

Master's Thesis Project

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Thank you, to my academic adviser who guided me in this process and kept me on track.

And I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, who had to flee their country for religious persecution by Islamic extremists, making their life in Germany as refugees they never got the chance for education.

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Chapter 1

1. Introduction

Instability and fragile political structures in the Middle East provide fertile grounds for radicalization and create spaces for terrorist organizations to operate. In the past five years, the “Islamic State” (IS) was the most influential terrorist organization because it has attracted people to join them from far away, indicating a transnational outreach of its propaganda. It may seem like a new player in the region but is not an entirely new group.

IS, which in fact has now lost territories in the region, was founded by Mohammed al-Zarqawi and is a direct descendant of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and a byproduct of the Iraq War in 2003. Yet its rapid military expansions in Iraq and Syria, large-scale international terrorist attacks and openly displayed brutality have added a totally new dimension to Islamic extremism and distinguish it from other terrorist organizations.

Its unique power to attract and recruit a large number of fighters from around the world in such a short time has not only made IS a global phenomenon it still poses a permanent threat to many states on the International level. Approximately 30,000 foreign fighters from over 80 countries had joined IS within a time of four years by December 2015. Although the majority came from the Middle East and Muslim countries, 5,000 foreign fighters, a significant number of young Muslims fascinated by Islamic extremism joined IS from European countries with liberal societies.

According to different European countries’ intelligence agency reports, there is a serious threat posed by Islamic extremism. Therefore, terrorist attacks in the past years in Europe and returning IS-fighters have made understanding the process of radicalization even more crucial to preventing.

This thesis will analyze and discuss possible reasons why young European born Muslims were drawn to extremist ideas, leaving even families and friends to join the battlefields in Syria and Iraq. The commitment underlining the decision of an individual leaving freedom, safety and peace behind to join a violent organization should not be underestimated. This shocking decision raises the question of why these young people chose this path or what made them choose

it? Many scholars from different academic fields have addressed this recent phenomenon of radicalization into Islamic extremism, and why some individuals are attracted to terrorist organizations such as IS.

The main problem here is that there is no general theoretical framework, which could reliably explain why people become radicalized.¹ Any approach generalizing radicalization would either produce wrong results and therefore only be applicable to a limited extent. But the various insights, provided by different academic disciplines, are important analytical components which help us to understand the complex process of radicalization into Islamic extremism.

Furthermore, considering the specific danger posed by homegrown Islamic extremists, the importance to develop future-oriented preventive measures has also become quite clear in political, academic and public debates, not only in the context of national security, but also in the context of integration and International politics. To be able to reconstruct the motivations of individuals who joined IS and to efficiently design preventive measures, it is essential to investigate and understand the processes of radicalization leading these individuals into Islamic extremism.

Some possible factors have been discussed and theorized in public debates but still it remains unclear to many public bodies in different European states, how in detail and to what extent those factors affect radicalization processes. This gap in knowledge is also a result of how radicalization is defined or understood by state agencies. While countries such as the UK or Germany dominantly explain radicalization with ideological reasons, others, like Denmark, have a more psychological approach.²

However, scholars criticize that so far, empirical studies on what matters in the radicalization process are missing³. Therefore, I limited my field of interest to essential push and pull factors in the radicalization process into Islamic extremism, theorized and discussed in recent academic literature which could allow relevant actors to make their preventive measures more efficient.

¹ Crenshaw, Martha: The Causes of Terrorism, in: Comparative Politics, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1981, p. 379

² Hardy, Keiran: Comparing Theories of Radicalisation with Countering Violent Extremism Policy, in: Journal for Deradicalization, 2018, p.77-78

³ Ibid., pp. 95-97

1.1. Research Question

Recent debates about radicalization in Europe are constantly searching for the motivations of thousands of young Muslims who left their home countries to fight for IS (and other terrorist organizations) in the Middle East and they continue to be largely centered on the ideological factor. The American journalist Graeme Wood was one of the first who published an article on the topic in the March 2015 issue of *The Atlantic*. He argues:

*“The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. Very Islamic. Yes, it has attracted psychopaths and adventure seekers, drawn largely from the disaffected populations of the Middle East and Europe. But the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam.”*⁴

So according to Wood, what makes the terrorist organization IS so "attractive" for those who support them is (1) their absolute clarity, that is the fact that they do not compromise on religious interpretations, and (2) their apocalyptic prophecies, to which many of their followers constantly refer and feel attracted to. Maybe that is why intelligence agencies, some Islamic scholars, and journalists somehow emphasize this approach as the key motivation for homegrown terrorists to join IS in Syria. The public debate is shaped by overstraining a phenomenon, without empirical references, as the root cause for radicalization into Islamic extremism. It seems that this focus is an attempt to understand how terrorism is justified by those who act with violence. Even so, the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on September 11 in the USA were somehow pushed into the incomprehensible. Violence remains publicly ignored as a rational goal-oriented action, but alas, it is too often explained as a solely performative act, thus supporting the public image and idea that terrorists are (always) mad and that terrorism is an expression of motiveless malignity.

But what if it is neither about religion nor psychopathy? According to the British criminologists Simon Cottee and Keith Hayward (2011), many journalists and scholars who study radicalization often deal with how terrorists act and think, but too few draw their attention on how terrorists feel.⁵ As they suggest in their work, religion or ideology is only part of the story, but an equally important factor for radicalization is the desire for excitement, ultimate meaning and glory.

⁴ Wood, Graeme: “What ISIS Really Wants”, *The Atlantic*, March 2015:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>

⁵ Cottee, Simon & Hayward, Keith: Terrorist (E)motives. *The Existential Attractions of Terrorism. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. 2011, pp. 965-966

So, the main research question of the proposed thesis actually is: *What motivated young Muslims in Europe to join the Islamic extremist group IS?*

1.2. Hypothesis

My key hypothesis is that these young Muslims who have travelled to join IS were radicalized through macro-, meso- and micro-level processes where political grievances, group dynamics and personal victimization merge to push and the desire for excitement, greater meaning and glory pull a person on the pathway to terrorism.

Many scholars understand terrorism as a behaviour, which they study like any other human behaviour. The focus of such research is to create links between terrorism and several assumed characteristics. They aim to explain or combine explanations that make terrorist behaviour plausible. The problem with such approaches is that there is no terrorist personality and that terrorism is not a social phenomenon.

Terrorism, in the sense of the philosopher and political scientist Hannah Arendt's work "*On Violence*" (1970), is a violent tool to achieve rational political goals and can "*never be reliably predicted*"⁶. So, making use of it also becomes important "*for the purpose of multiplying natural strength*"⁷, which makes it dangerous for those who hold power. These attacks are random and those who act violent feel that it is right and necessary to achieve their goal. However, terrorism itself does not provide any answer to important questions such as how they come to these conclusions, what motivates them or how they were radicalized, and which influences have triggered these processes?

According to the sociologist Charles Tilly (2004) "*terrorism is not a single causally coherent phenomenon. No social scientist can speak responsibly as though it were*"⁸. Every research trying to find a universal explanation for terrorism will not reach serious and meaningful conclusions, because there is no typical terrorist behaviour or personality as I will prove it by analyzing the

⁶ Arendt, Hannah: *On Violence*. London: Harcourt, 1970, p. 4

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46

⁸ Tilly, Charles: *Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists*, in: *Sociological Theory*, 22(1), 2004, p. 12

motives of German foreign fighters later in this thesis on the basis of the German intelligence service' reports.

There is a similar problem with individual predictions, for instance with the German security agencies trying to search for indicators to identify future terrorists. No matter what general theory is applied and however sophisticated the methods are, every attempt to identify future terrorists based on certain attributes, behaviour or characteristics will fail. Or to put it in the former CIA Operation Officer and forensic psychiatrist Sageman's (2009) words:

*"Even if we were to describe terrorists perfectly [...], the true terrorists would be drowned in a sea of people fitting the description but having no intention of turning violent. In other words, they would be drowned in a sea of 'false positives' ..."*⁹.

So, radicalization, through which individuals become terrorists, is a fragile process which depends on various factors and events that are not systematically standardized by any general theory. Nor can any of these factors be generalized. According to the founders of "ARTIS International", a scientific research organization which focuses on behavioural dynamics affecting conflicts, Atran and Davis (2009):

*"At best, we may be able to model a set of path-dependent futures for development, possible ways that things might turn out. But the real-world triggers that move things along one path rather than another are often thoroughly unpredictable... Contingent and even random events, involving seemingly marginal and peripheral connection, can become key to how a terrorist group or plot develops."*¹⁰

Yet, the fact that individual predictions are impossible does not mean that researches trying to explain the motivations for radicalization are useless. Even if there is no accurate radicalization-model, the many academic approaches play an important part in understanding this phenomenon. Different academic disciplines provide different perspectives and complement each other well.

However, there are always fundamental disputes between scholars of different disciplines, for instance, political and social scientists accuse psychologists of failing to provide any answer to questions such as how small acts of violence can turn into political violence, and of categorically ignoring political conflicts. Psychologists on the other hand criticize other scholars for not talking to terrorists personally and ignoring the personal agency of the individual here,

⁹ Sageman, Marc: Hofstad Case Study and the Blob Theory, in: Theoretical Frames on Pathways to Violent Radicalization, 2009, p. 15

¹⁰ Atran & Davis: Theoretical Frames on Pathways to Violent Radicalization, 2009, p.11

therefore overrating factors like politics, ideology or religion.¹¹ It is quite clear that not an academic discipline alone can provide a universal or general explanation for the causes of radicalization. But all academic perspectives together offer meaningful insights into the motivations which help us understand how complex the process of radicalization into Islamic extremism actually is and which factors played a prominent role in the radicalization of European young Muslims who joined Islamic extremist organizations such as IS in the Middle East.

1.3. Method

As I have stated in my project description, I am aware of the fact that primary data is mainly missing, which is why I wanted to contribute to filling this gap with my research on the motivations of young Muslims to radicalize. Therefore, I planned to interview experts working with radicalized young Muslims in official de-radicalization programs in Germany.

Now, due to the outbreak of the coronavirus and the country-wide lockdown as of March 2020, it has become impossible for me to conduct any interview. After consulting with my academic supervisor, I decided to use secondary qualitative data which is available and presented in existing research on Islamic foreign fighters. The main results provided by this research are presented in this thesis in the manner of a case study on German foreign fighters, highlighting the different uses of similar data comparatively and critically between state agencies and academic research. This allows me to detect and discuss prominent factors playing a significant role in the research on radicalization into Islamic extremism and will help me to avoid generalizing or simplifying radicalization.¹²

The analysis of secondary data is described as “*the use of existing data to find answers to research questions that differ from the question asked in the original research [and is often used to] apply a new perspective or new conceptual focus to the original research issue*”¹³. Thereby, I will be able to generate new

¹¹ Simon Cottee, “What ISIS Really Wants” Revisited: Religion Matters in Jihadist Violence, but How?, in: *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 40, Nr. 6, 2017, p. 442

¹² Braun, Virginia/Clarke, Victoria: Using thematic analysis in psychology, in: *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 2006, pp. 79-80

¹³ Long-Sutehall, Tracy/ Sque, Margaret/ Addington-Hall, Julia: Secondary analysis of qualitative data: a valuable method for exploring sensitive issues with an elusive population?, in: *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 16(4), 2011, p. 336

knowledge and perspectives on the motivations of young Muslims in Europe to join IS by using existing insights on the radicalization process.

Beside this limited data, I had limited time and numbers of pages to answer the research question adequately. Therefore, in the preparatory phase, I made use of the library and online search machines, looked for relevant publications, and for further references to my research field during the review of different academic articles. Not all of them are based on empirical data but to ensure a good quality of the result of my research, I set some criteria to further sort these references. Hence, I chose and used literature published in the very recent years, after the emergence of the IS-caliphate in 2014, based on empirical data for my analysis to detect prominent factors for radicalization, while for the discussion I also drew on arguments empathized by different scholars discussing Islamic extremism after the 9/11 attacks.

This process allowed me to identify, analyze and discuss arguments on the macro-, meso- and micro-level of the radicalization process and present a broad picture based on empirical data. My aim was not to form a new theory but to present a broad understanding of the topic, generating a research question, formulating a hypothesis and to check my assumptions by a more detailed analysis of empirical data and discussion of these insights.

Moreover, this thesis consists of five chapters and begins with an introductory chapter presenting the research question, hypothesis, and method. Chapter two offers a theoretical framework defining radicalization as a dynamic, multifaceted and complex process. Part three analyzes empirical data and evidence to detect motivational factors in the radicalization of German and Dutch Islamic extremist, as an example for radicalization in the European context. Chapter four discusses the different motivations involved and why they matter in the radicalization of young Muslims in Europe. These causes are grouped into ideological, political, social, psychological and technological factors. Finally, chapter five summarizes the findings by answering the research question and checking the key hypothesis of this paper.

Chapter 2

2. Theoretical framework: Understanding Radicalization

The various causes for radicalization are not just shaping discourses in politics and the media, different academic disciplines are also trying to explain this phenomenon with different theoretical concepts.

Radicalization is a multi-faceted process by which a person's desire to see and participate in profound political changes increases.¹⁴ It relies on various factors and events which are not systematically standardized by any general theory. None of these factors can be even generalized. Certain rational and psychological factors can create a setting for the radicalization of individuals and terrorism (extreme violence) can be the extreme outcome of this dynamic process. For radicalization to occur, the nature and intensity of a person's beliefs, feelings and behaviour must change.¹⁵

The German political scientist Neumann (2017) argues that there is little agreement about how terrorism and radicalization should be defined, but both are somehow (directly or indirectly) linked to a certain violent behaviour. In different ages, radicalism was understood differently, while it was the motto of liberal reformers in the 19th century, Marxist revolutionism was seen as radical in the 20th century. According to Neumann, in both cases there was a desire for a drastic ideological turn from the existing social norms towards a social change via a new political system. And the people supporting such ideas were seen as extremists in the context of their time. The process through which they became extremists is understood as radicalization. Although it is understood as a process, meaning that different stages are involved and that a person does not become radical overnight, it is highly controversial among scholars and different disciplines what causes such processes and where they end.¹⁶

¹⁴ Fraihi, Tarik: (De-)Escalating Radicalization: The Debate within Muslim and Immigrant Communities, in: *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge: European and American Experiences*, Ed. Rik Coolsaet, 2nd Edition, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, 2013, p. 209

¹⁵ McCauley, Clark/Moskalenko, Sophia: Mechanism of Political Radicalization: Pathways Towards Terrorism, in: *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2008, p. 416

¹⁶ Neumann, Peter R.: Was wir über Radikalisierung wissen – und was nicht, in: „Sie haben keinen Plan B“ Radikalisierung, Ausreise, Rückkehr – zwischen Prävention und Intervention, Ed. Jana Kärge, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn, 2017, p. 43

Furthermore, it is important to clarify: What is extremism? Firstly, it encompasses all political goals and ideas which are contrary to socially accepted norms and values (for example: as consolidated in a constitution). Secondly, extremism can be a method and tool (for example killing or guns) actors use to reach their higher political goals. This dichotomy of the term extremism draws an important distinction between (1) cognitive extremism, which focuses on extremist ideologies and (2) violent extremism, meaning the use of violence.¹⁷ The latter is understood as terrorism.

An academic interest for this phenomenon can be traced back into the 1960s when social scientists shaped early theories on terrorism by discussing anti-colonial movements. So, these first theoretical approaches were more or less directly dealing with ideologies which formed the basis of such anti-colonial (and violent) movements. Because of the rise of terrorist groups in industrialized countries, such as the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) in Germany, the focus and interest of academic research on terrorism also changed and many new ideas and theories were published mostly in the 1970s.¹⁸ In the following years publications analyzing this phenomenon mainly adopted earlier theories and concepts and tried to explain the behaviour of individuals turning to violence based on these frameworks. Also, the political scientist and terrorism-expert Martha Crenshaw already criticized the lack of developing new theories on the causes for terrorism in her article of 1981

“Even the most persuasive of statement about terrorism are not cast in the form of testable propositions, nor are they broadly comparative in origin or intent. Many are partial analyses, limited in scope to revolutionary terrorism from the Left, not terrorism that is a form of protest or a reaction to political or social change. A narrow historical or geographical focus is also common; the majority of explanations concern modern phenomena [...] In general, propositions about terrorism lack logical comparability, specification of the relationship of variables to each other, and a rank-ordering of variables in terms of explanatory power”¹⁹

Until a few years ago, this lack of progress was still the case when it came to theories on the motivations for terrorism in the West. Another political scientist

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 44-45

¹⁸ Wessel, Martin Schulze: Terrorismusstudien. Bemerkungen zur Entwicklung eines Forschungsfelds, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft, Vol. 35, No. 3, Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2009, pp. 357-359

¹⁹ Crenshaw, Martha: The Causes of Terrorism, in: Comparative Politics, Vol. 13, No. 4, 1981, p. 380

Moghadam (2006) highlights, that even if there are many new pieces of research in terrorism studies, only a few have tried to systemize those factors on why individuals join terrorist groups and rarely tried to integrate them into a general theoretical framework: *“A number of scholars have stressed the need for a multi-level approach at the etiology of terrorism [...] but few have attempted to conceptualize such an approach in more or less formal models”*²⁰.

