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"I'm Not the Same, but I'm Not Sorry": Exploring Dialogical Positioning in the Self-Transformation of a Former Politically Violent Militant

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This article traces the personal and cultural voices expressed in the life-story interview of a former politically violent militant regarding her engagement with and disengagement from the armed struggle. Rather than looking at the macro and meso aspects related to politically motivated violence, we examine micro-narratives which express individual arguments, sociocultural discourses, and negotiations within and between them, These are voiced in the dynamics that take place within the self-system at times of key identity transitions (e.g., from being a committed militant to becoming a former militant). In this vein, we highlight how the embodied emotional chords of personal positions, the development of meta-positions, and the positioning and repositioning movements within the dialogical self, facilitate the emergence of new and more adaptive meanings in the personal meaning system of former militants.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that terrorism literature tends to be "on a diet of fast-food research: quick, cheap, ready-to-hand and nutritionally dubious" (Silke, 2001, p.12). The analysis of secondary data in this field, which tends to originate from sources such as court documents,

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journalistic investigations and intelligence reports, is not only problematic (see Vidino, 2011), but also quite limited when it comes to understanding individuals' motivations to engage and disengage from a politically violent organization (hereafter PVO). However, researchers' access to individuals currently engaged or recently disengaged from this type of organization is extremely difficult and constrained and can be, obviously, dangerous (Toros, 2012).

In this context, Horgan (2009) noted that more research should be done, including with former politically violent militants, who have been disengaged for a long time, having, in some cases, served prison sentences and re-integrated back into society. Although some researchers were already doing so, quite a few researchers, in the last decade, have taken this cue, covering a wide range of geographical locations which have staged armed struggle in the past, such as Northern Ireland (e.g., Ferguson, Burgess & Hollywood, 2015; Toros, 2012), Italy (e.g., Heath-Kelly, 2013; della Porta, 2013), Cyprus (e.g., Heath-Kelly, 2013), Spain (e.g., Hamilton, 2007; Reinares, 2011), and Portugal (e.g., da Silva, 2019). These research projects focused on the experiences of former politically violent militants because "[t]o know about terrorism and counterterrorism, it is important to find the voices of those who have experienced them and bring those stories to the foreground of our analyses" (Heath-Kelly, Jarvis, & Baker-Beall, 2014, p. 3). Individuals' stories and experiences enable the understanding of individual dynamics of response to tumultuous socio-political contexts – the micro-level of analysis – but also shed light on both meso- and macro-level dynamics of the conflict (see Viterna, 2013).

Furthermore, the possibility of this idiographic knowledge results from the fact that each human being is simultaneously unique and similar to others. Every person has a developmental trajectory that is impossible to replicate (with his or her idiosyncratic experiences, adaptations, memories and so on), but at same time universal human patterns are present in this trajectory. To use an idea borrowed from White (2004), we are bound to an indeterminism (the multiplicity of trajectories) in the determinism (the human possibilities from development). Thus, we are interested in clarifying the general processes through which the dialogical self is present in the narrative accounts of former politically violent militants. One way to study this is through the detailed analysis of single case studies, which allows in-depth examination of complex phenomena.

In this vein, this study focuses on the life story of a former politically violent militant, who was a member of a Portuguese armed organization called FP-25 (*Forças Populares do 25 de Abril*/Popular Forces of the 25th of April). The FP-25 can be categorized into what Pluchinsky (1992) named a fighting communist organization (FCO), which is "generally a small, lethal, urban terrorist group which is guided by Marxist-Leninist ideology. The ultimate objective of European FCOs is to overthrow the democratic government in their country of origin and replace it with a vaguely defined 'proletarian dictatorship'" (p. 16). In contrast to the most well-known and well-studied cases of radical left terrorism – the West German Red Army Faction (RAF) and the Italian Red Brigades (BR) – the Portuguese FP-25 and a myriad of other organizations remain understudied.

Therefore, keeping in mind that there is a lack of studies concerning engagement and disengagement, as well as radicalization and deradicalisation processes in the context of PVOs, particularly historical ones, we intend to explore how the understanding of the identity dynamics at play in these processes can be informed by the Dialogical Self Theory (hereafter DST). Specifically, this study aims to explore the presence of I-positions that promote

engagement vs. disengagement in a life-story interview. In what follows, we first explore the possibilities offered by the DST in understanding general processes of self-transformation, but also specific processes related to political violence. We then present the methodology guiding this study, before examining and discussing the case study under analysis, and considering future avenues for research.

