Terrorism and Political Violence

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftpv20

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To cite this article: Marius Linge, Sveinung Sandberg & Sébastien Tutenges (2022): Confluences of Street Culture and Jihadism: The Spatial, Bodily, and Narrative Dimensions of Radicalization, Terrorism and Political Violence, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2022.2042269

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2042269

Published online: 22 Mar 2022.

TERRORISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE
https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2042269

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Confluences of Street Culture and Jihadism: The Spatial, Bodily, and Narrative Dimensions of Radicalization

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ABSTRACT

Research on the new crime-terror nexus has focused on examining the confluences of criminal and jihadist milieus. This article contributes to this research, using insights from criminological theory and analyzing data from interviews with Muslim men who have been exposed to jihadism and have a background in street life and crime. We propose that the connection between street crime and jihadism can be seen in three decisive points of confluence: places, bodies, and narratives. We show how specific places (e.g. prisons) enable the encounter between particular bodies (e.g. violently competent bodies) and the engagement or disengagement with certain extremist narratives (e.g. stories of redemption through violence). The crime-terror literature emphasizes that these points of confluence are sources of radicalization. We expand upon this by arguing that they may also serve as venues for resisting or rejecting politico-religious extremism. The study demonstrates that radicalization is only one possible outcome of the confluences between street culture and jihadism.

KEYWORDS

Crime-terror nexus; street culture; jihadism; radicalization; space; habitus; narrative

Introduction

Radicalization is a multifaceted and complex process.[1] When it comes to jihadi radicalization in environments characterized by marginalization and crime, there is a substantial pool of research highlighting the individual characteristics of jihadi extremists and the conditions that pushed them from conventional crime to terrorism.[2] This literature suggests that a "new crime-terror nexus" has emerged, which involves novel connections and ways of collaborating between criminal groups and extremists.[3] However, radicalization processes are fluid and multi-directional,[4] and they meet opposition and resistance,[5] also in street milieus.[6]

The traditional literature on the crime-terror nexus identifies several types of terrorist and criminal organization.[7] It generally views criminal and terrorist organizations as "separate organizational entities" that sometimes collaborate for opportunistic reasons.[8] When describing the *new* crime-terror nexus Rajan Basra and Peter Neumann, is more specific on the relationship between street crime and jihadism, emphasizing how extremist religious narratives offers a redemption narrative from past sins, that "ghettos" and prisons can be fertile grounds for radicalization, that "criminals" have bodily skills that are useful for terrorist organizations, and finally that crime is a source of financing for politico-religious extremism.[9] The more recent crime-terror literature also highlights the constantly fluctuating nature of the borders between extremist and criminal networks.[10]

Javier Argomaniz and Rut Bermejo argue that the link between crime and jihadism can be seen in several functional, financial, and ideological confluences.[11] Drawing upon the work of Marcus Felson,[12] they emphasize the spaces where offenders can meet and state that: "These places form an

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'ecosystem' that cultivates and fosters illegal activities" and include both physical and virtual places that allow criminal careers to take jihadi turns.[13] Bernard Rougier similarly describes "urban ghettos" as "ecosystems of rupture" where street crime and jihadism merge.[14] The new crime-terror nexus literature generally emphasizes the attractions of young (male) Muslims with a history of delinquency to jihadist terrorist rhetoric and organizations and the many commonalities that exist between criminal and jihadi individuals, groups, and environments.

This paper is based on qualitative interviews with Muslim men who are or have been involved in street culture, meaning the overall way of life, behaviors, beliefs, values, and conventions of people living in urban contexts marked by marginalization and crime.[15] We discuss the spatial, bodily, and narrative factors that drive radicalization in this context and connect these with relevant criminological theories. Further, we argue that distinguishing between points of confluence, and being sensitive to various forms of resistance to jihadism, is necessary to understand radicalization processes in street criminal contexts.

Spatial, bodily, and narrative points of confluence

Radicalization has "become the main frame for understanding, explaining, and preventing young Muslims from engaging in radical activities."[16] While the concept is contested,[17] there is a certain consensus that radicalization is a highly complex process that involves both human and non-human factors,[18] such as geopolitics,[19] religion,[20] ideology,[21] social networks,[22] charismatic leaders,[23] socio-economic marginalization,[24] existential frustration,[25] mental health characteristics,[26] loss of personal significance,[27] and the influence of social media.[28] In this paper, we examine three overarching factors —or what we refer to as points of confluence—that connect street culture and jihadi extremism, namely places, bodies, and narratives. We have selected these three points first and foremost because they stand out in our interviews, but also, as demonstrated below, because they are central in the literature on the new crime-terror nexus.

