(HARD)WIRED FOR TERROR:

Unraveling the Mediatized Roots and Routes of Radicalization

Thomas FRISSEN

Proefschrift aangeboden tot het verkrijgen van de
graad van Doctor in de Sociale Wetenschappen

Promotor: Prof. Dr. Leen d'Haenens
Onderzoekseenheid: Instituut voor Mediastudies [IMS]

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FACULTEIT SOCIALE WETENSCHAPPEN

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(Hard)Wired For Terror
Unraveling the Mediatized Roots and Routes of Radicalization

Thomas Frissen

Voor mama.

I love you, papa en broerie

Lola, je t'aime

Abstract

Terrorism *is* communication. It consists of a carefully orchestrated message that has to be conveyed to an audience that goes far beyond those directly involved in the violence of the incident. To ensure an effective communication, terrorists have to make tactical use of the mass media. As such, terrorism has to be composed in function of the logic of the media ecosystem. Concretely, terrorism is subject to 'the molding forces of the media'; terrorism is *mediatized*. If we wish to truly understand—and perhaps prevent—terrorism, we first need to unravel and grasp the mediated communicative architecture that underpins it. This dissertation set out with the ambition to do so.

(Hard)Wired for Terror is divided into two parts. In the first part, (the *'Roots'*) we provide a historical, semantic analysis of the concepts of radicalism, extremism and terrorism, and how they are interconnected. Furthermore, a comprehensive overview is presented of the state of the art in which the current radicalization and terrorism research is rooted. We challenge insights from individual-psychological and collective-sociological research and bind them together on a social-communicative dimension. By means of a theoretical blend of *Social Movement Theory*, *Mediatization*, and *Socio-Epidemiology*, we propose a new cyclic model of mediatized terrorism and radicalization.

In the second part (the *'Routes'*), we present the results of five original empirical studies. Both message-centered and audience-centered analyses were conducted. On the basis of a detailed content analysis, we uncover the moral psychological and theological underpinnings of the ISIS's worldview. Additionally, survey data of Belgian young adults reveal the 'effects' of different forms of Salafi-Jihadist communication artefacts (from beheading videos to terrorist attacks). Ultimately, the dissertation suggests a few policy recommendations with the aim to prevent radicalization and terrorism.

Preface and Acknowledgements

It was a slow day
And the sun was beating
On the soldiers by the side of the road
There was a bright light
A shattering of shop windows
The bomb in the baby carriage was wired to the radio
...
And I believe
These are the days of lasers in the jungle
Lasers in the jungle somewhere
Staccato signals of constant information
A loose affiliation of millionaires
And billionaires and baby
These are the days of miracle and wonder
This is the long distance call
The way the camera follows us in slo-mo
The way we look to us all, oh yeah"

Zo begon het allemaal voor me; mijn academische ontdekkingstocht. Met deze woorden. Het was 18 juli 2012 en samen met mijn moeder zat ik in een volle Ziggo Dome in Amsterdam. Stiekem–voor haar 52e verjaardag–had ik twee tickets besteld voor een concert van Paul Simon en de 25th Anniversary Tour van het Graceland album. Dit steengoede album (1986) werd geproduceerd in Zuid-Afrika. Het was een samenwerking met verschillende Zuid-Afrikaanse (Zoeloe) artiesten, waaronder Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Alleen al het idee was revolutionair—een samenwerking met zwarte, Zoeloe-muzikanten—en dat in de hoogtij dagen van 'apartheid'. Laat staan de muziek die ze maakten: revolutionair. Toen Ladysmith Black Mambazo "Diamonds on the Soles of her shoes" opende, sprong mijn ma op uit haar stoel en zong mee; ze danste mee. We genoten.

Ik weet nog toen ze *"The Boy in the Bubble"* begonnen te spelen. Ik had de plaat tot in den treure gehoord als kind, maar dit was misschien wel de eerste keer

dat ik écht naar de tekst luisterde. *"Staccato signals of constant information"*, *"This is the long distance call"*, *"The way the camera follows us in slo-mo"*. Ik realiseerde me toen pas waar deze plaat eigenlijk over ging. Behalve over apartheid, segregatie, polarisering, geweld, terrorisme, zong Simon eigenlijk over nieuwe media- en communicatietechnologieën. Over een fantastische technologische ontwikkeling op het gebied van media en communicatie, die de mens plots kon voorzien van 'constant information'. Over camera's die overal en alles vast konden leggen en uitzenden. Wauw, fantastisch, *"days of miracle and wonder"*. Maar ook over een griezelige, onvermijdelijke keerzijde van diezelfde nieuwe media- en communicatietechnologieën, zeker ten tijde van segregatie, polarisering, terrorisme — *"The bomb in the baby carriage was wired to the radio"*. Zijn observaties fascineerden me.

In die tijd, 'studeerde' ik Media en Entertainment Management aan de hogeschool InHolland in Rotterdam. Vlak voor het concert had ik mijn 'scriptie' afgerond. Met het einde van die studie in zicht, worstelde ik met de vraag 'wat nu?'. Verder studeren? Of werken?

Dankzij Paul Simon's woorden wist ik het al vrij snel. Ik wilde eigenlijk wel meer weten over die staccato signals of constant information. 'Wat doet dat nou eigenlijk met ons?', vroeg ik me af. Die eindeloze camerageilheid, selfies, avocado's en bikini's op Instagram, 't hele hebben en houden op Facebook... *"the camera follows us in slo-mo"*, dacht ik. Maar, wat zijn daar nu de consequenties van? Dat wilde ik gewoon weten. Het werd dus verder studeren.

Dat het communicatiewetenschappen zou worden werd me ook al gauw duidelijk. Maar, waar? Nieuw dilemma. Een premaster- en masterjaar in Nederland waren duur—zeker als je al een diploma op zak had. Tijdens een lunch met mijn vader vertelde ik hem dat Amsterdam een mooi programma bood, maar dat de kosten al gauw richting zes à zevenduizend euro zouden kunnen oplopen. Hij keek op, nam een hap van zijn boterham, en zei: "Ennuh...in België? In Leuven, of zo? Is daar niet ook een universiteit?". Ik keek, ik zag (inschrijvingsgeld 650 euro), en ik schreef me in. Zo simpel als pap eten. En zo zat ik—exact twee maanden na Paul Simon's concert; op maandag 17 september 2012—in mijn eigen studiootje in Leuven. Achter me liet ik Rotterdam 'de allermooiste rotstad die er is', en een groep van buitengewoon dierbare vrienden, die me altijd gesteund hebben in alles: Menno, Dorinth, Michiel (die altijd in Brussel voor me klaar stond), Jan, Gijs, Oscar, Eduard, Robbert, Rob, Iris, Laura, de Mari(lene), Tim. Dank jullie wel voor jullie onvoorwaardelijke vriendschap. Dank jullie wel om toch een klein beetje te geloven in die sukkelaar van InHolland.

In Leuven had ik het ook niet slecht, hoor. De opleiding, de Belgische 'pinkes', en de stad bevielen me eigenlijk wel goed. Het werd een mooie periode van mijn leven. Een soort nieuwe start. Ik ontmoette veel nieuwe mensen, kreeg een hele leuke

nieuwe vriendengroep—Alexander, Bram, Simon, Jeroen, Goele, Eva—en leerde steeds meer nieuwe dingen en theorieën over media en communicatie. Ik begreep al een beetje meer over de effecten van "the camera follows in slo-mo", maar nog lang niet alles. Het was daarom fantastisch dat ik tijdens het masterjaar mijn thesis kon schrijven over fantoomvibraties. Weer een stapje dichter bij het antwoord op de vragen die Paul Simon bij me gezaaid had. . . die staccato signals of constant information, 'Wat doet dat nou eigenlijk met ons?'.

Tegelijkertijd werd het een ellendige, kuttijd. Op 3 juli 2013 tussen het schakel- en masterjaar werd mijn moeder—met wie ik precies een jaar eerder nog in Amsterdam zonder enig vermoeden stond te zingen in de Ziggo Dome—gediagnosticeerd met een agressieve, onbehandelbare vorm van kanker: peritoneaal mesothelioom; buikvlieskanker. Geen hond die het weet waar ze dat vandaan had, maar dat leek ook verder niemand te interesseren, want volgens de oncoloog betekende dit nieuws: "geen jaar meer". Boem. Dat was een harde dreun. Dat kwam wel eventjes binnen. Hij had wel gelijk. Tien maanden later, op woensdag 14 mei 2014, hebben wij mama Susan, op 53 jarige leeftijd, voorgoed los moeten laten. Ook die timing was mooi kut gekozen, want precies drie weken later, op woensdag 4 juni moest ik mijn master thesis verdedigen. Maar dat ging gelukkig niet onaardig. Dankjewel, Prof. Bieke Zaman, voor je gulle beoordeling. Nu lag me dus eigenlijk niks meer in de weg om af te studeren. Ze had het zo graag gewild—en ze heeft er nog zo hard voor gevochten—maar ze heeft mijn afstuderen nét niet meer mee mogen maken.

