

## “I’m not the same, but i’m not sorry”

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**“I’m not the same, but I’m not sorry”: Exploring dialogical positioning in the self-transformation of a former politically violent militant**

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5 **transformation of a former politically violent militant**  
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4 **“I’m not the same, but I’m not sorry”**: Exploring dialogical positioning in the self-  
5 **transformation of a former politically violent militant**  
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9 **Abstract**  
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14 This article traces the personal and cultural voices expressed in the life-story interview of a  
15 former politically violent militant regarding her engagement with and disengagement from the  
16 armed struggle. Rather than looking at the macro and meso aspects related to politically  
17 motivated violence, we examine micro-narratives which express individual arguments,  
18 sociocultural discourses, and negotiations within and between them. These are voiced in the  
19 dynamics that take place within the self-system at times of key identity transitions (e.g., from  
20 being a committed militant to becoming a former militant). In this vein, we highlight how the  
21 embodied emotional chords of personal positions, the development of meta-positions, and the  
22 positioning and repositioning movements within the dialogical self, facilitate the emergence of  
23 new and more adaptive meanings in the personal meaning system of former militants.  
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34 **Key-words:** political violence, dialogical self, narrative, life-story, identity, radicalisation  
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39 **Introduction**  
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44 It is well known that terrorism literature tends to be “on a diet of fast-food research: quick,  
45 cheap, ready-to-hand and nutritionally dubious” (Silke, 2001, p.12). The analysis of secondary  
46 data in this field, which tends to originate from sources such as court documents, journalistic  
47 investigations and intelligence reports, is not only problematic (see Vidino, 2011), but also quite  
48 limited when it comes to understanding individuals’ motivations to engage and disengage from a  
49 politically violent organisation (hereafter PVO). However, researchers’ access to individuals  
50 currently engaged or recently disengaged from this type of organisation is extremely difficult and  
51 constrained and can be, obviously, dangerous (Toros, 2008).  
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58 In this context, Horgan (2009) noted that more research should be done, including with  
59 URL: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jconpsy> Email: [raskinj@newpaltz.edu](mailto:raskinj@newpaltz.edu)  
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4 former politically violent militants, who have been disengaged for a long time, having, in some  
5 cases, served prison sentences and re-integrated back into society. Although some researchers  
6 were already doing so, quite a few researchers, in the last decade, have taken this cue, covering a  
7 wide range of geographical locations which have staged armed struggle in the past, such as  
8 Northern Ireland (e.g., Ferguson, Burgess & Hollywood, 2015; Toros, 2012), Italy (e.g., Heath-  
9 Kelly, 2013; della Porta, 2013), Cyprus (e.g., Heath-Kelly, 2013), Spain (e.g., Hamilton, 2007;  
10 Reinares, 2011), and Portugal (e.g., da Silva, 2019). These research projects focused on the  
11 experiences of former politically violent militants because “[t]o know about terrorism and  
12 counterterrorism, it is important to find the voices of those who have experienced them and bring  
13 those stories to the foreground of our analyses” (Heath-Kelly, Jarvis & Baker-Beall, 2014, p.3).  
14 Individuals’ stories and experiences enable the understanding of individual dynamics of response  
15 to tumultuous socio-political contexts – the micro-level of analysis – but also shed light on both  
16 meso- and macro-level dynamics of the conflict (see Viterna, 2013).  
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27 Furthermore, the possibility of this idiographic knowledge results from the fact that each  
28 human being is simultaneously unique and similar to others. Every person has a developmental  
29 trajectory that is impossible to replicate (with his or her idiosyncratic experiences, adaptations,  
30 memories and so on), but at same time universal human patterns are present in this trajectory. To  
31 use an idea borrowed from White (2004), we are bound to an indeterminism (the multiplicity of  
32 trajectories) in the determinism (the human possibilities from development). Thus, we are  
33 interested in clarifying the general processes through which the dialogical self is present in the  
34 narrative accounts of former politically violent militants. One way to study this is through the  
35 detailed analysis of single case studies, which allows in-depth examination of complex  
36 phenomena.  
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45 In this vein, this study focuses on the life story of a former politically violent militant,  
46 who was a member of a Portuguese armed organisation called FP-25 (*Forças Populares do 25 de*  
47 *Abril* / Popular Forces of the 25<sup>th</sup> of April). The FP-25 can be categorised into what Pluchinsky  
48 (1992) named a fighting communist organisation (FCO), which is “generally a small, lethal,  
49 urban terrorist group which is guided by Marxist-Leninist ideology. The ultimate objective of  
50 European FCOs is to overthrow the democratic government in their country of origin and replace  
51 it with a vaguely defined ‘proletarian dictatorship’” (p. 16). In contrast to the most well-known  
52 and well-studied cases of radical left terrorism – the West German Red Army Faction (RAF) and  
53 the Italian Red Brigades (BR) – the Portuguese FP-25 and a myriad of other organisations  
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4 remain understudied.

