lafaye and Rapin, 2017; Sedgwick, 2010). Finally, the securitizing and stigmatizing capacity of the label 'radical' has been highlighted (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010; Silva, 2018; Staun, 2010).²

In this article, I suggest zooming in on the notion of 'grievance', which is used by scholars on PIV to account for feelings of frustration or dissatisfaction with social, political or economic conditions, whether at the local or global level. Depending on the discipline and the object of study, the role of grievance has been engaged with on different levels of analysis: the civil war and conflict literature usually analyses grievance at the *macro* level, using aggregate country-level indicators (for example, Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Gurr, 1970; Piazza, 2011); the social movement literature tends to analyse grievance production at the *macro* and *meso* level, within the national context, focusing on the interaction between political movements and the government (for example, Della Porta, 2013; Reinares, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2004); and the literature on radicalization tends to recognize grievance as a component in the 'radicalization process' of individuals and groups (*micro* and *meso* level) (for example, Doosje et al., 2016; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017).

Despite heterogeneous approaches, there seems to be a consensus that socio-political conditions, on both a domestic and international level, do play a role in trajectories towards PIV. However, proper analysis of and thorough engagement with the element of grievance is wanting, and grievance-based explanations of PIV tend to be simplistic. I argue that academic and public reticence to properly engage with the element of grievance involved in various forms of PIV is symptomatic of a '*de-politicizing*' trend characterizing research on PIV, including within the field of criminology. Ahmad and Monaghan (2019) note that radicalization research and criminology tend to intersect mostly around positivistic and pragmatic theoretical concepts, while the 'sizable intellectual energy devoted to the field [radicalization] continues to abstain from more plural and reflexive theorization' (2019: 16). By choosing to centre analysis around the notion of grievance, we may, I suggest, promote critical engagement with the notion of 'radicalization' via thorough investigation of the structural socio-political factors pertinent for trajectories towards PIV.

This article is structured as follows. I will first present a few possible explanations for why research on PIV has not sufficiently incorporated the analysis of grievances and elaborate on why I think it would benefit from doing so. Then I propose three 'ideal types' of grievances that I deem pertinent for the study of PIV. Finally, I conclude by reflecting on how grievances could be studied, and how shifting towards a grievance-based analysis could have beneficial ramifications for policymaking.

Incorporating grievances: Issues and potential benefits

I suggest that several reasons may go some way in elucidating why grievances have not been sufficiently engaged with in the study of PIV. First, research on radicalization since 9/11 is overwhelmingly engaged with the phenomenon on the individual and group level and tends to displace elements related to grievances, especially of a socio-economic and political nature, to the *macro* level and therefore outside its spectrum of analysis (Ahmad and Monaghan, 2019; Sedgwick, 2010). For example, the radicalization literature struggles to account for grievances related to historic experiences of suffering and injustice, such as those produced by colonialism and imperialism (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010; Mohamedou, 2018). Although the postcolonial literature is adamant that colonialist dynamics and structures have far from disappeared, either from reality or from the memories of affected communities (Carrington et al., 2016; Dabashi, 2011; Mohamedou, 2018), a substantial number of radicalization scholars who consider colonization to be a 'thing of the past' (for example, Roy, 2015) insist on its irrelevance for contemporary forms of PIV (Burgat, 2016).

Second, grievances can be used by the perpetrators of PIV as excuses or justifications for their actions. This potential instrumentalization (or misperception) of grievances can lead analysts and researchers to discredit it (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Maney, McCarthy and Yukich point out that approaches to terrorism in the 'aftermath of 9/11 have largely stigmatized insurgents and ignored political repression and structural violence as sources of armed conflict' (2012: 29). Protagonists of PIV in recent years have been voided of their political agency and studied, usually from a distance, as actors whose politically sounding outcries ought to be understood merely as attempts to excuse or mask their actual intentions. This tendency is reminiscent of Pomerantz's assertion that 'my vote [in explaining terrorism] is clearly for emphasizing mental difficulties as opposed to legitimate economic, political and religious grievances' (2001: 2–3) or former US president Bush's statement that 'we're not facing a set of grievances that can be soothed and addressed. We're facing a radical ideology with unalterable objectives to enslave whole nations and intimidate the world' (quoted by Cohan, 2006: 960). Further obscuring of the political aspirations of many groups engaged in PIV has been facilitated by what Dabashi (2011) describes as a post-9/11 tendency to *politicize the criminal* in order to *criminalize the political*. He argues that the politicization of certain 'criminal' groups such as 'al-Qaeda' (AQ) serves the criminalization of many other political resistance movements that may employ violent means, such as the Palestinian Hamas.