Many academic disciplines like sociology, psychology, political studies and criminology are dealing with this phenomenon of radicalization in general. Thereby, many inner- and inter-disciplinary theoretical approaches and empirical traditions are following various research questions. This has led to the problem that definitions of radicalization are often blurry. While previous research on violent extremism tried to explain radicalization by searching for psychopathological anomalies and physical aggression a person might have experienced in their early childhood as the cause for violent and aggressive behaviour, more recent studies focus on the interplay between an individual and their environment.²¹ The (previous) hypothesis of a negative identity and narcissistic aggression thus became less attractive because sociological and psychological approaches are more comprehensive when it comes to personal motivations.²²

This shows that besides the research on the overall causes for terrorism, hypotheses which directly deal with the mechanisms of radicalization are equally important to form new theories. To close this gap, scholars and security agencies, sometimes within cooperation, recently developed different models to further understand how radicalization into Islamic extremism works. They agree that it is a gradual process but the end-point differs depending on which approach a model is based on. Different linear approaches for instance try to present different stages in chronological order, such as the NYPD Model (developed in 2007) which counts four: pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination and jihadization.²³

²⁰ Moghadam, Assaf: The Root of Suicide Terrorism. A multi-causal approach, in: Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism, Ed. Ami Pedahzur, Routledge, London, 2006, pp. 83-84

²¹ Lützing, Saskia: Die Sicht der Anderen. Eine qualitative Studie zu Biographien von Extremisten und Terroristen, Köln, 2010, p. 4

²² Ibid.

²³ Hardy, Keiran: Comparing Theories of Radicalization with Countering Violent Extremism Policy, in: Journal for Deradicalization, Nr. 15, 2018, p. 80

The problem with such models is that they often define Jihad as political violence and assume certain political factors to play a prominent role in radicalization in a static and linear way where terrorism is always the outcome. These ideas often shape official prevention policies unnecessarily criminalizing a lot of people but are not based on empirical references. Such governmental policies should re-focus on terrorism and end their pre-occupation with radicalization if they want to be successful. Radical ideologies or organizations play a minor role in an individual's decision to engage in terrorism. It would be wrong to think of terrorists to be indoctrinated or brainwashed. Radicalization can start to emerge from an intense discussion among friends, whereby the assumed static environments such as mosques by such linear models do not play such a significant role as maybe assumed. Yet religion in general can compensate deeper psychological needs such as the search for identification or purification, suggesting that it is an individual's willful choice to adopt and act in a certain way as a reaction to inner conflicts, rather than all young Muslims who are looking for identity will end up in terrorism. And in that process individuals are trying to make sense of their own personal world. So, radicalization actually is a social process including communication and shared emotions which can be observed among small groups or in a person-to-person relationship instead of in a whole milieu such as mosques or ghettos. And only some few individuals become terrorists.²⁴

Therefore, in order to understand the process of radicalization of young Muslims in Europe into Islamic extremism, scholars suggest a three-tier model which includes political (macro), social (meso) and psychological (micro) perspectives.²⁵

Hence, instead of choosing just one model, it seems more appropriate to me to reflect on both static conditions and dynamic processes here and to present a multi-causal approach to explain an individual's motivations for radicalization comprehensibly. Many abstract and flexible components discussed in the research field are dealing with the causes for radicalization, therefore, I am going to show that two forces are coming into play accommodating certain factors as theorized by different scholars which can (1) push and (2) pull a person towards

²⁴ McDonald, Kevin: *Radicalization*, 2018, pp. 9-11

²⁵ Waldmann, Peter: *Terrorismus: Provokation der Macht*, Hamburg, 2005, p. 17

radicalization. This chapter will present a comprehensible framework that complements environmental causes with a nuanced appreciation of psychological motivations toward terrorism by presenting the dynamism between push and pull, helping us understand what people who engage in violent Islamic extremism believe and feel and what formed their behaviour.

2.1. Environmental push factors

To understand radicalization, it is necessary to look for individual factors, which explain why people even start to think about joining an extremist group. The American psychologist Horgan (2008), defines five push factors that are: (1) emotional vulnerability, (2) dissatisfaction, (3) identification with victims, (4) a person's belief that engaging in violence against the state or its symbols is not inherently immoral and (5) the sense of being rewarded in a movement, which can trigger radicalization with a potential outcome of extreme violence. These risk factors are contextualized in the initial phase of a cognitive radicalization.²⁶ But even if a bigger community or society shares the same values or understanding as a certain extremist group “*it is still the case that extremely few people engage in terrorism*”²⁷.

In addition to that, the American criminologist Agnew (2010) explains with his general strain theory of terrorism why and under which conditions, that are basically disliked by individuals, social and political tensions can then cause terrorism. He argues that it will most likely, but of course not always necessary, lead to terrorism, when people experience collective strains such as (1) high in magnitude, with civilians affected, (2) injustice and grievance and (3) weak ties with the powerful others, including civilians.²⁸

With the term strains, Agnew refers to negative treatments, the loss of valued possessions and/or the inability to achieve (positive) goals.²⁹ And so, these strains are affecting the lives, health, identities, norms and values of a large number of people in a society. In turn the ruling class, or as he calls them “the

²⁶ Horgan, John: From Profiles to Pathways and Roots to Routes: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism, in: The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 618 (1), 2008, pp. 84-5

²⁷ Ibid., p. 82

²⁸ Agnew, Robert: A general strain theory of terrorism, in: Theoretical Criminology, Vol 14, No. 2, 2010, p. 132

²⁹ Ibid., p. 135

others”, is seen by the deprived society as more powerful regarding their resources as a population, support by the civil society and military equipment. The link between the deprived society and the “others” seems weak.

According to Agnew, these intervening variables or repeated stressors should also be considered to answer the question of how a negative emotional condition in a deprived society can become a serious emotional and personal characteristic or attitude on the long-term.³⁰

His key argument is that the effectiveness of these stressors increases through perceived injustice. He further argues that it would also reduce the ability and willingness to cope through legal channels and reduce social control and links and support argumentation patterns or norms and values which support terrorism. These declared supportive goals and ideologies promise gratification, and the perceived obligation to defend or fight for these goals and ideologies are mainly seen as the so-called pull factors.³¹ On this level, he even determines a subjective interpretation of strains, which is strengthened by like-minded people from within the community.³² But the main difference between terrorists and other members of the deprived society is that on the individual level, they have specific capabilities, such as their physical and psychological conditions and skills and their willingness to take risks. On the collective level, it is their technical knowledge, material resources and organization to commit terrorist attacks.³³

With his general strain theory of terrorism, Agnew reflects on the overall conditions for terrorism by highlighting the intervening variables, such as negative emotional feelings, weak social connections and the perceived obligation to defend suffering people. He links the deprived society’s subjective interpretations of the structural environment to the quality and quantity of the social conflicts emerging from it: because the negative emotional condition of the deprived society weakens the physical ties and links between these two societies, this can lead to radical actions and form countercultures in the deprived society. An over-reaction from the powerful “others” then initiates then a spiral of violence and binds the deprived ones closer together.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 139

³¹ Ibid., p. 141

³² Ibid., p. 132

³³ Ibid., p. 144

These two concepts by (1) Horgan, who focus on the initial phase and what triggers cognitive radicalization and (2) Agnew, who analyzes under which conditions a negative emotion can lead up to extremism complement each other and help us understand that some environmental conditions facilitate a pushing force which can motivate people to radicalize.

2.2. Existential pull factors

Another line of argument in the research field of terrorism analyzes the psychology of terrorism. If there is no obvious evidence for environmental causes pushing someone towards terrorism, its cause must be the mind. But what drives a person to turn to violence, and in this case, in the service of a religion? As it was already made clear by examining a theoretical concept above, with the effort to mainly understand what environmental causes push a person to terrorism, this field tries to understand the willful choices of an individual to participate in violence. Here, violence is not understood as a political tool, but as someone becoming violent through psychological (or pulling) forces.³⁴

Early researches on the psychology of terrorism suggested that terrorists must be psychopaths. Even if this hypothesis remained popular, it was dismissed by psychological examinations, for example those of the RAF terrorists in Germany in the 1970s.³⁵ Other psychological approaches attempted to develop a terrorist profile from internal and external characteristics and focused on demographics and socioeconomic profiles finding the average terrorist to be an educated male in his mid-twenties from a middle-class background. The later analyses included more complex psychological characteristics such as personality and upbringing and from these efforts the assumption arose that terrorists are aggressive and excitement-seeking individuals.³⁶ Yet as Crenshaw (1981) highlights there are just very few aspects that distinguish a terrorist from a philosophically radical, *"it is important to avoid stereotyping the terrorist or oversimplifying the sources of terrorist actions. No single motivation or personality can be valid for all*

³⁴ Post, Jerrold M.: Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces, in: *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, State of Mind*, Ed. Walter Reich, Washington DC, John Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 25

³⁵ Crenshaw, 1981, p. 390

³⁶ Victoroff, Jeff: The Mind of the Terrorist: A Review and Critique of Psychological Approaches, in: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 49, No. 1, 2005, p. 7

circumstances.”³⁷ Paranoid, antisocial or narcissistic types of personality might have similarities with terrorist behaviour and are intuitively attractive as simple explanations for a very complex phenomenon, but they have not been found to be empirically true. The contemporary research largely opposes any notion of a typical terrorist behaviour or personality.³⁸

On the other hand, radicalization is often associated with a certain ideology, which is not a necessary precursor for joining a terrorist group, because the motivations of someone joining a terrorist group is much more complex, and often unknown. While according to the Irish sociologist Lynch (2019) the word motivation refers to the drive and desire to act in a certain way, looking for a person’s “*motivations for behaviour is unfortunately often an exercise in speculation*”³⁹, unless they (directly) tell us their motivations. And then, interpreting someone else’s motivations always depends on our own mental and emotional ability, which makes it much more difficult to analyze why it is easier to find many theoretical approaches on environmental causes and reasons for terrorism.⁴⁰

In a more recent article, the Canadian extremism researchers Dawson and Amarasingam (2017) made the effort to interpret and analyze what foreign fighters said in interviews to be their motivations to join IS (and other Islamic terror organizations) in the Middle East and suggest a change of perspectives too, warning not to overstress environmental push factors but also to consider existential pull factors on the individual and psychological level equally. Since the rise of the IS-caliphate around 2014, nearly 5,000 young Muslims travelled from Europe to Syria and Iraq to fight for the Islamic cause, the researchers do not see clear socio-economic and political causes for them to migrate and to engage in terrorism. They argue that religion plays a much more significant role for their migration (Hijrah) and put it into a broader context by linking it “*to the pursuit of greater purpose, meaning, identity, and belonging in explaining why*

³⁷ Crenshaw, 1981, p. 390

³⁸ Sageman, Marc: Hofstad Case Study and the Blob Theory, in: Theoretical Frames on Pathways to Violent Radicalization, p. 15

³⁹ Lynch, Orla: What motivates people to join a terrorist organization?, 2019: <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2018/0529/966842-what-motivates-people-to-join-a-terrorist-organisation/>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

*some individuals radicalize to violence or become foreign fighters*⁴¹. They criticize that many studies overstress social, political and economic factors as relevant to the rise of terrorism and that such push factors are not specific enough and *“invariably far exceeds the few individuals who decide to engage in terrorism”*⁴² and draw their attention to the influence of deeper existential issues involved in the decision to become a foreign fighter.

This article underlines that what all foreign fighters had in common was the *“feeling of apathy and lack in meaningfulness in their lives”*⁴³, so they referred to their emigration not only as their religious duty to establish a caliphate and help other Muslims in need but also as a chance to re-start life. Before they left to join and fight for IS, they isolated themselves from past social networks and involve with few others facing similar challenges in life under the influence of charismatic or inspiring radical figures.⁴⁴

Even if an increase of religiosity or turn to Salafi jihadist ideology and social networks can be observed among foreign fighters, it is suggested that the motive to engage in violence is not primarily rooted in their religiosity but in lacking future prospects which also brings a notion of a revolt of youngsters against society. A strong feeling of exclusion and absence of belonging and how it is related to the turn to religion should also be included into the debate on personal motivations behind their decision to travel far away to join an Islamic extremist organization.⁴⁵

Although this problem of low prospects relates to a large number of people within a society, just few of them engage in terrorist activities. Other data show that other individuals did not come from poor or bad/criminal environments, that they visited universities or had jobs and *“had a fairly happy and privileged [...] childhood [...]”. Several participants made a point of stating that something about the West did not “fit” with their religiosity and that they started feel increasingly out of place.*⁴⁶ They felt the need to study religion because of other

⁴¹ Dawson, Lorne/Amarasingam, Amarnath: Talking to Foreign Fighters: Insights into the Motivations of Hijrah to Syria and Iraq, in: Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Vol. 40, Nr. 3, 2017, p. 193

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 194

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 196

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 199

friends who had already joined some Islamic extremist group and who inspired them, or because of how negative media portrayed the Islamic concept of jihad from their perspective, or because they simply felt the need to rescue and help other Muslims in need by establishing a new social order under a revived Islamic caliphate. Others were attracted by the idea of martyrdom, i.e. to die for the greater cause and give their lives greater meaning and celebrated the martyrdom of others.

Dawson and Amarsingam interpret radicalization of European Islamic foreign fighters as being compensatory, which seems to come from their turn to religion and new community.⁴⁷ They suggest that foreign fighters might have different reasons to radicalize into Islamic extremism, but what all of the interviewees they analyzed had in common was that their lives must have been lacking in meaning, in one way or the other. Joining an Islamic extremist group can therefore also be understood as a quest for self-fulfilment from their perspective, because most of these interviews of foreign fighters indicate a justification of their decision by religious and moral explanations instead of explicitly political or socio-economic reasons.⁴⁸

2.3. “Putting the Pieces Together”

After defining different environmental and existential drives for radicalization, it is essential at this stage of this paper to summarize how radicalization works. Therefore, the remarkable insights of Davis and Cragin’s work “Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together” (2009) will help and cannot be ignored.

Besides discussing the causes for terrorism Davis and Craig present a clearer picture by linking very complex necessary and sufficient conditions and factors and help us narrow down this very broad research field.

They present different complementing figures which

“are schematic, qualitative, analytical models [and] their use in discussion can help avoid fruitless arguments about which factors matter and which do not. [Because] when

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 206

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 201

experts argue on such matters, they are often talking past each other because they have studies terrorism in different contexts and with different disciplinary paradigms.”⁴⁹

In the figure S.1. they arranged primary root causes in the shape of a "factor trees", in which they include all potentially relevant factors. All of these factors are important or thought to be significant sometimes, even if the relative significance varies greatly. All factors, be it independently or in combination with others, can matter as the push factors for radicalization in context.⁵⁰ They show that if (1) there is a collective actor who sees violence as a legitimate tool *and* (2) push factors appears as a strong motivation (perceived grievance) *and* (3) social mobilizing structures exist, the likelihood of terrorisms increases. All three factors in this model are seen as necessary conditions, as indicated by the “ands”.

Reading down the tree, multiple links contribute to each of these major factors. The acceptance of extreme violence can then be justified culturally or socially, *or* through political repression, *or* the perceived illegitimacy of the regime, *or* because of foreign occupation. These are to be read as “*alternative permissive factors*”⁵¹. Not all of these factors are necessary, but any single factor here, or the combination of two might be sufficient for radicalization. The word “or” is operative.

Figure S.2 summarizes individual motives for terrorist engagement that are also based on the understanding that there is no typical terrorist profile or character. Here, they include insights from psychology, social science and religious studies. This supports the prominent hypothesis that terrorists are psychologically normal. This factor tree mainly highlights two important motives such as (1) group social processes and (2) expected reward, in a combination with the following listed motives as the felt need to respond to grievances and a passion for change. The first branch is an essential precondition for radicalization into extremism. Besides, the (social) group plays an important role here because group processes have the power to assure individuals that their path is correct and to justify an ideology. It also strengthens the motivation and helps dehumanize the enemies. These group processes function in one or both ways.

⁴⁹ Davis, Paul/Cragin, Kim: Social Science for Counterterrorism: Putting the Pieces Together, Santa Monica, 2009, p. xxii

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. xix

⁵¹ Ibid., p. xxi

There may be a top-down approach, where recruiting is initiated by an extremist group or a bottom-up process dominated by social bonds and influences. Either way, strong feelings of alienation in Muslim groups may determine the success of recruitment and radicalization because "*it draws individuals to places where they can meet and identify with like-minded people*"⁵². This alienation is fed by the above-mentioned static conditions (political, social and economic discrimination).

The second branch combines group processes with the focus on the gratification of terrorist engagement, which is grounded in the intensively and individually experienced solidarity, friendship and excitement, in achieving a higher social status and the heavenly gains of martyrdom.⁵³

The other two key motivations on the right side of the factor tree are psychologically different. The felt need to defend a certain group is more of a sense of necessity, and the other is a religious or political passion for change, such as establishing a caliphate. But both motivational sets form the ideological basis for radicalization into extremism. "*Neither is in itself a necessary factor but at least one is likely required.*"⁵⁴

Finally, at the bottom, there is the existence of charismatic leaders as well as other contextual factors shown in this figure, which affect some but not all of the items above.