Na mijn master had ik toch nog niet het gevoel helemaal uitgestudeerd te zijn. Die staccato signals of constant information. . . .'Wat doet dat nou eigenlijk met ons?'. . . ik had nog steeds geen bevredigend antwoord op die vraag. Toen mijn masterproefbegeleider, Prof. Jan Van den Bulck, me vroeg of ik niet een jaartje met/bij hem wilde komen werken bij de "Leuven School for Mass Communication Research" vond ik dat natuurlijk grandioos. Uiteraard wil ik dat. Jan, het is dankzij jou dat ik ooit in de onderzoekswereld terecht ben gekomen. Het is ook dankzij jou dat ik verder stappen heb kunnen zetten en een academische carrière heb kunnen uitbouwen. Het is ook dankzij jou dat ik hier nu sta vandaag. Ik heb in jou altijd een voorbeeld gezien. Dus, dank je wel. En, dankjewel om in me te geloven.

Tijdens mijn jaartje bij de Leuven School for Mass Communication Research, had ik helaas geen fondsen te pakken weten te krijgen voor een doctoraatspositie. Het leek erop dat verder studeren er dus toch niet inzat voor mij. Totdat ik via collega Anna Berbers in contact kwam met Prof. Leen d'Haenens. Anna wist dat ik graag verder wilde als onderzoeker. En, Anna wist ook dat Leen nog iemand zocht voor een onderzoek naar iets met 'moslimjongeren en radicalisering'. Zij legde het

contact en knoopte de eindjes aan elkaar. Dankjewel hiervoor Anna, want dankzij jouw verbindende kracht, kon ik een paar maanden later, in oktober 2015 starten als PhD student onder begeleiding van Leen.

Ik ben elke dag met veel plezier naar de faculteit gekomen de afgelopen drie en een half jaar. Dat was niet alleen voor de leuke collega's, maar ook omdat mijn doctoraatsproject eigenlijk *spot-on* was. Het bracht—puur toevallig—alle thema's bijeen uit Paul Simon's plaat die me ooit aanspoorde om nog verder te gaan studeren: communicatie- en mediaeffecten, terrorisme, polarisering, segregatie, radicalisering. Wat een uniek project. Maar, dit alles was natuurlijk 'powered by' Prof. Leen d'Haenens. Leen. Supervisor, mentor, bron van energie en inspiratie, vertrouwenspersoon, én coach. Met jou klikte het vanaf het eerste begin heel goed. Onze eerste ontmoetingen waren meteen heel dynamisch en inspirerend—en dat zijn ze vier jaar lang gebleven. Jouw eindeloze enthousiasme en passie voor het onderzoeks- en onderwijsvak heb ik altijd heel 'besmettelijk' gevonden. Je hebt me vier jaar lang weten te motiveren (en dat is al een kunst op zich, denk ik) om dit project tot een goed einde te brengen. Je hebt me bij tijden zowel kort gehouden als vrij gelaten. Een knappe balans die misschien niet elke supervisor zal weten te vinden. Maar jij kunt dat. Je hebt me altijd het gevoel gegeven dat je vertrouwen had in mijn kunnen—en dat stimuleerde me enorm om mijn grenzen te verleggen. Dankjewel voor alles dat je voor me hebt gedaan. Dankjewel voor je aanmoedigingen en ondersteuning. Zonder jou was dit project nooit geworden wat het nu is.

Ook Prof. Rozane de Cock en Prof. Cédric Courtois waren twee onmisbare mentoren tijdens mijn doctoraatsstudie. Vanaf het prille begin hebben zij actief meegedacht en het project bijgestuurd. Onze jaarlijkse bijeenkomsten waren telkens inspirerend en motiverend. Rozane en Cédric, dank jullie wel voor de grondige lezingen van mijn tussentijdse versies. Jullie feedback is elke keer weer betekenisvol voor me geweest.

Na iets meer dan twee jaar proeven van het doctoraatsbestaan in Leuven, was het tijd voor een nieuwe impuls in januari 2018: drie maanden op research stay in Montréal, Canada. Het was er -26 toen ik er aankwam, maar Prof. Cecile Rousseau en haar team aan McGill University verzorgden een warm ontvangst. Cécile's team was enorm gastvrij en een bron van fantastische onderzoeksprojecten en -plannen. Cécile, thank you very much for having me at SHERPA. Thank you for inviting me in all these great projects that we have been doing in the last year. I often miss you guys in Montréal, and it is my desire to come back one day.

Tot slot is er ook Prof. Erkan Toguslu. Erkan, you have been more than a mentor to me and this project. I would like to thank you very much for your great contributions to this PhD project. I also would like to thank you, and Prof.

toppers zorgden voor het ultieme hoogtepunt tijdens mijn doctoraat. YOU-nite. Toppers, de bijzondere tijd die ik met jullie heb mogen doorbrengen, pakt niemand mij ooit nog af. Dankjewel.

Tot slot, zijn er nog drie personen die wel een heel bijzonder woord van dank verdienen. Jeroentje, Broerie. Allerliefste Jeroen. Hoe had ik dit project moeten klaarspelen zonder mijn broer? De tijd die we samen doorbrachten in ons huisje in Brussel is me ongelooflijk dierbaar. En ik vrees dat het nooit meer zal terugkomen. Als ik je 's ochtends zag zitten aan het ontbijt in je strakke pilotenpak, met je bijna-captains epauletten, was ik altijd apetrots op je. Stiekem heb ik altijd een beetje naar je opgekeken. Niet alleen letterlijk, door die lange nek van je, maar ook figuurlijk. Jouw ambitie, je vastberadenheid, en krachtig doorzettingsvermogen om te bereiken wat je wilt bereiken zijn een levendig voorbeeld voor me. Had ik dat maar, denk ik dan stiekem. Maar, het was dan ook juist dat, dat me een extra duwtje in de rug gaf de laatste jaren als 't mij even ontbrak aan zelfvertrouwen of vasthoudendheid. 'Waar een wil is, is een weg' en 'mijn tijd komt nog wel', dacht ik dan; zo doet Jeroen dat ook. Dankjewel, voor de mooie momenten van broederlijke liefde.

Pap. Lieve pap. Dankjewel om samen met mama zo'n fantastisch fijn nestje te hebben gecreëerd. Jij weet me al 30 jaar te stimuleren en uit te dagen om mijn eigen grenzen op te zoeken en te verleggen en om te doen waar ik gelukkig van word: Ontdêkke. Of het nu op vakantie is, of in het dagelijkse leven, of in de (sociale) wetenschap, ontdêkke is het mooist wat er is. In de zeven jaren die ik hier beschrijf, heb je flink wat voor je kiezen gekregen. In Juli 2012, was 't nog allemaal compleet. Wat was het lekker toen, hè, op de Pommardlaan?! Nu, nog geen zeven jaren later, is het er even wat anders. Als een donderslag bij heldere hemel, van een vol nest naar volledig leeg. Je twee zonen zijn naar het buitenland vertrokken; je hebt de liefde van je leven verloren; Gabbertje is er niet meer; Stoetel is er niet meer. Alleen jij zit er nog. Een oogverblindende leegte die is achter gebleven (behalve in de kelder dan, waar je nog altijd de meest bizarre fitness-apparaten verzamelt en opslaat voor als je ooit zin zou krijgen om te sporten). Ik heb met veel bewondering naar je gekeken, pap. En je mag gerust weten dat ik vind dat je het fantastisch doet. Ook samen met Monique ga je nu weer heerlijke momenten beleven—misschien zelfs een beetje van de wereld zien?! Ontdêkke? In ieder geval was dit proefschrift er nooit geweest zonder jouw hulp. Jij hebt mij leren schrijven. Het fundament van dit boekje werd gelegd tijdens die nachten in de tuin van zomer 2012 toen je me leerde een scriptie te schrijven. Dankjewel.

Lola, mon amour. Ce n'était pas toujours facile pour toi de vivre avec moi ces derniers mois. J'étais tout le temps en train d'écrire—le jour et la nuit. Et si je n'écrivais pas, j'était en train de contempler ce que je pourrais encore écrire. Mais,

Lola bella, c'est fini. Nouveau chapitre. A partir d'aujourd'hui je vais de nouveau prendre soin de toi, cuisiner pour toi, et préparer la chambre pour notre fils qui arrive déjà dans quelques semaines. Merci beaucoup pour tout. Je t'aime.

En, zo eindigde het allemaal voor me; mijn academische ontdekkingstocht. Althans, voorlopig. Want, om heel eerlijk te zijn, na twaalf jaar studeren blijf ik toch nog een beetje op mijn honger zitten: 'the camera follows us in slo-mo' en 'staccato signals of constant information', wat doet dat nou eigenlijk met ons? Ik weet in ieder geval dat er nog heel veel te ontdekken valt.

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biggest paradox on earth

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1 | Introduction

"I believe we all possess the raw material required to commit horrible acts. We just need the right or wrong combination of events to make the raw material combustible."

Dr. Laszlo Kreizler [1]

In the inevitable crisis following a terrorist attack in the West—be it in Madrid, London, New York, Paris, or Brussels—we ask ourselves repeatedly the same three questions: *Who did it?; Why did he/she/they do it?*; and *Can it happen again?* When answers to these pressing questions are not provided soon enough, societal panic grows. And when societal panic builds up, the outlook for a successful crisis management gradually declines. As a consequence, government officials, security services, and the news media alike share a pressure to provide the public with as much as information as possible—as soon as possible. However, and rather paradoxically, an information- and media-saturated crisis response—especially when the information is quickly-compiled—is likely to add oil on the panic fire, which in turn provokes increased feelings of insecurity, societal polarization, and potentially even 'radicalization' (see Benkler, Faris, and Roberts, 2018; Awan, Hoskins, and O'Loughlin, 2011). It is exactly this complex, dynamic, mediatized, and likely cyclic process that forms the locus of concern for the current

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[1]In reference to the opening quote of this dissertation: Dr. Laszlo Kreizler is a fictive character in the Netflix series 'The Alienist', based on the crime novels by Caleb Carr. The story takes place in the late 19th century and is centered around a so-called alienist Dr. Kreizler (played by Daniel Brühl). The idea was that people with mental disorders were considered to be alienated from their true nature, and Alienists were experts who specialized in studying them. I took this quote from episode 4, entitled *"These Bloody Thoughts"*.

dissertation.

