



CHAPTER 7

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Trajectories of (Non)Radicalisation in a French Prison

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The role that prisons play in the radicalisation process remains the subject of academic debate (Béraud, De Galembert and Rostaing 2016; Khosrokhavar 2016; de Galembert 2020). In both the collective imagination and within French institutions, however, prisons have already come to be seen as one of the main sites of the propagation of Islamist radicalisation (Kepel 2015; Micheron 2020; Rougier 2020). In France, the gradual development of a state model for countering terrorism that focuses on the prevention of radicalisation (Sèze 2019; Conti 2020) has led to the considerable expansion of the field of the fight against radicalisation.¹ In this process, prison has become the object of specific measures that have come to structure the prison space and the relationships therein.² While in France, like other European countries, prison is seen as an environment where radicalisation occurs more frequently than elsewhere in society – which would appear to be confirmed by the large number of people who have passed through the prison system prior to committing acts of terrorism – one might wonder whether the image of prison as a ‘terroristogenic’ place is not, at least partially, the result of its construction as such through academic and political discourse. In reflecting on this, three observations are worth noting. First, in response to a strong institutional and societal demand, the social sciences have mainly focused on those prisons where there is a concentration of prisoners with terrorist convictions, that is, where the discourse of radical Islam was not only more accessible, but also stronger and more visible. Secondly, like the prison administration, researchers have focused almost entirely on prisoners convicted of terrorism or who have been ‘radicalised’ or ‘suspected of being radicalised’, rather than looking at a broader spectrum

of prisoners. Finally, the primary objective of much of this research has been to produce profiles that might, among other things, be useful for prevention or even detection of radicalisation (Crettiez and Sèze 2017; Micheron 2020).

Taking these observations as a starting point, the research upon which this contribution is based provides a novel perspective due to three distinguishing features of the methodological approach adopted. First, it focuses on a prison considered to be 'peripheral' or designed for 'radicalisation dispersion' (Chantraine, Scheer and Depuiset 2018), that is, a prison where the size of the population judged to have been 'radicalised' or 'suspected of being radicalised' is limited. Secondly, it is concerned with prisoners with a range of profiles and trajectories in relation to the offences committed, their attitude in detention and their affiliations, as well as their religion and/or religiosity. This allows the study of not only radicalisation trajectories but also those that might be defined as trajectories of 'non-radicalisation'. Finally, the research was based on a dialogue with the respondents concerning inequalities, injustices (real or perceived) and prisoners' responses – including a turn to radical Islam – to them. It is through this shift in perspective that this chapter aims to illustrate how prison – a place of confinement which tends to promote de-socialisation and the breakdown of the prisoners' social and affective ties – is a milieu that can give rise to highly varied, even opposing, outcomes and narratives, which more often than not manifest in a rejection of the radical Islam narrative.

Data Collection and Methodology

This contribution is based on ethnographic research conducted, primarily, in a correctional centre, far from any large city and housing a population of around 450 male inmates. This centre was selected as the site for ethnographic research because it had already been the subject of participatory action research on 'Contesting knowledge in the prison milieu', which was carried out in response to a request from the prison's teaching staff, who are increasingly confronted with challenges to their educational activity, in particular by incarcerated students who contest knowledge and/or use the idea of God to explain the world.

A range of data sources, collected between 2017 and 2019, are drawn on. In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of eighteen respondents. In several cases, three to four interviews were carried out with participants, sometimes spaced out over the course of the fieldwork. Data are also drawn from interviews conducted with prison staff (management,

teachers, the warden, guards etc.), with the Muslim chaplain and with other inmates. A third source of data is a series of observations conducted during scheduled classes, on organised walks, in the corridors and exercise yards and during staff meetings. The final source of data comes from three group discussions. Two of these were conducted within the context of the action research 'Contesting knowledge in the prison milieu', where two groups of inmates participated in approximately ten group sessions. The third such discussion took place in the form of the DARE project Community Dialogue Event, which brought together a dozen prisoners for a day of collective reflection on the relationship between inequality, injustice, radicalisation and violence.

The methodological approach adopted in this study distinguishes it from the majority of French research to date on radicalisation in as much as the entire prison is considered as a 'negotiated' social space (Khos-rokhavar 2016) in which it is possible to generate a situational and interactional understanding of what is perceived as injustice and inequality and how these relate to extremism and radicalisation. This means that we employ a micro-sociological approach, where the researcher actively participates in the construction of an individual and collective narrative in which dialogue and contradictions can emerge between different stakeholders. The extended timeframe also gave us the opportunity to observe the evolution of phenomena and individuals and to avoid reducing them to their initial discourse or outward posturing.

This research was conducted with eighteen respondents, including one woman whom we met twice in a women's prison. The respondent set included three minors (at the time of the first interview one was sixteen and the other two were seventeen) and four individuals over thirty (thirty-seven, thirty-nine and forty-one respectively). The decision to include older individuals was based on the initial research results, which revealed the importance of the interaction between individuals of different ages, as the oldest individuals may be seen as (and claim to be) charismatic leaders who provide meaning to the juvenile rage that is acted out. The respondent set was composed of fifteen Muslims and three non-Muslims. Two were converts to Islam, both convicted of terrorism-related offences. The decision to include non-Muslims in the study came from previous studies, which illustrated how radical Islam can offer itself as a possible path for non-Muslims, in particular within the prison environment. The eighteen people in the respondent set were incarcerated for a variety of offences and crimes. Approximately one-third had been imprisoned for acts of terrorism, a third had been charged with, or convicted of, theft or armed robbery and the remaining third were in prison for drug trafficking.