Radicalization always emerges in specific places, and these places significantly shape the way people engage or disengage with extremist activities. In criminology, this perspective is sometimes summarized under the heading of the "Criminology of Place."[29] These places should not be understood as mere meeting points or passive backdrops to crime. Rather, they modulate and influence the way people feel, think, and act.[30] Such spatial properties call for consideration of the ways places are designed, used, and to what effects. People may, for example, find themselves in the same place and yet experience it very differently depending on their bodily dispositions.[31] A number of studies have found that jihadi recruitment tends to be concentrated in bounded locations, such as the Molenbeek neighborhood in Belgium,[32] a specific street in a small town in Norway,[33] particular prisons,[34] sites of political protest and movement,[35] or in specific mosques.[36] Such places have been referred to as "jihadist hotbeds,"[37] "melting pots,"[38] "convergence settings,"[39] "hybrid territories,"[40] or "sites of radicalization"[41] in which "the stage for criminal activity is set and accomplices can be easily found."[42] In both marginalized and low-income ethnic districts and prison for example, radicalization occurs at the intersection between a strong sense of socio-economic exclusion and the presence of jihadi networks and entrepreneurs.[43]

Another important point of confluence between street culture and jihadism is people, their aggregated experiences, and how these become imprinted in bodies. In criminology, studies of embodiment and violent skills often draw on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which refers to the internalized dispositions through which people perceive, make sense, and act in the world.[44] Radicalization is lodged in and articulated through habitus driven bodies that carry a history and certain capabilities. These bodies are constantly changing based on day-to-day encounters, practical tasks, and wider cultural forces.[45] They are not only shaped by the struggles of everyday street life, but also by the opposition they may feel towards mainstream society.[46] Importantly, radicalization is an embodied process that involves more than just the mind. As Manni Crone emphasizes, "aspiring extremists" do not radicalize simply by engaging in intellectual activities, such as "studying the Quran or being brainwashed by an 'extremist influencer,'" but also have to grow accustomed to violence.[47] Radicalization mobilizes and transforms both mind and body, imbuing individuals with in-group love

and out-group hate that prepares them for verbal or physical violence. For jihadists prior to the 2000s, the embodied process of learning violence often took place in military camps or battlegrounds abroad.[48] Later a large proportion of so-called "homegrown" jihadists developed their violent skills, or habitus, through an involvement with local street culture, local prisons, and local criminal networks in European suburbs, or through violent propaganda on the internet.[49]

Narratives form another key point of confluence between street culture and jihadism.[50] Rather than merely influencing how people think, narratives can arouse people's emotions,[51] gather multitudes around a common cause,[52] and inspire the pursuit of violent action. In criminology, this approach often goes under the name of Narrative Criminology.[53] Extremist ideology may be said to provide a "tool kit" of narrative resources[54] that highlight various social problems, the causes of these problems, and the actions that need to be undertaken to solve them.[55] For example, in European prisons and poor neighborhoods, jihadi recruiters offer young Muslims a powerful narrative of the suffering of the *ummah* at the hands of non-Muslim oppressors.[56] Before the internet, jihadi narratives and images were spread to a limited audience through magazines like "Al-Jihad."[57] In recent years, the online spreading of narratives has been particularly important for the diffusion of jihadi narratives.[58] Several studies have found that online jihadi magazines employ narrative characters, plots, and imagery that appeal to individuals with a background in street life and crime.[59] These developments are illustrative of new hybrid stories that combine traditional narratives of street crime with extremist narratives.

We distinguish between three essential confluences through which many processes of radicalization and de-radicalization occur in the context of street culture. Other points of confluence could have been highlighted (e.g. extremist networks and ideology), but these are either less central in our data or partly overlap with the ones we describe. We draw inspiration both from the literature on the new crime-terror nexus as well as literature on street culture with the aim to present a comprehensive account of the relationship between street culture and jihadism. This is needed given the tendency in existing crime-terror studies to focus narrowly on those individuals that become jihadists (sampling on the dependent variable). By contrast, we examine a broad spectrum of Muslims with a background in street culture. This variety of participants allows for a more nuanced examination of the many confluences between street culture and jihadism.

Method

The data for this study were drawn from 25 semi-structured, qualitative biographical interviews with men who identified as Muslims, but who also had a background in street culture and crime. The selection criteria were that they identified as practicing Muslims and that they had a background in street culture. We view street culture as a cultural spectrum, ranging from streetwise and street cool attitudes among mainstream youths to more destructive ways of life among criminally active individuals,[60] the latter being particularly relevant for this study. All the participants had been involved with street crime such as robbery, drug dealing, trafficking, and violent assault. Twelve had been part of notorious Norwegian street gangs or were still part of such gangs. Four of the interviews were conducted in prison and the majority of the participants had spent time in custody or served long prison sentences. Some of the participants were still involved in criminal activities.

All these individuals had been exposed to jihadism, here understood as a political ideology shaped by particularly violent Islamist groups like al-Qaida and ISIS. Jihadism is a powerful sub- and counterculture with the potential of "drawing young Muslims into extremism."[61] Between 2010–2016, a jihadist milieu emerged in Norway. Like in other European countries, it attracted many young Norwegian offenders.[62] The participants in this study reacted differently to their exposure to jihadism. Two of the participants had been part of a jihadist milieu and embraced its ideology. Three used to frequent a jihadist milieu without fully embracing its ideology. Six had considered fighting in Syria without actively being part of a jihadi milieu or embracing its ideology. Thirteen had rejected jihadism all along. One participant neither expressed support nor rejection of jihadism (Table 1).