Now, in contrast to a typical dissertation introduction, this chapter will not provide any contextualization to the subjects under scrutiny. Rather, it was written as a reader's guide and as a way to familiarize with the topic and structure of the book. That does not mean, however, that this dissertation will not pay attention to the broader context of radicalization and terrorism—it definitely does. Yet, this is for later chapters (see chapters 2 and 3). This chapter will only briefly introduce the reader to the rationale behind the thesis that set out under the banner of *'(Hard)Wired for Terror'*. What does this phrase actually mean? In what follows, it will become clear that '(Hard)Wired for Terror' contains five meanings that seem to bind together the individual chapters of this book.

First of all, the main thesis of this dissertation is that we are living in a 'wired', interconnected, and even hyper-connected world. For Hoskins (2014), it is only by looking through this lens of wired 'hyper-connectivity'—which he also calls 'mediatization'—that we can understand social phenomena in contemporary society. This is no different for radicalization and terrorism. In fact, as we will come to understand throughout this dissertation, both phenomena are mediatized—or wired—in their very nature. In the chapter 2.3 and 2.4 we will discuss this principle of mediatization more in detail.

Second, 'wired' refers to the role that the Internet is thought to play within a radicalization process. A growing body of literature has argued that the Internet is instrumental in facilitating access to radical materials and radical networks of likeminded people (Alava, Frau-Meigs, and Hassan, 2017; Ducol, 2015). In that sense, wired carries not only the meaning of *mediatized* but also of *mediated*. In chapter 2.1.3 we will review the current literature on the role of the Internet within radicalization. Similarly, in chapter 2.2.3 a brief overview of the current state of the art on mediated terrorism is provided. Furthermore, in chapters 4 and 5 we present our own empirical studies on the matter. We will look at different collective action frames and propaganda rhetoric in online materials from today's most vigorous

and media-savvy terrorist organization, ISIS. After these message-oriented analyses, we will investigate in chapter 7 the extent to which actively seeking out for such materials online is associated with violent radicalization in Belgian school-going youth.

Third, the English word 'wire' is thought to find its root in the Latin word 'veire' [2], meaning weaved. As we will see in chapter 2.2, terrorism and mediated communication are increasingly weaved into one another, and are thus interdependent on one another. This notion is known in the literature as a 'symbiotic relationship' (e.g. Archetti, 2013; Weimann, 2008)—in which both the media as well as the terrorists benefit from the relationship. In chapter 2.2.3 we will challenge this notion.

Fourth, the word 'terror' has a double meaning in this dissertation. Not only does it refer to those who are allegedly engaged in perpetrating acts of terror (as is potentially the case with radicalization), it also makes reference to the outcome of terrorism. As will become clear in chapter 2.2, Terrorism is an act of communication with its main purpose to frighten and to scare an audience (see Archetti, 2013; Horgan, 2005; Jenkins, 1985). After all, the word terror is derived from the latin word terrere, meaning 'to frighten' or 'to scare' (Weimann, 2008). The last part of this dissertation looks at this specific meaning more in detail. Concretely, we will explore in chapter 8 the association between news media exposure to terrorism, a heightened cognitive hypervigilance (i.e. terrorism catastrophizing), and anti-Muslim hostility.

Lastly, the parentheses are meaningful. They make reference to a longstanding and seemingly endless debate in the literature about whether radicalization should be studied from an individual-psychological or a collective-sociological perspective. Whilst the individual-psychological side of the debate beliefs that personal dispositions, i.e. hardwired, are the roots for radicalization, the collective-sociological side defends the idea that having ties—or being wired—to a

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[2]According to the Google Dictionary

collective is most crucial in a radicalization process. It is in this context, that the current dissertation suggests to study the phenomenon through a socio-epidemiological lens (chapter 2.1.4), whereby the host (i.e. individual) is considered to be equally important as the environment (e.g. the Internet) and as the 'pathogen' (e.g. collective action frames). Along these lines we have also adopted a holistic communication approach in which both the message-side as well as the audience side of the terrorists' mediated communication process is studied. At this point it becomes evident that dr. Kreizler's philosophy–with which we opened this chapter–is as a fruitful departing point. After all, the main point that this dissertation will make is that *"we all possess the raw material required to commit horrible acts,* i.e. hardwired, *but that we just need the right or wrong combination of events,* i.e. being wired to a specific environment, *to make the raw material combustible".* "

PART I

ROOTS

2 | Welcome to the Jungle of Definitions and Theories

"One man's terrorist, is another man's freedom fighter"
Cliché sentence—extremely useless.

Defining social (scientific) phenomena has always seemed a 'mission impossible' to me. Often debates on how to define a given phenomenon are drenched in normative and politicized ideas. Furthermore, the disciplinary fragmentation of the social sciences has been a serious obstacle to unify a shared research agenda. Social sciences are after all not exact sciences. Nevertheless, an accurate definition for social scientific concepts is of crucial importance. After all, *"how something is defined shapes how it is put into practice"* (Dean, 2014).

Looking at the definitions for key concepts in the current dissertation, we note that a haze of imprecision, inconsistency, and controversy has hovered over the concepts of radicalization, terrorism, and mediated communication. This has brought along a set of ontological, methodological, and ideological issues and challenges for studying these concepts and specifically their interrelations. This section of the dissertation will start with unraveling the historical roots and routes of the concept of radicalization. Second, it will (re)-conceptualize terrorism as communication. Third, it will introduce the theory of mediatization as the central framework of this dissertation. Finally, it will try to put all elements back together in a cyclic model of radicalization—the flywheel model.

2.1 Radicalization

In contrast to its relatively infrequent use before the attacks on September 11th 2001, the term 'radicalization' has nowadays become a 'buzzword', predominant in (counter-)terrorism policy-making realms, in national security and intelligence agencies' operations, in global news media discourses and the public debate, and in a broad range of (social) scientific disciplines (Ahmad, 2018; Coolsaet, 2011; Ducol, 2015). In respect to the latter, radicalization has become a focal point around which many fields of academia have actively converged. As it became a matter of national security, criminologists, for example, have been preoccupied by establishing when radicalization becomes a crime. They have used the lens of the *Situational Action Theory*(Bouhana & Wikström, 2011) in order to predict what criminogenic factors may lead to someone's radicalization (Borum & Neer, 2017; Ducol, 2015; Freilich & Lafree, 2015). Since radicalization could also be seen as a socio-political mobilization phenomenon, sociologists and political scientists have followed rather relational approaches to understand the phenomenon. They have applied theories such as the *Social Movement Theory* in order to understand how individuals take part in collective action (Cross & Snow, 2011; Della Porta, 2018; Olesen, 2009; Tilly, 2003; Wiktorowicz, 2004). In contrast, and arguing that radicalization is an internal personal process, (forensic) psychologists and psychiatrists have sought to comprehend the role of the individual. They have focused predominantly on the psychological vulnerabilities associated with radicalization, such as personality features, psychopathology, and psychological distress (Borum, 2004; Horgan, 2005, 2008; Moghaddam, 2005; Post, 2007; Saucier, Akers, Shen-Miller, Knežević, & Stankov, 2009). Whilst all that seems relevant, it takes not into account for example cultural and social anthropological insights, suggesting that we have to look at postcolonial contentions in order to understand what pushes and/or pulls an individual or a group to radicalize (Fadil, de Koning,

& Ragazzi, 2019 (forthcoming)). More recently, scholars have suggested that radicalization is a typical issue that should be approached from an epidemiological or public health perspective by investigating the prevalence of risk and protective factors in the general population (Rousseau, Hassan, & Oulhote, 2017).

Indeed, the phenomenon of radicalization perhaps does not fit neatly into any one academic discipline. Yet, we have to acknowledge as well that it cannot be understood in isolation either. Above all, what is actually meant by 'radicalization'? Does 'radicalization' mean the same to a criminologist as it does to a political scientist, or to an anthropologist? As Schmid points out: *"The concept of radicalization is by no means as solid and clear as many seem to take for granted"* (2013, p. 5). Fact is, there is no universally accepted definition in academia, nor in governmental circles or criminal justice, for 'radicalization'. To put it more clearly, Archetti (2013) concludes that there is *"a lack of agreement, not only on what radicalization actually consists of, but also on its causes"* (Archetti, 2013, p. 102).

In what follows, I will first start with tracing back the roots of the concept of radicalization and the routes of how it entered the public and academic debates. Then, I will look at the differences in defining radicalization. Next, I will discuss the different perspectives that have looked at the phenomenon by critically reviewing the dominant models that have tried to map the causes of radicalization. In a final step, I will explain why looking at the phenomenon by following the *radicalization puzzle* approach is meaningful.

2.1.1 From radical, and radicalism, to 'radicalization'

We first need to understand what exactly constitutes 'radicalization'. As will become clear in what follows, this is not an easy task. The term 'radical' and its derivatives 'radicalism' and 'radicalization' have been structurally and inappropriately conflated with 'extremism', 'terrorism', 'Jihadism'. However, consistently treating these terms as synonymous can be considered problematic,

from epistemic, ontological, methodological and ideological perspectives. Hence, it is important, before moving on, to attempt to disentangle these terms, whilst remaining sensitive to how they might be related to one another.