Even if there is just little support for extremist groups, they can still exist if a certain political infrastructure allows them to somehow operate autonomously. But without any social support, the chances to survive for such a group are very small. So, figure S.4 indicates possible types of support needed and from where it may come. All three top-level factors for support are needed, as (1) the felt need for resistance or action-by-proxy for public good, (2) identification with the terrorist organization and (3) pressure to support that organization. The aspect of identification seems to be the most important factor for support here.⁵⁵

With systematized data and their interpretation, Davis and Cragin offer a rare density and analytical depth in the research field on the motivations for terrorism. They also include the dichotomy between statics and dynamics, so they

⁵² Ibid., p. xxvi

⁵³ Ibid., p. xxiv

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. xxvi

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. xxviii

differentiate between structure and processes, on the level of their analysis. Furthermore, they extend their analysis by differentiating between structures and actors. So what makes their work so interesting is that they differentiate between the level of analysis and the categories of variables and present a picture that can be compared to a 3D-model by linking situational variables, individual motivations for participation and the strategy of a terrorist organization with top-down approaches that seek the seeds of terrorism in political and social circumstances, and bottom-up approaches that explore the characteristics of individuals and groups that turn to extremism and summarizes all essential aspects of radicalization for this paper.

Chapter 3

3. Analysis: Causes for Radicalization into Islamic extremism

Radicalization is a complex and multi-faceted process. Some might differ between the causes of terrorism and personal motivations, but as I already determined various levels of analysis in the previous section and underlined the complexity of the radicalization process and its dichotomy by highlighting dynamic variables in such processes and how structures and actors related top-down and bottom-up approaches work, it is not possible to draw a clear line between each of these. Nevertheless, it would be more appropriate to answer the research question of this thesis to analyze different lines of arguments instead of focusing only on the overall causes (macro-level) or only on personal motivations (micro-level), before coming to a conclusion.

To understand the process of radicalization of young Muslims in Europe into Islamic extremism, I presented a theoretical framework for a multi-layered model. Now by analyzing secondary data, I will focus on the case of German foreign fighters as an example to study radicalization in a European context. It will help me reconstruct their motivations with some empirical references. Hence, primary data and empirical studies in the research field on which factors matter more or less are rare.

The political scientists Biene et al. are criticizing and highlighting that if there are German reports which collect (and examine) direct information on foreign fighters, they are mainly published by intelligence and security services that are not transparent about their methods and mostly dealing with security issues to design preventive or predictive measures from it. This contributes in turn to shape the public discourses and can lead to wrong assumptions among the public as well.⁵⁶ This makes it interesting to study these views critically and check if other studies dealing with the same issue come to similar or other conclusions and why it is so.

⁵⁶ Biene, Janusz/Junk, Julian: Salafismus und Dschihadismus Konzepte, Erkenntnisse und Praxisrelevanz der Radikalisierungsforschung. In: „Sie haben keinen Plan B“ Radikalisierung, Ausreise, Rückkehr – zwischen Prävention und Intervention, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn, 2017, p. 119.

Therefore I will now analyze the data provided by the German intelligence service “Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz” (BfV) in their latest official annual report published in June 2019 and another study of the information available to the German security agency about the radicalization background and development of people who traveled from Germany in the direction of Syria out of Islamist motivation (2016)⁵⁷ and will compare this data in a critical manner with other academic researches on German foreign fighters. In the end, I am going to compare the German case with a study on the radicalization of a Dutch Islamic extremist group to see if there are any parallels in the radicalization of young Muslims in another European country.

3.1. Case Study: German foreign fighters

Instability and fragile political structures in the Middle East provide fertile grounds for radicalization and create spaces for terrorist organizations to operate. The IS is currently the most influential terrorist organization because it has attracted people to join them from far away, indicating a transnational outreach of its propaganda.

It may seem like a new player in the region but is not an entirely new group. IS, which in fact has now lost territories in the region, was founded by Mohammed al-Zarqawi and is a direct descendant of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and a byproduct of the Iraq War in 2003.⁵⁸ Yet its rapid military expansions in Iraq and Syria, large-scale international terrorist attacks and openly displayed brutality have added a totally new dimension to Islamic extremism and distinguish it from other terrorist organizations.⁵⁹

Its unique power to attract and recruit a large number of fighters from around the world has made IS not just a global phenomenon but its networks, propaganda and the returning foreign fighter still poses a permanent threat to many states on the international level. Approximately 30,000 foreign fighters from over 80 countries have joined IS within a time of four years by December 2015.

⁵⁷ Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV): Analyse der den deutschen Sicherheitsbehörden vorliegenden Informationen über die Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien ausgereist sind, Köln, 2016.

⁵⁸ McCants, William F.: The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2015, pp. 146-7

⁵⁹ Cottee, Simon: Pornography of ISIS, 2019, pp. 20-21

Although the majority came from the Middle East and Muslim countries and some thousands of people have joined IS from European states with liberal societies, such as Germany.⁶⁰

Germany has the largest population in the European Union and is a generous social welfare state, guaranteeing housing, social security, free healthcare and education to every resident. There is no obvious instability or fragile political structure in Germany, but 20 per cent of all European foreign fighters who joined IS are from Germany. The value to study the case in particular of German foreign fighters lies in the search for their motivations. Therefore, I will now analyze the recent developments presented in official reports on Islamic extremism in Germany and will examine figures to see how the motivations of German foreign fighter are explained by figures presented in intelligence service reports. I will check their insights by comparing them to other studies, which will then help me to detect prominent factors for radicalization into Islamic extremism to discuss them later in the next chapter.

3.1.1. Assessing the situation in Germany

The German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution – *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (BfV) is constantly observing extremist organizations and evaluating how and to what degree they pose a threat to the core democratic values and norms defined in the German constitution guaranteeing freedom and security to all people living in Germany. This Institution was founded to collect information on the national and state levels and gain insights about security-related illegal operations and predict violent attacks, observe violent tendencies and other trends among extremist groups.⁶¹

The BfV operates under the Ministry of the Interior, had 3,505 employees and was granted an annual budget of over EUR 345 million in 2018.⁶² Every year the BfV publishes a report based on the insights of their surveillance operations inside extremist milieus. They do not claim to have complete figures but present their knowledge on all relevant developments of anti-constitutional activities and

⁶⁰ Benmelech, Efraim/Klor, Esteban: What Explains The Flow Of Foreign Fighters To ISIS?, National Bureau of Economic Research, Massachusetts, 2016, p. 1. Online Source: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w22190.pdf>

⁶¹ BfV: Verfassungsschutzbericht 2018, Berlin, 2019, p. 15

⁶² Ibid.

tendencies in political extremist milieus. The method used by the BfV is quite simple, they use general information available to them on ideologies, structures, public activities and publications of extremist organizations and evaluate these sources to measure the risk-level and a general threat posed by different extremist organizations in Germany.⁶³

This report presents three main chapters dealing with different organizations among radical milieus such as (1) right-wing extremism, (2) left-wing extremism and (3) Islamism and notes that all figures reported in this report are estimated based on the information gained from the above-mentioned sources. It neither defines radical or extremism nor differentiates between these two, so I assume that every activity or anyone expressing something against the values and norms defined in the German constitution falls in this category.

Furthermore, they do not base their insights of this report on the personal data of members of any organization but paid special attention to political active extremists.⁶⁴ Yet they do not further define how they evaluate structures, activities or on what basis they assess total numbers at all in this report.

However, the chapter on Islamism starts with a positive statement regarding Islamic extremist activities in Germany, nothing that there has been no terrorist attack by Islamists in 2018 and that a series of planned attacks could be successfully prevented by security agencies. The majority has been planned by individuals or a pair of two who had clear links to the Salafi network.⁶⁵ Even though there has been no terrorist attack in Germany in 2018, the report states that the risk-level for Islamist motivated attacks in future is very high because Germany is named as a clear target in many Islamist propaganda videos and was already hit by several terrorist attacks in the past years.⁶⁶

The actual threat posed by Islamist becomes quite clear by looking at the actual numbers and dynamic developments in the political Salafi milieu. They counted a total number of 11,300 active members in this radical milieu – two years ago

⁶³ Ibid., p. 16

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 19

⁶⁵ Ibid., 172

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 171

they counted 9,700 members.⁶⁷ Another figure shows that from 2011 to 2018, the numbers tripled.⁶⁸

The Islamist milieu in Germany is heavily influenced by Salafi ideology propagated by religious preachers and “charismatic leaders” also recruiting for Jihad.⁶⁹ Salafism is defined in two ways, first as an extreme ideology and secondly as an extremist counterculture which presents an alternative way of life to the normative culture. The method of the Salafi movement to attract recruits is to present an exclusive environment and create an intensive feeling of togetherness and shared religious identity. The report says this has somehow attracted mainly marginalized “lost people” to join such milieus.⁷⁰

The report states that political and Jihadist Salafist share the same agenda, but the difference between them is that Jihadist Salafists pursue their goals with violence, and political Salafists mainly do missionary work and propaganda. Still both are seen dangerous by the BfV because the concept of Jihad links them to terrorist groups such as IS or Al-Qaeda who claim to fight against corrupt regimes and infidels at war against Islam.⁷¹ The numbers of their members have increased until 2018 although they do not appear and recruit publicly anymore. So, the report emphasizes that they have shifted their political and missionary activities to propagate Jihad into the private sphere, which makes it difficult for security agencies to evaluate their activities.⁷²

The report concludes that radicalization into Islamic extremism is not just a matter of attitude or mentality such as strictly observing the tenets of the religion but also has a very violent outcome in a significant number of cases. The number of radicalized people who migrated to Syria and Iraq to join terrorist organizations such as the IS rose and showed a connection with the Salafi milieus in Germany.

The BfV confirms 1,050 cases of individuals (approx. 20 per cent of all foreign fighters from Europe) who travelled from Germany in the direction of Syria out of Islamist motivations in the period from 2011 to December 2018. The majority

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 178

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 193

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 176

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 194

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 170

⁷² Ibid., p. 176

of them is less than 30 years old. Moreover, nearly 200 people have died in Syria and Iraq fighting for IS. The peak of foreign fighters travelling from Germany was in 2014, and the number of Islamists migrating towards Syria and Iraq declined since 2015. The BfV explains this development with the failure of IS and losing its military power over territories in the Middle East and the online-messages by their leaders towards IS-supporters not to travel to the caliphate anymore but to prepare for Jihad in the West.⁷³

Furthermore, there is evidence that 110 foreign fighters have returned to Germany in 2018. More are expected to return gradually over the next few years. These foreign fighters and their terrorist agenda represent an imminent risk because they have been indoctrinated or trained in terrorist tactics or engaged in the battlefields in Syria and Iraq. They could therefore still commit attacks or recruit and train new members on the long-term in Germany.⁷⁴ Also, other European foreign fighters have returned to their homes. The BfV notes that the links/friendships between foreign fighters and terrorist networks have shifted from the battlefield in Syria and Iraq towards Europe. Even migration waves from the Middle East increases the chances for Jihadist from non-European countries to enter Germany and get in contact with their comrades and Salafists or to build new networks. This development is creating new challenges for all security agencies in Europe. The BfV expects that numbers of Islamist in Germany will significantly increase in the future mainly recruiting an operating underground across national borders throughout Europe.⁷⁵

3.1.2. Characteristics of German foreign fighters

The second report published by the BfV in cooperation with the Federal Criminal Police Office in October 2016 analyzed personal data on the radicalization background and development of 784 foreign fighters who travelled from Germany in the direction of Syria and Iraq out of Islamist motivation. This report is an update of a report first published in 2014 analyzing the foreign fighter movement over a four-year period (2012-2016).⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid., p. 188

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 190

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 190-1

⁷⁶ BfV, 2016, p. 4

It also states that the peak of foreign fighters travelling to the Middle East was reached in 2014 and is seen in direct link to the proclamation of the IS-caliphate in the same year. It is assumed that a revived caliphate has mobilized not just Salafists but also emotionalized and caused many debates among other Muslims opening towards cognitive radicalization. In addition to the revival of a so-called caliphate, Salafists in Germany organized events to propagate their extremist ideology and attract people to support this caliphate, promising a powerful representation for all Muslims, and they recruited new members using the political conflict in the Middle East by creating a sense of a universal brotherhood pulling especially Muslims in the West who live under non-Muslim governments to join the caliphate and defend their Muslim brothers suffering in the Middle East against corrupt regimes and the West being permanently at war with Islam. This is an important point because even though a caliphate does not exist (anymore) and that IS has lost territories, and Salafists do not appear publicly, their ideology and method of fostering a universal brotherhood is appealing and has not lost any of its attractiveness, even if the number of their public activities decreased significantly. Similar to the statement made in the annual report, this report supports the argument that although IS has lost the fight, the aim of Islamists remain the same and it is anticipated that the threat has now shifted from the Middle East to “countries in the West” because a large number of German foreign fighters already returned home and others are expected to return soon.⁷⁷

Other than the annual report by the BfV which is formulated in a very general manner evaluating the risk level in general, this report seeks to inform on the radicalization background and development of 784 foreign fighters who travelled from Germany in the direction of Syria and Iraq out of Islamist motivation with more detail. It focusses on the foreign fighters’ backgrounds and on which factors played a role in the radicalization processes. This report aims to re-construct the motivations of German foreign fighters to join Islamist terror organizations in the Middle East by looking at their living conditions, environmental settings and socio-demographics to find links and similarities between individual cases.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 5

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 6

It is also based on a quite simple method, similar to the annual reports of the BfV, but with one major difference: the data used to design this report was person-related data collected on the state level by the criminal police, for example through criminal records if available or de-radicalization initiatives. These initiatives deal mainly with the environment of radicalized people and advise parents or teachers but also collect data and inform the criminal police on the state level about individual cases. To evaluate these individual cases, the BfV involves the use of questionnaires sent to the criminal police offices in all 16 German states. Those include 22 questions focusing on biography and environments. Also, this report doesn't claim to be sufficiently complete but notes that because of much better surveillance work and more detailed information collected by the criminal police and de-radicalization initiatives, this report presents improved data, compared to the 2014 report. An indicator was used to measure how much information exists, graded on a scale from 0 to 22 (with 22 meaning extensive data). While back in 2014 the average was 11,7, in 2016 the value of data increased to 15,7 and is seen as an improvement to gain more in-depth insights on the radicalization processes.⁷⁹

This report indicates that 80 per cent of the 784 German foreign fighters are young men with an average age of 25,8.⁸⁰ Nearly half of them are single, and approx. one-third are married and the majority of them have children. A bit more than 50 per cent had their household, the other half lived with their parents and other relatives.⁸¹

The majority of German foreign fighters were born Muslim, in 134 confirmed cases they were converts.⁸² A large number of German foreign fighters have joined the terror organization "Islamic State" in Syria and Iraq. Approx. 80 per cent of the foreign fighters migrated intending to join the Jihad and other evidence highlights that 27 per cent also stated that their motivation was above all was to live in a caliphate, under Islamic rule, some very few even also migrated even for marriage reasons.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.9

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 12

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 13

⁸² Ibid., p. 17

⁸³ Ibid., p. 26

Nearly 200 have died in Syria and Iraq since, and approx. 400 people have returned to Germany until December 2018 while the remaining approx. 200 foreign fighters are assumed to be in prison or living underground.⁸⁴

The majority travelled in small groups, mainly with friends, some were even accompanied by their family, including their partner and own children. The peak for the migration movement of foreign fighter towards Syria was reached in 2014 when the IS-caliphate was established in Syria and Iraq. These insights indicate that a desire to live under a new order, the utopia of a better world, might be the main reason for the migration of such large numbers.

Moreover, the study found that 62 per cent were born in Germany - 35 per cent held only German citizenship, and up to 27 per cent were dual citizens. So the majority of German foreign fighters are German citizens, which emphasizes that the causes for radicalization have to be studied within a specific German context. Therefore, the report presents certain environment and (infra)structure-related numbers. The majority lived in cities or at least metropole regions where a strong Salafi network already existed and recruited people very actively.⁸⁵ 50 per cent, that is a large number of all foreign fighters, were from 11 cities. These few cities are characterized as socially and economically poor areas with ghetto-like suburbs inhabited by a large number of migrants living. So, first of all, the foreign fighter movement is understood by the BfV as a mainly urban phenomenon.⁸⁶

This report also links poor living conditions in such areas to criminal milieus existing in these cities, and saying that two-thirds of all German foreign fighters already had criminal records before they became radicalized in a Salafi network: 47 per cent for cases of violent crimes, 41 per cent for property crimes and 12 per cent for drug law offences.⁸⁷ The majority of them have been convicted several times for minor crimes. Furthermore, this report shows that since they have become active Salafists, a new pattern of crime can be observed. The number of offences shifted slightly from minor criminal activities towards politically motivated criminality, which was indicated by 189 registered cases.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Numbers from the annual report included here to present a clearer picture

⁸⁵ BfV, 2016, p. 15

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 14

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 18

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 18-9

These numbers emphasize that Salafi missionaries prefer to recruit predominantly small-time criminals in economically and socially unstable environments and that their ideology seems to attract quite a large number of young people from these affected environments. However, the already much lower psychological barrier towards committing a crime and taking risks indicates a readiness towards Jihad. As already discussed above in the theoretical framework, a positive attitude towards risk-taking is an important aspect and indicator of why some people commit terrorist attacks, while others, the large majority that is, might only radicalize cognitively but do not engage in violence practically.