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6 Therefore, keeping in mind that there is a lack of studies concerning engagement and  
7 disengagement, as well as radicalisation and deradicalisation processes in the context of PVOs,  
8 particularly historical ones, we intend to explore how the understanding of the identity dynamics  
9 at play in these processes can be informed by the Dialogical Self Theory (hereafter DST).  
10 Specifically, this study aims to explore the presence of I-positions that promote engagement vs.  
11 disengagement in a life-story interview. In what follows, we first explore the possibilities offered  
12 by the DST in understanding general processes of self-transformation, but also specific processes  
13 related to political violence. We then present the methodology guiding this study, before  
14 examining and discussing the case study under analysis, and considering future avenues for  
15 research.  
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### 23 24 25 **Self-transformation and the Dialogical Self Theory**

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28 The DST, as conceptualised by Hermans (2001), extends the notion of the self towards the  
29 environment by incorporating the voices of significant other(s) and of valued experiences into  
30 the realm of the self. In this way, external positions can become a part of the extended, semi  
31 permeable self-system. The DST also accentuates the fact that culture and self are deeply  
32 intertwined and acknowledges history, body, and social environment as intrinsic features of a  
33 developing person, who is localised in time and in space. The voice of a group or organisation,  
34 following Bakhtin (1981), may equally be ventriloquised in the words of an individual, giving  
35 expression to a collective voice as we shall see in the present case study.  
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42 The dialogical self presents a paradox of unity and diversity, where change may occur,  
43 but where a sense of self-continuity also tends to be achieved (see Bourke, de Abreu &  
44 Rathbone, 2018). According to Hermans (2018, p. 2), the DST sees the self as “a dynamic  
45 multiplicity of I-positions located in social and societal fields of tension”. New meanings and  
46 possibilities of action emerge through dialogues between different I-positions (Hermans, 1999,  
47 König 2012). In this context,  
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56 “An I-position is a *spatial-relational* act. It exists only in the context of other positions  
57 (e.g., I position myself as strong towards a competitive other and as tender-hearted  
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4 towards a loving other). The act of *I*-positioning is *placing oneself* vis-à-vis somebody  
5 else and, at the same time, toward oneself in the metaphorical space of the self. As a  
6 spatial-relational process it is taking a *stance* toward somebody, either physically or  
7 virtually, and it is a way of addressing the other and oneself via verbal or non-verbal  
8 orientations and communications.” (Hermans, 2018, p.2, original italics)  
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15 In this vein, we are also positioned by others and can retaliate to this positioning with  
16 counter positioning, which may take the form of agreement, disagreement, protest, opposition, or  
17 the exploration of alternatives. Moreover, *I*-positions are often accompanied by emotions.  
18 Hermans (2018, p.9) considers that “as forms of energy, positions radiate to their environments  
19 and in the space between them different kinds of atmosphere emerge”. In this context, positions  
20 with positive emotions make a move towards a situation or object, while positions associated  
21 with negative emotions generate the opposite movement.  
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28 Change in the self-system can also occur when the context changes. New positions  
29 emerge depending on the context at hand and may form coalitions with old positions in the self  
30 system, shifting the balance in the power system. However, change is also facilitated by the  
31 emergence of meta-positions. A meta-position is a spatial concept that can provide an overview  
32 of large parts of the self-system, including patterns and inter-relationships. The development of  
33 a meta-position with a broad scope and a long-term perspective contributes more than most other  
34 positions to the cohesion and continuity of the self as a whole (Hermans and Konopka, 2010).  
35 This specific position, according to Hermans (2018), can have three functions: centralising,  
36 executive, and signalling. This author considers that  
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47 “While *centralising* it [meta-position] brings different and even opposed positions  
48 together so that their organization and mutual linkages become obvious, preventing the  
49 self from becoming fragmented. In its *executive* function it provides a basis for decision  
50 making and action programs, based on the insight in the nature of the specific *I*-positions  
51 and their organization. As *signalling*, it acts as a stop signal for automatic and habitual  
52 behaviour, enabling the self to consider ways to become liberated from rigidly  
53 established or maladaptive patterns of positions. Evaluating them from a broad-scoped  
54 and long-term perspective of a meta-position increases the chances for innovation of  
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4 significant parts of the self.” (Hermans, 2018 p. 30).  
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9 Furthermore, the dialogical self implies not only the cohabitation of different  
10 perspectives, but also the activation of hierarchies. I-positions are often balanced in relationships  
11 of power, some positions being dominated by others, some positions accessible or not accessible  
12 to each other and this is a consequence of the hierarchical nature of any flexible system  
13 (Valsiner, 2007). Hierarchy is a fundamental resource in any relationship, but rigid hierarchies  
14 can be installed, threatening the adaptive qualities of the self. For example, when it is possible to  
15 enter a position, but impossible to leave it we are in an I-prison (Hermans, 2018).  
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### 23 **Political Violence and the Dialogical Self Theory**

