This chapter uses the Israel/Palestine case to make a broader claim about deradicalization efforts in non-democratic contexts. Therefore, before delving into the case, important clarifications with regard to premises, assumptions, and concept definitions are in order. First, by non-democratic contexts I mean situations in which the targets for deradicalization come from communities that do not enjoy equal civil and political rights. Such rights include the right to vote and to be elected, freedom of expression and association, alongside other rights specified in the UN’s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These communities could be occupied by a foreign power or disenfranchised by their own government due to their ethnic, racial, religious, gender, political, or other affiliation. Non-democratic contexts of course most clearly also include authoritarian regimes, where the entire citizenry is denied civil and political rights. The premise of this chapter is that, in such non-democratic situations, the state-centered security approach to deradicalization is both ineffective and normatively questionable.

The efforts of states in non-democratic contexts to deradicalize members of disenfranchised communities are ineffective for several reasons. First, if we take this volume’s definition of categorizing an ideology as radical not based on its substance, but rather on its relational approach to competing or alternative ideologies — i.e., a radical ideology is one that is intolerant of differences and alternatives and seeks hegemony and dominance rather than democratic co-existence with competing worldviews — then in non-democratic situations both state and non-state actors fall under the radical category. A state-centered security approach to deradicalization, where the state targets members of disenfranchised groups using its repressive-security apparatuses: (1) is not likely to be viewed as legitimate by the larger communities to which radical dissidents belong as these communities do not have access to other, democratic, means for grievance expression such as voting, being elected, lobbying, demonstrating, organizing, and so forth; and (2) will assist the state in fortifying its own radical ideology (of non-democratic intolerance of different political visions), by suppressing political opponents. Second, in non-democratic situations, both non-state actors and state actors engage in political violence. By political violence I mean the use of violent means toward political ends. Non-state actors might employ methods such as attacks on military, security, and civilian targets. State actors in non-democratic situations would
employ methods such as extrajudicial killings, disproportionate use of force against protestors, torture, and arrests without charges or trial. State-centered deradicalization by the security apparatuses aims to curb the political violence of non-state actors, but does nothing to curb the political violence of the state.

Next, the state-centric security approach is questionable normatively in these cases. Of course, it is questionable only from a standpoint that upholds a commitment to democracy with equal civil and political rights. However, I assume that at least most scholars engaged with research, writing, and even practice of deradicalization initiatives share this normative commitment. The normative challenge entailed in the state-centric security paradigm in non-democratic contexts is that lines between deradicalization efforts and political suppression efforts by the state are extremely blurry. In non-democratic situations, states arrest and imprison large numbers of political dissidents, both ones that use violence and ones that do not. In the absence of due process, transparency, equality before the law, and general equal civil and political rights, the targets for deradicalization held at state prisons and detention camps often include both actual criminals and political dissidents. Scholars or practitioners advising or collaborating with the state’s deradicalization efforts could be complicit in a state’s efforts to silence, suppress, and reduce or eradicate political opposition to the regime by disenfranchised groups. In this capacity, the scholar and practitioner lend support to one radical ideology and actor (the non-democratic state aiming to establish a monopoly by silencing alternatives) in the suppression of another, competing radical actor (if the target indeed advocates a radical worldview) and non-radical actor (in cases where the target is a political dissident advocating democratic inclusion and equal civil and political rights).

Yet, the contention of this chapter is not that deradicalization initiatives are impossible in non-democratic situations and that scholars and practitioners should simply disengage from them. In this chapter, I also offer an example from Israel/Palestine of an alternative approach that can replace the state-security paradigm. This alternative focuses on civil society and adopts a political-transformative approach. It addresses the problem that both the state and non-state actors employ political violence and uphold radical ideologies. It does so by recruiting and targeting for joint deradicalization efforts people who have taken part in different forms of political violence both on behalf of non-state organizations and people who have used violence on behalf of the state. Furthermore, beyond simply aiming at a change in individual behavior and ideology, the objective of this work is to transform the political situation from one that perpetuates various forms of political violence to one that strives to resist and overcome the underlying structural roots of such violence. This transformation entails political efforts to change the status quo from a non-democratic to a democratic one, where all individuals and communities enjoy equal civil and political rights.

**The case of Israel/Palestine**

There are significant challenges to employing the concept of “deradicalization” in the context of Israel/Palestine. In particular, the politicized use of the terms “radicalization” and “deradicalization” by agents of the state, security services, the popular media, and even within academic research requires vigilant scrutiny. Given the fact that the Israeli state, as well as the Palestinian Authority government in the West Bank and the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip, suffer from severe democratic deficits, their use of the term “radicalization” to label dissidents who dispute the status quo must be critically evaluated. As Daniel Koehler helpfully outlines in this book, violent radical ideologies...
constantly erase and negate alternative or competing definitions of the ideology’s core values and concepts and try to establish a monopoly in this regard. At the same time, the propaganda and group dynamics constantly increase the urgency and importance of the core problems stated through the movement and ideology.

(Chapter 2)

But what of cases where the states or governments purporting to target radicalism themselves promote and propagate violent radical ideologies, as well as the use of violence against those who disagree with the state’s or government’s agenda? If deradicalization is understood as a “process of turning from a position of perceived deviance or conflict with the surrounding environment” or the degree of an individual’s or group’s accordance with “the legal, ideological or moral view of the surrounding majority (or mainstream) environment” (Chapter 2), what paradigms can we use to evaluate these processes when the mainstream environment itself is non-democratic and intolerant? In these situations, how do we draw a distinction between government efforts to deradicalize radicals and government efforts to eliminate dissent and opposition?