Moreover, the BfV highlights Salafism as a key factor in the radicalization process into Islamic extremism. There are clear signs that in 572 confirmed cases, foreign fighters were recruited through Salafi networks, whereby close friends, mosques and Islam-seminars, Salafi Internet channels, Quran distributions and street "da'wa" (invitation/ active missionary work) played a significant role in attracting and recruiting people. The relevance and importance of these factors change over time during the radicalization process. While in 2012, mosques played a bigger role in the radicalizations process; in 2013 and 2014, the Internet has become quite an important tool. As of mid-2014 social networks and friendship played a major role in radicalization.⁸⁹

This interesting shift from mosques to the internet to social network within two years is quite interesting to note. That Salafists had to move their recruitment and propaganda first from mosques to the internet may be explained by governments closing mosques where radical ideology was publicly spread. This led to a change in strategy whereby Salafists moved to more anonymously channels in the internet. But still certain figures and preachers could be detected in videos now getting more and more in the focus of police and security agencies but also of the media focusing on some few leading figures putting more pressure on them on their direct social environment. What then may have required more anonymity for such organizations to operate and made them operate in smaller social networks.

Nothing is said about how mosques, the Internet or friendships trigger radicalization exactly, or whether radicalization starts or ends with one of these

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 21

factors. But ideology always formed the basis of Salafists physical or virtual activity, so as for the BfV, it seems quite clear that it is the ideology is the common motivation for people to join IS and other Islamist terrorist organizations in the Middle East.

3.2. Critical review

Both BfV reports from 2019 and 2016 emphasize that Salafi ideology attracts people and it is identified as a core aspect of the radicalization process. Salafi ideology rejecting democratic values is contrary to the German constitution protecting dignity and guaranteeing equality to all people. This means that Salafism, not only in its violent form but also as a way of life, is seen as a threat to social peace. These reports indicate that the majority of Salafists actively try to recruit new members whereby their missionaries prefer to recruit in certain milieus using extremist narratives calling for Jihad. Religious concepts such as Jihad and caliphate seem to emotionalize and drive people to migrate for a better life. Figures show that a large number of foreign fighters left the German society on purpose, which indicates that those who were radicalized into Islamic extremism most likely see the German way of life and constitutional values as corrupt and evil, posing a threat for social peace, especially in the case of returning foreign fighters. So, the ideology is seen by both reports as the primary driver, motivating people to join an Islamist terrorist organization such as IS. Although neither of the reports explains how ideology exactly works in the radicalization process, the correlation between German foreign fighters and Salafi milieus is generally high.

Moreover, the 2016 report heavily emphasizes the lack of integration pushing people to radicalize into Islamic extremism. The typical German foreign fighter is assumed to be a young Muslim man with a second-generation migration background, from urban ghetto-like areas, economically poor and most likely criminal, that is someone who does not have much to lose. In addition to that, mosques, the use of the Internet and friends are playing an important role in such processes. Now, the threat posed by returning foreign fighters into the same old urban areas, knowing other poor and criminal Muslims living there, where the Salafi ideology and narratives have already worked and attracted quite a large

number is very high. Therefore, ideology and certain detected characteristics such as poor and criminal environments are linked together in both reports and are seen as core conditions to radicalize into Islamic extremism.

Surely statistical reports can offer a broad overview and help illustrate trends, but alas their role is limited because they lack the details needed to understand radicalization. Other research provided more details by using a similar method analyzing publicly available data about German foreign fighter also looking for their motivations came to a different conclusion, doubting the lack of integration-hypothesis as emphasized by the BfV to explain why some people are pushed towards terrorist groups.

A quite obvious reason for the different conclusions lies in the fact that the BfV is a national intelligence service and aims to predict and prevent crime. Instead of checking assumptions by using data, the BfV checks criminal data to shape general assumptions. Thereby, their method becomes biased and less transparent. They look for similarities, reoccurring patterns and external environments between all cases and shape a typical terrorist personality. Surely their role as an intelligence service is to collect information to identify local hotspots and analyze personal data to design security policies and optimize the work of other security agencies as the criminal police. But the problem with such generalizations is that there is no typical terrorist behaviour or personality.⁹⁰ And it is the same problem with individual predictions for instance with security agencies trying to search for indicators to identify future terrorists. Every attempt to identify future terrorists on the basis of certain attributes, behaviour or characteristics will fail. Or to put it in Sageman's words (2009):

"Even if we were to describe terrorists perfectly [...], the true terrorists would be drowned in a sea of people fitting the description but having no intention of turning violent. In other words, they would be drowned in a sea of 'false positives'..."⁹¹.

A study by the political scientists Reynolds and Hafez (2017) on German foreign fighter, for example, presents quite similar numbers to the numbers presented in the BfV-reports. But this study came to the conclusion that personal ties and friendships play a bigger role than the lack of integration for people to radicalize and become terrorists on the extreme outcome.

⁹⁰ Tilly, Charles: Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists, in: Sociological Theory, 22(1), 2004, p. 9

⁹¹ Sageman, Marc: Hofstad Case Study and the Blob Theory, in: Theoretical Frames on Pathways to Violent Radicalization, 2009, p. 15

At the very beginning, they present a definition for foreign fighters, citing David Malet, to be “*noncitizens of conflict states who [voluntarily] join insurgencies during civil conflicts*”⁹². This highlights a common shared transnational identity and a perceived threat to it, motivating people to join conflicts far away, which also supports the finding of the BfV that religious ideology mainly drives people to become foreign fighters. Yet at the same time, the limitation of such explanations is obvious when analyzing the “*war on Islam*” narrative appealing to defend suffering Muslims that only works for a very small number of people. It is possible that this narrative started attracting people to radicalize, but Reynold and Hafez reject it as a key motivation mobilizing such a large number of people from around the world to join and fight for a terrorist organization far away.⁹³ Instead they argue that interpersonal ties and bloc recruitment are more important in the radicalization of German foreign fighters.

To find a more comprehensive explanation towards the key motivation, they suggest looking closer at who is susceptible to foreign fighter recruitment and therefore study the case of German foreign fighters. They collected data from publicly accessible sources such as newspaper reports, commenting on their validity and stating that they even double-checked information on all foreign fighters and cleared up the database by removing aliases or people who were not recognized in at least two different sources. So, in the end, they had a database with 99 profound cases of German foreign fighters for further analysis.⁹⁴

Other than the BfV, Reynold and Hafez test different hypothesis with their numbers. They did not find much support for a deficit in integration among foreign fighters “*who from a cultural and linguistic perspective would be completely integrated within German society*”⁹⁵, because most of them are proper born German nationals. Even 17 per cent were even converts with no migration background at all and were not brought up in a migrant or Muslim environment. The high numbers of converts match with the BfV reports finding that converts among Salafists amount to 20 per cent, which is significantly higher than among other Muslim communities in Germany where there are around one

⁹² Reynolds, Sean C./Hafez, Mohammed M.: Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq, in: Terrorism and Political Violence, 31:4, 2017, p. 662

⁹³ Ibid., p. 663

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 667

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.672

per cent of converts to Islam. These high numbers are also somehow ignored by the BfV assuming that the typical foreign fighter is not just poorly integrated but also has to be a born Muslim emotionalized by the "war on Islam" narrative as the key motivation to join Islamic extremist organizations in the Middle East, which does not explain how it works for converts to Islam who were not physically connected with the Middle East before. Still, they can emotionally connect and also perceive the "war against Muslims" unjust, for example through personal ties and contacts to Muslim friends and can therefore be attracted to this narrative. The fact that this can also work also for non-Muslims or converts, underlines in turn the necessity to study in more details the emotional appeal in the radicalization process, as I will do later in this thesis.

Still, the crime rate, which can be seen as a "*proxy measure of integration*"⁹⁶, among their cases is high compared to the general societal trend in Germany. It is also quite interesting to note that there is a slight downward trend in the crime figures on violence or drug related issues after radicalization, but an upward trend in politically motivated criminal activity.⁹⁷ This can be explained in my view by people organizing in groups or in mosques which were later banned or shut down by the state, because they were declared illegal. However, Reynold and Hafez find that the level of unemployment and education among German foreign fighters is the only figure that indicates "*that this group as a whole may have been on the margins of German society*"⁹⁸. These applied measures of integration weaken the BfV's hypothesis that a lack of integration, in general, might be the key motivation for young Muslims to join a terrorist organization. Thus, their second hypothesis and method to analyze the social network of foreign fighters has proven to be more effective in the search for the motivation to join IS. It confirms the BfV's findings that foreign fighters are most likely from urban areas. The majority of German foreign fighters lived in three states sharing borders: 43 per cent were from North Rhine-Westphalia, 14 per cent from Hessen and 9 per cent from Lower Saxony. It is interesting to note that the majority of Muslims in Germany, nearly one-third, live in North Rhine-Westphalia, where the majority of the foreign fighters also originates.⁹⁹ So again,

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 670

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 671

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 672

⁹⁹ Ibid.

commenting on the topic of integration, one might assume that because of the high numbers of Muslim migrants in this state, an integration deficit hypothesis is legit and valid. But numbers on city-level analysis show that the majority of foreign fighters from North Rhine-Westphalia came from Bonn, Solingen and Dinslaken. Listing cities by the percentage of migrants and foreigners in their population shows that Bonn ranked 14th, Solingen 23rd, and Dinslaken 57th. The cities with the highest percentage of migrants or foreigners like Lüdenscheid, Paderborn or Gütersloh produced no foreign fighters in their study.¹⁰⁰

By clustering foreign fighters Reynold and Hafez were even able to show that the 99 foreign fighters were geographically linked and connected directly or indirectly through Salafi organizations or preachers before they migrated to join the Jihad: “[M]ost of the profiled fighters were mobilized within a single interconnected network.”¹⁰¹ Their analysis further shows that the majority of these 99 foreign fighters had a personal connections with at least one other foreign fighter before heading to the combat area. Some of them also had direct connections with at least one preacher or recruiter from the Salafi scene. Others participated in events organized by Salafi organizations in mosques or Quran distribution campaigns recruiting new members also on the streets. They also note that being in such groups does not necessarily mean that everybody knew each other, but “[s]hared membership in such organizations does, however, establish that these fighters were part of a common network before their mobilization”¹⁰².

This analysis emphasizes that the mobilization of German foreign fighters was mainly motivated by social networks through kinship ties or friendship and not by an integration deficit.

Thus, with this method, they have also succeeded in illustrating how radical milieus and charismatic preachers are directly linked to foreign fighters and where they stand in the recruitment process of foreign fighters. Salafi preachers and leaders are seen by the BfV as important figures encouraging and motivating people to join Jihad. But the BfV failed to explain where they and their ideology

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 673

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 675

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 678-9

stand in the recruitment process and consequently to Islamic terrorist organizations.

Another study on German foreign fighters by the German psychologists Frindte et al. (2017) also includes the perspective of a German returnee.

They also search for the key motivation to join the Jihad by talking to a German foreign fighter who returned home in 2015. From his direct quotes, they conclude that irritations and insecurities have occurred in his life, leading him into the radicalization process. Quranic and religious arguments provided reasonable answers to questions and irritations he had and simplified his thinking. The references he gave such as pseudo-scientific explanations out of the Quranic context and presenting Islam as more logical compared to Christianity could be identified by the researchers as typical narratives and prominent arguments used by Salafi preachers.¹⁰³ One of them, a very prominent preacher of the German Salafi scene, Pierre Vogel, is directly named and described as a very charismatic person he could easily identify with. This emphasizes that Vogel's influence on his motivation to join and become more active in this network is based on Vogel's charisma and less on his status as a religious preacher.¹⁰⁴

This study also emphasizes that the lack of integration and religious ideology plays a minor role in the motivation of people joining Jihad. First of all, there are no indicators or references, direct or indirect, from the interviewee towards poor economic living conditions, social exclusion or unemployment. Also, no discrimination was experienced, nor injustice perceived.¹⁰⁵

I chose this example to highlight another dimension. Regarding elaboration on the complexity between religiosity, conversion and radicalization, on the one hand, it can be assumed from his quotes on religious rules, concepts of hereafter etc., that radicalization starts with conversion, turning to a more religious sphere out of personal motivations. Although there is no method to check if someone believes in these things. Frindte et al. note that he ignored complex topics and showed a very limited religious knowledge throughout the interview and this

¹⁰³ Frindte, Wolfgang/Ben Slama, Brahim/ Dietrich, Nico/ PISOIU, Daniela/ Uhlmann, Milena/ Kausch, Melanie: Motivationen und Karrieren salafistischer Dschihadistinnen und Dschihadisten, in: Salafismus und Dschihadismus in Deutschland – Ursachen Dynamiken, Handlungsempfehlungen, J. Biene/ C. Daase/ J.Junk/ H. Müller (Ed.), Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn, 2017, pp. 146

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 147

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 149

does not support the idea that a person always becomes radical because of religious practices. So, they assume that he may not be an ideologist.¹⁰⁶

On the other hand, there are some observations made by Frindte et al., indicating another dynamism than religion in the radicalization process. They note that in this case, the pathway towards radicalization did not start with the search for God, but with a personal crisis, the death of his parents, putting strains on him, strengthening the desire to understand the contradictions of life and the search for the meaning of life.¹⁰⁷ Certain concepts and ideas preached by Salafists which then made sense to the interviewee have to be understood in this particular context. And after Salafi ideas, and rhetoric and simplified thinking started to make sense to him, he got closer to a certain Salafi network and environment of like-minded people whereby he was motivated and pushed further towards Jihad. They conclude from his statements that he was more a kind of follower and not the leader kind in such networks. Frindte et al. conclude that it was more of a coincidence that he got in touch with the Salafi scene, maybe via friends, but it could also have been any other ideology or milieu that might have satisfied his psychological and emotional need to get a structure in life and desire to see and participate in change.¹⁰⁸

This case shows that motivations to become a foreign fighter and to join IS are also to be found on the psychological and individual level, for example in the human desire for change and in the search for meaning in life.

However, all three findings do not contradict, they complement each other. The different angles presented in the German case shows, that due to the lack of primary data on the individual radicalization, the findings in this research field on the motivations to radicalize into Islamic extremism can be affected by a distance to the phenomenon. As a result, important aspects on the individual level are ignored or may seem unimportant, which it is quite the case in the BfV reports. Also, individual cases cannot be generalized. But as Reynold and Hafez present a comprehensive analysis by using public information, individual cases combined as one large dataset that can contribute to the research field and set a new focus. This also supports the hypothesis of this paper that radicalization is

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 147

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 148

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 149

a gradual multi-level process in which political grievances, group dynamics and personal victimization merge to push and the desire for excitement, greater meaning and glory to pull a person on the pathway to terrorism. Thereby, certain concepts such as Salafism can provide orientation and greater meaning in life. These concepts are rooted in greater (political) ideologies which also help solve personal irritations and accommodate clear structures and large networks where someone can meet other like-minded people and feel vindicated, powerful and in the right place.

The Dutch extremism expert Schuurman and his American colleague Horgan (2016) studied primary sources-based data of the Islamic extremist Dutch Hofstad-group. I chose this Dutch case now for comparison because Holland and the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, where a majority of foreign fighters stemmed from are not just sharing borders, but both countries are quite peaceful and guaranteeing security and freedom to all their residents as generous welfare-states with liberal democracies and seem to have the same percentage of Muslims living in their societies. So, I assume that the environments and motivations for young Muslims to engage in Islamic extremism in both countries to be similar and it will help to see if there are parallels in the radicalization of young Muslims in different European countries.

Schuurman and Horgan come to the conclusion, which also supports the perspective presented by Frindte et al., that the “*turn to violence was instead predicated on predominantly personal motives that, moreover, were not as strongly tied to extremist religious convictions as is frequently thought*”¹⁰⁹. They chose this certain group as an example to study the rationales behind European homegrown terrorists’ behaviour. Although it is not representative for all European homegrown terrorist and jihadist groups, yet:

*“Its organizational ambiguity and the fact that it proved capable of deadly violence despite its participants’ lack of (significant) paramilitary training or experience do make it a representative example of a subset of homegrown jihadism that has included numerous groups with similar attributes.”*¹¹⁰

The Hofstad-group was very diverse; people from all social classes were members, mainly second-generation Muslims migrants as well as some Dutch

¹⁰⁹ Schuurman, Bart/Horgan, John G.: Rationales for terrorist violence in homegrown jihadist groups: A case study from the Netherlands. In: *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 27: 55-63, 2016, p. 56

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

converts. Therefore, similar to the above presented socio-demographic figures on German foreign fighters, it is difficult to apply the idea of social deprivation on this case too. Also, similarly to the German case, there were some charismatic individuals with some religious authority, but no organizational structure, boundaries or hierarchy, which made it easy for all kinds of people to join.