Third, in contemporary forms of political violence,³ grievances tend to be related to situations in the so-called Middle East, where the foreign policies of dominant European and American powers are generally acknowledged to have wreaked much havoc over the past century, and more recently, in the post-9/11 era, under the banner of the 'Global War on Terror'. At the same time, the vast majority of research on this phenomenon is produced by universities, research centres and think tanks located in the same region of the world (Campana and Lapointe, 2012; Neumann and Kleinmann, 2013).⁴ This is likely to lead to conflicting interests and political unease, which tend to hamper analytical acumen. In fact, academic circles seem to continue to struggle with accommodating the idea that large-scale violence in 'peaceful' Western countries could be anyhow

related to the foreign policy of their governments, and that therefore they may hold a share of responsibility (Blakeley, 2017; Burgat, 2016; McCauley, 2017). McCauley puts it cogently when he writes that 'our blindness to seeing terrorism as interaction saves our image as blameless victims and eases our way to violence as retribution for terrorist violence' (2017: 88).

Finally, and linked to the previous point, amidst the extremely sensitive political climate and against the heavily emotional imagery of terrorist attacks occupying the collective memory of US and European audiences, many analysts seem to have refrained from trying to 'explain' *why*, for fear of appearing to 'justify' (Crettez, 2016; Neumann and Kleinmann, 2013). Instead, 'in dealing with extreme violence of any kind there is a tendency to regard the perpetrators as psychologically abnormal and deviant' (Silke, 2004: 178). Similarly, and much earlier, Bell argued that 'one of the unwritten requirements of writing on terrorism is that abhorrence must be stressed; on the other hand, if revolution be the subject, one can be either in favour or opposed' (1977: 483). The example of how the organization of the so-called 'Islamic State' has been studied and analysed is telling. Mohamedou argues that the 'overwhelmingly reductionist and sensationalist mainstream journalistic approach and policy-oriented security expertise' has led to a 'focus on the group's extreme violence and its alienating discourse' and thereby 'prevented deeper examination of the political and social conditions behind its rise' (2018: 2). Also, a focus on religious, cultural or ethnic and psycho-pathological factors has led to a 'masking of the political' (Burgat, 2016; McEvoy, 2003; Sedgwick, 2010). Although such attributes may, of course, play some role in the process of engaging in PIV, a parochial focus on them runs the risk of reinforcing essentialisms, producing incomplete pictures, leading to perilous conclusions that go on to inform alienating and stigmatizing policies, which in turn become major sources of grievance.

Globally, I suggest that the failure to properly engage with the element of grievance is symptomatic of a '*de-politicizing*' trend in research on PIV, befitting the 'new terrorism' thesis (Laqueur, 2000) and cogently summarized by Mohamedou (2018: 20): 'The understanding of that violence of the savage has become boxed into a discussion on terrorism that strips it of its political nature and moves to discuss anthropologically the Muslim, Arab, Brown, Black, or Southern perpetrator and the scriptures of their nominal religion.' Critical perspectives in criminology are all too familiar with the dangers of seeking out 'criminal types' and constructing 'criminal others' (Aas, 2007; Garland, 2001) but tend to be side-lined in the debate on PIV (Kundnani, 2012; Silva, 2018).

I propose that proper engagement with the role that grievances play in various forms of PIV may present a fruitful avenue to counterbalance some of this trend. For example, focusing on grievances can prove useful in moving beyond the micro/meso/macro distinction. As mentioned, different disciplines have engaged with grievances on these different levels of analysis. However, by acknowledging grievances as an element transcending them, we may get closer to understanding how individuals come to identify with grievances that seem to relate to a socio-political condition affecting an entire community, region or nation – one they perhaps do not even directly belong to. We may also be able to capture how individuals or groups connect grievances on different levels. Individuals may, for example, see and feel a link between the international community's failure to prevent an unjust war, their perception that a community they belong to suffers

from stigmatization and exclusion within their national context and their personal experiences of victimization. Such links are difficult to grasp if analysis remains confined to one specific level.