SELF-TRANSFORMATION AND THE DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY

The DST, as conceptualized by Hermans (2001), extends the notion of the self towards the environment by incorporating the voices of significant other(s) and of valued experiences into the realm of the self. In this way, external positions can become a part of the extended, semi permeable self-system. The DST also accentuates the fact that culture and self are deeply intertwined and acknowledges history, body, and social environment as intrinsic features of a developing person, who is localized in time and in space. The voice of a group or organization, following Bakhtin (1981), may equally be ventriloquized in the words of an individual, giving expression to a collective voice as we shall see in the present case study.

The dialogical self presents a paradox of unity and diversity, where change may occur, but where a sense of self-continuity also tends to be achieved (see Bourke, de Abreu & Rathbone, 2018). According to Hermans (2018, p. 2), the DST sees the self as "a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions located in social and societal fields of tension". New meanings and possibilities of action emerge through dialogs between different I-positions (Hermans, 1999, König 2012). In this context,

> "An *I*-position is a *spatial-relational* act. It exists only in the context of other positions (e.g., I position myself as strong towards a competitive other and as tender-hearted towards a loving other). The act of *I*-positioning is *placing oneself* vis-à-vis somebody else and, at the same time, toward oneself in the metaphorical space of the self. As a spatial-relational process it is taking a *stance* toward somebody, either physically or virtually, and it is a way of addressing the other and oneself via verbal or non-verbal orientations and communications." (Hermans, 2018, p.2, original italics)

In this vein, we are also positioned by others and can retaliate to this positioning with counter positioning, which may take the form of agreement, disagreement, protest, opposition, or the exploration of alternatives. Moreover, I-positions are often accompanied by emotions. Hermans (2018, p.9) considers that "as forms of energy, positions radiate to their environments and in the space between them different kinds of atmosphere emerge". In this context, positions with positive emotions make a move towards a situation or object, while positions associated with negative emotions generate the opposite movement.

Change in the self-system can also occur when the context changes. New positions emerge depending on the context at hand and may form coalitions with old positions in the self system, shifting the balance in the power system. However, change is also facilitated by the emergence of meta-positions. A meta-position is a spatial concept that can provide an overview of large parts of the self-system, including patterns and inter- relationships. The

development of a meta-position with a broad scope and a long-term perspective contributes more than most other positions to the cohesion and continuity of the self as a whole (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 2010). This specific position, according to Hermans (2018), can have three functions: centralizing, executive, and signaling. This author considers that

> "While *centralising* it [meta-position] brings different and even opposed positions together so that their organization and mutual linkages become obvious, preventing the self from becoming fragmented. In its *executive* function it provides a basis for decision making and action programs, based on the insight in the nature of the specific *I*-positions and their organization. As *signalling*, it acts as a stop signal for automatic and habitual behaviour, enabling the self to consider ways to become liberated from rigidly established or maladaptive patterns of positions. Evaluating them from a broad-scoped and long-term perspective of a meta-position increases the chances for innovation of significant parts of the self." (Hermans, 2018 p. 30).

Furthermore, the dialogical self implies not only the cohabitation of different perspectives, but also the activation of hierarchies. I-positions are often balanced in relationships of power, some positions being dominated by others, some positions accessible or not accessible to each other and this is a consequence of the hierarchical nature of any flexible system (Valsiner, 2007). Hierarchy is a fundamental resource in any relationship, but rigid hierarchies can be installed, threatening the adaptive qualities of the self. For example, when it is possible to enter a position, but impossible to leave it we are in an I-prison (Hermans, 2018).

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE DIALOGICAL SELF THEORY

The present study is a micro-level analysis of the life story of a former politically violent militant in the Portuguese armed organization FP-25. More specifically, it examines the processes of engagement with and disengagement from a PVO, as well as radicalization and deradicalisation through the lenses of the DST. In this section, we aim to define the processes under analysis and how they can benefit from a DST perspective.