The Desire for a Rewarding 'Elsewhere'

Inequality permeates the respondents' daily lives. It is engendered by structural relations within French society (at the macro level), the assigning of individuals to and/or identifying them with social groups (meso) and subjective experience (micro). Inequality at these three levels intersects in the lives of individuals, producing a widely shared feeling of injustice to which the responses are varied. The lives of the respondents are marked, above all, by a sense of physical, social and symbolic confinement, generally producing a shared feeling of being unable to move forward and, ultimately, to control one's life.

Spatial Marginalisation and Collective Identification

This experience manifests, firstly, in the form of physical and spatial confinement, as the majority of respondents grew up and lived in disadvantaged and marginalised neighbourhoods. The latter are mainly inhabited by immigrants and people of immigrant origin and are characterised by low-quality social services and a lack of social and economic mixing. They are neighbourhoods where there are very few people of French origin. This is the case for, among others, Steven:³ 'Well, where we live, and even at school, almost all of us are black, Arab and so on, or gypsies, and at my school there were only two French kids. So I'd never talked to them, never, not a word.' Anissa, who grew up in a small-town neighbourhood, described how her spatial horizon was limited to two high-rise buildings that embody the ghetto in which she lives. Her marriage allowed her to move from one high-rise to the other, in a kind of parody of the social mobility to which she, like most other prisoners, might aspire. Characterised by poverty and economic marginalisation – as well as the weak presence of the state, whose coercive branches are the most visible – these spaces are seen as the expression of a deliberate policy of exclusion. Anissa explains: 'Yeah, they do it on purpose . . . putting all the Arabs in the ghettos. So that we keep to ourselves and so that the shit stays in the shit.'

In a process of ghettoisation, in which a world is gradually and collectively built away from the outside world (Lapeyronnie 2008), childhood memories and forms of solidarity and bonds between groups nonetheless help shape a spatial identity, one that is rooted in the social and physical space where the individual lived and grew up, so much so that, for some, segregation engenders a sense of total separation, operating within a binary framework that pits what is inside, 'Us', against what is outside, 'Them'. This is expressed by Paul, a seventeen-year-old in prison for homicide:

Where we live, nobody comes and hassles us, we're chilled, we don't bother anyone, we're with our own people, we know everyone . . . We're in our little village, we've got everything we need in our village . . . Why would we leave? To do what? . . . They don't want to mix with us, why should we go mix with them?

Stigmatisation, Labelling and Discrimination

All of the respondents were born and/or raised in France. Most of them are French nationals who went to French schools and were educated in the values of the French Republic. Yet nearly all of the respondents of foreign origin underline how they are constantly reminded of their foreign roots and, in this way, rendered alien. They denounce a society, the media and institutions that deny them their Frenchness by preventing them from writing their story within the national narrative. The words of sixteen-year-old Griezmann, who has a French father and an Arab mother, serve as a brutal reminder: 'Since they always called me a "dirty Arab" and all that, I didn't think of myself as French anymore. I mean, I tell myself "I'm in France, I was born in France, I'm French and they treat me like a foreigner".' These are dilemmas associated with 'double absence' (Sayad 1999), that feeling of not belonging anywhere, of being second-class citizens, the 'illegitimate children' of French society. It is essentially a sense of rejection and non-recognition (Pilkington and Acik 2020), which often become reciprocal through the rejection of French society, as expressed by, among others, Paul: 'I don't feel French. Because for them, for French people – real French people, white French people – for them, we're not French. And I don't like this country. I was born here, but I don't like it.'

The respondents' experiences of discrimination, which play a major role in their life, are tied to background and belonging, ethnic-racial origins or religion, especially Islam. Within the prison, Islam is described by detainees as a 'refuge', 'helping them to escape it' and 'the only resort' enabling them to confront the conditions of detention, as well as social discredit and stigma. While Islam – like other religions – may be a mobilising source that detainees use to cope with prison, unlike other religions, and inside prison even more than in the rest of the society, Islam is perceived as a threat (Hajjat and Mohammed 2013), a source of stigmatisation and discrimination. This is vividly illustrated in the words of one prison officer: 'There are lots of Muslims in prison and they're all the same, they make incarceration hell . . . Neither side wants to live together. We are trying to integrate people who don't want to be integrated. Islam is an intrusive religion and it's scary.'

The untenable gap between the perception of Islam as a resource on the one hand, and the institutional and societal discourses and practices that

present Islam as a danger on the other, represents a clash of perceptions which shatters relationships of trust (Conti 2020). But in prison, this clash goes beyond Islam. As one detainee explained, it is present in the form of a feeling or certainty that you are being punished 'for who you are and not what you did': 'Here you have religious, ethnic and social racism. In prison, discrimination is everywhere. There is one law for white people and another law for everyone else. This is where people become anti-French. This is a jihadist factory. Push youngsters too far and you turn them into extremists.' This line of thinking reveals the strong feeling of a double standard whereby the people most likely to be convicted come from categories that dominant society and elites define as 'at risk' or as 'dangerous' (Kundnani 2014). This leads to the widespread perception of being victims of a stigmatising process that relegates individuals to 'dangerous' categories or groups and which, as a consequence, already finds them guilty. Following an interactionist logic, discrimination becomes a form of interaction between people on both sides of the prison bars who have been reduced to a category that labels them: Arabs, foreigners, Muslims, Whites, French people.

A Conflictual Relationship with the State

The respondents' stories portray an almost warlike relationship with law enforcement resulting from riots, police brutality, disputes, provocation, beatings and insults. For some, the story of violence is told through the scars on their bodies, which stem from conflict escalations or even cumulative violence and become spaces of memory that symbolise hatred towards the state, where the state is often reduced to its repressive institutions: the police, the justice system and prison.