Also, since grievances are usually related to social, political and/or economic dysfunctions, a grievance-based analysis is likely to promote the consideration of structural factors relevant for the engagement in PIV. Radicalization research is plagued by a predominantly positivist, individualist and essentializing focus on cultural-theological, ethno-racial and psychological factors (Ahmad and Monaghan, 2019; Silva, 2018) and would certainly benefit from including more structuralist perspectives. From an epistemological standpoint, a grievance-based analysis could also create more room for critical and reflective approaches to the study of PIV. In order to get a sound understanding of the grievances experienced by groups and individuals, researchers will likely privilege the ‘voices from below’, those of individuals directly affected or involved, via inductive, qualitative and ethnographic approaches (for a recent example, see Carlsson et al., 2019). Such methodologies expose researchers to the complexity of trajectories into and out of PIV, the realization of which may help foster critical reflexivity and nuanced analysis.

Importantly, zooming in on grievances allows for a transversal analysis of trajectories towards PIV, for grievances are present in all forms of PIV, whether left-wing, right-wing, ‘jihadist’, etc. It also allows for the comparison of both state and non-state actors across various sociocultural and historical contexts. Haggerty and Bucerus (2018), for instance, found that political grievance is used to mobilize both conventional soldiers and non-state actors engaged in PIV. McEvoy (2003) strongly argued for increased emphasis on the political in order to enable a discussion of PIV practised by liberal democratic states. Others (Blakeley, 2017; Kaldor, 2013; Sommier, 2002) similarly argue for the elevation of both non-state and state violence to the same level of analysis, since both of them are able to employ various forms of large-scale violence, which must be equally scrutinized.⁵ Widening analysis beyond the currently dominant parochial focus on ‘jihadist radicalization’ is likely to counterbalance some of the exceptionalizing tendencies of research on PIV.

Hence, a grievance-based analysis may help ‘re-politicize’ and ‘dehystericize’ discussions on PIV. By accounting for structural socio-political factors, it may be possible to restore the political agency of protagonists of PIV and contextualize their engagement and actions. Crucially, discussing political grievances allows for the analysis of political violence as an inherently *reactive* and *defensive* form of violence. This is, namely, how violent action tends to be perceived and justified by the perpetrators of violence themselves, namely as a violent *reaction*, or ‘counter-violence’, to some form of perceived or experienced injustice (see, for example, Huët, 2015). Even though some of the political motives and justifications put forward – if they are articulated at all – may sound irrational or illegitimate, it suffices to know that the perpetrators of such forms of violence do hold profound convictions regarding the socio-political strains at the basis of their engagement in violence and the ‘rightness of their actions’ (Taylor and Quayle, 1994: 103), and believe in the ultimate necessity of violence (Cohan, 2006), to warrant proper investigation of this element in order to further our understanding of PIV. By engaging with PIV as a ‘counter-attack’, a ‘legitimate’ retaliatory attack, revenge, payback and a redressal of grievance, the aim is to demystify contemporary forms of political violence

and uncouple scientific analysis from the hystericizing nature of public discourse. Now, in an attempt to move towards a grievance-based analysis, I shall turn to defining and organizing the grievances I suggest are related to PIV.