The focus of much of the research and policy work in Israel/Palestine, as it is elsewhere, is on the radicalization and deradicalization of non-state actors (for example, see: Della Porta and LaFree, 2012; Horgan, 2009; Horgan and Braddock, 2010, p. 279). In turn, the designation of a group as radical, and in extreme cases as “terrorist,” often borrows from lists or designations determined by states’ security apparatuses. Yet these representatives of the state, including in government, the police, military, and intelligence and security services, are rarely themselves defined as “radicalized,” even when they hold extreme intolerant ideologies and employ licit and illicit violence. While this immunity of state actors from the category of radicalization and from being potential targets for deradicalization is problematic even in democratic contexts, it is even more tenuous in non-democratic settings, such as repressive regimes and instances of military occupation, as in Israel/Palestine. What I propose in this chapter is that legitimate (from a democratic standpoint respectful of the principle of equal civil rights) and effective deradicalization efforts in non-democratic situations such as this one must target both violent non-state actors, often designated as “terrorists,” and state actors and bodies who also use violence and hold intolerant ideologies.

This approach is particularly apt to the evaluation of deradicalization initiatives in Israel/Palestine. While some studies place Israel in the company of democratic states in Western Europe and the US, which have grappled with what has been termed home-grown “Islamic radicalism” (Ganor, 2011; Ganor and Falk, 2013), a much more accurate frame would place Israel in the context of studies of radicalization under repressive regimes (for example, Davenport et al., 2012; Larzillière, 2012). Another apt comparison is of foreign military occupation or the imprisonment of non-citizens in military prisons, as in the case of Guantanamo (for example, Olesen, 2011). Israel itself within its pre-1967 borders, which do not include the West Bank and Gaza, is indeed a democracy. However, a majority of those whom Israel designates and imprisons as radicals or terrorists (called “security prisoners”) are not citizens entitled to equal civil rights, but rather residents of the occupied Palestinian territories that are under Israel’s military control. Because the territories it occupies are adjacent to its own territory, political violence against security services and Israeli civilians has been compared to home-grown radicalism in Western democracies. However, while home-grown radicalism in these countries originates in communities of citizens, in the Israeli context non-state actors using political violence are almost exclusively composed of residents who, because they are Palestinians and not Israeli or Jewish, do not enjoy civil rights. As an occupied population, they cannot vote or be elected to the Israeli parliament, serve in its police or military, and do not enjoy full civil liberties such as freedom of movement, association,
assembly, expression, and so on. The non-violent avenues available for this population to express grievances are much more limited in comparison to those available to citizens in a democratic country (for example, protest, lobbying, organizing political parties, pressuring elected officials). The category for comparison, therefore, should be non-democratic contexts such as occupation (for example, Kashmir, Tibet, Iraq, and Afghanistan under US occupation) or non-democratic or semi-democratic regimes (for example, Egypt, Jordan, Russia, and Turkey).

In addition, the state has designated as terrorist or illegal organizations a spectrum of Palestinian organizations with a plethora of ideological commitments – from the nationalist Fatah whose stated aim is the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, to Hamas and the Islamic Jihad that officially call for immediate or gradual reclamation of all of the lands of the historic mandatory Palestine (an aim which entails the cessation of the existence of Israel) and the establishment of a religious Islamic state. However, Israeli governments themselves, since at least 1977, have included political parties that advocate similar ideologies from the Jewish-Israeli side. Some of them today, like the Jewish Home party, advocate for the primacy of the ethno-nationalist religious Jewish identity of Israel over and at the expense of its democratic character (an aim which entails the prevention of Palestinian statehood by extending Israeli sovereignty to the occupied territories and making permanent the legal apartheid that exists there). Others hope to establish an illiberal religious Jewish state (for example, the ultra-Orthodox parties within the government).

Moreover, even from the narrower prism of radical violence or the use of political violence the Israeli government and military have engaged in repression and retaliation acts that have led to the deaths of thousands of Palestinian civilians, and the country’s security services have employed an array of violent tactics, including the use of torture and persistent violations of human rights. Compounding matters, the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority on the one hand, and the Hamas government in Gaza on the other hand, likewise cannot be considered fully democratic, and their security apparatuses also participate in repression of Palestinian dissenters under the guise of countering radicalism and terrorism.

In non-democratic contexts such as the Israel/Palestine case (whether it be classified in the category of repressive regimes or military occupations) where the targets for intended deradicalization lack full civil rights, two divergent approaches have been employed. One focuses on security services and prison administration – the representatives of the state – as the agents to potentially implement deradicalization initiatives. The second approach is vested in civil society and operates under a political-transformative paradigm rather than a purely state-centered security paradigm. In what follows I briefly outline these two approaches and argue that in the current political climate in Israel/Palestine, the first is highly ineffective and normatively questionable, from a democratic perspective of respect for equal civil rights, while the latter possesses tremendous potential, and merits the investment of much greater resources and funding than are currently available to it.