This relationship of distrust and violence towards state institutions translates into (and is the reflection of) the absence, in the lives of respondents, of civic engagement and community-based and political culture. One by-product of this is the decision not to vote. Hardly any of the respondents had ever voted or joined political movements or associations. They are, and feel, simply removed from democratic life and their lives are characterised by non-participation. For the respondents, this is primarily the consequence of deliberate measures taken by decision makers to exclude certain segments of the population from spaces of power and decision-making bodies. On this subject, Adil, arrested after spending four months with Islamic State (IS) in Syria, expresses his feeling of exclusion and his contempt for politics: 'Yes, people have opinions and they express them, but then what? Expressing one's opinion doesn't achieve anything. People's opinions are simply not taken into account . . . The voice of the people is like a sound, with no impact.'

What becomes especially apparent for these young people is the absence of intermediary bodies allowing them to collectively challenge their sense of injustice and to create fulfilling social connections – a role previously filled by workers' unions or political parties. The absence of resources needed to transform inequalities and the feeling of injustice into a political discourse and thus to establish oneself as a socio-political actor engenders fatalistic attitudes and feelings, and hence the perception that action is futile because everything is pre-determined. This fatalism is widespread among the prisoners, who feel that they have no control over their lives, a feeling which reinforces the conditions leading not only to recidivism,⁴ but also to victimisation, disempowerment and violence. The consequence is summed up in the words of one prisoner during a group session: 'I don't fit in with society . . . it is not a society for us.'

Socio-Economic Exclusion and the Desire for Social Mobility

Almost all of the respondents belong to the working class. Like them, their families are often 'stuck' in low-skilled, low-paid and sometimes degrading work. In certain cases, they and their parents are unemployed, in unstable jobs, or even involved in illegal activities. As the supervising prison officer bitterly says, '80% of those in prison have had family members in prison. So prison becomes a family legacy'. The delinquency in which certain young people are involved aligns with family history and practices and a 'know-how' that passes from generation to generation as a resource allowing one to climb the social ladder or simply to take what one does not have.

What is lacking, however, are not simply economic resources; indeed, some respondents have become accustomed to 'earning' large amounts of 'dirty' money through illegal activities. We therefore need to examine the social conditions of our respondents more broadly, in terms of economic, cultural and social capital (Ilan and Sandberg 2019). From this perspective, the dynamics of the street may be seen as a path towards social mobility and hence towards the type of success that most respondents have never found in their studies or in the workplace. Marco, a 21-year-old man who grew up around gang wars in a French overseas *département*, is one example of how deviance makes it easy to obtain what one desires and compensate for the lack of social mobility:

There's no such thing as easy money on the streets. With someone who doesn't have experience, you're going to put him on the side of the road to sell the 100 grams of weed or cocaine he's carrying. It's not easy, you know. Standing there for hours with the police passing by, it's not easy. The risk he has to take, the risks that other people

have to take in a job as a psychologist or school teacher or whatever, it's not the same, you know?

The Crisis of the Family Institution

At the micro level, it is in particular the breakdown of the family institution that affects respondents' perceptions and lived experiences. The accounts, as well as the silences, generally relate to a family model that no longer works, that of the traditional patriarchal family built on a rigid division of roles between father, mother and children. Parental authority and its associated normative framework are generally absent, weakened or openly contested, clearing the way for transgression, dysfunctional or reckless behaviour and violent outbursts. Among the respondents, we identified different configurations of what Khosrokhavar (2018: 278) has termed the 'headless patriarchal family'. The first configuration is that of those who essentially grew up without either parent, like Paul and Romain, who were both raised by their grandmothers. The second configuration, which applies to approximately half of the respondents, is that of single-parent households, in which, usually, it is the mother who struggles to bring up the children alone. In some cases, it is the death of the father that leads to this situation and the concomitant disruption of emotions and domestic norms, sometimes leading to delinquency and violence. In most cases, however, it is because the father is estranged from the family or has simply abandoned the household; this relinquishing of paternal duties is a consistent feature of the upbringing of those in prison. The third configuration is the reversal of generational roles, with sons replacing their fathers as authority figures within the fragmented family. The final configuration involves the symbolic death of the father (representing parental authority) in line with clearly jihadist frameworks (Ferret and Khosrokhavar 2022). In these cases, parental authority is replaced by that of a strict reading of religious texts, by the authority of the peer group, or of the imaginary community of believers (the *Ummah*). This is the case for Adrian, who had been affiliated to IS. After adopting a strict vision of Islam at the age of sixteen, he took on the role of moraliser in the family and adopted a controlling attitude towards his parents, whom he accused of being infidels.

What emerges from the respondents' accounts, above all, is the lack of intergenerational sharing and the consequent lack of knowledge of one's own origins, which makes it quite difficult for these individuals to tell their stories and thus understand where they come from (Yuval-Davis 2006). As Teodoro, who was engaged in a profound self-examination, said during a collective session on family trajectories: 'My story is similar to that of all the others in here. We are all uprooted people.'

Detachment: The Paradigm of Radicalisation

Taking a widely shared feeling of injustice as our starting point, we consider here the options presented to young people already feeling a sense of detachment from the rest of society. We show how, in some cases, this leads to a complete rupture with society while, in others, individuals are able to mobilise resources to avoid cutting themselves off completely from the world.

Momo's trajectory allows us to see both the ambivalence of such trajectories – propelled by conflicting desires to break away and to put down roots – and how the 'tipping point' into violent extremism is often the consequence of a chain of events and interactions that are not always predictable and are sometimes barely controllable. Momo, twenty-one years old, is incarcerated for the fifth time. Since the age of sixteen, he has spent just two years on the outside and four years in prison, which feeds the feeling of being stuck in a never-ending vicious circle. At the origin of his delinquent trajectory is the desire for money, because 'with money you can do everything, without money you can't do anything'. Growing up without a father, Momo has been involved in all kinds of violence, both inter-gang and against the police, who are, for him, the symbol of a repressive state. The nonchalance with which he speaks demonstrates this trivialisation of violence, which is by no means exclusive to him: 'I liked that. Going around town, getting it on with other neighbourhoods . . . Yeah, in a group. But sometimes I did it on my own. And I'd find myself surrounded by ten guys. But no worries, I really liked that.'