Table 1. Participants' age, occupation, time in prison, and ethnic and religious background.

	In numbers	In percentage
Male respondents	25	100
Age		
18–24	6	24
25–31	6	24
32–38	6	24
39–45	6	24
46 +	1	4
Average age	34	
Occupation		
Student	2	8
Employed	12	48
Employed part time	4	16
Unemployed	3	12
In prison	4	16
Time in prison		
In custody	8	32
> 1 year in prison	12	48
No time in prison	5	20
Parents birth country		
Pakistan	9	36
Norway	3	12
Somalia	2	8
Morocco	2	8
Other countries	9	36
Converts	3	12
Islamic affiliation		
Sunni	23	92
Shia	2	8

The first author recruited participants through networks in mosques, on social media and in prison and the interviews were conducted between August 2018 and August 2019. In the interviews, the participants focused on their point of transition, from street-criminals to practicing Muslims. Their age at this point of transition varied greatly, from 13 years to 40 years old. Their average age at that point in time was 26 years. Importantly, all the participants started to practice Islam between 2006–2015, a decade that was shaped by a broad Islamic revival and the emergence of a jihadist milieu among youths in Norway, and in 2011, the start of the civil war in Syria.

The interviews were done in the center of Oslo or in its eastern, less wealthy suburbs, where all but one of the participants lived. Here he conducted interviews in mosques, taxis, cars, cafes, homes and prisons. The positionality of researchers is important in qualitative research and studies that involve working with vulnerable groups.[63] The first author was at the time of the interviews 39-year-old, and a white, non-Muslim man from the majority population. Given the sensitive character of the topics raised in interviews and the stigma and marginalization the Muslim minority populations experiences in Norway, this could potentially influence interview dynamics and data.[64] One could, for example, conjecture that participants would tone down both criminal and politico-religious extremism or otherwise feel uncomfortable and speak less "freely." While there is no way to know for sure, we believe that the data we present later counter such assumptions.

The interviews were semi-structured, lasted approximately one to two hours each, and were designed so as to elicit storytelling about the participants' paths from street crime to Islam. The interview guide contained sections on criminal lifestyle, (re-) conversion, Islamic praxis and their views with regard to jihadism. Interviews were transcribed, coded and subsequently analyzed. The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved the study, and the participants are anonymized and gave their consent to participate in the research project.

Confluences of street culture and jihadism

Below we examine three domains in which street culture and jihadism connect, conjoin, or collide. We propose that these domains may be conceptualized as points of confluence and that they consist of places, bodies, and narratives. As we shall see, these confluences are volatile and have unpredictable outcomes. The result may be radicalization, but may also be acts of resistance or opposition to extremism. We illustrate each confluence by presenting three participants in more detail—Yusuf, Hamsa, and Imran—followed by analysis of other research participants and theoretical remarks.

Spatial confluences

Yusuf (41) told a life story of spatial and social exclusion. He once lived a happy life with his parents and siblings in his home country, but then a long civil war broke out. He fled alone to Norway, now a traumatized teenage refugee. Upon arrival, the immigration authorities settled him in a small town a couple of hours' drive from Oslo. He found a sense of community with other dark-skinned teenagers in town. During weekends, they gravitated toward a nightclub in Oslo, which oozed of "danger" and excitement. Here, Yusuf was introduced to the criminal underworld. He eventually moved to Oslo, started to drive a cab, and provided "criminals" with "small services." Eventually, dealing and taking drugs became a "100 percent occupation," which took him through many different places of crime and danger. This gradually hardened him, and he was eventually sentenced to prison for armed robbery.

Many offenders discover or renew their religious faith inside prisons.[65] The time behind bars often feels long and disempowering.[66] This may open up for critical self-reflection and facilitate the embrace of new practices, including austere religious practices.[67] For Yusuf, the time in prison was a "miraculous turning point," where he reviewed his life and started to practice Islam. After a while, however, he once again gravitated toward danger, this time in the form of a group of "extremist" prisoners. They spent much time together "talking shit about Norwegian society," saying that "it's racist and that it doesn't want us." Yusuf generally agreed with them, because he had "experienced such things." Moreover, there was something about the prison itself that made a change. The negative mood, the distress, and the feeling of being unwanted came to infuse him.[68]

In the crime-terror literature, prisons are commonly portrayed as "breeding grounds" for jihadi recruitment.[69] However, Yousef's experience with extremism in prison is more complex. He was exposed to jihadism over time, but never fully embraced it. He hung out with extremist inmates yet their advocacy of holy war never fully made sense to him, in part, because he associated Islam with peace. After release from prison, he went back to his "old life of crime and drugs," until a friend helped him into a rehab program. In this place of treatment and self-reflection, he found himself yet again opening up to religion. He started going to the mosque, participated in Friday prayers, and was exposed to a crowd and a version of Islam that resonated with him. Yousuf said that the mosque "taught morality, that people should be good to themselves and others." The therapists were supportive and viewed his return to Islam as a positive means for "going straight."[70]

When things were getting better, some of the "extremists" from prison invited Yusuf to a mosque in the city center. After prayer, they dined together in a down-town kebab restaurant. While watching the news, one of them said, "look what's going on in Chechnya! We must carry out jihad against the infidels." Yusuf was taken aback. He did not accept this sharp division between believers and "infidels," nor did he see any reason to commit violence in the name of Islam. Consequently, he irrevocably turned his back to them.