“Security prisoners” and the state-security approach

The Israeli Prisons Service (IPS) currently holds a large number of what it terms Palestinian “security prisoners.” The term officially refers to

a prisoner who was convicted and is serving a sentence for an offence, or who is detained for suspicion of committing an offence, which by its nature or circumstances is defined as a distinctly security offence, or that the motivation for its perpetration stems from nationalistic reasons.

(Ronen, 2019b, p. 2, translated from Hebrew)
The designation of a detainee as a “security prisoner” is not based on legislation but is rather the purview of the IPS as part of its administrative authority (Ronen, 2019b, p. 2). What acts are classified as a security offense are extremely broad. These range all the way from planning or committing violent attacks on military or civilian targets, to participating in an unauthorized gathering or unruly demonstration, spraying graffiti, posting of poems or social media statuses considered to be inciting, and simply being political members in organizations which Israel designates as unlawful or illegal. The criterion of “nationalist” motives casts even non-violent acts as security offenses, if they are motivated by Palestinian demands for self-determination. Moreover, and perhaps most problematic, while inside Israel there are proper procedures for declaring an organization illegal, in the occupied territories the situation is different. There, an area commander can declare any association an illegal association, and furthermore, a person can be convicted of being involved in an illegal association even if that association was not declared as illegal, and finally, an organization and association can be declared illegal even if it has not actually taken any action that poses a threat to security. Finally, Palestinians, including minors, are tried for all offenses (criminal and security) in military courts, while Israeli citizens living in the same territories are tried in civilian courts (see IDF, 2016; IPS, 2018; ACRI, n.d.; B’tselem, 2018).

The number of such prisoners spiked significantly during the first Palestinian intifada (uprising) in 1987–1993 and averaged 4,000. Following the Oslo Peace Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993, many prisoners were released and by the year 2000 their numbers dropped to about 800. The onset of the second intifada in 2000 again saw rising arrests, reaching a peak of about 10,000 security prisoners in 2007. As of May 2017, there were 6,189 such prisoners (Figure 21.1) and these constitute about 30% of the entire prison population in the country. Facilities established by the military to hold the prisoners were transferred to the IPS by 2006, and the IPS is currently the authority in charge of this population. Because of their designation as a security threat these prisoners are held separately from regular prisoners and their conditions, rights, and privileges are different from those of the general prisoner population. It should be noted

![Security Prisoners in Israel](image-url)

**Figure 21.1** Security prisoners in Israel.

Source: Data combined from B’tselem, 2018; Ganor and Falk, 2013; Hamoked, 2019
that the incarceration of Palestinian prisoners from the West Bank and Gaza inside Israel proper constitutes a violation of the fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the transfer of detainees and prisoners out of an occupied territory (Hamoked, 2019).

The administration of these prisoners by the IPS presents opportunities for deradicalization initiatives within a framework of a larger political process of settlement and peace building between the Israeli government and the different Palestinian organizations. However, in the absence of interest in a political settlement, extant and future efforts at the prison level implemented by state agents and with security, rather than political-transformative, objectives, are bound to be ineffective.

When arrested, security prisoners are sent to wards in accordance with their organizational affiliations (for example, Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, etc.). They hold bi-yearly elections to select a spokesperson to represent each organization in dealings with the prison administration. In general, the leadership of the different factions enjoys some autonomy in running the daily life of its members within the prison. This structure has also allowed them to coordinate collective action such as strikes or hunger strikes to extract concessions from prison authorities on living conditions, treatment, and privileges. In addition, the Palestinian Authority transfers funds to the personal accounts of dominant prisoners, which are used collectively to buy products in the prison’s commissary and for other purposes (according to a report by the Israeli Knesset, between 2000 and 2006 prisoners received 17 million NIS in this way (Ronen, 2019b). The evolution of this system of affiliation and representation stems from two sources. The first is the prisoners’ self-identification as “political prisoners,” rather than as terrorists, as they are defined by the IPS. They hold Israel accountable to articles 70 and 102 of the third Geneva Convention, which grant prisoners of war the right to elect their own representatives (Baker, 2016). The second is Israel’s tacit acknowledgment of this state of affairs and of the effectiveness of such mechanisms to maintain order among the security prisoner population. In addition, maintaining separate factions also helps to entrench the internal Palestinian split, especially between Fatah and Hamas (although the prisons have been one arena where occasionally the two factions in the past have effectively negotiated intra-Palestinian détentes (Noy, 2017)).

This level of organization and the collective action coordination and negotiation skills prisoners develop could serve an Israeli government keen on reaching a political solution to the conflict. The high status and nationalist credentials of prisoners make them credible representatives in the eyes of the Palestinian population and potential partners for an effective Israeli–Palestinian agreement. However, especially since 2009 the Israeli government has relied on a coalition of parties and Members of Knesset (Israeli Parliament) who object to the notion of a Palestinian state and hope to contain and manage the conflict while expanding settlements and Israel’s hold on the occupied territories, rather than make any political concessions to the Palestinians. In this context, Israel’s strategy toward security prisoners has seen a combination of: (1) using prisoners as bargaining chips with Palestinian factions by occasionally hardening their conditions and depriving them of privileges such as family visits or access to higher education, for example; and (2) an individualist approach of carrot-and-stick tactics to influence individual prisoners’ cost–benefit calculations with regard to what Israel defines as “radical” behavior (Baker, 2016; Ganor and Falk, 2013).