Violence and disorder aside, hatred was also part of Momo's trajectory. Although on the outside Momo's hatred was essentially directed at the police, in prison it is directed at the guards, in an 'us' vs 'them', or even warlike, relationship:

In this place the guards are heartless . . . Forgive my language, but they are total bastards. They do whatever they can to break you. If you're not strong enough mentally, you're screwed . . . they can do whatever they want, they'll never break me. That said, the only thing that frightened me was that one day I'd get hold of one or two of them and rip them apart.

Momo is a Muslim but his faith is not embedded in official Islam. Rather, Momo's Islam follows a discourse of distrust and contempt against the prison chaplain and against Imams in general, whom he accuses of perversity:

No problem, I'm well informed about my religion . . . I don't need to go and see an Imam, I know tons of people, they know a hundred times better than the Imams. And I get information about my religion

every day. About what to do and what not to do . . . Imams aren't necessarily knowledgeable! I've known Imams who prostitute their daughters. They put their daughters on the street.

More than anything else, his discourse reflects a broader phenomenon of the emergence of new figures of authority in Islam as well as of individualisation in the production of religious knowledge (Roy 2002). It also reflects a dehumanisation of the Other, which encompasses Imams, police officers, supervisors and more generally a society described as deeply unjust and racist. First and foremost, his response to the feeling of injustice demonstrates the weakness of social ties, but also brings out the last available ties, to which Momo clings in order not to become part of a jihadist vision:

I hate France. I don't like France. And if someone asked me: 'Why do you stay in France?', I'd say 'I don't like France but I like what people have done with it, and that basically these people are all immigrants' . . . And I'm happy to have grown up in a neighbourhood. That's the atmosphere I like. . .

Interviewer: And what don't you like about France?

Momo: Everything! The only good thing is the social security. That's all! . . . It's a country full of big fat sons of cowards. The French – they are big fat sons of cowards! They prefer rapists to thieves, they prefer rapists to drug dealers . . . There's no justice. There's no justice! There's no liberty, no equality, no fraternity. It's a lie . . . I have nothing in common with this country.

Momo has a radical discourse that mixes hatred with an extreme vision of Islam, one that is marginal and oppositional, in the sense that it is positioned outside or even against the traditional Islam of families and mosques. Its discourse is that of a dehumanisation of the Other, identified with evil, filth and disorder. Nevertheless, while breaking his links with French society, Momo desperately tries to hold onto those that remain, in order to avoid crossing the line. This emerges from the full interview with him, in which he imagines a mythic return to Algeria, a country 'that drove out the French'. He goes on to describe his neighbourhood as a social and physical space of identification, the last bastion of a wounded identity. Finally, he evokes the family, in particular his mother to whom he feels he owes a debt and who, in spite of everything, is still there to offer him a path to salvation through emotion.

Momo's trajectory introduces us to the importance of 'detachment' in radicalisation trajectories. Following a narrative of radical Islam, or even jihadism, means breaking one's emotional, social and political links in this world, that is, of taking the uprooting process even further.

In this sense, radicalisation appears as a process of detachment (de-socialisation) from the already fragile links that connect each individual to social, affective or territorial spaces, accompanied by a process of resocialisation into a new entity, the group or the neo-*Ummah*, the community of Allah remade in the image of the heroic period of Islam under the Prophet. For some, radical Islam thus extends a process that is already at work, with most of the young people in our respondent set being 'uprooted', as Teodoro puts it.

Anomie and Family Chaos: The Neo-Ummah as Substitute Family

Born into a Protestant family in a French overseas *département*, Romain is a 21-year-old convert who was imprisoned on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack and of wanting to reach Syria to join jihadist groups. His adherence to violent extremism is rooted in his family trajectory, one that is chaotic and marked by wounds that he finds difficult to put into words. He told us about an absent mother and an unknown father, an adopted brother and a grandmother who raised him until the age of sixteen. During his teens, he finally found his mother in France, a far-off country in his eyes: 'For me, France meant snow. That's all.' He moved in with his mother in a small town in the east of the country. He did not know anyone and spent his time doing nothing; he was alone and bored. It was during this phase, which might be described as anomic, that he converted to Islam. He undertook his conversion alone and thus his Islam was built in solitude, discovered exclusively on the Internet, and offered a way out of his isolation and a connection with what appeared to be an imaginary community. His conversion and adherence to radical Islam took place at the same time, without any contact with the traditional Islam of the mosques. As Romain recounts, 'I only went to the mosque twice. Then the police came and arrested me'. He seized this new ideology, first on social networks, then in prison. This new community cradles him, protects him and makes him feel part of a larger community, the neo-*Ummah*. For Romain, this community has become a substitute family:

Muslims are like a family. As far as I'm concerned, Muslims are family . . . I didn't know them, but I don't need to know them . . . Simply by reading the Qur'an I already know them. From the moment someone makes a declaration of faith, I will stand by him. For me, a Muslim, whether he is French, American or whatever, is dearer to me than any unbeliever from my country even if he is my own mother's son.

Romain took his uprooting to the extreme, sweeping aside all pre-existing ties, and being reborn in a new identity that calms him. The idea

of detachment, expressed in the doctrine of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'* (loyalty and disavowal), which encourages the believer to make a categorical break with all dimensions deemed unbelieving in contemporary society, provides Romain with the explanatory and strictly ideological framework to replace ineffective and disappointing family ties with new ones, in a society that presents itself as an epiphany of a new subjective and social order. It is in the neo-*Ummah*, an immaterial space that knows no boundaries, and which is not anchored in real cultures (Roy 2002), that the isolated and anomic individual can reinvent himself and be reborn in a new, valorising identity.