Individuals with a background in street culture and crime may be exposed to jihadism at "sites of radicalization," such as certain prisons.[71] However, this exposure only occasionally leads to radicalization and violent extremism.[72] In spite of his self-reported "fragility, loneliness, and drug addiction," Yusuf rejected the "extremists," even after having reestablished contact with them outside of prison. He explained how certain places, notably the rehab clinic and the mosque, had played an important role in his life, protecting him against radicalization and facilitating his reintegration into society.

Places of radicalization and resistance

Many of the participants in this study shared Yusuf's experience of frequenting places where criminal actors mingled with jihadi extremists. A lot fewer law-abiding young Norwegian Muslims have met jihadist recruiters,[73] illustrating how violent subcultures seems to be drawn towards the same spaces. However, in contrast to what is emphasized in the new crime-terror nexus literature,[74] the participants' accounts suggest that Muslims with a street-criminal background often avoid, reject, and otherwise oppose jihadism on such arenas.

In addition to prisons, the places where the participants met jihadists included particular mosques, deprived neighborhoods, social networks, and protest rallies. Ismat (25) lived in one of Oslo's rougher neighborhoods and sometimes walked by some jihadists who collected money near a metro station in the city center. The site, which is also a well-known drug marked, is a place where both drug dealers and jihadists hung out. Ismat knew some of them. They had been troublemakers in the same school, eaten kebabs on the same street corners, and prayed in the same mosque. He said that he sometimes greeted them, but that he avoided too much contact. Such avoidance may be described as a form of "soft resistance" to jihadism, because it isolates the extremists and prevent their recruitment attempts.[75] Ismat rejected jihadi extremism, in part, because of his childhood experiences of fleeing jihadist militias in his country of origin. Moreover, despite his involvement with crime, he did not feel excluded from mainstream society. He worked part-time in a local supermarket and played football in a local club. Ismat said that he was "pleased to live in Norway" and that he felt part of his local community. Where he lived, Muslims like himself were treated well.

Other participants were exposed more intensely to jihadism because of the people and social networks they frequented. Roman (25) knew several young men with the same ethnic background as himself who had traveled to Syria as foreign fighters. One of them was a close friend. Like other foreign fighters at that time, the friend had booked a flight towards the battlegrounds, and Roman and his friends drove him to the airport. In terms of Sageman's "bunch of guys thesis,"[76] the friends gathered in the car could potentially have served as a site of radicalization. However, even in such tightly knit friendship groups, violent jihadism is not a given but negotiated. Roman was wavering in his support and during the drive he tried to dissuade his friend from leaving. He considered it "kind of cool to fight," but was at the same time skeptical of foreign fighting due to his personal history of fleeing war in his home country and losing family members. The fascination with armed combat is a central feature of the new crime-terror nexus.[77] It is part of a broader search for excitement, meaning, and glory, which seem particularly appealing to those with a background in street culture.[78] In Roman's case, however, the fascination with combat was outweighed by his first-hand knowledge of the atrocities of war.

Some of the participants met jihadists in mosques and other religious settings.[79] Mosques in Norway are generally strongly opposed to jihadism, but some have kept their doors open to everyone who wish to pray, including jihadists. Bilal (35) and Kemal (34) sometimes met "old friends" in the mosques who had gone through the process of shifting from moderate to extremist interpretations of Islam. Aman (33) had met many "different types of practicing Muslims," ranging from moderate to extremist practitioners in the Islamic milieus he had frequented. He gradually became attracted to the idea of "fighting against injustice." However, more well-read friends in the mosque made him change his mind. Aman said he was lucky to be part of a religious community valuing "knowledge rather than blind faith." His story illustrates that street culture and jihadism can potentially merge in specific religious settings. As in other European countries, however,[80] the mosques in Norway were above all arenas of resistance and opposition to jihadism.[81]

Participants also met jihadists on the street during protest rallies. From the late 2000s, young Muslims in Norway organized several demonstrations, some of which attracted a mixed crowd of activists as well as gang members looking for some action.[82] In 2012, the emerging jihadist milieu organized their own events, including demonstrations against Norway's military engagement in Afghanistan and a movie mocking the Prophet Muhammad.[83] A number of Muslims with a background in street culture helped organizing these events. Faruk (36) was one of them. He met

regularly with a group of men with a profile similar to his in a house in one of Oslo's eastern suburbs. They discussed politics and planned demonstrations, and when ISIS first appeared, they "kind of supported it."