The motivation to engage with a PVO combines individual and contextual factors, which impact individuals' perceptions of the external reality, feeding grievances, and, at times, intensifying demands for violent actions (della Porta, 2013). In some processes of engagement, it is possible to witness the development of a revolutionary positioning that implies the pursuit of political ends through violent means. This is commonly known as radicalization. Thus, we do not consider engagement and radicalization to be the same process, since there can be engagement without radicalization and vice-versa (Taylor and Horgan, 2012). We also agree that the term radicalization is highly controversial, since, like the term terrorism, it can be used as a label to pursue certain political agendas in detriment of others. However, we propose to study radicalization by analyzing the process of dialogs between different I-positions in the position repertoire of a former militant, using life story narratives. This can be useful to understand the interplay of different voices that may influence individuals to committing themselves to a PVO.

Disengagement from a PVO is a very complex process, involving different motives and options at the individual level, but also being deeply influenced by contextual circumstances.

It is common for authors in the field of political violence to support the distinction between disengagement and deradicalisation. While disengagement focuses on "behavioural modification", implying a physical disconnection from the commission of violent activities (Reinares, 2011, p. 780), deradicalisation is "the social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity" (Horgan, 2009, p. 153).

A DST-based perspective on these processes, detailing how former militants describe and organize their different I-positions, including the dialogs and dynamic forces that occur among them, significant others, and the collective historical/societal positions at large, allows moving beyond the analysis of individual, social, contextual, political, and relational factors in isolation and understanding them in their dynamic interplay. In this sense, in the present case-study, and following the findings of previous studies (e.g., da Silva, Fernández-Navarro, Gonçalves, Rosa, & Silva, 2018; da Silva, 2019), we will explore the different I-positions in the personal position repertoire and the dialogs they establish among themselves. We will examine the influence of times of socio-political turmoil on the creation of collective historical positions that may lead individuals to challenge the political narratives surrounding them according to the identity positions that take root in their selves in the early years of their lives. We will, equally, explore the importance of meta-positions as self-transformation mediators and providers of self-continuity. These positions can underpin engagement decisions, but they can also support continued disengagement. They allow former militants to effectively integrate who they were, are and will be.

METHOD

Participant

Mariana's is one of twenty-eight life-story interviews collected for a research project on the narratives of former militants in Portugal (da Silva, 2019). She engaged in the FP-25 at the age of nineteen and lived several years underground, committing different violent acts. She was arrested twice and completed a total of nine years in jail. One of her sons was born in jail and stayed with her until he was 6 years old. At the time of the interview, Mariana was in her early fifties, married and a mother of two.

Mariana's case study was chosen to feature in this article due to the identification of several engagement and radicalization, as well as disengagement and deradicalisation I-positions in her narratives account, which shed light on her trajectory before engaging, during engagement, and after disengaging from a PVO.

Interview Process

Mariana participated in a semi-structured life history interview conducted by the first author in February 2013. The semi-structured interview protocol (provided upon request) was developed in order to explore theoretically driven themes on the processes of engagement/disengagement (affiliative, personal and social contexts; identification with the organization) and

radicalization/deradicalisation (ideology; grievance; approval and operationalization of violence). The protocol was used in a flexible way to help stimulate reflection co-led by the interviewee, allowing her to choose which events to recount and how to recount them. Mariana had the liberty to narrate multi-layered stories about her life, and she was particularly encouraged to recount autobiographical memories about her involvement with the FP-25. Such memories are not taken as *the* representation of *the* past reality, but as *a* representation of *a* past reality which is constructed in the present (Esin, Fathi, & Squire, 2013). This reconstruction of past experiences is of extreme relevance in portraying Mariana's dialogical positionings, identity dynamics, and self-transformation (see Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011).

Analytical Method

In the current study, a temporal framework defined in a previous study was applied (da Silva et.al., 2018). The structure and dynamics of Marianas's multivocal self were explored across three periods of time: engagement with, life within, and disengagement from a PVO. In each period, push and pull I-positions voicing engagement and radicalization, as well as disengagement and deradicalisation were identified. Two independent coders applied the following coding procedure:

1. Each coder analyzed the full interview transcript and conducted an independent identification of Mariana's I-positions in three moments of time described during the interview: engagement with, life within, and disengagement from a PVO.
2. The coders discussed the disagreements and reached a consensual final identification of Mariana's I-positions and the dialogs established among them.