Countering Injustice with Commitment and Rejection

Adrian's case illustrates the link between radicalisation and the feeling of confinement and rejection. Adrian became a refugee in France at the age of nine, initially living with his family in reception centres for migrants, sometimes on the streets. He was eventually housed in a working-class neighbourhood, inhabited by an immigrant population and known for its marginalisation, which was a source of stigmatisation for its residents. When he arrived, Adrian did not speak French but he quickly learned the language and proved to be a good student. His success gave him a sense of worth and the hope that he might find a way out of the ghetto and improve his social standing, in what seemed to be the fulfilment of the family's migratory experience. But his origin and his place of residence became an obstacle. Against his wishes, he was sent to a vocational high school, a choice imposed by his origin, just as it was for many other young people from minorities in France. Later, when it came to finding an internship to complete his course, he found that all doors were closed due to his place of residence, which stigmatised him as dangerous. This, Adrian says, was 'hard to take' because it signals 'a kind of rejection, a complete rejection'. He found refuge in a fundamentalist vision of Islam, which gave him an opportunity to counter the rejection he had suffered with his own spectacular rejection: 'As soon as I quit school I jumped straight into religion. Direct. Everything that was prayers, and all that. I found solace in my religion. I dived directly into religion in fact . . . I instantly felt hatred.'

Coming from a non-practising Muslim family, Adrian did not attend the mosque. His Islam was that of a quietist Salafism that he learned mainly on the Internet and which gave him a reason to detach himself from the society that had rejected him. But quietist Salafism was only a brief chapter, because he wanted action, rather than a rigorous and restrictive practice. The revolts in Syria, the repression that followed and

the creation of jihadist groups offered him a new possibility, a chance to respond to the rejection he had suffered and to a growing feeling of injustice. It was a second event which pushed him to take a step further and join the Islamic State, however:

There were terrorist attacks on the 16 November, and they came to our home, armed and wearing balaclavas. They kicked the door down, ran in and grabbed me . . . I've never felt such anger . . . It was like the first time I had felt rejected by society. So that was the second rejection.

This event, experienced as a profound injustice and humiliation, was the turning point for Adrian, who now sought 'revenge' and to take action. The ideology of the Islamic State supported his actions and gave a broader meaning to his subjective anger. Thus, with every instance of perceived injustice Adrian took a step further towards shutting himself inside an increasingly rigorist vision of religion and an extremist attitude that legitimised violence. Several years after his arrest, while we were talking, Adrian managed to put his trajectory into words:

It's a need for justice, a search for justice . . . but it's also in relation to the life I'd had . . . I mean I'd always grown up with injustice. I think that things like that are unfair to me . . . I feel as though I'm damned forever, until the end of my life. So yeah, obviously when faced with this feeling of injustice and . . . when there are things that happen like the Islamic State, you know, to restore justice in the world and all that, well . . . That's why I did it, I mean, I wanted to do it because of the anger I felt.

Adrian's trajectory is one of cumulative rejections over time and of the impossibility of escaping from the stigmatising condition in which he was confined. At every stage of his life, the doors had been shut and the rejection to which he was subjected in turn provoked a rejection, in a cumulative relationship. Adrian constructs his identity, his representations and his belonging based on the stigmas at the heart of his exclusion. As in the case of Romain, and all those who followed radical Islamist ideas, his commitment is built around the powerful notion of a persecuted and humiliated Muslim community across the world – one with which he identifies. The defence of Muslims is combined with the idea of the birth of a new society, where justice will finally reign and where differences will be erased, whether they be class-related, economic, racial or territorial. It is this dream of an (imaginary) egalitarian society that promises to sweep away the inequalities and injustices that have shaped the lives of these young people whilst failing to recognise its own roots in other

forms of inequality including that of gender and between 'true believers' and 'unbelievers'.

Commitment and Self-Worth: The Ideal

Adil's trajectory illustrates the subjective need to achieve self-esteem through a rewarding commitment. As a young man with little religious experience who 'lives life to the full', as he puts it, Adil left a large French city and headed for Syria with his brother and a dozen friends. Some died in Syria, others returned to France, where they were convicted in one of the biggest trials related to jihadism. The last of them was to blow himself up during the 13 November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris.

Adil's commitment is based on a fierce criticism of the democratic system, which he describes as hypocritical and dedicated exclusively to defending the interests of a minority. In his opinion, the voice of the people simply goes unheard and French society is governed by the stigmatisation of minorities, starting with Muslims. In what appears, again, as a reciprocal, cumulative process of rejection, Adil responds to marginalisation by placing himself outside the society that has rejected him. Like many others, radical Islam offers him the possibility of a rewarding commitment: 'I'd never had any opportunity to engage, and then it happened in a natural and spontaneous way. A natural commitment to go and help Muslim people. I had to take responsibility.' In this way, taking responsibility becomes a way to break free and claim a new role in society, a way to exist by stepping up to responsibility. Adil explains that this commitment was the result of the interaction between this personal need to commit to a cause, and an ideal of building an authentically Islamic society:

If you want to understand, you mustn't start with the details . . . And ask yourself how differences between people have been erased by a common element; they are attracted by an idea! . . . It's the ideal to reproduce their original religion. Rebuilding the original Islam is an idea that transcends differences, the differences between the rich and the poor, between people from different countries; it includes everyone, because it is an idea that has no boundaries.

The subjective need to commit oneself in the name of justice, and in particular against the injustice done to Muslims, goes hand in hand with a desire to write history and to take part in the construction of an authentically Islamic society based on the model of the ancestors. This is an ideal that also fulfils the desire to participate in something 'great' and 'just', accomplishing a self-affirmation that these young people cannot find in French society. In his approach, Adil pushes the doctrine of *al-*

walā' wa-l-barā' to the extreme through the idea of a voluntary exit from French society.