Three 'ideal types' of grievances

The literature on radicalization recognizes the importance of both collective and individual grievances for the process of engaging in PIV. Some authors argue that virtually all 'radical' groups define themselves around social or political grievances (Doosje et al., 2016; Peterka-Benton and Benton, 2014). Frequently cited models on radicalization tend to locate the importance of grievances within the early stages of the 'radicalization process': Borum (2011), for instance, argues that the four-stage process towards justification and perpetration of violence (originally developed as a training heuristic for law enforcement) begins with some unsatisfying event or condition being perceived as unjust. Wiktorowicz (2005), also proposing a four-stage process of radicalization, similarly suggests that 'cognitive opening' occurs through an experience of personal or group grievance. Moghaddam (2005) defines perceiving injustice and experiencing feelings of frustration as the first floor on the 'staircase' towards perpetrating a 'terrorist' act. Hafez and Mullins (2015) suggest that grievance is the first of four elements in the 'radicalization puzzle', and McCauley and Moskaleiko (2011) define 'political grievance' as the second out of 12 mechanisms of political radicalization: individuals may move towards violent action in response to 'political trends or events' (2011: 24). The authors also distinguish between individual and collective grievance: individual (or personal) grievance results from 'harm to self or loved ones' (McCauley and Moskaleiko, 2011: 13) and collective (or group) grievance from a 'threat or harm to a group or cause the individual cares about' (2011: 21). Haggerty and Bucerius (2018) argue that it is via a process of 'vicarious victimization' – that is, through identification with the suffering of others – that individuals come to experience grievances. Sageman (2011) suggests that at the beginning of the 'Islamist radicalization process' stands a sense of moral outrage about international conflicts (for example, Bosnia, Chechnya, Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq), major moral violations, or even local police actions. In his *general strain theory of terrorism*, Agnew argues that collective strain, that is, 'strain experienced by the members of an identifiable group or collectivity, most often a race/ethnic, religious, class, political, and/or territorial group' (2017: 125), could go some way in explaining why individuals engage in PIV for reasons beyond their individual grievances. Collective strains most likely related to terrorism, he argues, are 'high in magnitude, with civilian victims, are seen as unjust, and are caused by more powerful others' (Agnew, 2017: 131).⁶

Grievance has also been identified as a risk factor. So-called risk assessment tools, commonly used in order to evaluate the risk of recidivism, as well as screening tools, designed to 'detect' and 'measure' 'radicalization' (or 'radicalism'? 'radicality?'), have been developed for the phenomenon of PIV specifically. Such tools elevate feelings and expressions of grievance to the level of, essentially, 'risky' behaviour. The tool ERG22+ (Lloyd and Dean, 2015: 46) mentions the 'need to redress injustice and express grievance' as the first item. 'Personal grievance and moral outrage' is the first of 10 distal characteristics used by the tool TRAP-18 (Meloy and Gill, 2016: 7), which is widely

used by law enforcement agencies. Display of ‘strong feelings about political, religious or other injustices or felt discrimination’, whether perceived in the individual or the collective context, constitutes a ‘high’ risk for the second item of the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment (VERA) tool (Sadowski et al., 2017: 338–9).

Although grievance is acknowledged as a factor in the process of engaging in PIV and constructed as risk in tools that are used more and more widely by various actors within the criminal justice system, it remains poorly defined. Drawing on literature from various disciplines (political science, security studies, social psychology, sociology, social movement theory, civil war scholars, inter alia) that discusses grievances linked to outbreaks and acts of violence on a domestic and international level, I have identified three ‘ideal types’ of grievances: socio-economic; political; and ethnic, racial and religious grievances. In line with Lakhani (2014), I argue that grievances can relate to local (that is, communal, provincial or national) or global (transnational or international) contexts, respectively. The results are illustrated in Table 1. Weber’s (1949) ‘ideal type’ is a useful conceptual tool to structure social science research in a relatively new field. It does not pretend to be exhaustive or perfectly reflective of empirical reality. Accordingly, it would be futile to assume a neat separation between the three ideal types of grievance. As is usually the case with ‘ideal types’, these categories tend to be imbricated and alighting each other. Also, what is ‘local’ or ‘global’ depends very much on the protagonist’s perceptions and centre of attention. An element that would be categorized as ‘globally inspired grievance’ for a European engaged in PIV may be a ‘locally oriented grievance’ for individuals elsewhere. Grievances may also relate to a situation in the past. This can be referred to as ‘historical grievances’ (Adam, 2018), which are more likely to exist when there are events or circumstances that continue to nurture grievances in the present and thereby allow for a narrative about past grievances to be upheld (a ‘narrative of continuity’, as Bosi and Della Porta, 2012: 380, suggest).