What the Dutch Hofstad-group also had in common with the German Jihadi milieu was the same strong shared extremist ideology and interpretation of Islam closely resembling Salafism. And like in the German case a relatively small number, the "inner circle", actually became personally involved in terrorism against what they perceived as enemies of Islam. Some of the Hofstad-group members initially tried to join terrorist groups in Pakistan or Chechnya, similar to the current phenomenon but failed and started to explore ways to commit terrorist attacks with an Islamist motivation in the Netherlands using the narrative that the Netherlands who joined the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are in a war against Muslims.¹¹¹

Schuurman and Horgan argue that the only terrorist attack to emanate from this groups had little to do with geopolitics and targeted the controversial Dutch columnist and filmmaker Theo van Gogh for directing an Islam-critical film perceived as blasphemous by the groups as a whole. And the evidence suggests that *"the attack was planned, prepared and executed by only one participant only"*¹¹².

After some imprisoned members have been later released and sought revenge for a perceived unfair trial (perceived injustice), the group started to become active again. Underlining the role of returning foreign fighters to Europe, same as former inner circle member of the Hofstad-group, the latter was able to resemble some other members and engaged in planning further attacks still using the "war on Islam"-narrative. Returnees did not simply attract other members to become active but also served as role models or heroes, telling exciting stories in their old close social networks, appealing especially to those who are looking for excitement and adventures. As in this case the van Gogh murderer also inspired others *"to start considering an attack of his own"*¹¹³.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 59

This analysis also supports the idea that social networks play an important role in the radicalization process, more so than religious or conventional environments such as mosques or even Salafi preachers, highlighting that some members even disliked the way Salafi preachers adjusted and moderated their tone and statements, condemning figures such as Osama bin-Laden or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi over time. But at the same time, this indicates how there was a desire among these young Muslims to see their interests in change represented politically, but not by an older generation like the immigrant generation of their parents.¹¹⁴

However, they see these strategic rationales and social networks accommodating radicalization as quite important for the radicalization process but conclude that the key motivations for individuals in the Dutch case are subjective and differ from person to person, emphasizing a cognitive approach. This underlines the abovementioned statement that many might radicalize gradually, but just a few engage in terrorism. And in studying the evidence of the only case in which a member has become a terrorist, they found that his involvement was triggered by personal negative experiences and existential crisis, which made him refocus on religion and search for meaning in life, similar to the findings on the German returnee's motivations mentioned above. By joining a group he gradually "*adopted an extremist interpretation of Islam that led him to view the murder of blasphemers as a personal duty*"¹¹⁵. The fact that he was the only one in the group who committed a terrorist attack is explained by Schuurman and Horgan using the concept of fanaticism. Looking closer on his environment, van Gogh's murderer gradually isolated himself so that his behaviour and beliefs could not be controlled or challenged by others anymore and became more extreme over time. This could also explain why the majority of German foreign fighters, too, left or planned attacks individually. Surely, they are somehow linked by a certain ideology or social network where they might have met each-other, but the Dutch case emphasizes that these environments facilitate factors such as ideologies dehumanizing perceived enemies and offering role models and orientation for radicalization, rather than being the key motivation to become a terrorist.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 60

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

The same study by Schurman and Horgan shows how another individuals' motivation for violence was rooted in negative emotional feelings such as grievance. And similar to the general strain theory of terrorism by Robert Agnew as presented in the theoretical framework above, he constantly felt humiliated and shocked by the idea of Muslims suffering, because the Dutch government was at war with Muslim countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Besides the other case, in which weak ties or isolation made van Gogh's murderer more violent, in this case, negative emotional state (perceived injustice) became a permanent attitude and finally pushed him to join the radical Hofstadgroup which offered him a social network of like-minded people and a solution by providing ideological reasons motivating him further.¹¹⁷

3.3. Conclusions from analysis

According to the concepts presented as the theoretical framework of this paper, it can be said that this analysis has proven that certain rational and psychological factors can create a setting for the radicalization of individuals where terrorism can be the extreme outcome of this dynamic and gradual process. For radicalization to occur, the nature and intensity of a person's believe, feelings and behaviour must change. It has been proven that even if a bigger community or society shares the same values or understanding with a certain extremist group, only very few members really engage in terrorism.

Also, Agnew's concept of strains affecting the lives, identities etc. applies to the European case, not always directly or physically, but rather by stressors which increases through perceived injustice. Here, the powerful ruling class is demonized by the narrative of suppressing Muslims by being at war with Islam in general. This can lead to a further cognitive opening for the radicalization of young Muslims who were attracted to some level by this narrative, pulling them to defend Muslims overseas and to see it as their duty to fight for the higher political goal to establish a powerful Muslim representation through a caliphate who shall meet Western ruling class on eye-level.

Under such conditions, it seems like the ties between the ruling class and the environments some foreign fighters are from are weak. But in reality, it is more the act of self-isolation from the society which has proven to be a more important

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

aspect, loosening ties and leading to radical actions. Isolation creates a stronger negative condition (fanaticism), reduces the willingness to cope through legal channels (lack of social control) and can push a person further towards terrorism based on certain radical ideologies offering expected reward.

There is also a collective actor such as the Salafi organization who sees violence as a legitimate tool and provides mobilizing structures which increase the likelihood for cognitively radicalized young Muslims to physically engage in terrorism. It has also shown, that beside ideology and social networks, inspiring radical figures and role models young people can easily identify with, play an important part on the bottom of such processes because they have the authority to assure individuals that their path is correct and strengthens the motivation and helps to dehumanize the perceived enemies. Through the Salafi ideology, violence is not only justified but also seen as a legitimate tool to fight political repression and declares Western regimes are declared illegitimate, which creates a social acceptance among its members to fight against these regimes and lowers the psychological barriers for violence. This also accommodates the force of pulling people who were lacking meaning in life or feel a desire for change, closer to such networks.

Hence, group process functions in one or both ways. There is a top-down approach, where recruiting is initiated by an extremist group as the Salafists in Germany, or a bottom-up process dominated by social bonds and influences, as highlighted by Reynold and Hafez through friendship. Either way, strong feelings of alienation in Muslim groups may determine the success of recruitment and radicalization into Islamic extremism.

Consequently, the motivation for radicalization into Islamic extremism is predominantly explained by a German federal agency to be found in the religion, these agencies also draws a link between radicalization and a lack of integration to predict a certain type of future Islamic terrorist, which is not empirically supported. Thus, the case study on the motivations of German foreign fighters to join Islamic terrorist groups has shown that extremist ideology is somehow overstressed in official reports, while academic studies on the case of German foreign fighters and Dutch young Islamic extremists based on empirical data suggest that social networks and psychology are most significant, pushing and

pulling someone towards extremism, but these factors are under-represented and require more discussion in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

4. Discussion: Multifaceted reasons for radicalization

After studying the case of European and more precisely German foreign fighters, I will now discuss factors which play a significant role in the empirical data and are suggested by scholars to be the key motivators pushing and/or pulling young Muslims into the battlefields fighting for Islamic terrorist organizations with more detail.

The arguments above discussing the motivations of young Muslims to radicalize emphasizes three main directions. The first direction argues on the macro-level that the causes for radicalization are to be found in an individual's relation to political conditions in the society. The second line of argument discusses the role of social networks, organizations, group belongingness and friendships on the meso-level. The third approach focuses on the micro-level on psychology. All three approaches give references to religion as well, but I will deal with it independently as an ideological factor here, because it is seen as the key driver for radicalization by the German intelligence agency "Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz".

These factors are not competitive to each other, they are all part of the radicalization process. There might also be an overlap between these categories and therefore it is useful to discuss them with more detail. It will show that radicalization is not linear but more of an overlapping cluster with a dynamic interplay of different factors pushing and pulling someone into radicalization. Special attention will be put on how these two forces (push and pull) function and why they work for some people to radicalize into Islamic extremism, and why these five factors - ideology, politics, social networks, technology and psychology - matter in the context of the motivations of foreign fighters.

4.1. Ideology

According to the American political scientist Gerring (1997) an ideology is located in the mind of an individual as a set of beliefs, values and principles, and it is linked through language, by giving constant references to a set of

linguistic symbols, and behavior to a real-world political dilemma.¹¹⁸ In addition to that the sociologists Benford and Snow (2000) argue that all (political) ideologies work in the same way through collective action frames and framing processes and:

“...[A]re constructed in part as movement adherents negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and urge others to act in concert to affect change.”¹¹⁹

This also explains how ideologies simplify complex issues, triggering social frustration, linking to a political direction and how they articulate a vision to push people to act and are therefore important to understand cognitive radicalization.

Most foreign fighters are constantly giving references to Islamic religion and their religious duty to join their Muslim brothers in Jihad. While the research question of this thesis studies the motivations of young Muslims in Europe to join Islamic extremist groups, and as defined above, ideology can motivate people to act, it seems logical that many people assume that religion is the main motivator for foreign fighters to join IS. This part will analyze to what extent religion plays a role in the radicalization process.

The German Islamic studies professor Seidensticker (2016) defines Islamic fundamentalism overall as a general aspiration to change society, culture, state [system?] or politics on the basis of a set of norms and values, which are understood as Islamic.¹²⁰ The Salafi branch in Islam is seen as fundamentalist, advocating a return to the traditions of the first three generations of the Prophet Muhammad’s companions, who are seen by Salafi movements as those who performed Islam in its original form, because most of them did not only see the Prophet physically but were also led by the four Rashidun (rightly guided caliphs/successors of the Prophet). So, a Salafist is someone who recognizes only the Quran, the Prophets’ sayings and the practices (way of living) of his companions as sources of his or her understanding of an authentic Islam.¹²¹ But

¹¹⁸ Gerring, John: Ideology: A Definitional Analysis, in: Political Research Quarterly, Vol. 50, Nr. 4, 1997, pp. 966-967

¹¹⁹ Benford, Robert/Snow, David: Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment, in: Annual Review of Sociology, Nr. 26, 2000, p. 615

¹²⁰ Seidensticker, Tilman: Islamismus - Geschichte, Vordenker, Organisationen. C.H.Beck, München, 2016, p. 9 (my translation)

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 24

there are political tendencies as well in the evolution of the Salafi ideology, developed by Islamic scholars, for example those of the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood in the early 20th century, that combined theology with political Islam and propagated the idea of establishing an ideal Islamic state on the ideals of the early Muslims and “authentic” Islamic traditions.¹²²

Salafi scholars argue that the Muslims has become backward and fallen behind the Western world and give references to the 19th and early 20th centuries when colonial powers such as Britain and France ruled over and divided Muslim territories and compare this to how crusaders fell into the Middle East once before in history.¹²³ According to fundamentalists this only happened, then and now, because Muslims have turned away from Islamic traditions and become corrupt over time, which made them inferior to Westerners, who are to blame for the backwardness of Muslims in terms of political power.¹²⁴

Salafism and Jihadism are not equal but there are many similarities between them. While Salafism in general is a fundamentalist branch of Islam, Jihadism is more precisely a violent ideology. Jihad is an Arabic word which literally means “struggle” or “making an effort” but in an Islamic context, it describes a very complex concept which has been changed over time even allowing Jihadists to find justifications to kill anybody (including other Muslims) who disagrees with their point of view. Jihadists see themselves as the real guardians of Islam. Nowadays, they mainly justify their actions as a defensive act to protect Muslims, for example from foreign military occupation or invasions, but also from all kinds of their ideological, cultural and political influences which are understood by Jihadist as corrupt ideals. Their fight aims to free the whole Muslim world from bad and corrupt influences but it is not only restricted to Muslim territories and legitimizes all kinds of attacks on non-Muslim territories.¹²⁵

So, Salafi ideology also works the same way as I already made clear above: first the *diagnosis* by understanding the problem and the common conception that the situation has to be changed; second the *prognosis*, describing the solution, third the *motivation*, urging and pushing people to act. This makes it clear that the

¹²² Ibid., pp. 25-26

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 35-36

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 34

¹²⁵ Frindte et al., 2017, pp. 118-19

political goal of this ideology is to unite all Muslims to fight against all kinds of Western influences to make Islam superior again. But the ultimate goal remains to re-establish a united Islamic state with a caliph as the head of state and leader of all Muslims.

From that point of view, it seems reasonable that the public debate constantly discusses religion or particularly Islam as the key motivator for the radicalization of young Muslims, but there is a vertical and a horizontal approach to this issue I will discuss below.

The American journalist Wood published an article which created controversy in the March 2015 issue of *The Atlantic*. He argues that:

*“The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. Very Islamic. Yes, it has attracted psychopaths and adventure seekers, drawn largely from the disaffected populations of the Middle East and Europe. But the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam.”*¹²⁶

So according to Wood, what makes the terror organization IS so “attractive” for young Muslims to join their cause is (1) its absolute clarity, they do not compromise on religious interpretations, and (2) its (religious) apocalyptic prophecies, to which many of their followers constantly refer and feel attracted to. From terms and concepts to strategy. every single detail is based on “*the prophetic methodology*”¹²⁷. He underlines the compatibility of Islamism with Islam and that looking closer on the Islamic State’s intellectual genealogy allows us to see what is obvious in its religious nature:

*“The Prophet, whom all Muslims consider exemplary, imposed these rules and owned slaves. Leaders of the Islamic State have taken emulation of Muhammad as strict duty, and have revived traditions that have been dormant for hundreds of years.”*¹²⁸

That indicates that if the teachings of Islam are vague and potentially very wide, then its norms are not clearly defined and/or constructed in such a way (on purpose). And so, he criticizes, citing Haykel, that “*People want to absolve Islam [...] It’s this ‘Islam is a religion of peace’ mantra. [...] Those texts are shared by all Sunni Muslims, not just the Islamic State.*”¹²⁹. In addition to that, observing the brutality and barbarism, his thesis is that IS is a typical reoccurring pattern in Islamic history. It is legitimized by the principles set in Quran and the

¹²⁶ Wood, Graeme: “What ISIS Really Wants”, *The Atlantic*, March 2015, Online-Source: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Prophet's traditions and practices, i.e. during expansions and wars. And the fact that Islamic theology does not have any principal resources to accuse this pattern of a violent military expansions as un-Islamic: "*These guys have just as much legitimacy as anyone else*"¹³⁰. So, regarding the relationship between Islam and Islamism, he argues that it is actually impossible to differentiate between both through theological references. Islamism might be a modern phenomenon but it has its roots in the history of Islam.

The German journalist Reuter (2015) sees things similarly: he argues that if every party is just choosing certain quotes from the Islamic sources and ignoring other, everyone is right because there is no monopoly on the interpretation of Islamic sources. So Jihadists are picking quotes that fit their cause and legitimize brutal beheadings or enslavement or military conquests.¹³¹ Unlike Wood, he follows a more critical historical approach and analyzes how early fragments of Islamic sources portrayed the Prophet Muhammad's early conquests and wars as brutal. He differentiates between this uncertain early period of Islamic history and a much more stabilized Muslim civilizations as during the Golden age, some centuries later. He notes that in one of the first Prophetic biographies, Ibn Ishaq (died 767 A.D.) who collected oral transmission, poems, and other documents about the Prophet's life, portrayed even competing versions of the Prophet and also documented the century-long process of romantic idealization. Reuter argues that what people wrote about Muhammad's life from the second or third century on would have nothing to do with the few early years of Islamic history, when Muhammad violently forced his beliefs onto others and conquered other regions with his brutal troops. From a later perspective, these facts about brutal and violent behavior i.e. during the conquest of the city of Mecca lost their importance in the context of time. From his point of view, these historical fragments are of main importance to explain how IS could attract Muslims to join their brutal fights from far away.¹³²

Under this paradigm, the key motivation for individuals to radicalize is to be found in the Islamic theology. This top-down approach is looking for ideological influences and strategies of terrorist organizations, which means that the

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Reuter, Christoph: Die Schwarze Macht – Der „Islamische Staat“ und die Strategien des Terrors, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2015, München, p. 216

¹³² Ibid., pp. 217-18

ideological radicalization is linked to theological radicalization, whereby Islam is the source of legitimacy and plays an important role as an ideology to recruit individuals.

According to the Pakistani-American Islamic studies professor Ahmed (2016) this does not mean that Islam is causing violence, but that violence becomes a meaning for the actors with some context: *“The point here – as everywhere else – is whether the actor makes the act meaningful for himself in terms of islam”*¹³³. Thus, religion might exacerbate the conflict because unlike secular ideologies, it promises fulfillment through heavenly salvation. Depending on the religion – in this case it is Islam – the reward for strictly following the (religious) rules is not only seen as a guideline for a faithful pious life but for the hope of divine favor to enter paradise and eternal life. For some people, this might be a strong motivator to join Jihad than worldly pleasures and it is considered to be an important reason why religious people act in certain ways to do good or bad. At least as long they think it is the will of God, whereby even bad things can become good in their eyes. Now, religion has the power to lift conflicts to a spiritual level. The American sociologist Juergensmeyer (2003) describes this phenomenon as “cosmic wars”:

“They evoke great battles of the legendary past, and they relate to metaphysical conflicts between good and evil. Notions of cosmic wars are intimately personal but can also be translated to the social plane. Ultimately, though, they transcend human experience. What makes religious violence particularly savage and relentless is that the perpetrators have places such religious images of divine struggle – cosmic war – in the service of worldly political battles. For this reason, acts of religious terror serve not only as tactics in a political strategy but also as evocations of much larger spiritual confrontation.”¹³⁴

Those who join this war see themselves as a part of a divine plan and become soldiers of God who are not only fighting against worldly enemies but also against Satan himself. This clearly reflects on how any form of violence can be justified religiously, but also draws not only on the pushing but also pulling force of this phenomenon.