2.1.1.1 Eighteenth century

The fact that many scholars have conflated radicalism with extremism is partly a direct consequence of the historical roots and routes of the concept. In terms of the roots, the word 'radical' entered the public debate in the 18th century predominantly in reference to the French and American revolutions and in the context of the age of Enlightenment. As discussed by Nadia Fadil (2017), we can trace back the use of the term radical in political discourse by looking at the British political figure Charles James Fox, who reinvigorated the Latin term 'radix'—literally 'root' and figuratively speaking going back to 'the original' or 'the foundation' (Alava, Frau-Meigs, & Hassan, 2017; Fadil et al., 2019; Odorfer, 2015; Schmid, 2013)—and used it to refer to some of the far-reaching political reforms of the time. It was almost exclusively used in British and French revolutionary realms where radicalism referred to pro-republic, anti-colonialism, slavery-rejectionist, anti-monarchist ideas and events such as the Independence of the United States, the French Revolution, and the British constitutional crisis (Fadil, 2017). In other words, we could say that the root of the term 'radicalism' refers to some kind of a struggle for liberty against oppressive parties and policies.

2.1.1.2 Nineteenth century

In terms of routes, radicalism underwent several significant semantic changes. It was only in the 19th century that the term, and its connotation of advocating republicanism rather than royalism, gained widespread traction. As noted by Raymond Williams in his book Keywords (1976, 1983):

"Radical as a noun to describe a proponent of radical reform was common from

[early nineteenth century]: [. . .] 'the term Radical once employed as a name of low reproach, has found its way into high places, and is gone forth as the title of a class, who glory in their designation' (1830); 'the radical mob' (Emerson, 1856). Radicalism was formed from this use, in [the early nineteenth century], and was followed by radicalize. The words then have a curious subsequent history. Radical, especially with a capital letter, was by the second half of [the nineteenth century] almost as respectable as liberal, and Radicalism generally followed. But radical was still available, in some uses, in the sharper [early nineteenth century] sense. Where in 1852 we find 'incipient radicalism, chartist tendencies, or socialist symptoms', there was by [late nineteenth century] a clear distinction between Radicals and Socialists, and in the course of time most Radical parties, in other countries, were found considerably to the right of the political spectrum."(Williams, 1983, p. 251)

Nonetheless, with its connotation of fundamental reform, it is perfectly arguable that Radical parties were not easily placed on either side of the political spectrum. In fact, in that time, many Radicals were advocating for the introduction of a democratic system. They strived, for instance, for the right to vote that was independent of one's possession of property or gender (Schmid, 2013). In fact, it cannot go unmentioned here that in this era, in the mid-19th century, *"[d]emocracy was still a revolutionary or at least a **radical** term [. . .]"* (Williams, 1983, p. 96, emphasis of my own).

Hence, by observing the historical roots of 'radicalism', it becomes apparent that for a significant period in history, the term was actually inherently part of 'regular' political life (Schmid, 2013). *"Radical ideas referred, among others, to the progress and liberation of humankind, based on the principles of human rights and democracy"* (Pisoiu, 2011, as cited in Schmid, 2013, p. 7). As such, most radicals throughout the 19th century and in the early 20th century did not turn to extremist behaviors or violence for their cause. Interestingly, the connotation of extremism emerges only in the second half of the 20th century.

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2.1.1.3   Early and mid-twentieth century

Throughout the 20th century the use of the term became increasingly complicated, and the meaning increasingly diverse as three distinct and even opposing ways of 'radicalism' emerged. First, in the early 20th century, radicalism continued to refer to liberalism, but specifically to the more active branch of liberalism that was preoccupied with the advancement of far-reaching and fundamental reforms. However, as argued by Williams (1983), it was mainly the two other uses that severely complicated the concept, coming up near-simultaneously during the mid-20th century. The first one was the use of radical as an equivalent to 'socialist' or 'revolutionary', but at the same time as a distinction to communist and Marxist: *"Radical seemed to offer a way of avoiding dogmatic and factional associations while reasserting the need for vigorous and fundamental change. At the same time it avoided some of the difficulties in revolutionary, making a necessary distinction between an armed rising [revolution] and militant opposition to the political system [radical]."* (Williams, 1983, p. 252). Malkki (2001) corroborates this idea, when she refers to violent far-left groups of that time, such as the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) in Germany and the Brigate Rosse (BR) in Italy, as ***"revolutionary*** *groups drawing their ideas and inspiration from larger protest movements and Marxist-Leninist ideology"* (Malkki, 2011, p. 70 emphasis of my own).

The second one was the use of the term in the context of 'radical right' (Williams, 1983). This use of the concept grew out of the need for a label that could distinguish from the 'conventional conservatism'. More specifically, as of the 1950s, 'radical' became an equivalent to extremist right-wing politics and activism, that in turn was—at least partly—motivated by anti-socialist ideas (Williams, 1983). For that reason, we should conclude that whereas the term 'radical' originally referred to some noble struggle for liberty against oppressors, by the second half of the 20th century it has become a term to identify with—so to speak—'anti-liberal democratic' standpoints. Here we have arrived at a tipping point along the historical routes of

the term 'radical'. More specifically, it is at this point—i.e. the second half of the 20th century—that the term 'radical' loses its original root of 'liberal reform' and 'common democratic foundation', and becomes increasingly a concept that refers to the far-ends, or extremes, of any (socio-political) axis. In that sense, as of the 1950s, the meaning of 'radicalism' becomes intrinsically, inadequately, and dangerously, interwoven with 'extremism'.

In order to show that this development is precarious, it seems of essential importance to consider an Aristotelian perspective. For several centuries, as Johan Leman (2016) argues, Aristotle's work has been of significant influence on our notions of the center, the common ground, and 'extremes' (see also Logvinov (2019)[1]; Leman, 2016[2]). In his work *Ethica Nicomachea* (Pannier & Verhaeghe, 2015), Aristotle developed the conception of 'extremes' in the context of his virtue theory. Without going too deep into ancient Greek philosophy, virtue theory[3] is derived from the assumption that humans have a fixed nature; an essence. Aristotle believed that the essence for humans—or the highest good (i.e. *agathos*) towards which all human existence is oriented—is Eudaimonia, a concept that has gotten loosely translated into 'happiness'. Human actions (i.e. *praxis*) then are not pointless, but unequivocally serve the aim (i.e. *telos*) of achieving happiness. This can only be accomplished, according to Aristotle, if the human actions are virtuous; i.e. of 'excellence' (i.e. *aretê*). Aristotle saw a virtue as a set of character traits that, if well-practiced, will lead to virtuous behavior and subsequently to a virtuous character (i.e. *êthos*). Specifically, a virtue (i.e. *aretê*) can be understood

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[1]Michail Logvinov (2019, p. 7) states: "Der Extremismus-Begriff steht in einer langen – seit der Antike bestehenden – ideengeschichtlichen Tradition, die eine durch Maß und Mäßigung gekennzeichnete "Mitte" jenen Extremen gegenüberstellt, welche die etablierten Regeln des Gemeinwohls ablehnen und mit unterschiedlichen Methoden außer Kraft setzen wollen (Backes, 2006). Im zeithistorischen Kontext verortet, fungiert Extremismus als Antithese zum demokratischen Verfassungsstaat [. . .]

[2]Leman (2016) shows that this Aristotelian way of looking at extremes versus a 'common middle ground' formed *de facto* the very foundations for the seminal works of significant political theorists such as Blaise Pascal ("Pensées") (17th century) and Montesquieu (De l'esprit des lois) (18th century)

[3]It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to elaborate further on virtue theory, Eudaimonia, etc. Without claiming to be an expert on Aristotle's work myself, I believe that several in-depth works exist about this. For example, contemporary translations of Aristotle's original Ethica Nicomachea are easily accessible and provide a detailed analysis of his work.

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as the perfect midpoint between two vices, i.e. extremes; it is flanked by a vice of excess (too much of the character trait) and a vice of deficiency (too little of the character trait)[4]. Now the relevance of this information for the current discussion is that Aristotle not only applied this theory to individuals but also to groups (Pannier & Verhaeghe, 2015; Pattyn, 2014). Thus, in Aristotelian terms, the midpoint between the extremes in society (i.e. *polis*) was also called *aretê* (Leman, 2016, p. 3). The *aretê* in society was the 'common ground' which was composed of the good qualities from both extremes. In contrast, the extremes are in the margins where the bad qualities prevail. Even though the extremes might be diametrically opposed, they [...] *"find one another in their rejection of the middle, of the virtue, of the best; the extremes reject a common middle ground"* (Leman, 2016, p. 4). If we now look back at the historical roots of the word 'radical' we soon realize that the term historically (18th century) described a strive for the 'maximalization' of qualities of the center; of the common ground; of the virtue. Whilst by the mid-20th century, the term has become synonymous to exactly that what rejects the common ground. Leman (2016) stresses that this development is problematic. More concretely, he states that 'being radical' does not necessarily mean 'being extreme', and vice versa. Two arguments are needed to demonstrate this.

The first argument has to do with end goals. Whilst radicals envision a society based on diversity and reason above dogma, extremists tend to strive for the creation of a homogenous society based on an uncompromising, uniform, dogmatic ideology (e.g. fascism, Communism) (Schmid, 2013, p. 9). *"Their state of mind tolerates no diversity"* (Schmid, 2013, p. 10).