Ethnic, religious and racial grievances may be due to the presence of an ethnically dominant majority perceived as hostile by a minority (Buhaug et al., 2014; Getoš, 2012). This perception can be fuelled by experiences of ‘othering’, xenophobia, racism or ethnic and religious discrimination, often on a local and domestic level (Agnew, 2017; Burgat, 2016; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Hafez and Mullins, 2015; Mohamedou, 2018; Pauwels and De Waele, 2014). In the Western ‘war on terror’ context, these experiences include the securitization, ‘suspectification’ and misrecognition (Abbas, 2019; Blackwood et al., 2015; Pilkington and Acik, 2019) of citizens associated with ‘Muslimness’. On a global level, such grievances may result from the actual or perceived systematic or recurring stigmatization and discrimination of a collective characterized by race, ethnicity or religion (Hafez and Mullins, 2015; Ross, 1993). For contemporary forms of PIV, grievances are related to the perception that Islam as a religion and people associated with it are being discriminated against, stigmatized and labelled as ‘dangerous’ (Dabashi, 2011; Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010; Lakhani, 2014). This belief rests upon the idea that conflicts in Algeria, Chechnya, Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Yemen are not coincidental but conspirational and systematic and, to some, due to a perception of Islam, majority-Islamic countries and Muslims as the major threat after the demise of Soviet communism (Lakhani, 2014). Others similarly argue that the figure of the ‘Muslim’ has, since the end of the 15th

Table 1. Ideal types of grievances with examples.

	Locally oriented/inspired	Globally oriented/inspired
Ethnic, religious, racial grievances	Hostile majority, ethnic dominance Discrimination based on ethnic, religious or racial factors Securitization, 'suspectification', misrecognition Ethnic, racial or religious hatred, racism, xenophobia, 'othering'	Systematic or recurring stigmatization and discrimination of a collective characterized by race, ethnicity or religion on a global level
Socio-economic grievances	Low socio-economic status, poverty, relative material deprivation, economic deprivation Economic discrimination, exclusion and marginalization, characterized by income inequality, hampered access to the labour or housing markets and the education system	Grievances related to the negative repercussions of globalization, modernization and capitalism
Political grievances	Dysfunctional mechanisms of political representation, low representation of minorities in positions of influence, lack of civil rights Hampered access to the political system, alienation and exclusion from mainstream political processes Loss of trust in the government, corruption Suspension of civil liberties, censorship, banning of political parties, political repression (e.g. anti-terrorism laws) Violent state repression, persecution of minorities	Domination and primacy of a hegemonic power Deficient or biased system of international accountability: impunity of crimes of war Legacy of colonialism and imperialism, expansionist and interventionist foreign policy (military occupations and invasions), systematic large-scale violence and persecution of minorities

century, been the major archetypal 'Other', against which the idea of a 'West' started to cohere around concepts of 'Whiteness and Christianity', and that European expansion and colonialism have to be understood through that lens (Daulatzai, 2012: 8). This type of grievance is usually tied to the other two types of grievances: it tends to arise when socio-economic or political discrimination are based on ethnic, religious or racial factors (Rydgren, 2007).

Socio-economic grievances are generated by actual or perceived low socio-economic status, usually affecting a minority of the population (Buhaug et al., 2014; Piazza, 2011). Relative material deprivation may be experienced if there is a substantial difference between the socio-economic position of certain groups (Agnew, 2017; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Gurr, 1970). Economic discrimination, exclusion and marginalization may be involved in the creation and maintenance of the low socio-economic status of certain portions of the population. They may be present in the form of income inequality as well as hampered access to labour or the housing market and to the education system (Agnew, 2017; Da Silva et al., 2018; Getoš, 2012; Lowrence, 2006; Ratelle and Souleimanov, 2017; Stern, 2003). On the global level, grievances

may be related to the negative repercussions of trends such as globalization and modernization. Similarly, capitalism and the consequences that are associated with it, such as exploitative systems and a widening inequality gap, may also foster grievances (Türkmen, 2010; Villiger, 2017).

Finally, *political grievances* can result from dysfunctional mechanisms of political representation and the unequal distribution of political resources, low representation of members of a minority in positions of influence and a lack of civil rights for a portion of the population (Adam, 2018; Burgat, 2016). This may be the result of alienation and exclusion of portions of society from mainstream political processes, characterized by hampered access to the political system (Ratelle and Souleimanov, 2017; Rydgren, 2007). Grievances may also relate to the lack or loss of trust in the government and perceptions of it being unjust or corrupt (Akram, 2014; Lowrence, 2006; Tanner, 2011). Political repression may include the suspension of civil liberties, censorship and the criminalization or banning of political parties, groups or movements. Violent political repression may include the persecution of minorities or political opponents (Buhaug et al., 2014; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011). On a global level, political grievances may be related to the geopolitical domination and primacy of the perceived global 'West' and a biased system of international law working in its favour, leading to impunity of war crimes when they are perpetrated by dominant powers, and thus a perception of double standards (Blakeley, 2017; Falk, 2017; Marsella, 2004). Violent forms of geopolitical domination also fuel political grievances. Formerly, these were characterized by large-scale European imperialist and colonialist projects. Nowadays, they include foreign occupations and invasions, as well as systematic and large-scale violence and persecution of minorities within countries or regions (Burgat, 2016; Mohamedou, 2018).