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28 The present study is a micro-level analysis of the life story of a former politically violent militant  
29 in the Portuguese armed organisation FP-25. More specifically, it examines the processes of  
30 engagement with and disengagement from a PVO, as well as radicalisation and deradicalisation  
31 through the lenses of the DST. In this section, we aim to define the processes under analysis and  
32 how they can benefit from a DST perspective.  
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38 The motivation to engage with a PVO combines individual and contextual factors, which  
39 impact individuals’ perceptions of the external reality, feeding grievances, and, at times,  
40 intensifying demands for violent actions (della Porta, 2013). In some processes of engagement, it  
41 is possible to witness the development of a revolutionary positioning that implies the pursuit of  
42 political ends through violent means. This is commonly known as radicalisation. Thus, we do not  
43 consider engagement and radicalisation to be the same process, since there can be engagement  
44 without radicalisation and vice-versa (Taylor and Horgan, 2006). We also agree that the term  
45 radicalisation is highly controversial, since, like the term terrorism, it can be used as a label to  
46 pursue certain political agendas in detriment of others. However, we propose to study  
47 radicalisation by analysing the process of dialogues between different I-positions in the position  
48 repertoire of a former militant, using life story narratives. This can be useful to understand the  
49 interplay of different voices that may influence individuals to committing themselves to a PVO.  
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59 Disengagement from a PVO is a very complex process, involving different motives and



options at the individual level, but also being deeply influenced by contextual circumstances. It is common for authors in the field of political violence to support the distinction between disengagement and deradicalisation. While disengagement focuses on “behavioural modification”, implying a physical disconnection from the commission of violent activities (Reinares, 2011, p. 780), deradicalisation is “the social and psychological process whereby an individual’s commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalisation is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity” (Horgan, 2009, p. 153).

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

## Method

### *Participant*

Mariana’s is one of twenty-eight life-story interviews collected for a research project on the narratives of former militants in Portugal (da Silva, 2019). She engaged in the FP-25 at the age

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4 of nineteen and lived several years underground, committing different violent acts. She was  
5 arrested twice and completed a total of nine years in jail. One of her sons was born in jail and  
6 stayed with her until he was 6 years old. At the time of the interview, Mariana was in her early  
7 fifties, married and a mother of two.  
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11 Mariana's case study was chosen to feature in this article due to the identification of  
12 several engagement and radicalisation, as well as disengagement and deradicalisation I-positions  
13 in her narratives account, which shed light on her trajectory before engaging, during engagement,  
14 and after disengaging from a PVO.  
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### 21 *Interview process*

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26 Mariana participated in a semi-structured life history interview conducted by the first author in  
27 February 2013. The semi-structured interview protocol (provided upon request) was developed  
28 in order to explore theoretically driven themes on the processes of engagement/disengagement  
29 (affiliative, personal and social contexts; identification with the organisation) and  
30 radicalisation/deradicalisation (ideology; grievance; approval and operationalization of violence).  
31 The protocol was used in a flexible way to help stimulate reflection co-led by the interviewee,  
32 allowing her to choose which events to recount and how to recount them. Mariana had the liberty  
33 to narrate multi-layered stories about her life, and she was particularly encouraged to recount  
34 autobiographical memories about her involvement with the FP-25. Such memories are not taken  
35 as *the* representation of *the* past reality, but as *a* representation of *a* past reality which is  
36 constructed in the present (Esin, Fathi, & Squire, 2013). This reconstruction of past experiences  
37 is of extreme relevance in portraying Mariana's dialogical positionings, identity dynamics, and  
38 self-transformation (see Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2001).  
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### 51 *Analytical method*