The second argument has to do with the means to achieve that end goal. The means advocated by radicals have historically been based on rational discourse and pragmatic compromise (Schmid, 2013)—on finding the common ground; the *aretê*.

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[4]Common examples of the virtues and their corresponding vices from the Ethica Nicomachea are (1) confidence: which has 'courage' as the virtue between 'cowardice' (deficiency) and 'rashness' (excess); and (2) giving and taking, which has 'generous' as the virtue between 'stingy' (deficiency) and 'extravagant' (excess).

However, the means used by radicals have appeared to be either *"[...] non-violent and democratic (through persuasion and reform) or violent and non-democratic (through coercion and revolution).* Radicals then are not per se violent. Extremists, by contrast, tend to prefer the use of force or violence over persuasion, and structurally disregard the rule of law. As adequately defined by Manus I. Midlarsky (2011): in their pursuance of achieving a non-pluralistic, non-democratic, non-virtuous society, *"[p]olitical extremisms of all sorts share a propensity towards the mass murder of actual or potential opponents of their political programs"* (Midlarsky, 2011, p. 8). In fact, a willingness to kill massively for the cause or the collective is what characterizes all extremist groups, from fascists to communists, and from separatists to nationalists (see for a detailed analysis: Midlarsky 2011).

Hence, whilst both can reside in the use of violence as a means for their cause, extremists never embrace a democracy or a 'common ground' in Aristotelian terms, whilst radicals *always* do. In other words, in a society according to extremists, there will be no place for a 'common ground'. Likewise, where there are enough common grounds, we might find no place for extremisms (cfr. Leman, 2016, p. 14). In any case, from both a historical and semantic perspective, the fact that extremism and radicalism have become interchangeable remains precarious and problematic. Unfortunately, as we will see in the public, governmental, and academic discourses of the late 20th century and early 21st century, the meanings of the words 'radical' and 'radicalism'—and ultimately 'radicalization'—have only become more murky, obscure, and politicized.

2.1.1.4 Late 20th century; early 21st century

The 'erosion' of the meaning of the terms 'radical' and 'radicalism' continued during the 1990s and made ultimately room for the introduction of the term 'radicalization' in the beginning of the 21st century. To explain why and how this occurred, we will continue tracking the roots and routes of the terms further. For

this we will focus our attention on a small Dutch speaking-enclave in Europe: the Low Countries, i.e. Flanders—the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium—and The Netherlands. In her book, *Tegen Radicalisering* ['Against Radicalization', freely translated from Dutch], Nadia Fadil (2017) shows that the security services of the Low Countries, and specifically the Dutch intelligence agency, played a crucial role in (a) furthering the semantic shift of the term 'radical' and (b) in the conception and dissemination of the term 'radicalization' (Fadil, 2017). Her in-depth analysis of the yearly reports of the BVD (i.e. *Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst* [Internal Security Service]) and later AIVD[5](i.e. *Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst* [General Intelligence and Security Services]) demonstrates that in the beginning of the 1990s, the term 'radicalization' was nowhere to be found in the documents of the security services. The term radical, on the contrary, was present, but mainly in reference to left-wing-inspired groups. As of 1993, however, Fadil (2017) notes a brusque semantic shift. Left-wing militant groups are suddenly called 'activists' and the term 'radical' is uniquely employed in tandem with 'Islamic', and specifically in the context of 'radical Islamic organizations'. These organizations, according to the BVD, were mainly global Islamic networks that were associated with, for instance, militant groups in the Algerian civil war (e.g. GIA) (See for a more detailed analysis and explanation: Fadil, 2017; Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming)). However, three years later that changes. As of 1996, the emphasis shifts rather on local and national Islamic networks. The security services observe that these local networks or communities are under the influence of international *"orthodox and radical forces"*(Fadil, 2017, p. 18)—that promote 'anti-Western', 'anti-integration', and 'anti-democratic' attitudes—which in turn may have obstructive consequences for the integration of Muslims within these communities. That focus on failed integration' becomes increasingly noticeable in the reports of the years 1999 and 2000 (Fadil, 2017). In these reports, the BVD implied that the 'failed integration' of Muslims or Muslim communities in general—as a

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[5]The security services for The Netherlands were called Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst (BVD). After 2002 they changed their name into Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD).

consequence of these international forces of a 'radical Islam'—could be a potential security threat to society. Importantly, the term 'radical' is again, or still, used to denote rather extremist (in Aristotelian terms) viewpoints. The only difference, however, is that it does not refer to any politically tinged extremes anymore but uniquely to Islamic ones. Fadil (2017) argues that in the discourse of the security services a *"gradual culturalization and essentialization"* of the term radicalism has occurred, as it evolved towards the 'threat of Muslims', whereby the Muslim communities themselves were considered to be problematic to (national) security.

It is in 2001 that the term 'radicalization' for the first time appears in the BVD reports. It was conceptualized to make the link between 'integration', 'Islam', and 'security' definitive and tangible (Fadil, 2017; Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming)). Fadil, de Koning, and Ragazzi (2019 (forthcoming)) argue that *"The introduction of this term in the 2001 [BVD] report was explicitly tied with the growing perception that the integration of postcolonial (especially Moroccan) migrants represented a particular challenge, and that the evolution towards a "multi-ethnic society" could result in security hazards"*. But there was more to it. In the direct aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington D.C., the term 'radicalization' became also a way to connect this *Islam-Integration-Security*-nexus to another upcoming threat in society which was terrorism (Fadil, 2017). In fact, a few significant events in the following years—the Madrid attacks in March 2004, the murder of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands in November 2004, and the London Bombings in July 2005—further validated and corroborated the notion that a failed integration, especially that of Muslims, could not only be a significant threat to a peaceful, multi-ethnic co-existence in society, but that it also may very well lead to terrorist actions (Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming)). The concept of 'radicalization' became now also understood as a process that potentially leads to violence. This is, in my interpretation, an extremely crucial point on the historical routes of the concept of 'radicalism'. Because it is at this point in time where the term 'radical'—and all of its derivatives— for the first time becomes unequivocally

associated, and even integrated, with terrorism. More specifically, along its historical routes, we have now observed that the term 'radicalism' shifted from pro-democratic/pro-liberal, to anti-liberal/uncompromising dogmatic, to anti-democratic/pro-violence/precursor to terrorism.

Fascinatingly, 'radicalization' and the association with terrorism as coined by the Dutch intelligence agency gained rapidly significant traction in other EU political and bureaucratic realms (Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming)). In fact, the 2004 Madrid bombings and the 2005 London bombings catapulted the concept to the epicenter of EU's (and later also U.S.) counterterrorism debates and policies (Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming); Kundnani, 2014). In order to completely understand this development we have to look at it from a more critical studies perspective. Awan, Hoskins, and O'Loughlin's (2012) thesis is that 'radicalization' became *de facto* a discursive construction 'invented' by the media, politics, and security services, in order to make the intangible threat of terrorism tangible and governable. More specifically, they argue that Western societies experienced an unprecedented threat of an incalculable scale by early 21st century terrorism. Consequently, those who were in charge of national security had to demonstrate that they can *"make terror at least governable"* and make society safe (again) (Awan, Hoskins, & O'Loughlin, 2011, p. 3). For those people, the concept of radicalization and its fixation on Muslims and Muslim communities[6] was a welcome solution. It enabled certain *'exceptionalist politics'* under the banner of '(national) security'. More concretely, the surveillance of Muslims and Muslim communities became unanimously seen as a valid attempt to demarcate and control the perceived and potential security threats (Awan et al., 2011; Kundnani, 2014). This is what Fadil, de Koning, and Ragazzi (2019 (forthcoming)) have called an *'exonerating discourse'* whereby radicalization fulfills the mere function of an *"externalization of responsibilities for, and the origins of, political discontent"* (Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming), p. 11). Besides that, Muslims became what

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[6]Besides the (failed) U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the war on terror in general, and other penetrating measures.

Samuel P. Huntington (1996) in his famous book *"The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order"* calls the *"ideal enemy"—"a group that is racially and culturally distinct and ideologically hostile"* (Kundnani, 2014, p. 10). National security officials came to understand that 'the enemy' now was not a foreign terrorist residing among ordinary Muslims in the West, but that it was now the 'radicalization' of those ordinary Muslims themselves that had become the security threat—the so-called 'homegrown terrorists' (Kundnani, 2014, p. 8). Awan et al. (2011) argued along these lines that it is *'the characterisation of a terrorist threat from young Muslim men as potential terrorists [...], i.e. any one person could potentially be radicalised [...]"* that has become ubiquitous in counterterrorism discourses within official political realms as well as in public spheres.