The particular case of 'globally oriented/inspired grievances'

Although it may appear intuitive that grievances related to the domestic context can lead to outbreaks of violence, what the study of PIV has been struggling to explain is why and how individuals come to experience *globally oriented* grievances, that is, feel compelled to react to a perceived injustice that is located in a different context and does not directly (physically) affect them. In her analysis of political violence in Switzerland, Villiger found there to be something distinctive about movements affected by global grievances: 'The most intense acts of violence were those perpetrated by movements that were fighting for causes beyond [their] borders' (2013: 685). By way of example, among the sources of globally oriented political grievance, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict figures prominently in the narrative repertoire of various movements, ranging from the Rote Armee Fraktion (Della Porta, 2013), the Brigade Rosse (Imarisio, 2003), the Irish Republican Army (Miller, 2010), Swiss far-left groups (Villiger, 2013), Black freedom struggles (Daulatzai, 2012), Latin American revolutions (Meari, 2018) and, of course, groups aligned with Islamist ideologies, from more moderate ones to so-called 'al-Qaeda' and so-called 'Islamic State' (Ahmed, 2005; Hegghammer and Wagemakers, 2013; Lakhani, 2014; Mohamedou, 2018). As the Palestinian author and member of the

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine Ghassan Kanafani once put it: 'The Palestinian cause is not a cause for Palestinians only, but a cause for every revolutionary, wherever he is, as a cause for the exploited and oppressed masses in our era' (Meari, 2018: 50).

Military interventions and occupations, such as those that took place in the context of the 'Global War on Terror' in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the large-scale civilian suffering they caused, are also major sources of globally inspired political grievance involved in the emergence of contemporary forms of PIV (Falk, 2017; Hafez and Mullins, 2015; Hamm, 2013; Mohamedou, 2018; Najeeb Shafiq and Sinno, 2010; Wilkinson, 1999). Such motivational spill-over effects of conflicts have been dubbed the 'Palestine effect' (Hegghammer and Wagemakers, 2013) or the 'Iraq effect' (Nesser, 2006; Wehrey et al., 2010). Schuurman, Bakker and Eijkman (2018: 107) also found that,

[I]n the absence of geopolitical events involving the perceived victimization of Muslim populations and the violent responses that this elicited from groups like al-Qaeda, the [Dutch] Hofstadgroup would arguably not have existed or developed in the way it did. Geopolitically inspired grievances were a key structural-level factor leading to the Hofstadgroup's emergence and motivating the violent intentions of some of its most extremist participants.

Finally, the legacy of colonialism and its impact on postcolonial state systems also nurture globally oriented political grievance. In fact, to some authors, contemporary forms of political violence cannot be dissociated from the consequences of violence perpetrated in the era of colonialism and imperialism (Burgat, 2016; Dabashi, 2011). Mohamedou (2018) describes this effect as 'colonialism boomerang'. As he puts it, with reference to the so-called 'Islamic State', "'Return to sender" is in effect the motto of the violence counter-produced, remixed and shipped back by ISIS to the imperial centres' (2018: 2).

For a sound investigation of PIV, I believe that it is crucial to keep an eye on the different types of grievances and their local and global sources of inspiration. There is no straightforward answer to the question of which grievances are most pertinent for contemporary forms of PIV, although globally inspired political grievances figure prominently in the speeches, narratives, justifications and accusations of various movements. Rather, in line with arguments put forward by some authors (Akbarzadeh and Mansouri, 2010; Hafez and Mullins, 2015; Mohamedou, 2018), it is likely to be a 'remixing' of local and global grievances that is at work, across the globe, in mobilizations for PIV. For example, as Akbarzadeh and Mansouri (2010: 11) suggest:

Neo-Islamism's notion of global jihad feeds on political grievances of Muslims against the global order. The unequal power relations in international affairs represented for example in *global* inaction in the face of Israel's incursion into Lebanon in August 2006, or growing pressures on the Muslim diaspora reflected in the 2004 French law banning hijab from schools [*a local grievance*], are noted as evidence of a global conspiracy against Islam.