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54 In the current study, a temporal framework defined in a previous study was applied (da Silva  
55 et.al., 2018). The structure and dynamics of Marianas's multivocal self were explored across  
56 three periods of time: engagement with, life within, and disengagement from a PVO. In each  
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4 period, push and pull I-positions voicing engagement and radicalisation, as well as  
5 disengagement and deradicalisation were identified. Two independent coders applied the  
6 following coding procedure:  
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9 1) Each coder analysed the full interview transcript and conducted an independent  
10 identification of Mariana's I-positions in three moments of time described during the  
11 interview: engagement with, life within, and disengagement from a PVO.  
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14 2) The coders discussed the disagreements and reached a consensual final identification of  
15 Mariana's I-positions and the dialogues established among them.  
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### 19 **A case-study of a former politically violent militant**

#### 20 21 22 23 24 1. Engagement with the organisation

##### 25 26 27 28 *1.1. Engagement and radicalisation positions*

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33 At the origin of Mariana's radicalisation process, it was possible to find an external position *My*  
34 *Republican grandfather*, which was represented by tales of a grandfather who was  
35 "systematically arrested"<sup>1</sup>. This external position did not exist in a vacuum in Mariana's self-  
36 system, but it formed a very important coalition regarding her engagement with a PVO with the  
37 internal positions *I as someone who has been ready for the armed struggle from birth* and *I as*  
38 *someone highly sensitive and responsive to social injustices*.  
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45 In Mariana's radicalisation process, this coalition was reinforced by the fact that she was a  
46 politically active student, involved with the very active and oppositional student movement of  
47 the pre-revolution period in Portugal<sup>2</sup>. Unlike her friends at school, Mariana "used to think about  
48 stuff" and she used her "head for something else besides growing hair". Social injustices, like the  
49 ones perpetrated by the Colonial War in Africa, concerned her and made her feel angry, as did  
50 issues in Portugal, such as the homicide of the law student Ribeiro dos Santos by the political  
51 police in 1972. This event caused Mariana's first arrest at the age of 14 when caught sticking up  
52 a poster of Ribeiro dos Santos. Mariana was eagerly waiting for the end of the dictatorship, she  
53 believed it would happen and she wanted to be ready – "At secondary school, I was always part  
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of student organisations, when the 25 April 1974 revolution came, I was waiting for it, there were rumours, I was 16 and I knew, I was organised. So, when the 25 April happened, I was more than available!”

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

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

## 2. Life within the organisation

### 2.1. Engagement and radicalisation positions

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

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4 The second voice of the organisation supporting Mariana's commitment – *FP-25: deep*  
5 *friendships* – showcased the strong sense of camaraderie among FP-25 members. Some of  
6 Mariana's most relevant relationships came from the time of the FP-25, including her partner  
7 and, in most cases, they are as strong in the present as they were in the past – "We have created  
8 friendships that still remain today, stronger than some family relationships. My friends all come  
9 from there, my real friends, on whom I can count. This was created there, we had to trust each  
10 other a lot, there had to be a very strong link between us, we still have it today, not with all of  
11 them, of course, but that's everywhere. I was there, we had a team and the team had to function  
12 as one. And the teams still work today."

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19 Therefore, while living within the organisation, these two collective positions, through  
20 which Mariana shared moments of loyalty, trust, intimacy, and fun with her comrades, formed a  
21 coalition with the core I-position *I as a militant*. This promoted Mariana's commitment and  
22 faithfulness to the PVO. Mariana saw herself as resilient in stressful circumstances and well-  
23 integrated into a group of comrades who shared positive emotions, despite the grim nature of  
24 their activities.  
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## 31 2.2. *Disengagement and deradicalisation positions*