Also, the German professor for Comparative Religious Studies Kippenberg (2008) argues that even violent actions will make sense religiously if someone

¹³³ Ahmed, Shahab: *What is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton/Oxford, 2016, p. 452

¹³⁴ Juergensmeyer, Mark: *Terror in the mind of god. The global rise of religious violence*. Berkeley: University of California, 2003, pp. 149-50

links them to some higher reward and therefore, looking for higher religious meanings in violence makes sense but it should not be overrated because there might also be other motives, causes and interpretations.¹³⁵

Other than the vertical approach, that directly links the radicalization processes of young Muslims with Islam, the horizontal line analyses Islamism not as the cause for violence but as a powerful narrative. The French sociologist Roy (2009) argues that radicalization has to be analyzed in a specific European context. Muslims born and raised in Europe do not have (physical) connections to the conflicts in the Middle East which matter on an emotional level and are used as strong narratives by Islamic terrorist organizations. The conflicts in the Arab world play a role in the radicalization process just in the form of narratives. By using these political narratives, radical Islamic ideas can be extended into the European context. Every perceived crime against the virtual Ummah (Muslim community) is seen by Islamists as a direct attack on Muslims.¹³⁶ By allowing themselves to be attracted to these narratives people can connect to fighters far away emotionally. The idea for instance behind virtual posts or propaganda is not to motivate people to engage in discourses but to create sensation and construct a feeling of pleasure. In that way a person is also enabled to travel and connect with others far away without physically moving, which is described as distance suffering and can lead up in a transformation of feeling that a person become a foreigner in his own land. Thus, becoming a stranger can be linked to other experiences of displacement where the world becomes complex and strange and highlight the role of conspiracy theories helping to reduce irritation and simplifying the world.¹³⁷

According to Roy the motivation for radicalized Muslims to engage in terrorism does not come from the religion itself, it is more the Islamisation of radicalism. These motivations are deep-rooted in the desire for political power and proper representation of Muslims. Hence, he advocates that the overall causes for this phenomenon are to be found in the lacking cultural integration of Islam in the

¹³⁵ Kippenberg, Hans: *Gewalt als Gottesdienst: Religionskriege im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*. München, 2008, p. 24

¹³⁶ Roy, Olivier: *Al-Qaeda in the West as a Youth Movement: The Power of Narrative*. In: *Ethno-Religious Conflict in Europe. Typologies of Radicalisation in Europe's Muslim Community*, Emerson, Michael (Ed.), Brussels, 2009, p. 15

¹³⁷ McDonald, Kevin: *Radicalization*, 2018, p. 11

West.¹³⁸ However, it might be right to study or analyze the radicalization of the delinquent generation in a European context, as suggested by Roy, but the Islamic or ideological influence cannot be ignored.

The horizontal approach categorically fails to explain why European foreign fighters are attracted to certain interpretations of religious sources and exclude the obvious values and visions Jihadist are constantly referring to. Religious vocabulary based on Jihadi ideology does matter, because it draws on theological discourses on cosmology, history or eschatology. And when anti-imperialism and the rejection of economic and social globalization are dramatized for a cosmic war, they are given a new motivational dimension through religion.

Yet, there is also a problem with the vertical approach as it rather understands Islam as the overall cause for terrorism and somehow became a proxy debate for a debate on the relationship of Islam to the secular West, rather than to make the effort to understand the root of violence and it does not allow us to understand the personal motivation of those who join Islamic terrorist groups either.

Cottee (2017) underlines that these two positions are not exclusive but the link between them is to be understood in terms of political narratives, as already mentioned by Roy (2009). Quoting Skinner, he argues that people always have a strong tendency to try to legitimize their behavior and as long they find any source justifying their actions, they will carry on. So, actually their behavior is of course motivated by some accepted principles, people behave in a certain way so that their actions remain compatible with their claim to have been motivated by certain principles. This is how Cottee comprehensibly explains how religion matters in Islamic terrorism and how it intersects with other things, such as politics and human emotion. He concludes:

“Both sides in this debate make some valid points. But they are also deficient in numerous respects. It is of course entirely plausible that some jihadists are motivated by a sincere religious commitment, as they subjectively see it, and that their actions are directly premised on this commitment. In fact, there is some empirical to show this. But, equally, it is also entirely plausible that others became jihadists not out of a religious commitment and were not remotely religious at the time at which they became involved in jihadist activism. There is some evidence, also, for this alternative scenario.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Roy, 2009, p. 16

¹³⁹ Cottee, „What ISIS Really Wants“, 2017, p. 443

4.2. Politics

As Cottee sums it up, there are also not practicing Muslims and converts who were raised in a non-Islamic environment and who might be triggered by other reasons to radicalize and (in the extreme outcome) to join terrorist groups.

To explain this phenomenon, Neumann (2016) suggests analyzing Salafism in the European context as a protest ideology. He argues by referring to a controversial term used by Bernard Lewis that the presence of a growing Muslim generation born and raised in Europe is creating Europe's own "*Crisis of Islam*". While the parents of this generation mainly came as "*Gastarbeiter*" (migrant workers) this generation is much more integrated (structurally) in terms of being a proper European citizen, speaking the languages properly, graduating from schools and universities and having better jobs than their parents had, but still experiencing racism and discrimination. Neumann says that Salafism, which reached Europe in the 1990s, had nothing to do with the "*boring, adjusted and culturally influenced Islam of their parents*"¹⁴⁰.

Salafism provides a community, meaning in life and structure, more precisely it is being radically different that makes it attractive. It is an alternative lifestyle to European liberalism and the lifestyles of the older migrant generation. Some young Muslims feel confused by the contrasts and trapped in-between, and for those who joined this movement in the recent years, following Salafi preachers and practices, it is a protest and provocation against these two different kinds of lifestyles. This also indicates that there might be more people triggered by or at least attracted to (cognitive radicalization) Salafi ideology but not everyone becomes a terrorist.

However, Neumann highlights that Salafist ideology also initially attracts non-Muslims in the same way. Salafism offers not only a religious identity, but also a cultural identity too for many different kinds of misfits and the disoriented. It turns the contradictions of the modern Western cultures into something bad and morally shameful, so Salafism makes these contradictions senseful or meaningful for irritated young people but in a negative way. An individual converting and joining Salafism rejects everything that is mainstream. Becoming a Muslim by joining Salafism does not require much knowledge, no preparation,

¹⁴⁰ Neumann, Peter: *Der Terror ist unter uns. Dschihadismus und Radikalisierung in Europa*. Ullstein, Berlin, 2016, p. 153 (my translation).

just commitment and a simple confession of faith. To Neumann “*it is not surprising that among European Salafists approximately 20 percent are converts – ten times more than among other Muslim communities in Europe*”.¹⁴¹ In addition to that, Khosrokhavar (2016) argues that there are mainly two factors that support the process of radicalization of young Muslims in Europe and drive them to terrorism. The first lies within the increasingly desolate conditions in European ghettos for individuals, while disadvantage (for example on the job market) also plays a role. Both factors combined create hate for society and the feeling of being rejected as a second-class citizen. According to Khosrokhavar, the feeling that doors seems closed and opportunities lacking, linked to a radical ideology, can end up pushing them to Jihad. Here, it is not about the actually experienced discrimination and more often about the perceived dehumanization on a subjective level.¹⁴² Khosrokhavar built his arguments on the theory of relative deprivation, whereby a person compares their own material (economic) condition to that of others and comes to the conclusion that they have a lower social status. This person perceives it to be unjust. In the same way it can also work for groups or communities. So socioeconomic inequality can play a role in the radicalization process if combined with personal experience of discrimination. And according to the British political scientists Hafez and Mullins (2015), the majority of Muslims in Europe experience discrimination and segregation, these strains can push some to criminal activities:

“At the risk of overly generalizing, one can point to several developments that have contributed to Muslim disenchantment with their European host societies. These include poor socioeconomic status due to unemployment rates that are consistently higher than the national average. Although the Muslim population of Europe contains many educated middle class professionals and wealthy individuals, this is not the case for the majority of the population that occupies the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. Unemployment combines with residential discrimination and segregation to produce ethnically homogenous neighborhoods that are mostly dilapidated. High levels of residential concentration and poor housing conditions contribute to higher levels of criminality. Unemployment, poverty, and crime, in turn, produce the usual stereotypes concerning the “uncivilized” foreigners.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 154 (my translation)

¹⁴² Khosrokhavar, 2016, pp. 125-27

¹⁴³ Hafez, Mohammed/Mullins, Creighton: The radicalization puzzle: A theoretical synthesis of empirical approaches to homegrown extremism, in: Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Vol. 38(11), 2015, p. 962

Discussing the role of discrimination, racism and humiliation in general in the radicalization process, Roy (2004) adds another perspective to this debate and analyzes political developments in the European context, trying to answer the question about the effects of multi-culturalism (policy) has on the society, and more importantly about how Islamist extremist groups develop in the context of European multi-culturalism.¹⁴⁴ He highlights how structures and organizations changed because of globalization and affected the turn into a globalized Muslim *Ummah* (community).¹⁴⁵ To understand this transformation of the *Ummah* is of particular importance for this line of argument because globalization has made it easier to see something abstract (as the *ummah* or a brotherhood) and to construct a group-feeling when Muslims are attacked far away, so that an extremist ideology based on this, could be spread much faster and create an outrage in Europe even. So, the feeling of discrimination also works here through perceived attacks on Muslims far away, resulting in shared grievances. Khosrokhavar (2005) calls it “*humiliation by proxy*”¹⁴⁶. Also, Juergensmayer (2003) highlights the role of humiliation in the radicalization process:

“Most important is the intimacy with which the humiliation is experienced and the degree to which it is regarded as a threat to one’s personal honor and respectability. These can create the condition for a desperate need for empowerment, which, when no other options appear to be open, are symbolically and violently expressed.”¹⁴⁷

Investigating political narratives used by Salafists in Germany, Günther et al. (2017) underline that political and social problems in Muslim countries play an important role in their political engagement as a movement to recruit new members, or at least supporters. They address perceived injustice and discrimination in Germany too, but ideologically they are influenced by the global changes Muslim countries are going through. These narratives are influenced on the one hand by the tense relationships between Islamic extremist movements and the governments in Muslim countries, and on the other hand by external factors, such as the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel, the US-led military invasion in Afghanistan or the war in Syria. These developments are interpreted as a modern version of crusades against true believers from

¹⁴⁴ Roy, Olivier: Globalised Islam: The search for a new ummah, 2004, p. 2

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 12-15

¹⁴⁶ Khosrokhavar, Farhad: Suicide Bombers: Allah’s New Martyrs, 2005, p. 157

¹⁴⁷ Juergensmayer, Mark: Terror in the mind of god. The global rise of religious violence. Berkeley: University of California, 2003, p. 198

outside and inside, to create chaos and keep Muslims inferior to the West.¹⁴⁸ Thereby political narratives of Islamic extremist groups draw upon neo-colonial aspirations of foreign forces, saying that Western governments have always tried to suppress Muslims in the Middle East and in the West, and still do. Empathy from the European Muslim side towards those who are affected by political developments in the Middle East helps and plays an important role in constructing a political identity. Hence, they can easily accuse Western governments of double standards when they urge Muslims to integrate and accept liberal values, by giving references to human right violations by Western powers in the Middle East.¹⁴⁹

However, in this context it is necessary to be considered that political frustration alone do not explain why individuals join extremist groups, although the Australian criminologist Hardy (2018) mentions that they should not be underestimated when analyzing the process of radicalization at all. He also links them with the religious or ideological concerns of Islamic extremists about the Western-liberal societies being corrupt and at war with Islam. So, Islamic extremist groups often use (geo-)political goals as part of their ideology justifying their violent actions, for example pressing the USA to withdraw its army from the Middle East through terrorist attacks, or the way IS, after declaring its caliphate, dismantled its physical borders imposed by French and British governments under the Sykes-Picot-Agreement separating Syria and Iraq.¹⁵⁰

Discussing narratives Cottee (2019), argues that IS actually became so powerful because of political narratives. He argues that people being pushed towards Islamic radicalization and joining Islamic extremist groups were trying to find a way to do something meaningful with their lives. And the message that IS is the solution to the fact that Muslims are being killed in the Middle East, is “...*also an appeal to the best in people, to people’s aspirations, hopes and dreams, to their deepest yearnings for identity, faith, and self-actualization*”.¹⁵¹ Cottee

¹⁴⁸ Günter, Christoph/Ourghi, Marielle/Schröter, Susanne/Weidl, Nina: Dschihadistische Rechtfertigungsnarrative und ihre Angriffsflächen, in: Salafismus und Dschihadismus in Deutschland – Ursachen Dynamiken, Handlungsempfehlungen, J. Biene/ C. Daase/ J.Junk/ H. Müller (Ed.), Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn, 2017, pp. 166

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 167

¹⁵⁰ Hardy, Keiran: Comparing Theories of Radicalisation with Countering Violent Extremism Policy, 2018, p. 86

¹⁵¹ Cottee, Simon: ISIS and the Pornography of Violence, 2019, p. 62

criticizes that just telling people not to join Islamic extremist organizations is not enough, there has to be an alternate opportunity to do something exciting and empowering.

He concludes with a very important point, stating that as long there is no change on the ground and the political reality supports Islamic extremists' narrative, it will continue to attract and motivate people to join their cause.¹⁵²

4.3. Social Networks

As mentioned above, Reynold and Hafez are emphasizing social network to be the key motivator assuring and pushing people towards terrorism. I will now discuss why social networks play an important role in the radicalization process of young Muslims to leave their families and friends behind to join terrorist groups far away.

Sageman explains in his book *“Understanding Terror Networks”* (2004) his prominent “bunch-of-guys”-theory, highlighting the role of friendships and relationships, and he rejects socioeconomic and political factors in radicalization. Sageman argues that many people would suffer under bad living conditions but only a very small number, just a “*bunch of guys*”¹⁵³, have become terrorists. Sageman further says that networks are of main importance to the radicalization process, not hate for the society:

*“Social bonds are the critical element in this process and precede ideological commitment. These bonds facilitate the process of joining the jihad through mutual emotional and social support, development of a common identity, and encouragement to adopt a new faith. All these factors are internal to the group.”*¹⁵⁴

According to Sageman, it is loyalty, trust and intimacy (in-group love), rather than out-group hate, that keep the group together and explains why group members, a “bunch of guys”, are willing to become terrorists.

As a prominent example for radicalization of the members of an Islamic terrorist group in Europe, he examines the group-psychological processes of Al-Qaeda's Hamburg cell *“involving those who would be responsible for the 9/11 operations”*.¹⁵⁵ The terror cell had (just) eight young members with an Arab background who studied at the Technical University and had lived together in

¹⁵² Ibid., pp. 63-64

¹⁵³ Sageman, Marc: *Understanding Terror Networks*, 2004, p. 108

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 135

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 103

Hamburg since the early 1990s. The Egyptian Mohammed Atta, for example, met these Arabs as fellow students at the University first, these young men then became really close friends, shared everything, talked about politics and “*strictly observed the tenets of their religion*”¹⁵⁶. Later on, they joined a Quran study group at the Salafi Al-Quds mosque in Hamburg together. As Sageman highlights it, these guys first became a group of friends, then radicalized, and later joined the Jihad for Al-Qaeda in November 1999.¹⁵⁷

Because of these observations made by Sageman, it makes sense to include social approaches, mechanisms and interactions into the debate on radicalization.

However, Sageman differentiates between two different pathways to terrorism: one is emphasizing the collective decision of a group, as in the case of the Hamburg cell (*bunch of guys*). The second line focuses on the second or third generation of (Muslim) immigrants, among which he observed weak physical links to the host society and a strong sense of exclusion. Sagemann (2008) argues that these people most likely feel attracted to simplistic anti-Western frames, which blame the West for suppressing Muslims and being at war with Islam.¹⁵⁸ In order to answer the research question regarding the motivations of homegrown terrorism, I will focus here on the latter. To understand his approach it is important to understand first, that individuals identify themselves through belonging to a group or community. Not just experienced but also imagined communities can provide meaning to them, and those communities can offer different items for identification such as a certain language, ancestry, neighborhoods, territories, beliefs and religion or social classes. Being a member of such a group generally also includes benefits, such as other people caring for their fellow members, sometimes even in an intimate way which can be compared to parent’s relationship to their children. So, normally, members feel strongly obligated and very loyal to their group (as it could be observed among the Hamburg cell) that they may be even willing to fight or die for it. But whether

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 105

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Sageman, Marc: *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, Pennsylvania, 2008, pp. 66-7

it will happen depends on the level of escalation of a conflict existing between this group and another group or society.¹⁵⁹

The German sociologist Eckert (2013) says that in our daily life, we normally have more than one identity related to our biography or a community we belong to. As we belong to a family, a certain neighborhood, different clubs or political parties, or a religious community. The social changes in the modern era, migration and globalization have led to a zoom out and broke traditional boundaries and social identities and now, different ethnicities, religions and life concepts exist side by side. Eckert further argues that since the 17th century and religious wars of that time, different attempts have been made to subject people to the principles of religion or politics. These attempts have led to an unintentional social diversity, i.e. by forming new states and territories and mass conversions; even colonialization has created multi-culturalism in modern societies. At the same time these identities can provide answers to external challenges such as irritation created by diversity where different realities co-exist. These environments can obviously change over time (i.e. through globalization).