It has been argued that the paranoid-like narrative that just any ordinary Muslim could suddenly transform, i.e. radicalize, into a terrorist directly feeds into a condition of 'hyper-security'. Many scholars have assumed that the pervasiveness of this narrative has in fact provoked a *"securitisation of Islam and Muslims and an "Islamisation of security"—which means that any debate on Islam focuses on the threat it represents and that any debate about security is reduced to Islam."* (Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming), p. 19). There is quite an extensive amount of scholarly work demonstrating the negative and detrimental drawbacks thereof for Muslims and Muslim communities (see for example: Aistrope, 2016; A. Cherney & Murphy, 2015; Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011; Kundnani, 2014; Larsen, 2018; Rytter & Holm Pedersen, 2014). For example, Rousseau et al. (2015) demonstrated on the basis of an extensive literature review that young people have experienced—in all reviewed studies—an increased *"increased negative stereotyping, bias, suspicion and discrimination towards them as Arabs, Muslims or being associated with Middle Eastern countries"*, which in turn has *"shattered the sense of safety [...], provoking or reactivating anxiety and anger, and transforming their vision of themselves, the "other" and the future."* and transformed their *"experiences of belonging and exclusion."* (2015, p. 173)

What propels the condition of hyper-security even more is the obscurity of the concept of radicalization. In fact, the word has now an endless number of different meanings, it is loaded with controversies and confusion, and its concrete value to policy makers, scholars, lawyers, and counter-terrorism officials remains unclear until today (Coolsaet, 2016). The news media played an indispensable role in vehiculating this confusion. Awan et al. (2011, p. 3) called this the 'mediatization of radicalization', or *"a discursive frame that has 'gone wild'"*. Consequently, as a result of the lack of conceptual clarity and consensus, it was—and still is—difficult to identify beginning and ending points, or any other generalizable and coherent reasons, for the process of radicalization (Awan et al., 2011). In the context of some generalization attempts, most models[7] explaining why and how people radicalize in both Europe and the U.S. structurally assume that an "Islamist" ideology[8] is the root cause for radicalization and subsequently for terrorism. Along those lines, we see that radicalization slowly becomes understood in political circles as some kind of a "virus"[9] vehiculated by a religious doctrine that parasitizes in the brains of (some) Muslims and ultimately leads to violent acts (Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming)).

To my surprise, the above discussed narrative was omnipresent in the book *"The Great War of Our Time: The CIA's Fight Against Terrorism: From al Qa'ida to ISIS"* in which former CIA agent Michael Morell wrote down his memoirs as deputy director of the CIA. A brief excerpt:

"As a terrorist group, ISIS poses a threat to the homeland. In mid-2015 that threat was largely indirect—ISIS's ability to radicalize young American men and women to conduct lone-wolf attacks here. That indirect threat remains today. There are thousands of ISIS sympathizers in the United States—more than al Qa'ida ever had. The FBI has roughly 1,000 open investigations into homegrown extremists—the vast majority radicalized by ISIS and a large number of whom may

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[7] See for a discussion of these models, chapter 2.1.3
[8] More about Islamist ideology in chapter 3 and 5
[9] More about the analogy to virality, infectious ideas, and epidemiology in chapter 2.1.4

be plotting attacks here. Such attacks have already occurred in the United States, including the attack in San Bernardino. Other ISIS supporters have been arrested before they could act." (Morell & Harlow, 2016, p. 8)

In the light of the above discussion, this quote mesmerizes because it clearly shows that political authorities in charge of counterterrorism and national security (in this case the second-highest ranked official of the United States's most powerful intelligence apparatus) bolster exactly that heavily politicized, discursive conception of radicalization. First of all, Morell (2016) clearly uses the terms 'radicalized', 'extremists', and 'terrorism' interchangeably. As we will see in the next section, he commits an important reasoning fallacy, i.e. the unsupported assumption that radicalization is *de facto* the precursor to violent behavior or *"lone-wolf attacks"*[10]. Furthermore, by emphasizing *"ISIS's ability to radicalize American men and women"* he also flagrantly nourishes the politicized idea that it is predominantly an Islamist ideology (embodied by ISIS in this case) that is responsible for homegrown radicalization (cfr. *Externalization of responsibilities* (Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming)). We will see later, however, that there are many more forces at play than ideology alone. By the way, Morell provides us here with some wild estimates that there are *'thousands'* of ISIS sympathizers of whom *'a large number may be plotting'*[11] attacks in the United States. No matter how precarious this declaration is, it is important to note here that several scientific studies have shown that these numbers are generously overestimated, as the "[the United States] *government [. . .] has been far better at counting [potential terrorists] than at finding them"* (Mueller & Stewart, 2016, p. 2). Lastly, this excerpt is obviously living proof of what Awan et al. (2011) call a 'state of hyper-security', whereby the surveillance of Muslims (*"open investigations"*) is considered unavoidable and even imperative for the prevention of terrorist attacks (*"arrested before they could act"*). In fact, with this final sentence about 'arresting

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[10]In chapter 4 more about the terminology of lone wolves.

[11]I mean, how imprecise and vague can one be. . .

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before acting', Morell puts an emphasis on the holy grail of all counter-radicalization/counter-terrorism endeavors—the so-called preventive approach. For many years now, governments and scholars alike have been preoccupied with trying to identify individuals who are not terrorists yet but might become terrorists 'tomorrow'. However, this approach has had far-reaching consequences and has produced unintended adverse effects (such as false-positives, Islamophobia, ...). Hence, Kundnani (2014) expresses his concerns for this approach as he sees strong parallels with Steven Spielberg's science fiction film Minority Report (2002). In this film, three so-called *PreCogs* are responsible for arresting 'precriminals' before they commit the crime for which they are arrested. Kundnani (2014, p. 18) concludes skeptically: *"Likewise, a preventive approach to the war on terror would need its own PreCogs' capability to identify the terrorists of the future."*

So, in the opening decennium of the 21st century, radicalization has become the dominant lens through which Western societies view both Islam and Muslims as well as terrorism and the terrorist threat. With its roots in a so-called failed integration of Muslims and as a so-called crucial root to terrorism, 'radicalization' is now more than ever prevalent in everyday political and media discourses. Some scholars have even argued that we live today in an "age of radicalization" (see, Fadil 2019 (forthcoming)), and that the word is now part of our daily vocabulary (Coolsaet, 2016). However, 'radicalization' is now considered to be nothing more than a discursive container that governments have used to make the incalculable scale of terrorist events that marked the opening decennium of the 21st century manageable. We have come to understand that its conception is de facto rooted and routed in a mediatized and politicized 'condition of hyper-security' (cfr. Awan et al., 2011). More concretely, the above rather social-constructionist discussion made clear that the term "radicalization" suffers from a lack of conceptual clarity, ambiguity, and is surrounded by controversies (Coolsaet, 2016). Some authors have

called it therefore an 'empty signifier' (Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming)) and a catch-all concept (Ducol, 2015). Furthermore, putting radicalization at the center of terrorism discourses has had far-reaching consequences. Not the least the fact that it has bolstered and advanced the perceptions of Islam as the enemy and Muslims as a suspect community (cfr. Choudhury & Fenwick, 2011; Kundnani, 2014). Additionally, many counter-radicalization practices that focused on the early detection of would-be terrorists and the prevention approach, have proven to be unsuccessful or to produce even unintended adverse effects (Coolsaet, 2016).

Given the ambiguous nature of the term, there seems to be a strong need to put radicalization and its causes into a more adequate perspective. In that sense, radicalization is similar to what a fever is to an illness—a symptom to an underlying problem (Coolsaet, 2016). "Sometimes, medicine for fever will alleviate suffering, but as long as the triggering illness is not cured, fever will continue to haunt the patient. In both cases – fever and radicalization – an adequate diagnosis is crucial in countering the symptom." (Coolsaet, 2016, p. 4). What follows is an examination of how radicalization is defined in scholarly terms. Thereafter, a few models available in the current scientific literature explaining why and how people radicalize will be discussed. Finally, my study will be presented on the psychometric properties of a measurement tool that assesses, i.e. diagnoses in Coolsaet's (2016) terms, someone's degree of radicalization.

2.1.2 Defining radicalization

As we have seen in the previous section, radicalization originates and prevails predominantly as a discursive, political artefact. As a matter of fact, there is hardly any (social) scientific research on the concept before the early 21st century (Schmid, 2016). The term appears in the scientific literature around 2004 and 2005. At that time, scholars adopted straightforwardly the political connotation and considered radicalization as the process that precedes terrorism or political violence, especially in an Islamic context. In fact, the concept was warmly

welcomed in the scholarly community, as it was thought of as *the* final explanation for why terrorism happens in the first place (Schmid, 2013). As described by Coolsaet (2016), the 'why-terrorism-occurs approach' has been the center of attention for terrorism studies since their beginnings in the 1970s. By the start of the 21st century, the field had become academically frustrated, as individual psychological, theological, and criminological explanations had proven to be unsatisfactory and inconclusive. With the introduction of the concept of *'radicalization'*, terrorism scholars believed to have found the answer to their most-pressing question—radicalization as *the* root cause for terrorism and all alternative explanations to the side lines. The idea was that radicalization is *"what happens before the bomb goes off"*(Neumann, 2008, p. 4). However, perhaps as a consequence of the politicized nature of the concept in the first place, 'radicalization' immediately suffered from a lack of conceptual clarity. Not only that. The amalgamation of radicalization with terrorism and violent extremism in social sciences has also serious operational implications (Dean, 2014). What *is* radicalization then? How to define this concept in scholarly and helpful analytical terms? This section of the dissertation will look exclusively at the scholarly definitions of radicalization. This means that we leave definitions from law enforcement, governmental organizations, intelligence agencies, counterterrorism practices, etc. aside. That does not mean, however, that these rather functional definitions did not find their way into academic discourse, or even helped shaping it—they definitely did. However, with an eye on analytical terms, the focus here is first and foremost on definitions put forward by scientific scholars.