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36 When Mariana focused on the reasons why she started distancing herself from the organisation,  
37 she mainly voiced internal positions rather than external ones, as she did in the previous section.  
38 The confident and cheerful militant was replaced by a tired and disappointed one. Voicing the  
39 *underground* dimension of the internal position *I as a militant*, Mariana started by pointing out  
40 the contingencies of life underground which she used to accept as normal, but that over the years  
41 became very difficult to deal with. These included not being able to have a social life – "the most  
42 difficult for me was that I started to feel like doing a lot of things that I couldn't do. Once I had  
43 to flee the theatre in the middle of the show because the police arrived. If I went to a cafe, I had  
44 to be always attentive to whoever came and left because if the police arrived, we had to leave.  
45 This happened numerous times." – and going through financial trouble and even starvation –  
46 "people think that we robbed money, so we had money... we did not have money, we sometimes  
47 starved". Thus, the relevant, and initially desired and well accepted, I-position *I as a militant*  
48 becomes an I-prison (Hermans, 2018), from which Mariana is no longer able to flexibly move to  
49 other I-positions depending on the context at hand. When *I as a militant* was dominating her  
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4 system, Mariana realised that she could no longer enter into I-positions like *I as a daughter* or *I*  
5 *as a normal person in a cafe*. This dynamic of imprisonment illustrates how a multiplicity of I-  
6 positions are located in social and societal fields of tension, and how a beloved I-position can  
7 become, after a while, an I-prison, reducing the bandwidth of the position repertoire in the self  
8 system.  
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13 In addition, at this point in time, the I-position *I as a mother* became dominant. Mariana  
14 recounts that she got pregnant and decided to have the baby, unlike a previous time when she  
15 chose to have an abortion. This time she was ready to distance herself from the organisation – “I  
16 was getting ready to leave, it was not to give up, but I was 26 and I was basically tired, and I was  
17 a little disappointed at the time too”. Such a process of “getting ready to leave” also allowed  
18 Mariana to create some distance from the dominant collective positions which fuelled her  
19 commitment to the organisation, allowing the emergence of the meta-position *A holistic look at*  
20 *the organisation*. This meta-position had a clear signalling function in Mariana’s self, leading her  
21 to see FP-25’s structural deficits and incapacity to achieve its socio-political goals, as well as an  
22 executive function in her decision to leave the organisation behind.  
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### 33 3. Disengagement from the organisation 34 35 36 37

#### 38 3.1. Engagement and radicalisation positions 39 40 41 42

43 Despite having left the organisation behind, Mariana kept a strong sense of having fully  
44 fulfilled the duty of her I-position *I as a militant* – “I did not stay at home waiting for something  
45 to fall from the sky. I went to war. I fought, I was there, I did not stay put”. At the time of the  
46 interview, Mariana has no regrets in relation to her violent militancy – “I did what had to be  
47 done. Despite everything, I am not at all sorry” – and she showcases the continuation of a very  
48 important collective position between her life within the organisation and her life after  
49 disengaging from the organisation – *FP-25: deep friendships*. She continues to see her comrades  
50 as “brothers” with whom she has “very strong bonds that don’t get lost”. One of them has even  
51 been her partner for the last thirty years.  
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59 Thus, Mariana still stands as a politically radical individual because she is still unhappy  
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4 with the socio-political conditions surrounding her. Despite having assumed the disengagement  
5 position *I as a former militant*, she still disagrees with pacifism – “Non-violent forms of struggle  
6 don’t go anywhere, even today I agree with that. I think people have to take positions. Now I’m  
7 much calmer, but I still don’t agree with it. I go to demonstrations, OK let’s go... but there are no  
8 results, there is nothing. There is just more and more repression” – and defends (in contrast with  
9 her husband) violence – “I think that there are some sectors, and now I’m speaking about  
10 nowadays, I think... (my husband kills me if he hears me say this), but I think that it is still  
11 justified [to use violence], the problem is that we’re all old. I think that it is still defensible. If I  
12 was in my twenties again, they would see. (...) People [nowadays] are amorphous, totally  
13 amorphous.”