Bashir (22) once took part in a demonstration and described how the large gathering combined with the flags and drums gave him a "feeling of strength." When people come together in large numbers in the same place, shouting the same slogans and moving under the same banners, they may obtain a sense of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility.[84] Such experiences may foster new beliefs and allegiances, and this may be particularly rewarding for marginalized individuals longing for a sense of purpose and significance in life. However, although effervescent gatherings may bring together people of varying backgrounds—e.g. extremists and gang members—the outcome is not necessarily an alignment of values and beliefs. For example, Hassan (29) described how he was drawn to the action of a street demonstration but left it as soon as he realized that the organizers were "extreme people."

Most of the participants in this study had encountered extremists on numerous occasions: in prison, in their neighborhoods, in the mosque, and during protest rallies. These are places where street culture and jihadism overlap.[85] In such places of convergence, jihadism may seem like an appealing avenue for respect, recognition, adventure, and group belonging.[86] However, these places are complex social arenas that also generate resistance to radicalization. In most instances, they trigger antipathy toward jihadism and push people from the street away from the path of radicalization.

Bodily confluences

Hamsa (25) had a big black beard, a round prayer hat on his head and a traditional white robe. In contrast to this otherwise traditional appearance, he wore Nike sneakers and a pair of khaki pants under the robe. He was talkative, jovial, and charming and talked passionately about bodybuilding. He appeared relaxed and well versed in street culture. Hamsa grew up in one of Oslo's less wealthy eastern suburbs where he mostly spent time with Muslims with an immigrant background. As he came of age, he got to know people from several different criminal gangs. "From early on, I was taught to hate certain people," he explained. He "interiorized" the hate and grew so accustomed to violence that it seemed normal to him. Such adaptations can be seen as an embodied process that leads to a "violent habitus," which is acquired, first and foremost, through "practice and imitation."[87]

According to Hamsa, things started to go "wrong" for him after primary school. He "wanted to be cool" and chose a criminal path where he became accustomed to weapons and violence. Like many other youths slipping into petty crime,[88] he looked for "easy money" and dropped out of college, which further added to his embodied street habitus.[89] Before Hamsa became more engaged in a criminal lifestyle, however, he joined a Muslim group that preached in their neighborhood and started to practice Islam vigorously. After the war in Syria broke out in 2011, he gradually withdrew from the peaceful group and joined the emerging jihadist milieu. The jihadists he met there were mostly petty "criminals" and sometimes "hardcore criminals," he said. The formation of the jihadist group drew on street-cultural forms of loyalty and dissent. Hamsa described the group as a small "solid milieu in which people stood up for each other." These extremist group structures can be compared to street gangs.[90] Like gangs, the small militant group provided them with a strong bond of loyalty and a sense of anti-establishment rebellion.

In this environment, Hamsa was, for the first time, able to merge embodied experiences and competencies he had developed in street culture (e.g., violence and weapons) with knowledge of jihadism.[91] His account still reflects a relatively ambiguous relation to violence. During the war in Syria, he and his militant comrades received "hardcore uncensored videos" from jihadi fighters on the ground. While jihadists with a background in street crime may be exposed to violent propaganda on the internet,[92] Hamsa was ambiguous about the violent content: "I thought it was wrong, but it was

embarrassing to tell the others." As part of a group however, or a "bunch of guys resenting society"[93] and "developing a common religious identity"[94] he was prone to endorse the violence and remained committed to jihadism.

Some Muslims with a background in street culture and crime acquire a street habitus that facilitates engagement with violent extremism. This observation is emphasized in the literature on the new crime-terror nexus.[95] Like most offenders who start to practice Islam, Hamsa explored different forms of Islam before joining the jihadists. In that group, he found a sense of rebellion, a tight brotherhood and a shared appetite for violence. These structures reflected, coincided with, and strengthened his street habitus. At the same time, he occasionally had doubts and concerns about the type of violence condoned by the group. This is illustrative of how participation in extremism is an ongoing negotiation between different embodied value systems.

A habitus that draws toward and opposes jihadism

Jihadism may serve as a means for Muslims with a street-criminal background to gain status and respect.[96] Within the ranks of certain jihadist groups, such as ISIS, their criminal skills are welcomed and they may obtain recognition for their years-long street socialization, which is a form of socialization viewed with suspicion in most other social contexts.

Asam (24) explained that extremism attracts people who are already "astray" and who have only just begun to "practice Islam." He knew about people who had traveled to Syria because, as he put it, they loved "blood, slaying, and guns." Indeed, for people who have experienced the visceral rush of street violence, and perhaps derived a sense of mastery and pride from it, the prospect of war may seem an attractive next step.[97] Familiarity with violence can be a powerful driving force behind radicalization into jihadism,[98] and since this knowledge is embodied, it cannot be willed away or changed easily. Hamid explained that some people grow so accustomed to violent action that they "got addicted" to it. However, while there are many indications that a street habitus makes those with a background in street culture who turn to Islam particularly vulnerable to jihadism, most of the participants in this study described jihadi violence as excessive, brutal, and unjust.