A CASE-STUDY OF A FORMER POLITICALLY VIOLENT MILITANT

Engagement with the Organization

Engagement and Radicalization Positions

At the origin of Mariana's radicalization process, it was possible to find an external position *My Republican grandfather*, which was represented by tales of a grandfather who was "systematically arrested".[1] This external position did not exist in a vacuum in Mariana's self-system, but it formed a very important coalition regarding her engagement with a PVO with the internal positions *I as someone who has been ready for the armed struggle from birth* and *I as someone highly sensitive and responsive to social injustices.*

In Mariana' radicalization process, this coalition was reinforced by the fact that she was a politically active student, involved with the very active and oppositional student movement of the pre-revolution period in Portugal.[2] Unlike her friends at school, Mariana "used to think about stuff" and she used her "head for something else besides growing hair". Social injustices, like the ones perpetrated by the Colonial War in Africa, concerned her and made her feel

angry, as did issues in Portugal, such as the homicide of the law student Ribeiro dos Santos by the political police in 1972. This event caused Mariana's first arrest at the age of 14 when caught sticking up a poster of Ribeiro dos Santos. Mariana was eagerly waiting for the end of the dictatorship, she believed it would happen and she wanted to be ready – "At secondary school, I was always part of student organizations, when the 25 April 1974 revolution came, I was waiting for it, there were rumors, I was 16 and I knew, I was organized. So, when the 25 April happened, I was more than available!"

After the revolution, Mariana's availability and eagerness to fight social injustices led to her involvement with a couple of radical left legal political parties at a very young age (16 years old). She also used to support the ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), the IRA (Irish Republican Army), and the Red Brigades. Thus, both the historical voice of the 25 April revolution and the collective voices of the international armed organizations shaped Mariana's views and future activities. At the age of 19, she had the opportunity to take part in the struggle herself, which made her "very proud". Mariana assumed that only violence could bring socio-political change and that pacifism was disappointing. It is, thus, at this point that the life-changing, core I-position *I as a militant* starts developing in Mariana's self-system.

No disengagement or deradicalisation positions were found in this period of time

Life Within the Organization

Engagement and Radicalization Positions

Throughout her engagement with the organization, several subpositions of Mariana's *I as a militant* position were developed, such as *I as a militant who sees armed actions as needed*. This position seemed to be at the core of her commitment to life within the organization, which meant life underground under a clandestine identity, planning and carrying out violent actions – "I had always been motivated, I did not need to justify myself to anyone, it was natural. That's [violent acts] what I was doing there." In Mariana's case, this internal position works in tandem with two collective positions ventriloquizing the voices of the organization in her self-system: 1) *FP-25: ideology, goals, and management;* and 2) *FP-25: deep friendships*. With regard to the first collective position, Mariana totally sided with the organization's support of the workers' struggles and with its targets – "big business owners." She also agreed with the way the FP-25 was managed, both in terms of how it was structured – small teams which decided on the actions to undertake from start to finish – and how it dealt with interpersonal conflicts – solved in meetings where people shared their views and reached a consensus.

The second voice of the organization supporting Mariana's commitment – *FP-25: deep friendships* – showcased the strong sense of camaraderie among FP-25 members. Some of Mariana's most relevant relationships came from the time of the FP-25, including her partner and, in most cases, they are as strong in the present as they were in the past – "We have created friendships that still remain today, stronger than some family relationships. My friends all come from there, my real friends, on whom I can count. This was created there, we had to trust each other a lot, there had to be a very strong link between us, we still have it today, not

with all of them, of course, but that's everywhere. I was there, we had a team and the team had to function as one. And the teams still work today."

Therefore, while living within the organization, these two collective positions, through which Mariana shared moments of loyalty, trust, intimacy, and fun with her comrades, formed a coalition with the core I-position *I as a militant*. This promoted Mariana's commitment and faithfulness to the PVO. Mariana saw herself as resilient in stressful circumstances and well-integrated into a group of comrades who shared positive emotions, despite the grim nature of their activities.

Disengagement and Deradicalisation Positions

When Mariana focused on the reasons why she started distancing herself from the organization, she mainly voiced internal positions rather than external ones, as she did in the previous section. The confident and cheerful militant was replaced by a tired and disappointed one. Voicing the *underground* dimension of the internal position *I as a militant*, Mariana started by pointing out the contingencies of life underground which she used to accept as normal, but that over the years became very difficult to deal with. These included not being able to have a social life – "the most difficult for me was that I started to feel like doing a lot of things that I couldn't do. Once I had to flee the theater in the middle of the show because the police arrived. If I went to a cafe, I had to be always attentive to whoever came and left because if the police arrived, we had to leave. This happened numerous times." – and going through financial trouble and even starvation – "people think that we robbed money, so we had money … we did not have money, we sometimes starved". Thus, the relevant, and initially desired and well accepted, I-position *I as a militant* becomes an I-prison (Hermans, 2018), from which Mariana is no longer able to flexibly move to other I-positions depending on the context at hand. When *I as a militant* was dominating her system, Mariana realized that she could no longer enter into I-positions like *I as a daughter* or *I as a normal person in a cafe*. This dynamic of imprisonment illustrates how a multiplicity of I-positions are located in social and societal fields of tension, and how a beloved I-position can become, after a while, an I-prison, reducing the bandwidth of the position repertoire in the self system.