But in a war, these diversities are much often observed in their most simple form: friends versus foes. Yet this simplified model can also be adopted by organizations being in a conflict with other groups to motivate people to fight against a rival party. Leaders of such groups construct a scenario in which like-minded people really start to feel under attack by the rival group and see it as their duty to defend themselves and their community or religion. Eckert underlines, that this would just work in an unsecure and conflicted environment, because peace would always support the trend of more diversity in a society (tolerance).¹⁶⁰

All extremist religious ideologies rejecting contradictions of modernity and globalization are formally based on the same two cognitive operators: (1) simplifying society (friends versus foes) and (2) calling for war against their enemies. And when individuals find themselves upset in such a social environment which supports the narrative of the extremist religious group, it can

¹⁵⁹ Eckert, Roland: Radikalisierung – Eine soziologische Perspektive, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. Vol. 63(29-31/2013), Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn, 2013, p. 11

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12

cause more irritation, where simplifications start to make sense and in the extreme, the outcome can lead to paranoia.

This approach argues that at the beginning of the radicalization process there are either really experienced or subjectively perceived discrimination, humiliation or persecution of individuals (deprivation). And when an ideology addresses a certain personal feeling, it can pull people together who then propagate to defend this constructed collective's interests to free themselves, which sometimes attracts even other people to join. New members do not always have to be in the same dilemma but can be motivated through friendships and closeness to old members. The new grown and experienced solidarity between people and enthusiasm in this group is projected on the future ideal condition. This gives a greater meaning and can motivate individuals to become even more violent and makes suffering valuable and dying for the greater cause worthy to them. This logic emphasizes that such generalizations often attract people who are looking for solutions to their personal misery, but also including personal desire, search for an identity, social status, home or adventure.

This line also explains why common practices can be observed among members of groups. Ideologically perceived threats can initiate dynamics and processes for radicalization within a group and a dualistic worldview can reduce insecurities of their members and thereby satisfy the cognitive need to understand the world without further cognitive dissonances and offer a symbolic self-completion to an individual. This symbolism can also be observed in common practices whereby a certain behavior is gradually adopted by imitation of other group members. Imitating behavior gradually is explained by social learning theory.¹⁶¹ It emphasizes that if an excessive religious behavior or vocabulary is used by a member of such a group, it does not always mean that this member automatically believes in what he does or says and it is more likely that this behavior or practice is just an imitation of others, whereby role models for example, martyrs celebrated as heroes, are part of processes in social learning. So, members of a radical group learn from the reactions of other group members how the standards are set. Here violence and terrorism cannot just be

¹⁶¹ Logvinov, Michail: *Salafismus, Radikalisierung und terroristische Gewalt. Erklärungsansätze – Befunde – Kritik.* Springer Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2017, p. 67

supported by an ideology but if it is liked by the whole group, it is more likely that the members of such a group also act according to those standards.¹⁶²

So, the sociological approach in the research field of radicalization also focuses on the gratifications radicalized groups offer to their members and how they satisfy their needs. As discussed above, extremist religious groups can create (more) irritation and in the worst case even paranoia, but at the same time they offer a solution or satisfaction for an individual's (troubled) mind. Groups, normally including hierarchy and ideology can provide social roles, a sense of belonging and an identity (gratification) especially to young people who were looking for or lacking one of these. In that way being active in such groups can also satisfy the psychological quest for significance.

Another reason why group processes matter in the radicalization process is that once individuals join the group, they cannot easily exit, due to isolation and peer pressure, because there might be also a feeling of guilt or fear of returning to the former ways of life or being sanctioned by the state, pushing a person further into to the radical network.¹⁶³ What makes it so interesting for this research is that the social factor accommodates both pushing and pulling forces. So, the interaction of individual needs and group-processes creates a dynamism which can also push and/or pull people further into the process of radicalization. This also emphasizes that at this level, networks can work either ways, bottom-up as mentioned above or mobilizing and recruiting people top-down.

So, people adopting certain moral values are more willing to fight or perceive it as their duty to defend these values, as it was made clear in this section, and therefore risk their lives. And when these values are shared by a social group, their willingness becomes greater, and therefore in-group love drives them to kill or die not only or primarily for the cause, but also for each other. Referring to Atran's work arguing that Jihadists are devoted actors who were less motivated by self-interests but by the duty to defend sacred values and do irrational thing in defense of what they love, Cottee (2019) argues:

“Ever since ISIS started unraveling at the end of 2017, with thousands of its fighters surrendering to Iraq and Kurdish forces and proclaiming their innocence as lowly cooks and farm-hands, I have started to have doubts about this core insights.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Cottee, 2019, p. 16

He further criticizes that if it was their moral sentiment that made them to defend sacred values and their loved comrades, then, “*why did they go far beyond the call of duty*”¹⁶⁵? And emphasizing that this, the extreme brutality and violence in their actions, cannot be explained with devotion but with it giving them pleasure and satisfying their psychological self-interests which I will discuss in the next paragraphs.¹⁶⁶

4.4. Psychology

In an article published in August 2015, I tried to explain why young Muslims in Germany who have the luxury of free education, strawberries and mangoes in the winter season, almost thousand-euro cell phones in their pockets, free medical health care and clean drinking water, so living pretty good lives compared to the majority of young people in this world, voluntarily turn to an ideology advocating a return to medieval traditions and lifestyle. Why do they give up freedom and obey and follow strict religious rules for what they see as a “pious life”? I argued that this globalized generation, which grew up with so much technical progress in such a short time, who watched Japanese cartoons and thereby sipped the American dream out of the Coca-Cola can, were certainly protesting and suffering from an identity crisis and old-fashioned zeitgeist, looking for meaning in their lives. I mentioned that it can be observed that especially young radicalized Muslims flooding Facebook with their ego trips, checking how many likes they generated for posting a pictures of victims in Gaza suffering and when confronted by facts in reality, it showed that they know nothing about for example the Israel-Palestine conflict, was not really a cry for help for those who were suffering but a call for attention for their own problems.¹⁶⁷ Back in 2015, this line of argument was quite unpopular in Germany, radicalization even then was mainly explained by ideological reasons. Also, I certainly failed in explaining how exactly it matters.

But in the very recent years of research on radicalization scholars put much more effort and attention on this line and succeeded in explaining the quest for significance and search for identity as psychological motivations of young

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 18

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 18-9

¹⁶⁷ Nadeem, Mohammad: Deutschland sollte von den Salafisten lernen..., Das Milieu, 2015, Online Source: <https://www.dasmili.eu/art/deutschland-sollte-von-den-salafisten-lernen/>

Muslims to radicalize into Islamic extremism more comprehensively, on which I will now elaborate in this section.

The psychologist Borum (2004) argues that psychological approaches are more suitable to explain one's personal motivation to join terrorist groups but notes that too few theoretical models whereby the focus often lies on psychopathological behavior, are based on empirical research.¹⁶⁸

However, in the beginning of the research on terrorism, the root for violence was broadly explained by psychoanalytical and psychopathological approaches. For example, leaning on the instinct theory, some were arguing that terrorist behavior is an animalic instinct rooted deep in human nature, which became quite popular and has influenced many writers from different academic fields. It was then linked to psychoanalytic concepts and ideas, whereby mental weakness, narcissistic personality and sexual tendencies which could stand contrary to someone's environment have been used as further explanatory causes. Two basic assumptions for these attempts to explain violent behavior stand out here. First, the motives for terrorist behavior are unconscious and result from hostility towards one's parents. Second, that it is the result of early abuse and mistreatment. Both hypotheses are still quite common in the research of radicalization, maybe because terrorism, and violence in general, are seen as antisocial, for some, it makes sense to look for pathological approaches to explain the motivations.¹⁶⁹ But these psychopathological and -analytical approaches do not do this justice, in fact other psychological interpretations see motivations of people turning to terrorism as more rational.

Cottee and Hayward (2011), drawing on the Arendtian perspective that terrorists are (psychologically) normal, agree that the focuses on how terrorists act and think have dominated the research agenda, whereby too few have asked how terrorists feel. They suggest a change in perspective and argue that it has to be considered that for some people terrorism "*may be part of a project to live a life less ordinary*"¹⁷⁰ Here, terrorism can be seen as much as an existential as a political phenomenon whereby a certain lifestyle makes it attractive for people to become a terrorist. Inspired by small literature on how thrilling war or the use of guns or planting an explosive device can be for some people, they elaborate

¹⁶⁸ Borum, Randy: *Psychology of Terrorism*, University of South Florida, Tampa, 2004, p. 11

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19

¹⁷⁰ Cottee, Simon/ Hayward, Keith, 2011, p. 965.

on existential factors – feelings, desires, aspirations relating to one’s moral self. Therefore, they suggest, that it does not make much sense to say that people were pushed or driven but pulled to terrorism: “*that they allow themselves to be seduced by its own appeal*”¹⁷¹.

According to Cottee and Hayward the core existential motivations, the desires for people to engage in terrorism lies in excitement, ultimate meaning and glory. They do not claim that these are the only factors but want to raise awareness in the research field that it should be similarly considered that people can be pulled by motivational desire, beside static environmental factors pushing towards it.¹⁷² They define terrorism not only as a political activity (aiming higher goals) but also as a collective one, because even if an attack is often carried out by individuals, their action stands in the context of a group, as mentioned above. So, groups are of main importance for radicalization, but when it comes to motivations, they argue that terrorism includes the use of extreme violence against other human beings: “*To put it more strongly, terrorist acts are purposively designed to explode human bodies and tear limbs apart and shred flesh.*”¹⁷³ Thus, terrorists know and aim to do harm to others, which makes them brutal and not just political but violent agents too:

*“This raises the possibility that part of the motivation behind terrorism lies in the various emotional or sensual attractions associated with doing violent acts. Preeminent among these is excitement.”*¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, drawing on groups and social bonds, they rethink the ideological motivation for radicalization. In causing violence, which is seen by Cottee and Hayward to serve more of an expressive and of an less instrumental purpose, it provides them with an identity for what they stand in the world: “*it also supplies them with a narrative for understanding their own place in the wider world.*”¹⁷⁵ And beside an individual’s identity, terrorist groups also offer rewards by providing them a sense of ultimate meaning, by letting them feel that they are an active part of a cosmic war to defend the sacred, which can be in a physical form through comrades and group members. By defending something transcendental

¹⁷¹ Ibid.,

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 966

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 966

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 966-7

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 973

*“one experiences an ultimate meaning and purpose for which to live and even die”*¹⁷⁶.

In addition to that, Juergensmeyer (2003) also highlights that especially religiously motivated (cosmic) wars include thrill and drama, a theatrical form in terrorism. Beside the strategic or political values of terrorism, in some cases this extreme violence is carried out just *“to make a symbolic statement”*¹⁷⁷ Targeting a building can dramatically indicate that not the agent but what stands behind it, for example the government or economy, were targeted as evil foes. Here, the point of the attack is to create an illustrative object as an example. They are designed dramatically to have an impact on the witnesses, even at a distance, who automatically become part of that event.¹⁷⁸ And terrorists are aware of the fact *“that they were creating enormous spectacle”*¹⁷⁹. He concludes that they do not do it for the cause but do it for the drama and may hope that their action then makes a difference but primarily they intend to catch the attention of their audience to change their understanding of the world.

According to Cottee and Hayward (2011), terrorism also has a compensatory feature. It satisfies one’s existential frustration, a *“feeling that one’s life is meaningless, directionless, boring, banal, uneventful, anodyne, soulless, aimless, passive, cowardly”*¹⁸⁰. Hence, extremist groups offer bonds, intimacy and solidarity and open up a world full of thrill and excitement through action, drama and intrigue for their members.

However, this approach also includes and explains why so many converts who were brought up in non-Muslim households joined IS and were attracted by it. In that way it also weakens the “lack of integration” -idea as concluded by the German intelligence service BfV to be the key motivation for people to join Islamic extremist groups far away.

The demographics as presented by the BfV heavily emphasize that the ideological end state of a caliphate may be attractive but as the further analysis of social networks and this line argues, it rather supports Roy’s “Islamization of radicalism”-hypothesis. Most foreign fighters have marginal religious knowledge and often certain life events threatened their identity, so that they

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Juergensmeyer, 2003, p. 125

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 126

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 127

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 979

were looking for meaning in life. Radicalization can be interpreted here as a compensatory turn to fill the gap.

Certainly, beyond ideological and political push factors, there is an emotional experience and aesthetic appeal pulling people towards IS. Writing about the allure of IS, Cottee (2019) argues that despite their brutal actions, radicalized young people were described by their family, friends and former teachers as ordinary, nice, polite or reserved people. *“Like serial killers, terrorists have become the new everyman next door who, according to the script we have written for them, transform, without warning, from angelic-looking children into megalomaniacal monsters.”*¹⁸¹ Their radicalization into the extreme is then often explained by manipulations or the fact that they must have been brainwashed by someone. Cottee says that this point of view needs revising because it excludes one’s desire and emphasizes that only mad people would join IS. But it is more likely that these foreign fighters were pulled by their desire, shared by all, searching for a greater meaning, wanting to escape their ordinary life:

“The Islamic State is both a terrorist organization and insurgent army. It is also, like the best reality TV, a fantastically compelling viewing spectacle. We watch aghast at its moral depravity – but we watch nonetheless, transfixed by atrocity. The Islamic State show is slick and exciting, and there are twists and turns. It is also edgy and, with its cast of sword-wielding, horse-riding, hair-raising holy warriors, profoundly exotic, offering a version of reality that is a stark counterpoint to life in the West.”¹⁸²

In this way, it contributes to the human desire and longings displayed in its seductive narrative, portraying an ideal, exciting, thrilling, meaningful and peaceful state. Their propaganda videos and media materials show that the IS has understood the role of existential allure in the recruitment process. It is no coincidence that their videos match a Hollywood-style in high-quality audio and graphic effects, standards and different genres from highly shocking and brutal to absolutely boring.

The American philosopher Picart (2015) describes these images, but more importantly the rhetoric and behavior of individuals in IS, as a “jihadi cool”-subculture. The Internet brings people closer not only to organized terrorist networks but specifically to this “badass” culture which has a strong appeal for certain people to further self-radicalize into this culture:

¹⁸¹ Cottee, 2019, p. 120

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 122

“Arguably, the internet plays a crucial role in this galvanization of monster talk into monstrous action, as it provides the means through which a lone wolf may first self-radicalize through some imaginary or sympathetic connection with an organized terrorist network.”¹⁸³

People then individually adopt certain features shared by more, as a medievalist-seeming language which can be unintentionally funnier than it is scary. She argues that it is an attempt to mix sacred concepts with “*a desire to be cool in the MTV generation*”¹⁸⁴, portrayed through pictures, IS magazines and videos and used in language which attracts all kind of people, from male to female, from Muslims to non-Muslims, from brave citizens to criminals – making it an adventure for them to become a real badass gangster-style Jihadi: living a celebrity life, celebrating themselves, but thinking it is virtuous.

Also, the Norwegian political scientist Hegghammer (2017) highlights a highly seductive and aesthetic cultural dimension of Jihadism, which gives us a clue about their mindset and worldview, which is why it makes it important to study the cultural aspect of it with more detail.

He notes that “*militancy is about more than bombs and doctrines. It is also about rituals, customs, and dress codes. It is about music, film, and storytelling. It is about sports, jokes, and food*”¹⁸⁵. Jihadists are emotionally sensitive, they like to listen to Jihadi poetry, they discuss and talk about dream interpretations and they also weep a lot. And arguing why we should study this culture, he emphasizes two hypotheses. First, a command or knowledge of these customs among Jihadi culture, which is not easy to access, shows that there is also a personal commitment behind a person’s effort to adopt and learn these “*because it takes time to acquire it*”¹⁸⁶. Secondly, the complex and rich Jihadi cultural corpus accommodates emotional tools “*that reinforce and complement the cognitive persuasion work done by doctrine*”¹⁸⁷.

This surely supports the argument that Jihadi magazines and propaganda videos make use of Hollywood-like and Western style productions aiming to address potential European/Western recruits, drawing on their desire for excitement, glory and meaning. Alas, the academic and also state agents focus mainly on

¹⁸³ Picart. Caroline Joan S. “Jihad Cool/Jihad Chic”. *Societies* 2015, 5, p. 358

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 363

¹⁸⁵ Hegghammer, Thomas: *Jihadi Culture. The Art and Social Practices of Militant Islamists*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017, p. 1

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 15

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p.16

structures, operations, political goals and ideologies of Jihadi groups and ignore the cultural and emotional importance for radicalization emerging from it.