In their study of deradicalization efforts in Israeli prisons, Ganor and Falk outline this individualist approach. They explain:

Prison authorities have a variety of rewards and sanctions at their disposal, all of which can be used to convince inmates to participate in the deradicalization process,
or which may influence their individual cost–benefit calculations. In return for cooperating with and participating in meetings, deradicalization lessons, indoctrination sessions, non-religious/non-ideological work, or academic, vocational or professional education, a prisoner may be rewarded with family visits, telephone calls, canteen purchases (goods and food), preferred cooking facilities and accommodations, and leisure activities. A prisoner who fails to cooperate with or participate in such activities may be penalized in these same areas.

(Ganor and Falk, 2013, p. 125)

There are several problems with this method that render it largely ineffective. In her excellent study of security prisoners in Israel, Abeer Bake, a human rights lawyer who has represented some of these prisoners in court, outlines the major logistical and political flaws of the individualist approach (Baker, 2016). First, since security prisoners are designated by the prison administration to an organizational affiliation, they encounter a Catch-22 dilemma when presented with the opportunity to take the individual cost–benefits approach outlined by Ganor and Falk above. In order to be considered for certain benefits, such as participation in rehabilitation programs or early release eligibility, security prisoners have to demonstrate that they have renounced all affiliation with their organization. However, since the prisoners’ life is administered by these organizations, with the consent and support of the prison administration, proving non-affiliation requires active defiance by individual prisoners of their elected prison leadership. For instance, if the leadership declares a hunger strike, a prisoner must request and actively engage in consuming food in front of his peers to demonstrate an active breaking of the strike. If he does not eat, in solidarity with his peers, the act is taken as an affirmation of membership, and denies him eligibility to privileges available to regular criminal prisoners.

The problems with this are that: first, as explained here, logistically the prison administration makes it close to impossible for prisoners not to be affiliated, as it assigns them collective affiliation. Second, it is clear that renunciation of the organization serves the political interest of Israel and is detrimental to the political and collective bargaining power of Palestinians. The aim of conditioning privileges on the severing of affiliation with the prisoner’s organization is clearly to weaken the collective action capacity of the organization within the prison, and also outside of it, rather than a concern for the use of violence by the prisoner. Finally, as Baker explains, only few Palestinian prisoners in fact pursue the individual track. This is not only because of the logistical difficulty, but also because they do not see themselves as criminals in need of rehabilitation programs (which is a condition for early release) but rather as patriotic nationalists resisting a military occupation. Moreover, even for those who take the individual track, most requests for early release are usually denied by military courts (Baker, 2016).

Even Ganor and Falk, who subscribe to the state-centric security paradigm, admit that it has proved ineffective. Measured by “rate of return to terrorism,” in their words, they state that Israel’s

deradicalisation efforts have not been effective in preventing released terrorists from returning to lethal terrorism. In fact, of the 6,912 convicted Palestinian terrorists released as part of the confidence-building measures that attended the Oslo Peace Process between 1993 and 1999, 854 of them had been rearrested for acts of terrorism by August 2003. Moreover, since 2000, 180 Israelis have been killed and hundreds injured by terrorists released from Israeli jails.

(Ganor and Falk, 2013, pp.127–128)
This approach, beyond its logistical and structural flaws, also maintains a tenuous double standard. It sees non-state actors’ “radical” ideology, affiliation, and violence as a target for deradicalization, while ignoring or even condoning the same type of ideology and violence by the state or state actors.8

The questionable nature of the security approach in a non-democratic setting is as apparent when examined in the intra-Palestinian context too. In a fascinating research, Björn Brenner has looked at a deradicalization initiative undertaken by Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, in Gaza starting in 2009 (Brenner, 2017). Hamas, which itself is considered a terrorist organization by Israel, violently took over the Gaza Strip in 2007 in a fight with Fatah, and has formed an unelected repressive government in the Strip. Increasingly, Hamas has been challenged by Salafi-Jihadis, many of them former Hamas members who felt that the organization was not radical enough both in terms of religious doctrine and resistance to Israel. The Hamas government’s first step in countering this trend included sweeping purges of Hamas’s own membership focusing mainly on its military wing, the Qassam Brigades. This was followed by heavy restrictions of Salafi-affiliated mosques, including shutdowns of some mosques or replacing their imams with Hamas sympathizers. In tandem, Hamas conducted massive arrests and began the construction of five new detention centers to house around 1,200 security detainees, among them many Salafis.

In prison, Hamas sought to implement a deradicalization approach centered on Islamic re-education by religious teachers and scholars. As Brenner outlines:

The religious scholars engaged with the detainees through lectures, one-on-one sessions, and group seminars. The sessions began with the scholars listening to the experiences and views of the detainees. They then moved on to a traditional form of religious dialogue, with the goal of re-educating the subjects to accept Hamas’s interpretation of Islam. The second part of the program was political and involved lectures and group sessions with Hamas leaders from the movement’s political echelon … The third and final part of the program sought to engage the Salafi jihadists after their release from detention. Upon release, they had to sign pledges not to violate truces agreed between Hamas and Israel or to engage in any activities that compromised Gaza’s internal security. The former prisoners received regular home visits by security officers who continued to monitor them.