People involved in street life and crime may use Islam as an ethical framework to break with a violent street habitus and to reintegrate into mainstream society.[99] Illustratively, most participants in this study rejected jihadism on moral, physical, and religious grounds. This rejection is not only cognitive but also embodied and deeply emotional. Although people involved in street culture may have a relatively high tolerance for violence, they are likely to reject forms of violence that they find unjustified, cowardly, or disproportional.[100] For example, Haidar (20) said that he felt physically disgusted by the brutality in ISIS videos. For Bashir (28), his main feeling was anger when he saw or heard of IS' "killings, raping, and torturing of women and children." Faruk felt much the same and concluded that he could not imagine "burning or decapitating people." Although, arguably, some of these concerns might have come later, the quotes above highlight the ethical concerns of participants, including among those who had been deeply involved in extremism.

Some participants claimed that their criminal background made them particularly adept at rejecting violence in the name of Islam. Faruk said "I have been through and seen a lot of bad stuff. So I have a gut feeling about right and wrong." Daniel (44), a convert to Islam, stated that "real hardcore gangsters" like himself started to practice Islam because they were "fed up with violence." Hamid was sent by his family to his country of origin to straighten up and get away from the streets of Oslo. During his stay, however, he went to a jihadist training camp for a couple of weeks. He described the atmosphere as a "cool kind of Rambo-milieu," referring to the famous movie from the 1980s. In the camp, Hamid met a European with "CAT shoes and Calvin Klein perfume, who wanted to do jihad." Although he found certain aspects attractive, Hamid said that, overall, the jihadi "lifestyle did not suit him"—it was too far from the hedonistic pleasures of street culture and a criminal lifestyle.

The hostility towards jihadism in street criminal milieus sometimes results in confrontations.[101] Asam almost got into a fight with jihadists. He explained that he once saw them "flock together like a small gang" to assault a Muslim they disagreed with. Asam described the jihadists as "cowards"

who loved to harass others: "I was ready for a fight. Had they hit him, I would've hit back. No doubt" he claimed. There have been fights between Shia Muslims and jihadists with a street-criminal background.[102] Bashir said he knew "many who had returned from Syria" and that he met one of them at the train station. "He was bragging about his brutality in Syria so I beat the shit out of him," he stated with great contempt. In this way, participants' violent street habitus was used against jihadists.

In contrast to studies that describe violent offenders as "predators" who exploit the opportunity to commit violence in the name of Islam,[103] most of the participants in this study denounced jihadism. Some of them claimed that their physical and emotional experiences with street-crime made them more prudent and less likely to embrace jihadism. It was based on their habitus, or a sort of "body pedagogics"[104] emerging from physical engagement, experience, and know-how.[105] Some even used their embodied skills to fight jihadists and extremism. Still, it was evident that it did go both ways, depending upon person, context and timing of exposure to jihadism. Their street habitus could both draw them toward and trigger opposition to jihadism.

Narrative confluences

Imran (25) told a life story that reflected his strong sense of being excluded as a foreigner, street criminal, and Muslim. He explained that being "outcasts," he and his friends drew parallels between their own situation and the oppression of Afro-Americans. He identified with the lyrics in gangster-rap, that the "white man was on top and that we were on the bottom." After 9/11, Hamid and his friends felt increasingly suspected as Muslims and that Islam was under attack.

In his late teens, Imran slid into serious crime, such as brutal violence, and started selling larger quantities of drugs. He became increasingly anxious and paranoid and said that he started to "lose himself." The increasing destructiveness of his criminal lifestyle made him question that lifestyle and prompted him to start practicing Islam. The story of seeing the light after "hitting rock bottom" is a classic reconversion narrative among young Muslims who start to practice Islam.[106] The crime-terror nexus describes such turning points as cognitive openings, or personal crises that force individuals to reinterpret their lives and try to create a new story of themselves.[107] Imran was drawn toward literalist forms of Islam that satisfied his need for clear-cut answers, and that were aligned with his growing sense of marginalization and exclusion as a Muslim. According to Imran, the jihadists were the only Muslims who responded to the oppression of Muslims in Syria and the mocking of the Prophet Mohammad. Somehow, the jihadi narratives best suited his change from street culture to religious life, and Imran ended up a committed jihadist.

Scholars in the new crime-terror nexus argue that jihadism offers offenders who turn to Islam a powerful "redemption narrative."[108] It is a way to show commitment and willingness to make sacrifices for religious belief. Forgiveness for past sins was Imran's main motivation when starting to practice Islam. This quest for purification may be particularly salient for those with a background in violence and crime who seek redemption from a strong sense of guilt. Such reconversions may lead to an "overidentification" with suffering Muslims.[109] Biographic reconstructions and narratives of exclusion from society, the atrocities committed against Muslims, and religious duty are essential for those in marginalized populations who turn jihadist.[110] For Imran, violent jihad became the final means of redemption in a long trajectory of real and imagined forms of exclusion—and a way to try to carve out a new story of himself.