Concluding reflections

In this paper, I have argued that an increased focus on grievances could be beneficial for the study of PIV and taken a first step towards a grievance-based analysis by proposing

three ideal types of grievance that seem to be recurring when it comes to engagement in PIV. Now, one will of course be tempted to ask how to pursue a grievance-based analysis in methodological terms. Given the complexity of the role that grievances play in trajectories towards PIV – due to the interplay between locally oriented and globally oriented grievances and the idiosyncratic nature of the processes through which these grievances become relevant on a personal level – inductive research based on first-hand data collection, via, for example, in-depth interviews and ethnographic methods, could be the most appropriate. The suggested ideal types could provide guidance for interview questions and the analysis of narratives. They should, however, be developed, enriched and adjusted to the particular context of the interview population.⁷ Although the qualitative approach in this field is fraught with methodological difficulties and limitations (Bonelli and Carrié, 2018; Horgan, 2012), it probably remains the most promising avenue towards a profound exploration of the grievances at play in trajectories towards violent engagement. Valuable insights could be obtained by asking questions related to locally oriented grievances (for example, experiences of discrimination, xenophobia) and globally oriented grievances (for example, perceptions of and frustrations with geopolitical events) and how individuals and groups engage with them.

It should be recalled that there is, of course, no straightforward link between grievances and violence. Grievances may not be precisely articulated to individuals experiencing them, as suggested by Akram (2014). Also, they may simply be experienced but not acted upon. However, they seem to be involved in trajectories towards non-violent political engagement, or towards violent or military action. Scholars have attempted to conceptualize the link between grievances and PIV in different ways. Kruglanski and colleagues (2017), for instance, suggest that grievances are linked to a ‘loss of significance’. They argue that human beings tend to be significance-seeking, driven by the fundamental human need ‘to matter’, and that a significance loss would prompt a willingness to restore significance, if necessary using violent means. Grievances related to ‘significance loss’ would arise from ‘harm suffered’, and ‘significance restoration’ would then equate to ‘redressing the undeserved harm’ (Kruglanski et al., 2017: 221–3). Other scholars argue that socio-economic grievances lead to violence via the element of ‘greed’. Rebellion or insurgency would then become tantamount to common profit-driven criminality (Collier, 2000; Grossman, 1999). In the conflict literature, the theories predominantly used to conceptualize the link between grievance and action are ‘relative deprivation’ (Gurr, 1970) and ‘frustration-aggression theory’ (Berkowitz, 1993), which postulate that, much like anomie and strain theory in criminology (Agnew, 2017; Merton, 1938), individuals and groups resort to violence in order to change their dissatisfactory socio-economic or political status. McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2004) argue that, since grievances are simply too common to account for outbreaks of violence, analysis of motivations has to be subsumed to a consideration of ‘mobilizing structures’ and opportunities, which provide insurgents with material or organizational resources.⁸ Lowrence (2006) argues that other factors, such as expectations of success, degree of initiative and personal resources, or a desire to express certain identities, also interact with grievances to produce political outcomes. To others, grievance leads to violence once its peaceful expressions face repression (for example, Della Porta, 2013).