Becoming the 'Chosen Ones': Changing Status through God's Forgiveness

Radical Islam offers a way out for young people who are failing, lost, anomic, alone, searching for an ideal through which to engage or even reinvent themselves. It offers them a change of status as long as they break the pre-existing political, social and emotional ties in order to be reborn into a new identity. Jeremy is a convert in his forties, convicted of recruiting young people whom he had allegedly encouraged to leave for Syria. His narrative provides insight into how reinvention through radical Islam appeals to young people.

Jeremy describes himself as someone who knows religion and introduces two important aspects of the radical Islam narrative: being 'chosen', and the condition of detachment, that is, the need to detach oneself from everything, including one's own personal desire and affects, in order to be able to follow the divine path. Clarifying this notion of detachment, he offered the following example: 'If you choose your wife because you love her, you are giving in to what you love. And not to that which allows you to progress. It is God who must decide. Not us . . . Our ally is God, our enemy is the soul, the Devil, this lowly world.' He explains that even his incarceration is simply an expression of the divine will, and that for him 'prison is heaven!' as it allows him to 'bring those who are lost to the right path'. In particular, Jeremy is talking to those who carry a burden of guilt and significant, even crushing, social disapproval. He offers them a way out that will erase the past and open up new perspectives, God's forgiveness. All is forgiven when one follows the will of God, or of those who speak in his name, when one detaches oneself from this lowly world and from the desires of the soul. The individual leaves a world of sin, to be reborn in purity. For young people caught up in the feeling that their condition offers no way out, this idea of a new status is fascinating in that it allows them to escape the humiliation they feel; they thus become the all-powerful 'chosen ones', as Jeremy or Romain put it, 'after a lifetime of being losers'.

Safeguards to Resist, Reject and Counter the Narrative of Radical Islam

This narrative of radical Islam, which aims to sever ties with 'this lowly world' or with this society of 'unbelievers', as a response to the feeling of

injustice, does not go unchallenged. Alternative narratives mobilise other resources, which we might describe as capital, which provide a response rooted in the maintenance, rediscovery or strengthening of ties, not in their breaking.

The Temporalities of Radicalisation

In order to illustrate the resources (emotional, memory, relational, social) that are mobilised to resist, reject and counter the path of total withdrawal offered by radical Islam, we begin, at the macro level, by considering the declining attraction of what is being offered.

During a particular period, roughly between 2012 and 2017 (i.e. during the construction of the Islamic State in Syria), we witnessed what Adil refers to as a 'social movement', namely young people drawn to the great adventure of building a new, authentically Islamic society. This was a phase of exaltation that mobilised a broad cross-section of young people beyond their social origin, political involvement or even religious practice. Within the prison system, this meant that the narrative of radical Islam was particularly attractive and that the 'radicals' basked in a special aura, as a sort of 'vanguard' who were 'models' of ethical integrity and great courage. They bore testament to an emancipation that was (and is) highly sought after among ghettoised, marginalised or imprisoned youth.

Just a few years later, that period simply appears to be over. The narrative of radical Islam is no longer as enchanting as it was before, either in prison or outside. There are three main reasons for this.

Firstly, the ideal was never attained, above all because IS lost the territory it had gained. In addition, the 'returnees' brought back a feeling of disappointment, as evident from Adil's experience: 'I have no regrets about the intentions. There might be regret about how things played out, the way, the method – that was disgusting. The intentions were noble, but the method was despicable . . . I came back following this disappointment.' In Syria, where the ideal was supposed to be achieved, the French fighters ultimately 'imported their *jahilya* (pre-Islamic religious ignorance) of the hood' (Thomson 2016: 174), by reproducing the frameworks, the power relations and the injustices of the ghetto/neighbourhoods (and society) that they wanted to escape. Secondly, the violence, which was largely mediated by IS, was a problem in relation to confrontations with other prisoners. As jihadist discourse became less and less audible in prison, even those who expressed a certain fascination with the perspectives offered by radical Islam openly stated their opposition to a violence 'taken out on children' or a 'blind' violence that some describe as clearly 'contrary to Islam'. Thirdly, the phase of exaltation, where 'rad-

icals' were seen as 'models', seems to have come to an end, because the trajectories of the 'radicals' (almost) always ended badly, leaving no models to follow.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, in this peripheral prison we identified four major outcomes of the trajectories of those labelled in prison as 'radicals' or 'terrorists'. Firstly, one that might be described as a take-it-to-the-limit attitude, like Adil, whose trajectory has alienated him, cutting him off from society, from his feelings and even from his memory. Such individuals may fascinate by their defiant attitude towards the prison administration, or a society they deem to be unjust, but (almost) none of the other prisoners wishes to follow their path. A second outcome, which, in some ways, takes things to the limit also, is that of a 'between-self' that flirts with madness. As in the case of Romain, this involves a process of immersion in the religiously normative. Madness is similarly unappealing, however; on the contrary, it is evidence of a path that leads to failure. Another way out is that of the development of a critical or even guilt-based appraisal, like that of Adrian. Here, with the passage of time, the individual can take the path of rationally structuring the commitment, which is often accompanied by the remobilisation of previously neglected links. Finally, we encountered those for whom the outcome is disappointment and admission of failure. This was the case for Blaise and Jeremy, both of whom were around the age of forty. Tired, caught up in a life of successive disappointments, with a bleak future, these individuals now only dream of withdrawing from the world and/or of settling down, forming a family and renewing neglected ties. As Blaise said: 'I plan to go back to Algeria and even to have a job there that will let me remain outside society . . . For example, living like a peasant, like my grandfather did . . . The farm, life in nature, that's what the Prophet recommends . . . And also, with my grandfather, it's important to remember where you come from, you have to go back to your roots.' Here Blaise depicts familial roots instead of religious ones, a farm in the mountains instead of the utopian homeland where religious law would rule.