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

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

### 3.2. Disengagement and deradicalisation positions

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6 As previously mentioned, becoming pregnant strengthened Mariana's decision to leave the  
7 organisation. However, at this point in time, the organisation itself was nearing its final days  
8 because the police were closing in and Mariana ended up being arrested while pregnant. In  
9 prison, the disengagement position of *I as a mother* was strengthened because she was the first  
10 militant to have a baby in such conditions (there was one other case that can be found in da Silva,  
11 2019; da Silva, et al., 2018). In this vein, she stated that she was the one who opened the way –  
12 “I fought all wars: the birth war, the hospital war, the milk war, the hake war, the dummy war. I  
13 opened the way; my baby was the first one.” It is interesting that Mariana uses the war metaphor  
14 in relation to her experience of having a baby as a prisoner, creating a coalition between the  
15 positions *I as a militant* and *I as a mother*. The former position is now fighting for a different  
16 cause: the life of her child in prison at the mercy of a “truly wicked” man – the General Director  
17 of Prison Services. According to Mariana, he hated her deeply. When her son was born, he  
18 isolated her for twelve days, not even allowing family visits and in her first three years in prison,  
19 he made her move around all the time, isolating her from any support network.  
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31 In prison, Mariana also felt abandoned by the FP-25, particularly by its legal structure,  
32 which was composed of individuals who never engaged in violent acts directly, but who  
33 supported them. She explained that in her view the legal structure and the clandestine structure  
34 were one and the same. However, in the court processes, the people belonging to the legal  
35 structure denied their involvement with the FP-25 in order to avoid a prison sentence and  
36 distanced themselves from the clandestine militants – “I was the terrorist and they had nothing to  
37 do with that.” Thus, throughout her time in prison, Mariana felt angry, upset, abandoned,  
38 downhearted, and disappointed. This strengthened the already existent meta-position *A holistic*  
39 *look at the organisation* and its signalling function. The recognition of the lack of loyalty on the  
40 part of the FP-25 was used by Mariana to explain the emotional wounds she suffered during her  
41 time in prison, fragmenting the image she had of the FP-25 as a united, family-like organisation.  
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51 Thus, at the time of the interview, it was possible to identify two meta-positions in  
52 Mariana's account: one that reflects on and integrates her life course – *I as a result of my*  
53 *personal/social context*; and another that reflects on her involvement with the organisation – *A*  
54 *holistic look at the organisation*. The first meta-position seemed to play a centralising role,  
55 leading Mariana to recognise that she does not have the innocence and illusion of her twenties  
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4 anymore. She was able to acknowledge what was different in the past about herself, expressing a  
5 temporal contrast between a past and a present position, as well as a re-evaluation of the  
6 contingencies of the environment that led her to engage with a PVO. Regarding the second meta-  
7 position, in addition to what has been already said, Mariana was also able to reflect on the  
8 political analysis performed by the FP-25. According to Mariana, this organisation did not lack  
9 political analysis, however, such an analysis was wrong – “We thought that after the PREC<sup>3</sup> the  
10 population would be prepared, but they weren’t.”  
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17 Mariana considered that she invested a considerable period of her life fighting for what  
18 she believed in, but in the end very little has changed. Moreover, while still a member of the FP-  
19 25, Mariana understood that people support violent actions in theory, but when they become a  
20 reality the support disappears – “people were afraid, we had too many years of fascism. I think  
21 that personally they supported us, but they would not go public with it”. For Mariana, this is  
22 something that was still quite clear at the time of the interview, as she explained: “People are  
23 afraid. I wander around in Facebook quite a lot, I don’t comment, but I am there. Today, you can  
24 find 500 thousand people saying things like ‘we should put a bomb here, shoot the legs off that  
25 person, the FP-25 should come back’. But then, in practice, when it is time to show face, those  
26 people are not there.” Mariana felt that although a considerable part of society ideologically  
27 believes in the need for violence, the number of people available to publicly support those who  
28 practice violence is much lower. Thus, nowadays, she is not even part of a political party, like  
29 other FP-25 former militants, because she considered that “none of them fully works for me.”  
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### 43 **Discussion and conclusion**

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48 With this study, we intended to explore the I-positions’ repertoire, and their dialogues, in the  
49 narrative accounts of a former politically violent militant in three different periods of  
50 involvement with a PVO (engagement with, life within and disengagement from a PVO). In an  
51 age where counter-terrorism (CT), countering violent extremism (CVE), and desistance and  
52 disengagement programmes (DDP) proliferate around the world, it is crucial to not only  
53 understand why individuals engage in political violence, but also to focus on why they  
54 disengage.  
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Insert Figure 1 about here