Stories that radicalize and resist radicalization

Many participants had felt excluded from Norwegian society, and increasingly as Muslims. They described fragile childhoods shaped by violence, uprooting and racism. This exclusion is often seen as one of the main sources of hatred among Muslims with a street-criminal background,[111] and serves as a cornerstone of Islamic narratives of exclusion.[112] Experiences of marginalization and exclusion are often transformed into stories that take on great importance in individuals' interpretation of their own

lives as well as society and politics. Such stories are widespread among Norwegian gang members and ethnic minority offenders. However, only a couple of the participants justified violence in the name of Islam as an appropriate response to such exclusion.

Many participants described their path from street-crime to Islam in terms of a redemption narrative. Only a few viewed jihad as a means of making up for past sins, and even these participants expressed their reservations and doubts about the redemptive power of jihadism. Aman, for example, who described jihad as a strong "physical and psychological way of seeking forgiveness and pleasing God," stressed that those he knew about who had died in Syria were not necessarily martyrs. Drawing on a widespread narrative about jihadists, he emphasized that they had a "strong faith, but scarce religious knowledge."

At the same time, some participants described jihad as a legitimate means to defend oppressed Muslims, particularly in Syria. They were still often in two minds about jihadism and violent jihad. Fahad (29), who was drawn to jihadism at a certain point in his life, exemplifies this narrative ambiguity or indecisiveness. According to Fahad, the jihadists wished to "kill every non-Muslim" without any backing from Islamic scholars. Their arguments were "bullshit I didn't buy," he said. At the same time, Fahad described a conversation with a profiled jihadist, who accused him of "just sitting here while our sisters are being raped by the American pigs." At that moment, Fahad said, he wanted to buy a "one-way ticket to Syria."

Narrative ambiguity is well known from narrative studies.[113] Opinions are not set in stone and people are often pulled in different directions. Participants were often influenced by scholars or mainstream Muslim rejections of extremism.[114] At other times, jihadi "moral narratives"[115] of violence in which the protagonists are "heroes" and their acts of violence morally just were more appealing. For example, the participants who had been part of jihadi groups sometimes described themselves as supporters of a "just war."

Those who supported violent jihad, however, only supported certain versions of it. They could, for example, differentiate between Muslims who went to Syria with "good intentions" and "wannabe jihadists" with bad intentions. Many described the establishment of the Islamic State in 2013 as a watershed. They generally described those who went to Syria at an early phase of the war as "goodhearted." Those who planned to go to Syria themselves, like Tariq, described their motivations as "purely humanitarian." Whether the motivations are real or imagined, these descriptions and self-ascriptions are also important forms of narrative boundary work.[116] In a global and national context in which jihadists are portrayed as antiheros, some of the participants positioned themselves in-between by distinguishing between "good" and "bad" jihadists.[117]

Those who rejected jihadism altogether drew different boundaries. Many of them claimed that the jihadists were not "real criminals." Faruk said he was so "fed up" of hearing about the connection between crime and jihadism and said it was just "bullshit." Daniel emphasized that only "brats" traveled to Syria, and that none of the foreign fighters were "real gangsters." Central to these claims were participants' descriptions of their own transformation from "real criminals" to practicing Muslims as being different from that of individuals they described as petty criminals turning "wannabee jihadists." "Real" commitment to street culture and crime thus symbolized something authentic and positive, while the absence of these experiences or the attempt to fake them were looked down upon.

Some of the participants further characterized jihadists as cowards and "attention seekers" rather than real fighters. John (28), another convert to Islam referred to the Norwegian documentary *The Jihadist* to illustrate his point. In the documentary, a famous Norwegian jihadist claimed that he was unable to travel to Syria due to illness.[118] He laughed and asked rhetorically whether "Allah accepted sick leave." Amir further described jihadists as "publicity-mongers" rather than real fighters. Tariq said that they wanted a "macho image" and compared them to participants in "Paradise Hotel." Dawud (51) described them as "wannabe jihadists."

Jihadism offers marginalized Muslim offenders a powerful narrative of exclusion and redemption.[119] Illustratively, stories from street culture and Western jihadism share an emphasis on exclusion and alienation. These stories draw excluded populations in the same direction. Young

Norwegian Muslims often describe jihadists in derogatory terms,[120] but participants in this study stood out from such general rejections of jihadism by emphasizing that jihadists were not "real gangsters" either. Taken together, this shows the many ways that stories from street culture merge with stories of jihadism, sometimes pulling toward jihadism and sometimes being a resource in rejecting the same extremist ideology.

Concluding discussion

Studies of the new crime-terror nexus have emphasized that recruitment into criminal and terrorist groups now takes place "from the same pool of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps that have consequences for how individuals radicalize and operate."[121] As demonstrated by our study, these new confluences of jihadi and street cultures have complex spatial, bodily, and narrative dimensions. They materialize in places such as prisons, crime hotspots, disadvantaged neighborhoods, and mosques, can be seen in the bodies of those drawn toward different forms of rebellion and violence, and are reflected in the narratives of Western jihadism and street cultures.