(Brenner, 2017, pp. 30–31)

This initiative yielded few results, according to Brenner, exactly due to the non-democratic nature of the regime implementing it. Arrested Salafi individuals were not only those who participated in violent activities, but also those who simply had ideological and political disagreements with Hamas. Deradicalization programs for Salafis were not voluntary but rather mandatory. Moreover, repressive detention and interrogation methods used in Hamas’s prisons included and continue to include the use of torture and violations of human rights, as well as periodic executions of political rivals. The US State Department’s Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor stated in its latest human rights report that in 2016:

Human rights abuses under Hamas included security forces killing, torturing, arbitrarily detaining, and harassing opponents, including Fatah members and other Palestinians with impunity … Human rights organizations reported authorities held prisoners in poor conditions in detention facilities in the Gaza Strip, and Hamas publicly and unlawfully executed persons without trial or after proceedings that did
not meet “fair trial” standards. Hamas also infringed on privacy rights. Hamas restricted the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, association, religion, and movement of Gaza Strip residents.

(US Department of State, 2016, p. 70)

It is not surprising, then, that Salafi radicals interviewed in Brenner’s research stated that the religious re-education felt like ideological indoctrination and not a form of equal, meaningful, and transformative dialogue. Like the Israeli prisons case, this example is a stark illustration of the limited effectiveness and normative dubiousness, in terms of respect for basic democratic civil rights, of attempts at deradicalization undertaken by non-democratic authorities.

The same also applies to the security practices of the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Here too, as numerous Palestinian and international human rights organizations consistently document, violations of human rights of prisoners in Palestinian prisons is rampant, and security pretexts are often used to arrest political dissidents and critics of the political status quo. The US government has contributed an average of $100 million annually since the mid-1900s to the Palestinian Authority’s security sector. In recent years, this aid has been used to “train, reform, advise, house, and provide non-lethal equipment for PA [Palestinian Authority] civil security forces in the West Bank loyal to President Abbas.” The stated aim of this support has been “countering militants from organizations such as Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad-Shaqaqi Faction, and establishing the rule of law for an expected Palestinian state” (Zanotti, 2016, p. 8). Yet, as the US State Department itself acknowledges, human rights violations under the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank routinely include “abuse and mistreatment of detainees, overcrowded detention facilities, prolonged detention, and infringements on privacy rights” alongside restrictions on freedom of speech, press, and assembly and limits on freedom of association and movement (US Department of State, 2016, p. 70).

Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas’s security apparatuses are unlikely to produce meaningful deradicalization results in their prisons. As this section reviewed, these state or proto-state actors are themselves engaged in the use of illegitimate violence inside and outside prisons and use incarceration as a measure to curb political opposition to the status quo. For Israel, membership in organizations that resist the Israeli occupation is labeled radicalism and terrorism. For Fatah and Hamas, political opponents, even those who simply criticize these respective organizations but do not engage in violence, are routinely arrested and mistreated in detention centers. Furthermore, these three governments themselves uphold unpalatable intolerant ideologies. The Israeli government continues to invest in a system of occupation, civilian settlements, and repression of the occupied population in contravention of international law and out of a belief in Jewish supremacy in rights to the land. The Palestinian Authority and its affiliated media and social media herald as “martyrs” Palestinians who die while executing attacks against Israeli civilians and security personnel (US Department of State, 2016). Hamas’s rhetoric is explicit in its incitement against Israel and Jews and often resorts to anti-Semitism and incitement to violence in its media operations and public speeches by its cadres (US Department of State, 2016).

As under other repressive regimes, deradicalization efforts in prisons of such state actors are not likely to be seen as legitimate by their targets and their communities, and should not be lumped in the same category as prison-based deradicalization efforts in democratic contexts. In democratic contexts, citizens have formal non-violent avenues to express their grievances, engage in politics, and have their interests heard and represented by elected officials. In non-
democratic contexts lacking freedom of expression, association, and basic civil rights such as the right to participate in free and fair elections. “Deradicalization” is often a way to silence opposition or regime critiques. This is not lost on prisoners, who see themselves as political prisoners rather than radical deviants (Baker and Matar, 2011; Della Porta and LaFree, 2012). In the next section, I outline an alternative strategy employed by civil society groups, which I argue has a much greater transformative potential and more sound moral legitimacy from a democratic standpoint that upholds the principle of equal civil rights.

Civil society and the political-transformative approach

The political-transformative approach addresses the problem of state vs. non-state violence by recruiting and targeting people who have taken part in different forms of political violence on behalf of both the state and of non-state organizations. Furthermore, beyond simply aiming at a change in individual behavior and ideology, the objective of this work is to transform the political situation from one that perpetuates various forms of political violence to one that strives to resist and overcome the underlying structural roots of such violence.

To illustrate this strategy, I will use the example of the Israeli–Palestinian organization Combatants for Peace (CfP). CfP was established in 2006 by former Palestinian combatants, many of whom spent time in Israeli prisons, and former Israeli soldiers, including some currently serving on reserve duties, who served in the Israeli military (the Israel Defense Force – IDF). It is run jointly by a steering committee currently consisting of 15 Palestinians and 18 Israelis. The individuals who originally established the organization found their individual paths toward a commitment to non-violence but decided to take action for the benefit of their wider societies, which are the victims of the violence of the ongoing conflict. By outlining the organization’s mission and work in what follows, I highlight the fundamental difference in the logics of the political-transformative approach and the state-centric security approach explained in the previous section.