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

The commitment to a PVO gave origin to the core internal position *I as a militant*, which dominated Mariana's self-system for several years, before disengagement positions started emerging. Different subpositions of this core position were developed and entered a coalition with two particular collective positions (*FP-25: ideology, goals, and management* and *FP-25: deep friendships*), helping Mariana to focus solely on the task at hand and to deepen her commitment to the PVO. However, after living six years through the hardships of life underground, it is clear that Mariana began to feel that the core position *I as a militant*, which used to feed her commitment to the PVO, had become an I-prison, which made it difficult for her to take other I-positions which she enjoyed (*I in a cafe* or *I at the theatre*). In this sense, the emergence of the meta-position *A holistic look at the organisation* allowed Mariana to conclude that she was disappointed with the structural deficits of the FP-25 and its incapacity to achieve its goals as well as the fact that she was tired of living underground. This, together with her pregnancy and the lack of support the organisation provided while in prison, shifted the power system in Mariana's self, allowing the I-position *I as a mother* to emerge.

Despite the existence of clear disengagement positions in Mariana's self-system, her actual disengagement happened due to her arrest. New positions emerged due to a different context. Nonetheless, she had to undergo a self-transformation process from the position *I as a*

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4 *militant* to the position *I as a former militant*. Such a process seemed to have been helped by the  
5 emerging position *I as a mother*, which, at least temporarily, joined forces with the position *I as*  
6 *a militant*, which now fought different battles and seemed to have the same monological and  
7 polarised way of thinking. In addition, Mariana still affirms at present her belief of the need for  
8 violence in unjust socio-political circumstances.  
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13 As pointed out by Gadd (2006, p. 196), “desistance from crime does not map neatly onto  
14 the policy-driven search for positive outcomes” or, in this context, to the request that former  
15 politically violent militants should go through a deradicalisation process in order to not be seen  
16 as a danger to society. In this sense, as corroborated by Cherney’s (2018) ethnographic study, it  
17 seems more accurate to expect individuals to stop committing political violence (to disengage)  
18 and to reject violence as a personal legitimate tactic, than to expect a full make-over of their  
19 belief systems (to deradicalise). The focus on the individual in this study does not intend to  
20 suggest that political violence can be explained through individual experiences only. Political  
21 violence is a phenomenon that operates at different levels – macro, meso, and micro – yet the  
22 exploration of individual dynamics, pathways, and perspectives through primary sources is of  
23 extreme importance to the development of integrated and well-informed approaches.  
24 Autobiographical memories are not simply a narrative output, they embody the processes of  
25 meaning construction involved in the ongoing development of a sense of unity and purpose  
26 (McAdams, 2001). In the same vein, retrospective case studies of politically motivated violence  
27 are not disenfranchised from present realities because they put forward similar and relevant  
28 human experiences.  
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41 In Mariana’s case study, it was possible to access and explore the dynamics between  
42 different I-positions, as well as the emergence of meta-positions which play a critical role in  
43 sustaining her disengagement from a PVO (*I as a result of my personal/social context and A*  
44 *holistic look at the organisation*). In this vein, we pose the following questions which need to be  
45 considered in future research projects: What kind of patterns of self-transformation can we  
46 expect from former politically violent militants? Could we conceptualise the self-  
47 transformation process from formerly violent militant to a deradicalised militant as a  
48 cultural transition process? Could a specific process of transformation be facilitated by  
49 using methodologies based on dialogical self theory, like the PEACE methodology  
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4 (König 2012), which have been researched as an effective methodology in cases of  
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6 cross-cultural transitions and coming to terms with different personal cultural positions?  
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9 Future research should explore these questions.  
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12 This case study explores the personal motives of meaning making that cannot be  
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14 generalized to other subjects using dialogical self theory as a lens through which  
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16 personal processes of meaning making are traced in the position repertoire of personal  
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18 voices, in different contexts, at different times during the life span. It could be seen as a  
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20 processual model of multiplicity management through which the process of meaning-  
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22 making during the life span may be explored in any individual case. In our view the  
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24 detailed and intensive study of a single case, in its human and contextually localised  
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26 specificities, can lead to the identification of generic and universal processes, which can  
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28 be generalised to other individual cases (Molenaar & Valsiner, 2008). This constitutes  
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30 the first step in the process of knowledge construction used in idiographic science.  
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32 Thus, the theoretical model here designed, based on empirical data, should now be  
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34 further and repeatedly tested on the basis of other individual cases, in order to refine the  
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36 process and increase its generalising ability.  
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#### 47 **Comment on Frans Wijzen Contribution to the Special Issue**