Over the course of the years, a plethora of academic definitions emerged in the literature. Despite that, the concept remains poorly defined in analytical terms. Some scholars have called 'radicalization' a *"catch-all concept"* (Coolsaet, 2015; Ducol, 2015) or an *"empty signifier"* (Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming)). In a now oft-cited report, the prominent terrorism scholar Alex P. Schmid (2013) attempted to list all definitions that he collected on the basis of an extensive review of the

literature on radicalization, deradicalization, and counter-radicalization. Schmid (2013) concludes that *"academics [. . .] have come up with multiple definitions that often lack precision"*. This lack of precision refers mainly to the levels of granularity academics recur to in order to define radicalization. The literature seems to be divided into groups of scholars who say that radicalization is either a process of gradually adopting extremist behavior, or a process of gradually adopting extremist beliefs[12](Schmid, 2013). Furthermore, the field is scattered around the question whether radicalization takes place on an individual level, within a group, or at societal level (Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Lastly, some scholars have argued that a distinction has to be made between violent and non-violent radicalization (Bartlett & Miller, 2012). In any case, it is important to understand that a single scientific definition of radicalization, either theory-driven or empiric-driven, does not exist in the academic literature at the moment of writing this thesis.

Let us first look at the differences in definitions between behavioral or attitudinal radicalization. A first group of authors considers that only processes of socialization or mobilization on a behavioral level could be defined as radicalization. In this approach, radicalization refers to the actual use of violence, with escalation in terms of forms and intensity, and with ultimately a manifestation in terrorism. The most renowned scholars within this paradigm are perhaps Gary LaFree and Donatella Della Porta (2011). They wrote that *"Radicalization may be understood as a process leading towards the increased use of political violence"* (Porta & LaFree, 2011, p. 5). In this definition, the authors seem to focus their attention exclusively on violence in the context of political ambitions. In contrast, however, a very recent study by Della Porta (2018), re-defined radicalization as *"[. . .] a process of escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time"* (Della Porta, 2018, p. 460). While this second

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[12]Note that radicalization is not defined as a gradual process of adopting more radical beliefs or behaviors.

definition is definitely praiseworthy in the sense that it makes radicalization applicable to a broader range of contexts instead of merely a political one, it is also less adequate in operational terms. Referring to what Schmid (2013) called 'a lack of precision', this way of defining radicalization is obviously imprecise, as it does not specify underlying motivations or socio-political contexts. More concretely, according to this definition, basically everybody who is increasingly acting violently, in whatever context, can be labeled as radicalizing. When looking at both definitions in clear analytical terms, it is evident that this way of defining radicalization is barely maintainable. If we take both definitions strictly, radicalization can only be measured in social scientific terms if violent behavior is manifest. For these authors, thus, the willingness or readiness to adopt violent behaviors in the future falls not necessarily within their idea of radicalization. Hence, looking at the phenomenon in these terms is only helpful as a basis for retrospective case studies in which the individual under scrutiny has already engaged in violent actions—or, of course, for the *Minority Report*-like studies as referred to by Kundnani (2014) (see above, previous section).

In attempts to overcome these shortcomings, other authors have tried to be more precise. Olesen's (2009), for example, wrote that radicalization *"is the process through which individuals and organizations adopt violent strategies—or threaten to do so—in order to achieve political goals"* (Olesen, 2009, p. 6). In this latter definition we see that Olesen is definitely more inclusive by adding a part on 'threatening' to use violence. Furthermore, it should be noted that he also differentiates between group and individual radicalization. However, there is again a relatively narrow focus on a political context only. Furthermore, the operationalization issues that we identified earlier remain evident with this definition, i.e. we can only study those cases that have already explicitly used violence or threatened to use it. What, then, to do with individuals who are perhaps preparing a violent action? After all, radicalization is defined here as 'a process', and we may want to identify radicalization before an individual acts

violently.

That is the reason why another group of researchers argue that we should rather focus on the radicalization of beliefs, attitudes, and/or opinions. In this strand of research, it is assumed that radicalization is preliminarily and predominantly a process on a cognitive level. The leading scholars in this line of thinking are Horgan and Braddock (2011). Their definition for radicalization reads as follows: *"the social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist political or religious ideology. Radicalization may not necessarily lead to violence, but is one of several risk factors required for this"* (Horgan & Braddock, 2010, p. 279). This is in line with what Awan and colleagues (2011) have put forward: *"a phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which potentially **could** lead to acts of terrorism"*[emphasis in original](Awan et al., 2011, p. 3)". In both these definitions, the authors have stressed the fact that the behavioral outcome is merely conditional—radicalization may or may not lead to violent actions or terrorism. From a scientific perspective, this is a crucial distinction. Because *"[First], the overwhelming majority of people who hold radical beliefs do not engage in violence. And second, there is increasing evidence that people who engage in terrorism don't necessarily hold radical beliefs."* (see Knefel, 2013). This notion is well supported in the literature. For example, Moghaddam (2009) wrote that *"[a]lmost eight decades of psychological research on attitudes [...] suggest that radicalization of attitudes need not result in radicalization of behavior"* (Moghaddam, 2009, p. 280). And Knudsen (2018) has argued that although scholars have suggested that there is a *"[...]causal link between radical ideological, political or religious thought and violent terrorist acts; but no such link exists [...]"* (Knudsen, 2018, p. 2).

As a consequence some authors have rigorously decided to jettison the behavioral component in its entirety: *"the process through which apparently ordinary individuals come to embrace extremist beliefs"* (Archetti, 2013, p. 101). For this line of thinking, it is purely the involvement on a cognitive level that constitutes radicalization, i.e.

radicalization is not defined in any behavioral terms nor in the context of violence. To put it even stronger, the question whether an individual will or will not act upon their beliefs becomes conceptually irrelevant. It is noteworthy, however, that even though a reference to violence is now not explicitly made, implicitly the link between radicalization and violence is there. In fact, the core of the definition is *"embracing extremist beliefs"*.

The previous chapter clarified that extremists—those in the margins, rejecting the common ground in Aristotelian terms—are invariably inclined to use violence for their cause (Midlarsky, 2011), whereas radicals are not necessarily (Schmid, 2013). Thus, although this definition is praiseworthy when it comes to precision, uniformity, and the nuanced disentanglement between radicalization of beliefs and radicalization of behavior, it obscures the conceptual clarity of both radicalization and extremism.

As a solution to this, some authors have argued that it is of essential importance to distinguish between violent and non-violent radicalization. Most central to this way of thinking are Bartlett and Miller (2012). In their definition, fundamental distinctions between violent versus non-violent radicalization, and behavioral versus cognitive radicalization are made: *"The first, radicalization that leads to violence ("violent radicalization") is a process by which individuals come to undertake or directly aid or abet terrorist activity. The second, radicalization that does not lead to violence ("non-violent radicalization") refers to the process by which individuals come to hold radical views in relation to the status quo but do not undertake, aid, or abet terrorist activity* (Bartlett & Miller, 2012, p. 2).

Again, it is important to stress here that not all previous definitions are wrong or irrelevant—they definitely contribute to the debate in their own respect. But, at the moment of writing this thesis, a uniform scientific definition of radicalization—either theory-driven or empiric-driven—does not exist in the academic literature. Nevertheless, with an eye on the discussion above, Bartlett and Miller's (2012) definition is the most meaningful that we can find today. There are two arguments for this. First, not only does it make a distinction between

violent and non-violent radicalization, it is also sensitive to the fundamental differences between behavioral involvement and cognitive radicalization. Second, and perhaps most importantly, Bartlett and Miller (2012) do not equate radicalization with the internalization of extremist beliefs. In contrast to nearly all previous definitions, which basically all muddied the waters conceptually (cfr. Dean, 2014), this definition succeeds in disentangling radicalization from extremism. By emphasizing that radicalization is about viewpoints *"in relation to the status quo"*, Bartlett and Miller's interpretation is much closer to the historical meaning of the concept of radicalism (i.e. radix, as we have seen in the previous chapter) than any other scholarly definition in the current literature.

Additionally, in methodological and ontological terms this definition is also very vital. It enables researchers to study radicalization on several levels whilst overcoming the methodological barriers as earlier mentioned. More specifically, we know that focusing exclusively on violent radicalization and thereby exclusively leaning on retrospective case studies leads to a so-called selection bias (i.e. selecting subjects on the basis of the dependent variable) which in turn interferes with making a valid statement about causality and theory at large (cfr. King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994). However, by means of Bartlett and Miller's (2012) definition, radicalization cannot only be considered as a precursor to terrorism or political violence (violent radicalization), it is also a subject on its own (non-violent radicalization). In the latter case, radicalization can be operationalized in clear cognitive concepts, such as beliefs, worldviews, attitudes, or opinions—which are typical social scientific research domains. This can be studied by methods and techniques from a large, well-established social scientific research toolbox that goes well beyond the use of retrospective case studies only (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, content analyses, surveys to just name a few) and can thereby overcome the weakness of the current state of the art and the barriers of selection bias. Without arguing that attitude and opinion measures are flawless—they definitely have their methodological weaknesses (see for an

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extensive and detailed analysis, Coenen, 2017)—but by following this all-encompassing definition we are at least not dependent on waiting until someone commits a violent act before we can study the concept of radicalization. Therefore, Bartlett & Miller's definition will be the fundamental basis for the studies in the context of the current dissertation. Before taking a look at the empirical studies, let us briefly walk through the numerous theoretical models that have been developed in order to explain the root cause for radicalization.