Now, Cottee (2019) highlights that one could conclude from this that Jihadists, especially European foreign fighters, would join IS only for adventure and excitement and not for religious reasons, arguing that most of them only had marginal theological knowledge. But giving a reference to Hegghammer's work, he underlines that once they have joined Islamic extremist groups, they take these ritual and traditional customs very seriously, thereby he differentiates between intense beliefs and marginal theological knowledge.¹⁸⁸

In conclusion, writing about "How not to think about ISIS", Cottee argues that these people are neither "*misguided about the authentic nature of Islam and their religious obligations, and that these lost souls must be returned to the correct path*"¹⁸⁹, nor were they brainwashed or manipulated by any cult's subversive techniques. A more fruitful debate will emerge when we take them seriously, not only being pushed, but also allowing themselves to be pulled and attracted by an extremist group's messages. So, when they become recruits and are even willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater cause of the group, they might do it on purpose: "*Understanding this, and not how they have been "brainwashed," is the graver and more urgent explanatory project.*"¹⁹⁰

Hence, this line of argument sounds very plausible and interesting, but surely it alone cannot explain radicalization into Islamic extremism. A lot of people may look for meaning in life and have the desire for excitement and adventure. This approach (as all the other lines here) alone cannot explain why they then join an Islamic extremist groups. Islamists do not have the monopoly on satisfying personal or emotional needs as desire. The quest for identity, meaning or desire for excitement are common emotions many people feel in their life and without context are useless as indicators for radicalization to occur. And Islamist extremist groups are not the only one offering to satisfy these emotional needs. Local gangs or the military may be matching these needs in the same way. They all offer structure, meaning, social bonds and adventures. But as all the other factors discussed above in this chapter, this line of argument is very important to understand radicalization processes in the context of Islamic extremism. It

¹⁸⁸ Cottee, 2019, pp. 231-2

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 240

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 243

explains why especially young people become interested in Islamic extremist ideologies and activities. Which then just combined with all other factors makes sense and a fertile ground for radicalization to emerge from it pulling people into Islamic extremism.

4.5. Role of the Internet

I will now draw some attention on the role of the Internet, which is considered as an enabler rather than a direct cause for radicalization, yet IS has been quite successful in using different virtual channels to recruit new members and encourage Muslims from Europe to migrate. Even the BfV reports on German foreign fighters shows that during the peak of the foreign fighter movement the Internet played a significant role in the radicalization process. This recent development makes it even necessary to include and reflect briefly on the role of the Internet as a medium that facilitates radicalization as well.

Drawing on Salafism as a Jihadist ideology, using certain narratives attracting people in Europe, makes it necessary to look closer on how extremists are using different strategies and tools to share and spread these narratives and propaganda. The BfV reports also emphasizes that especially during the peak of the migration of European foreign fighters, the use of the Internet played an important role in the recruitment and radicalization process, more than mosques or friends, but that can surely change over time, depending on context.

The Egyptian-German sociologist El-Wereny (2018), analyzing German Salafi websites, comes to the conclusion that Salafists are not just heavily spreading their ideology in Germany via the Internet but also compared to other Islamic organizations, Salafists also dominate the German virtual scene on Islam with their interpretation in the form of texts, videos and audio. They mainly reach the younger generation and intend to influence them in order to recruit them for their cause. As highlighted above, according to the BfV, these interpretations are seen as radical and offer strong motivations for young people to become terrorists. El-Wereny also cites the BfV, saying that the Internet plays a very important role in the recruitment process, because it can bring young people quickly, easily and anonymously closer to real existing Salafist networks.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ El-Wereny, Mahmud: Die virtuelle Welt des Salafismus – eine Quelle für islamistische Radikalisierung? Eine Analyse zur Internetpräsenz des Salafismus im deutschen Kontext, in:

He notes that all websites offer a huge diversity of old and new sources and Islamic scholars present their interpretation of Islam as authentic and true. This leads to the fact that other Islamic interpretations and Muslims as well as non-Muslims are being discredited and with that method of dehumanizing others collides with the German constitution.¹⁹² Their most important features are Fatwas (religious judgments, or religious answers to questions) on all kinds of issues, mainly those young people are dealing with in daily life, but also on more abstract topics such as violence and terrorism. Providing them with orientations and concrete recommendations for action.¹⁹³

Especially Fatwas can also be seen as tools to agitate politically and challenge existing power structures, for instance by not accepting laws and courts on the macro-level, or even parents or teachers giving advices on the micro-level of society. These ideas can reach and offer an identity to a large number of diverse people, especially via the Internet and virtual social platforms, and makes it possible for young people, independently from time and place, to adopt these ideas and see that they might share daily problems and conflicts with other young people. These websites also invite people to experience and contribute to a normative discourse which draws on wishes as political representation or emotional desires, empowering and bounding them virtually together, whereby an ummah is virtually constructed using the same methods as mentioned above to trigger perceived injustice and gradually construct the idea that suffering Muslims have to be defended.

These websites contribute to the radicalization process on the cognitive level by presenting certain charismatic preachers or providing ideas, which are then gradually adopted by the consumers of such virtual contents. By offering them the possibility to contribute to the normative discourse, Salafists are empowering potential recruits to express their wishes and desires and letting them feel included in a flat hierarchy environment where they are free to act and in turn ensuring them to be on the right path.

El-Wereny concludes in his article that because these contents are mainly anti-constitutional or at least contradicts the democratic norms and values as defined

Jahrbuch für Extremismus- und Terrorismusforschung 2017/18 (II), Armin Pfahl-Traugher (Ed.), Hochschule des Bundes für öffentliche Verwaltung, Brühl, 2018, p. 115

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 136

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 141

in the German constitution, they accommodate and support radicalization cognitively.¹⁹⁴

A less structuralist approach by Neumann (2016) highlights the role of the Internet from the perspective of the foreign fighters who use it as a daily tool to stay in contact with family or friends updating and bringing them closer to the front and battlefields through personal posts on Instagram or Facebook or other social media. Beside, the fact that people from home and elsewhere in the world could easily connect virtually to the combat zone is clearly a sensation. So, especially for European Salafists who were interested in Jihad could easily access, connect and gain information on what was going on far away (distance suffering). Neumann argues that the outcome of it was a non-stop input of emotional, dramatic or brutal messages, for example showing how people were suffering under the Assad regime in Syria and how IS fighters freed Muslims, supporting the narrative of corrupt political regimes, triggered a feeling of guilt and pain. Beside the emotional use, it practically helped foreign fighters to instruct other people from Europe who were on the way to join the Jihad to share their experiences and routes navigating them to IS.¹⁹⁵

This highlights that the radicalization process, as we could see it in the case study above, with people who might get in contact with certain milieus through friends who empower people to join the Jihad. Here fighters are then seen as heroes and role models' other people may try to imitate, suggesting that the ideas that social networks and psychology plays a stronger role than thought. Such tools can attract and pull many people using such narratives and tools which can trigger certain emotions such as desire for excitement, but as it was also made clear above, just a few actually become terrorists, so the attraction does not work for everyone to act.

However, the Palestinian Journalist Atwan (2015) can explain not only the excessive use of the Internet by foreign fighters but also how the terror organization itself uses it openly to sell their product and bring their message even into the laptops in the bedrooms of potential recruits. Highlighting that the Internet is not just a minor, but an important tool, IS is operating with and shows how well they know virtual infrastructures and the state of the art of technology,

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 143

¹⁹⁵ Neumann, Peter: *Der Terror ist unter uns. Dschihadismus und Radikalisierung in Europa*. Ullstein, Berlin, 2016, pp. 171-2

for example by producing high-definition, Hollywood-like movies using special effects or Western fashion-like magazines, attracting also European young people and presenting a celebrity life.¹⁹⁶

He argues that the use of modern technology seems contrary to the old fundamentalist Salafi teaching they preach, but once they had explored possibilities to operate in the Internet it has been used since the 1990s. While Al-Qaeda internally communicated via e-mail world-wide, nowadays, virtual media platforms such as YouTube and social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook are used by IS to recruit people and show them in action. Here, the flat hierarchy of the virtual Jihadi world can be observed, because not only the organization is acting and producing propaganda material, but individual fighters contribute to the recruitment with their personal accounts and virtual profiles and make it so hard to stop them, whereby physical (Salafists) social networks can be extended into the virtual world.¹⁹⁷

Constantly feeding their channels and profiles with their propaganda material keeps the message alive and reminds its supporters that they are at war with the unbelievers, underlining these narratives ideologically with verses from the Quran and quotes of certain Islamic scholars and authorities to legitimize them. The IS media centers Al-Hayat founded in 2014 in Syria, with proper TV and radio stations, Al-Furqan founded in 2006 in Iraq and Al-Iltisam a Syrian film-production company which in turn produces videos and movies for Al-Hayat are playing an important role in spreading these official messages. Atwan also said that not only fighters and soldiers were recruited by the IS but also professional journalists, filmmakers and photographers, working in their media centers producing Hollywood-style TV-shows, interviews, documentaries of different genres from comedy to horror.¹⁹⁸ And all this:

“to build up the image of Islamic State as an emotionally attractive place where people ‘belong’, where everyone is a ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. A kind of slang, melding adaptations of shortenings of Islamic terms with street language, is evolving among the English-language fraternity on social media platforms in an attempt to create a ‘jihadi cool’. A jolly home life is portrayed via Instagram images where fighters play with fluffy kittens and jihadist ‘poster-girls’ proudly display the dishes they have created.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Atwan, Abdel Bari: Islamic State. The Digital Caliphate. London: Saqi, 2015, pp. 9-10

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 10-11

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 15

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 14

In addition to that, the Israeli professor for Communication Weimann (2016) argues that the recent developments in modern Jihadist media strategy also attracted the attention of counter terrorism agencies and International media companies, trying to fight hate speech and extremism online by deleting and blocking accounts. Even hackers such as the “Anonymous” groups have taken down hundreds of IS websites after the 2015 attacks in Paris, which has led IS to change and run their whole media operation from the dark web, keeping it alive virtually and making it nearly impossible to stop their online activity.²⁰⁰

Because communication, via platforms on the surface of the online world such as YouTube, Google, Facebook and Twitter, have made it difficult for extremists to operate, they found alternative technologies: instead of WhatsApp, they started to use Telegram an encrypted communication application mobile messenger, where IS Media center Al-Hayat announced and distributed instructions to access their materials and links to the dark web, where one can be anyone or do anything they want.²⁰¹ It is the deepest layer and not indexed by traditional search engines. *“It contains content that has been intentionally concealed [...] by illegal content like pornography, illicit finances, drug hubs, weapons trafficking, counterfeit currency, terrorist communication, and much more.”*²⁰²

So, Islamic terrorist and extremist groups too are quite aware of the fact that it offers them new opportunities to recruit and attract, to spread propaganda, to raise funds and to coordinate attacks secretly and to stow their material in the dark web, making it accessible worldwide. And to ensure sufficient funding, money transfers and illegal purchase of weapons and explosives the deep web page “Fund the Islamic Struggle without Leaving a Trace” was activated and it invites people to donate Bitcoins through a particular dark-web-address.²⁰³

He concludes with the note that studies analyzing the role of the dark web in terrorist activities such as propaganda and recruitment are missing, so it can only be speculated by knowing the possibilities it accommodates, that terrorist make use of it, but not to what extend they have totally shifted their processes to the dark web.

²⁰⁰ Weimann, Gabriel: Terrorist Migration to the Dark Web, in: Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2016, p. 41

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 40

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 42

The dark web might be a channel for terrorist organizations, advanced recruits and returning foreign fighters, who got special training to access, use and distribute propaganda material in the underground or among a certain environment to recruit, train and arm new terrorists.

So, on the one hand the Internet offers terrorist organizations different channels to organize, distribute and spread their propaganda material anonymously and unfiltered. On the other hand, this discussion has also shown that it is heavily used by their members and fans. It gives them a feeling to agitate anonymously. In that way no one has to join a mosque where radical figures preach or go underground to get information physically, what makes it even harder to detect a certain radical milieu physically. All kinds of people can connect and communicate with other like-minded people and even join them in battles far away. Becoming a part of a global virtual community without even leaving the bedroom.

Yet, the relationship between online propaganda and offline/ real world violence still has to be proven empirically. Millions may watch online propaganda videos but just very few are motivated by their message to act. Also, users of social media and fanboys of IS propaganda on Twitter or Facebook, might have radicalized cognitively, but they have not become terrorists. This also underlines that the Internet is not the cause for radicalization in general but surely accommodates it. This shows that in the reality of young people's life there is no separation between an online and offline world anymore and that terrorists have understood this by making a successful use of it for their cause.

Thus, studying the internet contributes to detect new mechanisms in radicalization helping us to set new focuses in further analysis, such as on self-study or self-radicalization as for example in the case of the only member of the Hofstad-groups who self-isolated before committing a terrorist attack whereby the internet offered him different radical channels and propaganda material he adopted without being controlled or challenged by other world-views.

4.6. Conclusions from discussion

Although radicalization is complex, it does not mean that different lines trying to explain radicalization are useless. Even if no universal theory can explain reliably why some people become terrorists in the end, the many academic

approaches presented above play an important role to understand their motivations. They provide different perspectives and complement each other well from which I can now conclude that these four factors provide motivations and matter in the radicalization of European young Muslims into Islamic extremism.

1. **Frustration** is an often-used idea to explain why some people become extremists. Every political movement draws and emerges from social conflicts. People who identify with these conflicts may join certain movements. Whereby individual identity crisis can drive them closer to such movements as well as perceived discrimination or suppression by the powerful others. These experiences also offer cognitive reasons to adopt new norms and values and to identify with radical ideas.
2. **Ideology** is also important because terrorist acts cannot be explained without political or religious contexts. Without context, it is impossible to identify who is their friend and who is foe or to explain what they fight for. It was made clear that not all extremist are ideologists, but ideologies are important in the process of radicalization because they provide justifications and directions pushing people towards extremist actions.
3. **Peer groups** play a crucial role in the recruiting process among young Muslims in Europe because one's behaviour and feelings are often affected by those who we know and who we spend our time with and what others think of and expect from us. To understand radicalization, it is important to understand group processes, whereby people can motivate each other.
4. **Desire / Emotions** can be as much important as political or religious factors in the radicalization of young Muslims into Islamic extremism. Protesting against existing norms and values can be also a sign or quest for their emotional needs. It is easier for extremist organizations to satisfy these needs because they stand contrary to the socially accepted system and simplify the complex life and reality into good and bad and offer to those who feel lost the chance to feel good by providing meaning, identity, excitement and adventure.

These four factors cannot easily be converted into a general theory, because it is difficult to prove empirically which factor matters more and in which order they

have to occur. Yet, other mechanisms have to be searched and analyzed. Radicalization on the individual level is very complex and surely not linear. It would be wrong to generalize or assume a certain pathway by combining factors, as it is the case in the above-presented analysis of the BfV report. But these factors, in general, are helpful tools to describe risk factors into Islamic extremism.

For example, a young Muslim man who regularly visits a mosque and has many Salafist friends do not have to be radicalized but belongs to a certain environment where extremist groups predominantly recruit new members from. So, his way into Islamic extremism may be shorter than the way of a young Muslim man not visiting any mosque and just having non-Muslim friends. But even this person can as well radicalize through the Internet on his own and may find his way to an Islamic terrorist organization, highlighting a strong dynamism in such processes. And in turn, it does not mean automatically that because some people share certain characteristics and environments with extremists have to become extremists as well and should not be criminalized at all. So, not every person will radicalize, especially not everyone in the same way, but these four factors can help to assess certain risk factors and to use available resources efficiently in future researches on the motivations of European young Muslims to join extremist groups.

Chapter 5

5. Summary

This thesis was based on the ideas that terrorists are psychologically normal and that there is no typical terrorist personality. And those people who radicalize were not brainwashed nor indoctrinated by any cult, rather it was the willful choice of approx. 5,000 young Muslims in Europe to join an Islamic extremist organization such as IS in the Middle East in recent years. This willful choice makes it interesting to study what made them choose this path. This gradual process of becoming an extremist was then defined as radicalization.

Radicalization is a very complex process including different causes, which makes it very difficult to speak about an individual's motivations to join a terrorist group because every case is different from another. Yet, different approaches together have helped and provided meaningful insights to what causes radicalization.

Furthermore, the analysis based on empirical data and discussion has shown that personal and identity crisis or the quest for significance and meaning in life led European Islamic foreign fighters to gradually adopt Islamic extremist ideology to simplify the complexity of life and solve irritations. Thereby technology and friendship played a significant role to bring them closer to real existing Islamic extremist social networks which made it possible for them to imitate a radical culture or follow the lead of other foreign fighters. Especially social media channels increased the risk for radicalization by allowing Islamic extremist groups, who are well aware of the existential crisis of this European young Muslim generation, to spread their propaganda and political narratives worldwide, directly addressing and attracting potential recruits with images of an ideal, exciting, celebrity life under their rule. Political grievances and frustration provided further important context.

These motivational factors stand out in the radicalization of European young Muslims who joined IS and support the hypothesis of this thesis that they were radicalized through macro-, meso- and micro-level processes where political grievances, group dynamics and personal victimization merge to push and the desire for excitement, greater meaning and glory pull a person on the pathway to terrorism.

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