Definitions

In introducing themselves, the members of CfP define themselves in the following words:

We are a group of Palestinians and Israelis who have taken an active part in the cycle of violence in our region: Israeli soldiers serving in the IDF and Palestinians as combatants fighting to free their country, Palestine, from the Israeli occupation.10

The language here is clearly vastly different from the language of the security approach. If the IPS and academics subscribing to the security paradigm use words such as “radicals” and “terrorists” to describe Palestinians who have taken part in political violence, CfP talks about Palestinian “combatants” involved in resistance to a military occupation. Furthermore, both Israeli soldiers and Palestinian combatants are acknowledged as having taken an “active part in the cycle of violence.” The purpose here is not necessarily to equate the two sides or the political rationale for each side’s engagement in violence, but simply to recognize that in so far as violence is rejected as a political tool, both sides have been implicated in using this illegitimate tool. The use of the word combatant is not meant to justify or legitimize the members’ participation in violent action, but rather to recognize their self-perception as having been motivated by a desire to act in defense of their national collectives.
Politics

The security paradigm completely obfuscates the question of politics by designating its targets as radicalized terrorists in need of rehabilitation, similarly to criminals who have broken the law. Its objective is therefore to rehabilitate the “terrorist” so that s/he relinquishes violent action and eventually also disassociates from organizations designated as terrorist. Presenting itself as apolitical, the security paradigm is quintessentially political in that it works to maintain a political status quo that favors a monopoly by the state and its agents over the use of political violence. The political-transformative approach recognizes that, while for some the choice to engage in political violence may stem from personal anti-social or syncretic motivations, for the majority on both sides the motivation and self-understanding are largely political. Without working to change the structural political reality that is the root cause of political violence, an approach that addresses only its symptoms remains inherently limited.

CfP, therefore, describes its mission statement as striving to create a model for humanistic values of freedom, democracy, security and dignity for all. We envision Combatants for Peace as a strong, significant, influential bi-national community — a community that exemplifies viable cooperation: co-resistance to the occupation and violence, which forms the basis for future coexistence. Through joint nonviolence in the present, we lay the foundations for a nonviolent future.11

A commitment to non-violent action is here embedded in a larger political vision that includes freedom, democracy and security for both sides. Moreover, rather than simply pacifying people who have previously engaged in violence in a way that benefits the status quo, the organization includes co-resistance to military occupation as a stated objective and recruits Israelis to this cause as well. There is, then, a transformation in which both people formerly involved in the security apparatuses of the state and people who have in the past been imprisoned and branded as “radicals” or “terrorists” commit to a joint effort toward a political goal. This approach rejects their former use of violence while still affirming the legitimacy of their original political motivations.

Community

Finally, in contrast to the security approach that seeks to pacify the individual by separating him/her from a perceived “radical” collective or environment, the civil society approach focuses on individuals as always embedded within communities. CfP’s goals thus emphasize community work. They include, in their words:

1) Building an ever-expanding Palestinian–Israeli joint activist community based upon CfP’s bi-national regional groups that embody our vision and serve as a model for both societies and their future; 2) Motivating broad and effective bi-national, nonviolent activity promoting freedom and security for both peoples in their homeland; 3) Changing attitudes on a wide scale, both within the Israeli and Palestinian public, as well as with governmental decision makers (stress added).12

The organization’s activities reflect this community-centered approach. There are six regional bi-national groups that bring Israelis and Palestinians in their areas for joint activities (Nablus–Tel Aviv, Qalailya–Tel Aviv, Bethlehem–Jerusalem, el-Quds/Jericho–Jerusalem, Ramallah–Jerusalem, North and Hebron–Beer Sheva). The focus of activities is determined
by the regional group itself according to local priorities. These include social and recreational activities such as bi-national tours and meetings, as well as more explicitly activist work such as helping villagers re-build after army demolitions, advocating against land expropriation, and non-violent protests on local issues. The organization also runs a theater group and a women’s group, and former combatants visit with schools and communities to share their stories about transition from violence to non-violent activism.

The most far-reaching action by the group is the Joint Israeli–Palestinian Memorial Day, run jointly with other peace organizations, which has been held annually for the past 11 years. The Memorial Day brings people from both sides to remember together the victims of the conflict who have lost their lives in the violence it perpetuates. In 2016 there were 2,500 attendees, and by 2017 the number had grown to 4,000. Hostility toward the event still exists in both societies. In 2017 the Israeli army prevented Palestinian families attending the event, and right-wing Jewish protestors attacked participants. Nevertheless, the high attendance is noteworthy, and the wide media coverage of the event has raised awareness of it in both communities.