Affective Ties: The Family

Despite the breakdown of the family, at a micro level family ties remain a resource that the respondents can mobilise. While the narrative of radical Islam pushes family dysfunction to the extreme, by cutting emotional and normative ties, the detainees who resist, reject and counter the discourse of radical Islam try 'desperately' to renew or reinvent such bonds. Family thus presents itself as a space which can have three main functions: identity construction, forgiveness and looking ahead.

Identity construction is evident, first of all, in the creation of a personal narrative, being able to articulate a wounded identity, which occurs when family history is put into words. These family histories occupy a central place in the trajectories of the young people who are constantly trying to bring coherence to their lives in order to rebuild themselves. This task of bringing order to one's biography operates in particular through family memory and through the (re)discovery of familial sentiments and bonds. Teodoro, who is thirty years old, imagines an escape from delinquency by rebuilding a family history. Griezmann, who is sixteen, constructs his identity in the image of his grandfather, who, as a role model, helps him to respond to the feeling of injustice and the pain of double absence.

Secondly, with its affective ties, the family also presents itself as a place for forgiveness and hence salvation. Marco, Saïd and Ousmane all speak of a family that did not abandon them, despite the suffering caused by their delinquent paths. Not abandoning an imprisoned son, brother or husband proves to be a gift of the self, which engenders self-esteem and entails a moral obligation, even a moral debt, in that one also wants to give. We must stress that blood and family ties also retain a place for those who adhere to a radical vision of Islam and who spent time severing social and emotional bonds. In such cases, the original family is seen as an emergency exit, leading towards salvation. As Adrian states, 'If someone really wants to see me change, the only way to do it is through my parents . . . For me, they're the solution.'

Finally, family represents a space in which one can plan for the future. Some of these young people are now parents themselves, which changes their status. Such is the case of Anissa, whose sole dream is to leave her ghetto to ensure a better future for her three children. Here, we again find the need to construct oneself by giving of oneself, which becomes a source of attributing value and building a particular ethic. The responsibility towards others in some way constitutes the key to escaping a vicious circle of disdain, uselessness and failure.

So, while the narrative of radical Islam accelerates the destruction of the family in crisis, by replacing it with an ideal (but also ephemeral) family, those who refuse or resist adherence to the narrative of radical Islam still cling to their families (or what remains of them) and to what family can represent.

Islam as a Shield against Radicalisation

Islam is mobilised by individuals who identify with radical Islam. They claim to speak in the name of 'true Islam', that which is created by scholars. As the prison chaplain says, 'Those whom they call "scholars" are

able to simplify the world, making things easier to grasp: “God said”, “the Prophet said”. What they are seeking is simplicity . . . For this radicalised youth, there’s a real problem of knowledge.’ Before turning to radical Islam, few of these young people had practised regularly or had much religious knowledge. Some, like Adil, continued to relegate religious practice to second place, even after carrying out *jihad*. None of the respondents situate themselves in the Islam they associate with French mosques, traditional Islam or family traditions surrounding religious practice. Their Islam is instead one of separation, disconnected from concrete reality – what we call a PDF Islam (Conti 2022).

Other respondents employ Islam to counter the narrative of radical Islam, in what appears to be a mutual act of excommunication regarding what constitutes ‘true Islam’. First, there are those like Saïd and Ousmane, who practise Islam regularly and rigorously, settling into religion, which represents peace and stillness, not action and movement like it does for the jihadists. Most importantly, by setting down norms and structuring their lives, Islam offers a means of establishing order. For others, and younger inmates in particular, Islam primarily represents an escape route, a last resort to which they can turn to save themselves, a refuge that must be preserved. Islam is thus described as a resource that allows one to become calm, find stability and conform to a particular ethical framework. It is, therefore, a way to escape from illegality, while at the same time constituting a resource with which, for example, to build a family. This vision contrasts with radical Islam precisely because the discourse and actions of ‘radicals’ deprive young inmates of this ‘last’ resource that is Islam. Radical Islam is an Islam of revolt, which uproots and breaks the bonds that these young people struggle to renew.

Becoming a Socio-Political Actor

Other identifications and loyalties allow for more direct responses to feelings of injustice. We observed a variety of what Truong (2017) refers to as ‘safeguards’ that shield one from the temptation of totally breaking away from society. These ‘safeguards’ can become a reality at different levels (local, national and transnational) and require different types of loyalty and identification, as well as forms of engagement.

At the local level, safeguards appear in the form of relationships that are forged daily within the living spaces of these individuals. These include friendships, relationships with neighbours and professional relationships, along with support that is provided by institutions such as schools, the social security system, hospitals and so on. These relation-

ships primarily take shape at the neighbourhood level, which can become a place of identification, not a place to escape.

Narratives of identification and loyalty can also be constructed at the national level. The nation essentially remains a powerful agent of identification around which certain individuals build their identities. Such is the case of Nabil, who refers to Morocco, where he was born, as the place that allows him to integrate and which serves as a shield against the potential allure of radical Islam. Some of those who were born and raised in France openly assert their attachment to the country and clearly lay claim to their French identity. As Anissa states, 'I love France. We're happy here, we're safe and we get a lot of assistance'.

Finally, socio-political engagement may also act as a safeguard where narratives rooted in social history and the collective imagination make it possible to turn the sense of injustice into a conflict. By being part of a grand mobilising narrative, one finds a source of valorisation. This is what happened to Teodoro, who is rebuilding himself through the social movement of the fight against racism and through getting involved (or aspiring to) in helping young people from disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. For Teodoro, engaging with young people has become a way to cultivate rewarding commitments and become politically active.