Many of these explanations tend to simplify the link between grievance and violent action in order to facilitate operationalization and empirical quantification. Instead, I would suggest looking at ‘grievance-generating’ elements (Why and how do people develop grievances?) and ‘action-generating’ factors (Why and how is action envisaged? How does violent action become justified and how are grievances mobilized for justification?), and ‘action-facilitating’ elements (What situational, contextual or environmental elements facilitate or impede engagement in violence?). One benefit of this conceptual organization is that it takes into account the often-asked question: why does only a minor fraction of those who are frustrated or aggrieved, among which some hold ‘radical’ or pro-violent attitudes, end up engaging in action, and some of them in violent action? Looking at both ‘grievance-generating’ and ‘action-generating’ elements could offer a promising avenue towards addressing this question. Among the ‘grievance-generating’ elements, a discussion of ‘moral shocks’ (Jasper, 2011), ‘injustice frames’ (Benford and Snow, 2000), ‘collective identity’ (Hafez and Mullins, 2015; Ruggiero, 2005), ‘collective memory’ (Marsella, 2004; Rydgren, 2007), ‘sensitivity’ (Cohen, 2016; McCauley and Moskaleiko, 2011) and emotions (Jasper, 2011; Petersen, 2002) imposes itself. When it comes to ‘action-generating’ elements, concepts such as ‘emotional liberation’ (Jasper, 2011) and theories such as neutralization theory (Sykes and Matza, 1957) and legal cynicism (Sampson and Bartusch, 1998) could help us understand how violent action comes to be reframed and justified as a legitimate and necessary form of responding to grievances and addressing injustices.⁹

Policies aiming to prevent citizens from engaging in different forms of PIV may also benefit from sincere consideration of grievances. If the adopted policies (including foreign policies) continue to nurture the local and global grievances, for example through the securitization and ‘suspectification’ of citizens associated with ‘Muslimness’ (Pilkington and Acik, 2019), they will most likely end up being counterproductive. On the other hand, ignoring and downplaying grievances may send a signal to those holding grievances either that their means are insufficient – which may encourage them to resort to violent or more violent means – or that their voice is unheard, unwanted or uncalled for – which may increase their frustration with or alienation from conventional institutions. Engaging with grievance, however, requires tact and empathy. Constructing the expression of grievance as ‘risky’ behaviour (Hamm, 2013) is likely to hamper socio-political integration and the participation of concerned groups who will feel observed, scrutinized and problematized (Jarvis and Lister, 2013; Taylor, 2018). Instead, truly engaging with grievances requires, it would seem, working on the sources of grievance, that is, the structural dysfunctions and injustices nurturing them, while fostering critical thinking and media awareness to equip the youth in particular with the necessary tools to deconstruct ideas they may be receiving via social media, the public discourse or influential individuals in their environment. On a final note, one should not forget that grievances remain potent drivers of social change. A sense of moral indignation about injustice and suffering is what drives the radicals who give everything to fight for a more just and equitable world. One would therefore be utterly mistaken to consider grievances as inherently negative because of the role they play in various forms of politico-ideological violence.

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Notes

1. I define PIV as acts of violence committed in defence of a collective (not individual) cause, justified on political or ideological grounds and seen as inherently moral by the agents of violence themselves.
2. Nevertheless, this article partly draws on research produced under the label of radicalization. However, the term politico-ideological violence (or engagement therein) will be privileged throughout.
3. Although the aim of this article is not to deal with PIV related to jihadist ideologies specifically, the examples used will frequently be associated with this phenomenon – first, because it has been a major source of preoccupation for research, policy and the public in recent years; and, second, because I suggest that grievances related to situations and conflicts in the Arab–Asian region illustrate well how political grievances can mobilize individuals across the world for violent action.
4. On this topic, I also refer to Moosavi's (2019) critical analysis of 'Asian' and 'Southern' criminologies and Aas's (2007) work on the ethnocentricity of criminology.
5. For example, Sommier (2002: 475): 'Conventional and unconventional forms of war therefore tend to resemble each other, so that it is now wrong to distinguish terrorism from state warfare by saying that it [terrorism] ignores the laws and conventions of war, attacks civilians and is always indiscriminate and arbitrary. For these characteristics can, all in all, nowadays be applied to many forms of state violence.'
6. Nivette, Eisner and Ribeaud (2017) tested the postulates of the general strain theory of terrorism on a set of longitudinal data from a Swiss youth delinquency survey. They found that collective strain did have a small effect on violent extremist attitudes. That effect was largely neutralized when moral and legal neutralization mechanisms were controlled for.
7. Interesting examples are Hicham Bou Nassif's study of Sunni officers' grievances (see Bou Nassif, 2015), Romain Huët's ethnography of Syrian fighters (Huët, 2015), and Carlsson and colleagues' study of violent extremism in Sweden (Carlsson et al., 2019).
8. On this, see also Buhaug, Cederman and Gleditsch (2014) and Crettez (2016).
9. I have applied some of these suggestions on a sample of Swiss individuals. See Ajil (2019).

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