In addition, at this point in time, the I-position *I as a mother* became dominant. Mariana recounts that she got pregnant and decided to have the baby, unlike a previous time when she chose to have an abortion. This time she was ready to distance herself from the organization – "I was getting ready to leave, it was not to give up, but I was 26 and I was basically tired, and I was a little disappointed at the time too". Such a process of "getting ready to leave" also allowed Mariana to create some distance from the dominant collective positions which fueled her commitment to the organization, allowing the emergence of the meta-position *A holistic look at the organization*. This meta-position had a clear signaling function in Mariana's self, leading her to see FP-25's structural deficits and incapacity to achieve its socio-political goals, as well as an executive function in her decision to leave the organization behind.

Disengagement from the Organization

Engagement and Radicalization Positions

Despite having left the organization behind, Mariana kept a strong sense of having fully fulfilled the duty of her I-position *I as a militant* – "I did not stay at home waiting for

something to fall from the sky. I went to war. I fought, I was there, I did not stay put". At the time of the interview, Mariana has no regrets in relation to her violent militancy – "I did what had to be done. Despite everything, I am not at all sorry" – and she showcases the continuation of a very important collective position between her life within the organization and her life after disengaging from the organization – *FP-25: deep friendships*. She continues to see her comrades as "brothers" with whom she has "very strong bonds that don't get lost". One of them has even been her partner for the last thirty years.

Thus, Mariana still stands as a politically radical individual because she is still unhappy with the socio-political conditions surrounding her. Despite having assumed the disengagement position *I as a former militant*, she still disagrees with pacifism – "Non-violent forms of struggle don't go anywhere, even today I agree with that. I think people have to take positions. Now I'm much calmer, but I still don't agree with it. I go to demonstrations, OK let's go … but there are no results, there is nothing. There is just more and more repression" – and defends (in contrast with her husband) violence – "I think that there are some sectors, and now I'm speaking about nowadays, I think … (my husband kills me if he hears me say this), but I think that it is still justified [to use violence], the problem is that we're all old. I think that it is still defensible. If I was in my twenties again, they would see. (…) People [nowadays] are amorphous, totally amorphous."

In this vein, despite admitting that it is not up to FP-25 former militants to engage in violence again, Mariana lacks belief in today's young generation. In her opinion, the young people today are "too quiet", they are "neither engaged or minimally mobilised" and, like her own children, they are "not bothered much by anything". In contrast, the youth of her generation "used to throw stones at the banks and to run away from the police." Although feeling disappointed with this scenario, Mariana is still attentive to what is happening around her, not only in Portugal but also at the international level. She now believes that change needs to occur worldwide, small and localized actions do not work anymore. Thus, she is convinced that the armed struggle will see its place renewed on the international stage, where seeds are being planted by movements like the Anonymous or the Zapatista Movement in Mexico.

Thus, all in all, Mariana represented herself through the position *I as a former militant*, considering that she remains the same regarding social injustices – "I'm the same person, by the way. I'm still here. I'm not sorry. I got tired – that's different. I'm not sorry, my ideas and my fight remain the same". Furthermore, Mariana is also still moved by a view of the State as an entity that has not changed in relation to the time in which she got engaged with the FP-25. The collective voice of the State within Mariana' self-system is still the voice of an illegitimate institution – "the guys who were there before are the same as the guys who are there now … they are the same, so there hasn't been much change. In my opinion, we don't recognize their legitimacy to be there."