Radicalization of individuals with a background in crime and street culture is well documented in the existing literature.[122] We show that these spatial, bodily, and narrative confluences also form key avenues for rejecting and resisting radicalization. To put it simply: the confluences between street and jihadi culture can have several outcomes, of which radicalization is just one. This calls for a better understanding of the link between street and jihadi culture than is provided in the existing literature. Most importantly, it demands data on and closer investigation of individuals who are part of criminal milieus and become exposed to extremist influences yet resist radicalization.

A recent ethnographic study of a street drug market in Oslo is the only research so far with such an approach. The study shows how Muslims actively involved in street culture and crime more blatantly reject jihadism.[123] While this is the overall finding in this study as well, our data reveal a more multifaceted and complex picture, including some support. A possible reason for these different results may be that most of the participants in the present study were older and so-called "born-again" Muslims, who had experienced more long-term exposure to jihadism inside prison, during protest rallies, and in mosques. Their exposure was also at a time when jihadism was less stigmatized than it is today (before or in the beginning of the conflict in Syria). Degree and historical time period of exposure are factors that influence the confluences of jihadism and street culture.

Importantly, for the participants who had supported jihadism, there was a close alignment between street culture and jihadi culture which involved simultaneous spatial, bodily, and narrative convergences. This contributed to the degree of exposure that seems to be an important factor for radicalization, but as our analysis demonstrates, even in these cases the outcome was open. That Muslim men with a background in street life and crime can be drawn towards or repelled by jihadism for each point of convergence, does not mean that bodies, places, and narratives lack explanatory power. It rather signifies that to identify pull and push factors of radicalization, every case of convergence needs to be studied separately. As we have shown, convergences of street culture and jihadism are often characterized by capriciousness and ambiguity.

The complexity of the relations between criminal groups and jihadist groups is reflected in the places where street culture and jihadism meet. Prisons, neighborhoods, and mosques can lead to exposure to jihadists, but also, and maybe more often, to meetings with moderate Muslims. Confluences can lead to conflict, collaboration, or mutual disinterest, depending in part on spatial properties. For instance, the depriving atmosphere of prison life may facilitate an engagement with new ideas, beliefs, and communities that offer salvation through violence. However, people who share the same place may experience it very differently—and although places influence people, they never dictate how people feel and act. Similarly encounters between violent street habitus and violent jihadi ideology are multifaceted rather than streamlined. Some people on the street seeking redemption in Islam may transfer their hate, violent skills, and appetite for action into jihadism. These cases are exceptions however. Variations may be linked to the type of crime individuals have grown accustomed to as well as their age at exposure. It seems, for example, that young petty delinquents are more likely to experience redefining "cognitive openings that

make them perceptive of revolutionary jihadi narratives and more eager to engage in "high-risk activism" like jihadism.[124] Finally, narrative confluences are also complex and ambiguous. Street culture and jihadi stories in the West rely on narratives of marginalization and are fueled by the same discontent, but there are also striking discrepancies. In street culture for example, hedonism and egocentrism are celebrated,[125] while in jihadist cultures, puritanism and sacrifice are the most important cultural stories.[126]

We have identified three points of confluence of street and jihadi cultures. These have some similarities to the convergence settings theory typology used by Kupatadze and Argomaniz.[127] However, while they distinguish between functional, financial and ideological confluences, we distinguish between spatial, embodied and narrative confluences. Our spatial dimension includes much of the convergence settings theory, emphasizing concrete places where jihadists and those involved in crime and street culture meet. The functional dimensions include the concrete exchanges of goods and services and the mutual learning of skills. What we describe as bodily confluences covers some of this, but with an emphasis on the embodied rather than the rational dimension of this socialization and learning. Finally, we prefer to use the concept of narrative confluences, rather than ideological, because —especially for individuals with a background in street culture and crime—extremist involvement often relies more on simple narratives and everyday storytelling than on systematic ideology or theology.

In this paper we have expanded on the criminological influences in studies of the crime-terror nexus, from a sole focus on Felson's offender convergence settings,[128] to a broader view including the Criminology of Place, Bourdieusian criminology and Narrative Criminology. We propose including these theoretical frameworks in future studies of the crime-terrorism nexus. We further expand on the crime-terror nexus by highlighting rejections of jihadism as well as processes of de-radicalization in street culture, and add to the extensive literature on radicalization processes, a particular focus on the nuances of radicalization in environments characterized by street culture and crime. Radicalization processes among offenders are just as complex and unpredictable as those in play when other groups turn to extremism, and exposure to jihadism feeds both radicalization and resistance to radicalization —including among those most vulnerable to jihadi recruitment.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the valuable insights and input from the anonymous referees for Terrorism and Political Violence.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was partly funded by the Research Council of Norway, grant 259541.

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