Other civil society initiatives abound in Israel/Palestine, although CfP is unique in that it was established and is managed by former combatants on both sides. Fascinating examples of non-governmental efforts include the Bereaved Families Circle, a group of Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost loved ones in the conflict and who meet with students and other groups on both sides to share their stories and advocate an end to the occupation and to violence. The Circle has organized the joint Memorial Day ceremony with CfP in order to highlight the human costs of the violent status quo. Another example, from the Israeli side, is the Adam Institute for Democracy and Peace (n.d.), which runs educational programs throughout the country that focus on pluralism, tolerance, respect for human rights, democratic practices, and peaceful conflict resolution. Participants in the Institute’s programs over the years number in the thousands and include children and youth – from kindergarten to high school – educators, journalists, women’s rights activists, and civil society leaders.13

There are many other civil society initiatives on the Israeli side. Many of them coordinate through the Peace NGOs Forum, which is a platform aimed at networking and coordinating their efforts to get Israelis to recognize the need for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict through an end to the occupation.14

On the Palestinian side, given the asymmetric nature of the situation where Palestinians lack the same resources and freedoms available to Israelis, there also exist some civil society initiatives that promote non-violent approaches to the occupation. The Holy Land Trust, for example, established in 1998 and based in Bethlehem, works “through a commitment to the principles of nonviolence … to strengthen and empower the peoples of the Holy Land to engage in spiritual, pragmatic and strategic paths that will end all forms of oppression.”15 The Wasatia (moderation) project, started in 2007 by Prof. Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi (formerly of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem) is another such initiative. The goals of his work, as he articulates them, are to simultaneously promote religious moderation and to end the occupation through non-violent means, seeing these two as interconnected. The most high-profile project in the initiative was an educational trip for Palestinian university students to Auschwitz and other death-camp sites in Poland in 2014. The goal was to learn about the Holocaust and become familiar and more empathetic with the Jewish historical narrative. Even though this work has been limited and did not generate much support in Palestine, it is noteworthy to quote here the ambitious mission statement of Wasatia (n.d.):
(a) To bring a deeper and more rational understanding of Islam to Moslems as well as to non-Moslems. (b) To clarify the distortions to which Islam has been subjected at home and in the West. (c) To educate Palestinians on taboo topics such as the Holocaust taking a new humanistic approach. (d) To seek answers for the deep religious, political, social, and economic crises inflicting the Palestinian society. (e) To strive and work for ending the Israeli military occupation through negotiations and peaceful means. (f) To spread and promote Islamic tolerant concepts, values and principles within the Palestinian community. (g) To encourage the practice of moderation among Palestinians in order to mitigate religious radicalism and bigotry and reduce political extremism. (h) To bring a message of peace, moderation, justice, coexistence, tolerance, and reconciliation to Palestinian community through vocal civic leaders. (i) To teach creative and critical thinking and open-mindedness. (j) To empower the potential for leadership in their society. The goal of dialogue and education is to deconstruct mythologies and distortions and misinterpretations and to promote knowledge and empathy for the other. Wasatia addresses all aspects of life: the way we eat, the way we dress, the way we spend money. Moderation is a value shared with the various thinkers and philosophers as well as all faiths and therefore could become a fruitful foundation for dialogue to achieve peace and reconciliation.¹⁶

Wasatia now works in cooperation with a German university to offer MA and PhD courses in peace and non-violence research. Another example is Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy (MEND), which was founded in 1998 and has engaged in projects such as:

Active Nonviolence Network in 9 centers throughout Palestine, including the Gaza Strip; Preparing alternate curriculum which aims to promote acceptance of the “Other”; Distribution of Bumper Stickers which question the outcome of violence; Radio Soap Opera program which promotes the value of nonviolence; Training for children and teachers in over 35 schools including the Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jericho, and Bethlehem areas; Video Conferencing Debates on Nonviolence between activists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.¹⁷

Despite their lofty aims, there are several major challenges that plague these civil society political-transformative efforts. First, in terms of resources, civil society organizations of this nature are at an incredible disadvantage in comparison to the funding available to the state security apparatuses (both Israeli and the Palestinian Authority), and to non-state armed groups (such as Hamas). While a group like CfP relies on small and often non-sustainable donations from foundations, Western governments, and communities (CfP’s total budget, for example, was around 900,000 NIS in 2014 and 2015),¹⁸ state and non-state military actors enjoy budgets of hundreds of millions of dollars. Funding for civil society organizations is often project-based, entailing short life-cycles for projects, little sustained support for long-term operational costs, the need to compete with other organizations for funding, and of course the need to adjust to the objectives and agendas of donors at the expense of autonomy and grassroots independence. Second, due to limited resources, not enough funding is available for systematic evaluation of such groups’ impact and the creation of strategic planning for scaling their work. This is an area where academics might assist practitioners. While civil society practitioners often lack the funding for scientific evaluation of outcomes, academics might volunteer their time and social scientific skills to collaborate in such an
endeavor. Even though most organizations cannot afford to pay for these services, academics might benefit otherwise through access to data, generating publications, and contributing to the accumulation of a rigorous body of knowledge (see Chapter 2).

Finally, because of their bi-national joint activities, such organizations are often branded as “collaborators” and “traitors” by hawkish groups in their respective societies, and even by representatives of the state. For example, a different organization called “Breaking the Silence,” consisting of IDF soldiers who have served in the occupied territories and who strive to raise awareness of the toll of the occupation on the moral and mental wellbeing of soldiers, has been a target of government attacks. Ministers and politicians have taken steps to bar the group from giving lectures in high schools, military bases, and community centers, and some have even tried to outlaw the group (Alon, 2016; Lem, 2016). On the Palestinian side, those who work jointly with Israelis are increasingly accused of “normalizing” the occupation and denounced as unpatriotic. A stark illustration of this is the fate of Prof. Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi, founder of the Wasatia project. He had to resign from his university position and leave for several years to the US due to death threats and denunciations from students and colleagues who accused him of collaboration with Israel and normalization of the occupation following his trip to Auschwitz (Alexander, 2016).