Disengagement and Deradicalisation Positions

As previously mentioned, becoming pregnant strengthened Mariana's decision to leave the organization. However, at this point in time, the organization itself was nearing its final days because the police were closing in and Mariana ended up being arrested while pregnant. In prison, the disengagement position of *I as a mother* was strengthened because she was the first militant to have a baby in such conditions (there was one other case that can be found in da Silva, 2019; da Silva, et al., 2018). In this vein, she stated that she was the one who opened the way – "I fought all wars: the birth war, the hospital war, the milk war, the hake

war, the dummy war. I opened the way; my baby was the first one." It is interesting that Mariana uses the war metaphor in relation to her experience of having a baby as a prisoner, creating a coalition between the positions *I as a militant* and *I as a mother*. The former position is now fighting for a different cause: the life of her child in prison at the mercy of a "truly wicked" man – the General Director of Prison Services. According to Mariana, he hated her deeply. When her son was born, he isolated her for twelve days, not even allowing family visits and in her first three years in prison, he made her move around all the time, isolating her from any support network.

In prison, Mariana also felt abandoned by the FP-25, particularly by its legal structure, which was composed of individuals who never engaged in violent acts directly, but who supported them. She explained that in her view the legal structure and the clandestine structure were one and the same. However, in the court processes, the people belonging to the legal structure denied their involvement with the FP-25 in order to avoid a prison sentence and distanced themselves from the clandestine militants – "I was the terrorist and they had nothing to do with that." Thus, throughout her time in prison, Mariana felt angry, upset, abandoned, downhearted, and disappointed. This strengthened the already existent meta-position *A holistic look at the organization* and its signaling function. The recognition of the lack of loyalty on the part of the FP-25 was used by Mariana to explain the emotional wounds she suffered during her time in prison, fragmenting the image she had of the FP-25 as a united, family-like organization.

Thus, at the time of the interview, it was possible to identify two meta-positions in Mariana's account: one that reflects on and integrates her life course – *I as a result of my personal/social context*; and another that reflects on her involvement with the organization – *A holistic look at the organization*. The first meta-position seemed to play a centralizing role, leading Mariana to recognize that she does not have the innocence and illusion of her twenties anymore. She was able to acknowledge what was different in the past about herself, expressing a temporal contrast between a past and a present position, as well as a reevaluation of the contingencies of the environment that led her to engage with a PVO. Regarding the second meta-position, in addition to what has been already said, Mariana was also able to reflect on the political analysis performed by the FP-25. According to Mariana, this organization did not lack political analysis, however, such an analysis was wrong – "We thought that after the PREC[3] the population would be prepared, but they weren't."

Mariana considered that she invested a considerable period of her life fighting for what she believed in, but in the end very little has changed. Moreover, while still a member of the FP-25, Mariana understood that people support violent actions in theory, but when they become a reality the support disappears – "people were afraid, we had too many years of fascism. I think that personally they supported us, but they would not go public with it". For Mariana, this is something that was still quite clear at the time of the interview, as she explained: "People are afraid. I wander around in Facebook quite a lot, I don't comment, but I am there. Today, you can find 500 thousand people saying things like 'we should put a bomb here, shoot the legs off that person, the FP-25 should come back'. But then, in practice, when it is time to show face, those people are not there." Mariana felt that although a considerable part of society ideologically believes in the need for violence, the number of people available to publicly support those who practice violence is much lower. Thus, nowadays, she is not even part of a political party, like other FP-25 former militants, because she considered that "none of them fully works for me."