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51 Wijzen's article looks at polarization and (de)radicalisation in Tanzania through a  
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53 combination of insights from Dialogical Self Theory (DST) and from Critical Discourse  
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55 Analysis (CDA) in the analysis of a single case study, composed of one interview with a  
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57 well-known Muslim leader in Dar es Salaam – Ponda Issa Ponda. The author argues  
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4 that the combination of these approaches makes for a deeper understanding of social  
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6 polarization and (de)radicalisation, since while the DST conceptualizes the self in  
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8 society, CDA offers a better conceptualization of the society in the self.  
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12 In comparison, in our article we equally examined a single life-story interview of a  
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14 former politically violent militant in Portugal – Mariana – regarding her engagement with  
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16 and disengagement from the armed struggle. However, we focused solely on tracing the  
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18 personal and cultural voices taking place within the self-system at times of key identity  
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20 transitions (e.g., from being a committed militant to becoming a former militant), which  
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22 express individual arguments, sociocultural discourses, and negotiations within and  
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24 between them. In this vein, we highlight how the embodied emotional chords of  
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26 personal positions, the development of meta-positions, and the positioning and  
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28 repositioning movements within the dialogical self, facilitate the emergence of new and  
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30 more adaptive meanings in the personal meaning system of former militants.  
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39 Both articles underline the importance of conducting in-depth analysis of single  
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41 case studies of people who have been involved or are still involved with politically  
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43 motivated violence and violent extremism in order to shed light on the general  
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45 processes through which the dialogical self is present in their narrative accounts. While  
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47 Wijzen's article used CDA to carry out a detailed linguistic analysis of his body of data,  
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49 we used a theoretically driven thematic and temporal framework. In other words, we  
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51 coded our interviewee's narrative account according to the main themes encountered in  
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53 the literature regarding engagement/disengagement (affiliative, personal and social  
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4 contexts; identification with the organisation) and radicalisation/deradicalisation  
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6 (ideology; grievance; approval and operationalization of violence); and according to  
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8 three moments of time covered during the interview: engagement with, life within, and  
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10 disengagement from a PVO. According to this thematic and temporal framework, we  
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12 then identified the repertoire of I-positions in the trajectory of a former politically violent  
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14 militant.  
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20 The main distinction between these two articles is that Wijzen's article, by  
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22 focusing on someone who is still currently engaged in radical activities, makes sense of  
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24 how his I-positions repertoire feeds and justifies such radicalism. Our article, by taking  
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26 into consideration someone who has been disengaged from a politically violent  
27  
28 organisation for almost three decades, is able to create an overview of the life course of  
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30 a politically violent militant. Nonetheless, what is interesting is that similar I-positions are  
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32 found in the narrative accounts of the different militants, particularly when it comes to  
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34 reproducing a social justice discourse through their dialogical positioning and to come  
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36 up with meta-positions that bring stability to the turmoil created in the self by opposing  
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38 positions (e.g., *I as critic of the Government* and *I as reconciler* is bridged by the meta-  
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40 position *I as a citizen* in Ponda Issa Ponda's case; *I as a militant* and *I as a former*  
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42 *militant* is bridged by the meta-position *An holistic look at the organisation* in Mariana's  
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44 case).  
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44 contexts and how this influences their wellbeing.  
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47 Mariana's dialogical positioning  
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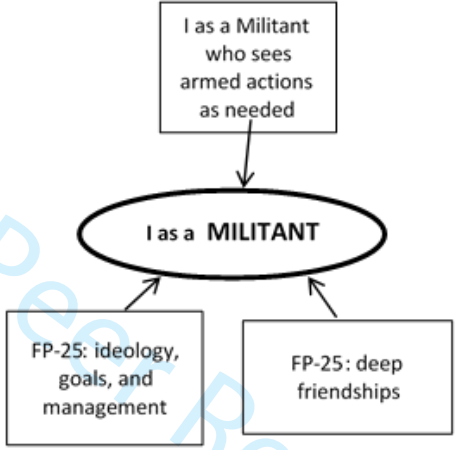
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Engagement/  
Radicalisation I-positions

**Engagement with the organisation**



**Life within the organisation**



**Disengagement from the organisation**



Time

Disengagement/  
deradicalisation I-positions



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