Conclusion

Israel/Palestine presents a unique case for the implementation of “deradicalization” projects. Israel is often viewed in the literature on security and terrorism as a democratic country facing similar War on Terror challenges as Western democracies, but its situation is far more complex. Because the territories it occupies are adjacent to its own territory, political violence against security services and Israeli civilians has been compared to home-grown radicalism in Western democracies. However, while home-grown radicalism in these countries originates in communities of citizens, in the Israeli context non-state actors using political violence are almost exclusively composed of residents who, because they are Palestinians and not Israeli or Jewish, do not enjoy civil rights. As an occupied population, they cannot vote or be elected to the Israeli parliament, serve in its police or military, and do not enjoy full civil liberties such as freedom of movement, association, assembly, expression, and so on. The non-violent avenues available for this population to express grievances are much more limited in comparison to those available to citizens in a democratic country (for example, protest, lobbying, organizing political parties, pressuring elected officials). The category for comparison, therefore, should be non-democratic contexts such as occupation (for example, Kashmir, Tibet, Iraq, and Afghanistan under US occupation) or non-democratic or semi-democratic regimes (for example, Egypt, Jordan, Russia, and Turkey). Similarly, the Palestinian Authority on the one hand and the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip on the other, are both semi- or proto-states in the sense that they have a government (although under severe restrictions of autonomy by the Israeli occupation) that also displays repressive authoritarian tendencies toward the Palestinian civilian population under their control.

In other non-democratic or semi-democratic cases there indeed have been some successful episodes of deradicalization of non-state actors resulting from various state policies of repression and cooptation, as part of a state-centered security paradigm. There have also been many failures (Loyle, Lindekilde, Nets-Zehngut, Diehl and Steinmann, 2012). Yet in the absence of a true transition to democracy, examples touted as successes have often simply entailed the restoration of the state actor’s monopoly over the use of political violence, rather than a move away from political violence. In this respect, the security approaches to deradicalization employed by Israel, the
Palestinian Authority, and Hamas outlined in this chapter are not very different from these other experiences. However, the civil society political-transformative paradigm as it is taking shape in Israel/Palestine, and which of course draws on examples such as anti-apartheid activism in South Africa or the civil rights movement in the US among others, can perhaps serve as a model for other contexts of military occupation or repressive regimes. The uniqueness of this approach is that it recognizes that political violence is perpetrated by both state and non-state actors, and that deradicalization efforts must target both non-state individuals as well as representatives of the state who participate in such violence. Furthermore, this approach aims at the political, systematic root causes that give rise to political violence and to its legitimation and justification on both sides. Instead of the piecemeal targeting of individuals for “rehabilitation,” the paradigm endows individuals and communities with recognition for the legitimacy of their grievances. It encourages the option of working together with those who are considered “enemies” to address these grievances non-violently. Significant challenges remain in the way of this approach in non-democratic contexts, especially in the absence of willingness by major state and non-state official parties to a conflict to move toward democracy. Even so, both moral-normative and practical considerations, as discussed in this chapter, still make the political-transformative path a more preferred and effective course of action.

Notes

1 By intolerant, I mean Koehler’s definition in this book regarding radical ideologies being ones that “constantly erase and negate alternative or competing definitions of the ideology’s core values and concepts and try to establish a monopoly in this regard. At the same time, the propaganda and group dynamics constantly increase the urgency and importance of the core problems stated through the movement and ideology (Chapter 2).

2 The Gaza Strip has not been internally under Israeli occupation since 2005, but Israel controls its airspace, sea, and all entry points (except for the Rafah crossing that is controlled by the Egyptian military). As part of its ongoing siege Israel heavily restricts the movement of people and goods in and out of the Strip. In October 2018 there were 310 Gazans among the over 5,000 Palestinian security prisoners held in Israeli prisons (B’tselem, 2019).

3 By political violence I mean the use of violence toward political ends. Political violence can be perpetrated by individuals, non-state actors, and states.

4 Between 1964 and 2018, Israel declared as illegal 404 organizations, out of which only two were right-wing Jewish organizations (or 0.4% of the total); the rest were all Palestinian or Muslim organizations. See Terrorists Organization in accordance with the Defense Regulations (Emergency) 1945 and the Prohibition on Terrorist Financing Law 5765–2004 and Declarations on Terrorist Organizations in accordance with the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance No 33 5708–1948 and the Counter Terrorism Law 2016. Available here: www.mod.gov.il/Defence-and-Security/Fighting-terrorism/Pages/default.aspx (Accessed Nov. 30, 2018).


6 ibid.

7 The vast majority of security prisoners are Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, but the data also include a few Palestinian citizens of Israel and Israeli Jews.

8 For example, a Palestinian organization calling for Palestinian sovereignty over all of the territories of Israel and Palestine from the river to the sea could be declared an illegal organization and its participants can be prosecuted as committing a security offence. A Jewish-Israeli organization calling for Israeli sovereignty over the whole same territory, and the denial of Palestinian right to self-determination would not be considered an illegal organization, and in some cases (like the Jewish Home party) would even be invited to join the government. A Hamas capturing of an Israeli soldier would be considered a radical act of violence, while an Israel Defense Forces capturing and...
holding of thousands of Palestinians, and hundreds imprisoned without charges or a trial (through administrative arrest) is not considered a radical act of political violence.


12 ibid.


References