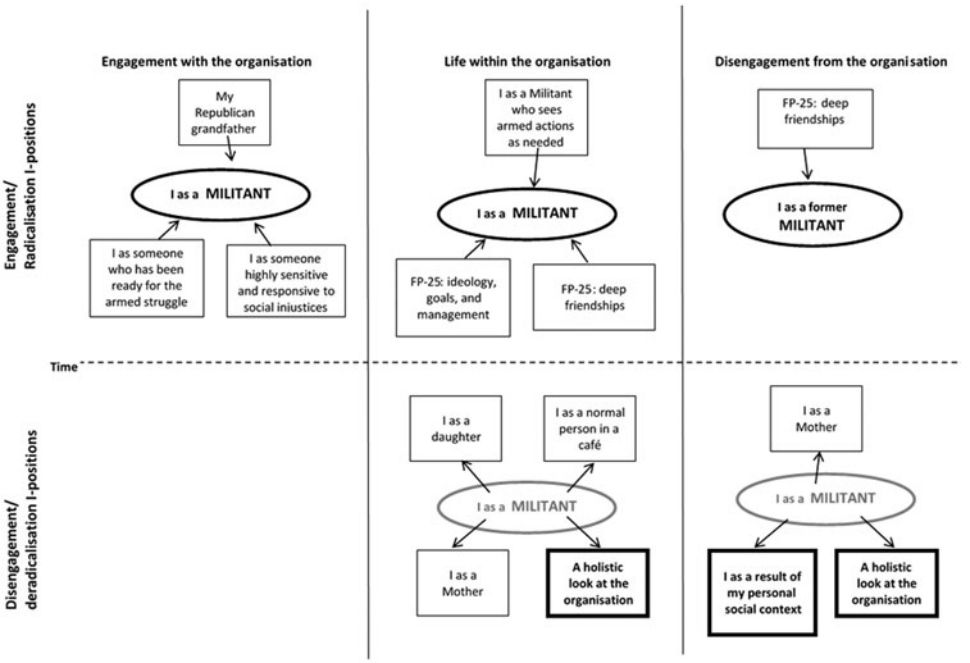


FIGURE 1. Mariana's dialogical positioning.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With this study, we intended to explore the I-positions' repertoire, and their dialogs, in the narrative accounts of a former politically violent militant in three different periods of involvement with a PVO (engagement with, life within and disengagement from a PVO). In an age where counter-terrorism (CT), countering violent extremism (CVE), and desistance and disengagement programs (DDP) proliferate around the world, it is crucial to not only understand why individuals engage in political violence, but also to focus on why they disengage.

In this sense, we can schematically observe through Figure 1, the dialogical positioning in the self-transformation of a former politically violent militant. At the origin of Mariana's radicalization process there was a coalition of external (*My Republican grandfather*) and internal positions (*I as someone who has been ready for the armed struggle from birth* and *I as someone highly sensitive and responsive to social injustices*) which made her available for recruitment by a PVO. In addition, she had undergone a particular politicization process, which swept up the Portuguese youth in the 1970's due to the 25 April revolution. Therefore, Mariana's engagement with a PVO following a time of socio-political turmoil, which acquainted and socialized ordinary individuals with and to violent actions and strategies, is consistent with the findings of other researchers (e.g., della Porta, 2013).

The commitment to a PVO gave origin to the core internal position *I as a militant*, which dominated Mariana's self-system for several years, before disengagement positions started emerging. Different subpositions of this core position were developed and entered a coalition with two particular collective positions (*FP-25: ideology, goals, and management* and *FP-25:*

deep friendships), helping Mariana to focus solely on the task at hand and to deepen her commitment to the PVO. However, after living six years through the hardships of life underground, it is clear that Mariana began to feel that the core position *I as a militant*, which used to feed her commitment to the PVO, had become an I-prison, which made it difficult for her to take other I-positions which she enjoyed (*I in a cafe* or *I at the theater*). In this sense, the emergence of the meta-position *A holistic look at the organization* allowed Mariana to conclude that she was disappointed with the structural deficits of the FP-25 and its incapacity to achieve its goals as well as the fact that she was tired of living underground. This, together with her pregnancy and the lack of support the organization provided while in prison, shifted the power system in Mariana's self, allowing the I-position *I as a mother* to emerge.

Despite the existence of clear disengagement positions in Mariana's self-system, her actual disengagement happened due to her arrest. New positions emerged due to a different context. Nonetheless, she had to undergo a self-transformation process from the position *I as a militant* to the position *I as a former militant*. Such a process seemed to have been helped by the emerging position *I as a mother*, which, at least temporarily, joined forces with the position *I as a militant*, which now fought different battles and seemed to have the same monological and polarized way of thinking. In addition, Mariana still affirms at present her belief of the need for violence in unjust socio-political circumstances.

As pointed out by Gadd (2006, p. 196), "desistance from crime does not map neatly onto the policy-driven search for positive outcomes" or, in this context, to the request that former politically violent militants should go through a deradicalisation process in order to not be seen as a danger to society. In this sense, as corroborated by Cherney's (2018) ethnographic study, it seems more accurate to expect individuals to stop committing political violence (to disengage) and to reject violence as a personal legitimate tactic, than to expect a full make-over of their belief systems (to deradicalise). The focus on the individual in this study does not intend to suggest that political violence can be explained through individual experiences only. Political violence is a phenomenon that operates at different levels – macro, meso, and micro – yet the exploration of individual dynamics, pathways, and perspectives through primary sources is of extreme importance to the development of integrated and well-informed approaches. Autobiographical memories are not simply a narrative output, they embody the processes of meaning construction involved in the ongoing development of a sense of unity and purpose (McAdams, 2001). In the same vein, retrospective case studies of politically motivated violence are not disenfranchized from present realities because they put forward similar and relevant human experiences.