Criminal Logic

There is an ambiguous relationship between criminal logic and radical Islam. Within the prison system, there is no shortage of cases involving alliances, convergences or transitions from one to the other (Basra, Neumann and Brunner 2016). This is, firstly, because, as Ilan and Sandberg (2019) point out, street capital can be an added value in the jihadist career and therefore facilitate recruitment into extremist groups. Adherence to radical Islam may offer a way out of criminality and the possibility to have 'everything forgiven', as Jeremy says. However, the trajectory can also be inverted, as criminality (and criminal forms of loyalty and morality) can also act as an alternative to a radical ideology. As Marco explains: 'We, the bandits, the thugs, we're not like that (extremism). We have values. We would never kill a child. We'd never take out a kid.' This is a discourse shared by others, such as Griezmann and Anissa, for whom criminal morality imposes boundaries that must not be crossed. Finally, the hedonistic aspect of delinquent or criminal practice may exclude radical Islam. As Paul explains, when young people who do not hide their love for money, drugs, trafficking, alcohol, uninhibited sexuality and so on are confronted with the jihadist offering – rooted in sacrifices and renunciation – they simply prefer the 'lowly' world, built on passion, de-

sire and pleasure, which functions according to a strictly criminal logic, with its own rules, objectives and modalities: 'Personally, I'm not into this whole terrorism thing and all that stuff . . . I'm just fine doing my own thing, hashish, drugs. There you have it . . . I'll stick with that rather than go kill people or whatever.'

Conclusions

How do we explain the now axiomatic observation that 'all extremists have grievances, but not all people with grievances become extremists' (Berger 2018: 129)? Based on the findings of research drawn on in this chapter, it appears that there is, in fact, a very thin line between becoming radicalised and not becoming radicalised. Everything is held together by a tiny thread, a tiny connection that prevents one from shifting from 'Us' to 'Them'. Such affective and social connections, these 'tiny threads' that hold everything together, can snap without a major reason or event, but simply as a result of one small thing: encounters at a particular moment in life; a small injustice that accumulates on top of those already experienced; a hurtful word that was never taken back; the boredom of an existential void for young people searching for an identity. Just one small thing can change everything.

Most of the young people we met in the course of this research tread the perilous edges of this limbo, where such a 'small thing' can precipitate events, break links and erase the last remaining attachments. From one moment to the next, a link can be broken, which, when one has to put it into words years later, is difficult to explain but, at the time, seemed logical. An epiphany of a new order. All-encompassing. And there, to help, even to provoke this properly individual, subjective, sometimes intimate process, there is the offer, the narrative of radical Islam, and the forms of sociability (groups, networks) that link the individual to the macro level. Ideology has exactly this power of explaining everything, of eliminating doubts and uncertainty, of 'being in the truth', as Romain puts it, in that which presents itself as a state of grace. The offer proposes a new (ephemeral) family (Ferret and Khosrokhavar 2022), a distant and imaginary world where (divine) justice will reign, a change of status, an escape from shame, a reversal of humiliation and the overcoming of alienation. To be the chosen ones. To restore justice in this world, if necessary through violence, generating a new order (and untold new injustices).

If everything can be turned upside down by just 'a small thing', everything can be held together by it too. Safeguards are at work. These

links, even though they are fragile, prevent one from falling and are ultimately the cornerstone of the non-radicalisation of a youth that shares inequalities and a feeling of injustice. Family ties, living space, personal memories, desires, the trust of a close friend. Or a model grandfather, a mother who is always there, a friend who helps, the desire for a son, a teacher or a guardian who has the 'courage' to listen. Then there is the mobilising force of other major narratives, which help to explain, to let one feel part of something bigger, which allow one (to have the illusion) of participating in the construction of this world. As a result, the encounter between the offer of radical Islam and the subjective dimension is not linear, but is made up of back-and-forths, of the combination of events, encounters and situations. It is based on structural factors, such as injustice, inequality, non-recognition, stigmatisation, exclusion and can be caused by just 'a small thing', by a severing of ties that can occur very suddenly. This interconnectedness suggests the importance of examining these phenomena through what, like Dawson (2017), we might call an 'ecological approach'. By adopting such a holistic approach, we are able to take into account the 'small things', which may prove, in fact, to be the 'huge things' that are decisive in following or countering trajectories of radicalisation.

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NOTES

1. Recent years have seen a considerable broadening in the scope of the fight against radicalisation; it no longer relates to just jihadists or 'radicals', but also includes persons who are 'potentially radicalised' or 'in the process of being radicalised'. This evolution in vocabulary demonstrates a security shift that now encompasses an increasingly broad spectrum of inmates.
2. The prison administration distinguishes between two profiles of prisoners associated with radical Islam. The first are those incarcerated for terrorist acts relating to radical Islam (known as TIS); these inmates numbered 511 in 2019 compared to just ninety in 2014. The second category are those incarcerated for common law offences but who are flagged for radicalisation (DCSR); there were approximately 1,100 such inmates in 2019. To the latter, we should add 635 individuals, in open custody, monitored by the French Penitentiary Integration and Probation Department (SPIP) for radicalisation. On this, see https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_lois/l15b2082_rapport-information.
3. Place names and interviewees' first names have been changed to ensure anonymity. Participants in group discussions and institutional employees interviewed, such as prison officers, are not given pseudonyms but referred to by their role or status (e.g. 'prison officer', 'detainee').
4. According to a report by the French Ministry of Justice, 31% of prisoners released in 2016 were sentenced for a new offence committed during the year of their release. See <http://www.justice.gouv.fr/statistiques-10054/info-stats-justice-10057/mesurer-et-comprendre-les-determinants-de-la-recidive-34044.html>.

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