In Mariana's case study, is was possible to access and explore the dynamics between different I-positions, as well as the emergence of meta-positions which play a critical role in sustaining her disengagement from a PVO (*I as a result of my personal/social context* and *A holistic look at the organization*). In this vein, we pose the following questions which need to be considered in future research projects: What kind of patterns of self-transformation can we expect from former politically violent militants? Could we conceptualize the self-transformation process from formerly violent militant to a deradicalised militant as a cultural transition process? Could a specific process of transformation be facilitated by using methodologies based on dialogical self theory, like the PEACE methodology (König 2012), which have been researched as an effective methodology in cases of cross-cultural transitions and coming to terms with different personal cultural positions? Future research should explore these questions.

This case study explores the personal motives of meaning making that cannot be generalized to other subjects using dialogical self theory as a lens through which personal processes of meaning making are traced in the position repertoire of personal voices, in different contexts, at different times during the life span. It could be seen as a processual model of multiplicity management through which the process of meaning-making during the life span may be explored in any individual case. In our view the detailed and intensive study of a single case, in its human and contextually localized specificities, can lead to the identification of generic and universal processes, which can be generalized to other individual cases (Molenaar & Valsiner, 2008). This constitutes the first step in the process of knowledge construction used in idiographic science. Thus, the theoretical model here designed, based on empirical data, should now be further and repeatedly tested on the basis of other individual cases, in order to refine the process and increase its generalizing ability.

COMMENT ON FRANS WIJSEN CONTRIBUTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Wijsen's article looks at polarization and (de)radicalization in Tanzania through a combination of insights from Dialogical Self Theory (DST) and from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the analysis of a single case study, composed of one interview with a well-known Muslim leader in Dar es Salaam – Ponda Issa Ponda. The author argues that the combination of these approaches makes for a deeper understanding of social polarization and (de)radicalization, since while the DST conceptualizes the self in society, CDA offers a better conceptualization of the society in the self.

In comparison, in our article we equally examined a single life-story interview of a former politically violent militant in Portugal – Mariana – regarding her engagement with and disengagement from the armed struggle. However, we focused solely on tracing the personal and cultural voices taking place within the self-system at times of key identity transitions (e.g., from being a committed militant to becoming a former militant), which express individual arguments, sociocultural discourses, and negotiations within and between them. In this vein, we highlight how the embodied emotional chords of personal positions, the development of meta-positions, and the positioning and repositioning movements within the dialogical self, facilitate the emergence of new and more adaptive meanings in the personal meaning system of former militants.

Both articles underline the importance of conducting in-depth analysis of single case studies of people who have been involved or are still involved with politically motivated violence and violent extremism in order to shed light on the general processes through which the dialogical self is present in their narrative accounts. While Wijsen's article used CDA to carry out a detailed linguistic analysis of his body of data, we used a theoretically driven thematic and temporal framework. In other words, we coded our interviewee's narrative account according to the main themes encountered in the literature regarding engagement/disengagement (affiliative, personal and social contexts; identification with the organization) and radicalization/deradicalisation (ideology; grievance; approval and operationalization of violence); and according to three moments of time covered during the interview: engagement with, life within, and disengagement from a PVO. According to this thematic and temporal framework,

we then identified the repertoire of I-positions in the trajectory of a former politically violent militant.

The main distinction between these two articles is that Wijsen's article, by focusing on someone who is still currently engaged in radical activities, makes sense of how his I-positions repertoire feeds and justifies such radicalism. Our article, by taking into consideration someone who has been disengaged from a politically violent organization for almost three decades, is able to create an overview of the life course of a politically violent militant. Nonetheless, what is interesting is that similar I-positions are found in the narrative accounts of the different militants, particularly when it comes to reproducing a social justice discourse through their dialogical positioning and to come up with meta-positions that bring stability to the turmoil created in the self by opposing positions (e.g., *I as critic of the Government* and *I as reconciler* is bridged by the meta-position *I as a citizen* in Ponda Issa Ponda's case; *I as a militant* and *I as a former militant* is bridged by the meta-position *An holistic look at the organization* in Mariana's case).

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