2.1.3 The etiology of radicalization

As we have seen above, with the introduction of the concept of radicalization in the social scientific domain, many terrorism scholars thought to have found the answer to their most-pressing question—radicalization as *the* root cause for terrorism. However, when it became clear that the concept did not live up to its expectations (cfr. Coolsaet, 2011), researchers were quick to explore the root causes of radicalization. One could jokingly argue that with the introduction of radicalization in the scientific literature, the field of terrorism studies entered an era of searching for 'the root cause of the root cause...'. Nonetheless, based on the discussion of the definitions above we have come to understand that radicalization is not *de facto* a precursor to terrorism (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Horgan & Braddock, 2010). But what, then, are the precursors to radicalization? This question appears to be difficult to answer.

In what follows, I will first, explain why the current state of the literature is plagued by a few ontological and methodological issues. Second, I will examine the different models and theories that exist laterally and how disciplines are talking past one another. Finally, I will take a detailed look at epidemiological insights and discuss why that framework seems most applicable for the current dissertation and for radicalization studies in general.

Ontological and methodological barriers In attempts to understand why people radicalize, several explanatory models and theories have been developed. It may not come as a surprise that, as reflected by the many different definitions, a large number of different and sometimes even conflicting models exists. It seems evident that if we cannot find agreement on a single uniform scientific foundation to draw upon, we cannot expect to find agreement on a uniform, monolithic explanatory model or theory. As a result, we have made progress in radicalization research over the last fifteen years, but because most scholars have never agreed upon a solid definition of what exactly constitutes radicalization, many of the theories are talking past one another. To put it in Hafez and Mullins's (2015) words: *"A decade following the 9/11 attacks on the United States, there is some scholarly consensus on the key variables that produce radicalization and violent extremism, but we are no closer to an agreement on the models that chart out the transformative process by which ordinary individuals become extremists"* (2015, p. 959). This disagreement has resulted in a few serious ontological and methodological issues within the current field of radicalization research.

First, most studies on the causes of radicalization are either purely theoretical in nature or only grounded in limited case evidence. In fact, Jensen and colleagues (2018) concluded on the basis of their literature review that instead of focusing on rigorous empirical testing of key theoretical propositions, the field has made the 'development of a radicalization theory' its quest for the holy grail. Consequently, the lack of empirical studies has made it difficult to judge how well the (numerous) existing theories in fact perform (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). An additional obstacle is the fact that the multidisciplinary nature of the research on radicalization has not been unified by a shared research agenda (e.g. Wiktorowicz, 2004). Scattered among a variety of disciplines, the existing studies of radicalization tend to follow narrow sets of research questions, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies that are all predetermined by their own disciplinary boundaries. As a result, an alleged 'arms race' emerged between different scholarly disciplines whereby scholars from one field

were trying to prove the wrong of others. It has been argued that this disciplinary fragmentation has not advanced a collective and interconnected understanding of radicalization (Coolsaet, 2016; Wiktorowicz, 2004).

Furthermore, and as already discussed above, for a substantial number of scholars (e.g. LaFree & Della Porta, 2011), radicalization can be defined only in terms of the use of violence, or in the best case the threat of using violence (cfr. Olesen, 2009). A broad body of radicalization theories that have been developed within this line of research is based on retrospective case studies with violent individuals, many of whom are alleged terrorists. As already briefly demonstrated above, this leads to a selection bias, whereby subjects are identified on the basis of a dependent variable (i.e. violent behavior) (cfr. King et al., 1994). Hence, we know a lot of the radicalization processes of specific terrorists, but we have much less understanding of the radicalization processes of those who did not (yet) engage in violent behavior. Studies that only examine subjects from a sample of violent terrorists tend to downplay the complex and non-symbiotic nature of the relationship between beliefs and behaviors. Indeed, this body of research structurally ignores significant evidence that radicalization has a more complex reality, given that (1) radicalization is not *de facto* violent (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Horgan & Braddock, 2010), and (2) radicalization of beliefs does not have to lead to radicalization of behavior (Moghaddam, 2009; Schmid, 2013), and (3) just as not all radicals engage in terrorism, not all terrorists hold radical beliefs (Horgan & Altier, 2012; Knefel, 2013). It is generally considered a fact that some terrorists also tend to 'drift' into terrorism for reasons that have nothing to do with ideology or radical views (cfr. Dean, 2014). In that sense, our understanding of radicalization is structurally skewed and potentially biased towards 'violent radicalization' only.

Second, many research efforts on radicalization continue to conceptualize the phenomenon in terms of a simple linear process (Borum, 2003; Knefel, 2013). This means that most studies believe that radicalization occurs in small incremental

steps that are placed on a single line from 'ordinary' individual to violent radical and ultimately to terrorist (Borum, 2011b; Moghaddam, 2005). Models in this line of research have compared radicalization for example with a staircase, in which every higher step is metaphorically more indicative for a step closer to terrorism (e.g. Moghaddam, 2005). However, in the (slowly) growing body of empirical literature there is increasing evidence that this structural, orderly image of a process does not hold true (cfr. Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Similar as the linear process assumption, many efforts have been undertaken in the pursuance of profiling 'would-be terrorists'. A vast body of research has focused on identifying small sets of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral traits that could be predictive of who would radicalize (into terrorism) which has resulted in *"a legacy of reductionist approaches to understanding terrorist behavior"*(Horgan, 2008, p. 80). Yet, this focus on profiling and simple, predictive indicators tends to be only of limited use. First, it is generally agreed that an oversimplification of the extremely complex phenomenon leads to inconsistent and confusing findings (Coolsaet, 2016). Second, by leaning strongly on profiling and the linear process assumption, radicalization models have been found to produce false positives, which have led in some cases—beyond academia—to the wrongful detainment of innocent people (Mueller & Stewart, 2016). Third, a growing body of research has argued that radicalization is not a straightforward causal process, but rather a complex conditional phenomenon whereby external catalysts, mechanisms and other potential trigger factors work together (Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Jensen et al., 2018).

Besides these ontological and methodological issues, I would dare to argue that there is also an ideological challenge plaguing the radicalization research discipline. What I mean to say is that we should bear in mind, when reviewing the current state of the radicalization research, and thus also the models below, that the vast majority of our knowledge has been produced in the near-exclusive context of Islamist-inspired terrorism or Muslim radicalization.

Fact is that attention to radicalization grew in the social sciences in the debate

over so-called "home-grown" violent Islamists. Thus, most research endeavors pursuing the development of a monolithic theory for radicalization have departed *de facto* from the question 'why and how do *Muslims* —specifically referring to Muslims residing in the West— engage in terrorism or extremist violence'? Hence, in the post-9/11 society, it is not only in the political, security services, and media discourses that this term has been politicized. Also in the social sciences, we see that radicalization tends to be a symptom of a hyper-security condition as it carries the constant connotation of 'Islam and Muslims in pursuance of terrorism'. Therefore, it will become clear that some factors in the following models are framed as 'quintessential causes for radicalization', whilst in fact they should be solely viewed as 'potential precursors to violent extremism for Muslims in the West'. It is important to underscore that distinction. Perhaps as a direct result from structural sampling and selection bias, symptomatic for a state of hyper-security in post-9/11 society—but fact is that, despite claiming the opposite—most models for radicalization suffer from these ontological, methodological, and ideological limitations that make them in reality probably not generalizable to a sample other than Islamist-inspired terrorists.

Along the way, scholars have identified a diverse set of individual-level, group-based, and social-communicative mechanisms as potential foundational causes for radicalization. These mechanisms have also been referred to as macro, meso and micro level factors (e.g. Veldhuis & Staun, 2009), or push and pull factors (e.g. Coolsaet, 2015; Weggemans & Graaf, 2017). First of all, it is important to mention that numerous in-depth analyses of radicals' and terrorists' socio-demographic backgrounds have demonstrated that radicals are neither poor nor rich (Bouchard & Nash, 2015); that they are not exclusively male (Conway, 2016; Hafez & Mullins, 2015); and that levels of education are not significant predictors for radicalization (e.g. Sageman, 2004b)[13]. Other mechanism, however,

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[13]Fact is that studies have shown that radicalization and terrorist activity are generally independent of education—both the highly skilled and highly educated as well as the lower schooled

have been found to be important. Below, I will discuss them in respect to these levels of analysis.

2.1.3.1 Individual-psychological level

A significant body of research has studied radicalization from an individual-psychological perspective (see for example, Borum, 2004; Horgan, 2005; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Victoroff, 2005). Models within this strand of research concentrate predominantly on the psychopathological, cognitive, and emotional characteristics that contribute to an individual's radicalization process. More specifically, the study of radicalization by (forensic) psychology and psychiatry aims to map psychological vulnerabilities that make an individual susceptible for (gradual) engagement with violent extremism and/or terrorism. Studies range from analyses of the role of ideological indoctrination or mindset (e.g. King & Taylor, 2011; Saucier et al., 2009) to non-ideological elements such as childhood trauma, (sexual) abuse, and patterns of adolescent development (e.g. Huesmann, 2010; Simi, Bubolz, Windisch, & Sporer, 2015). A substantial set of individual psychological causes have received extensive critique as they have proved to be inconsistent and non-replicable, e.g. psychiatric pathologies and socio-demographics amongst others (see Borum, 2011a, 2011b). Nevertheless, there are a few vigorous individual-psychological-level concepts on which (to a certain extent) consensus exists in the literature. I will discuss them here.

Grievances / Discrimination /Alienation

Grievances are a structurally recurring theme in radicalization and terrorism literature. Hafez and Mullins (2015) argue that grievances can be local and personal—for example grievances referring to economic marginalization, cultural alienation, and a deep-rooted sense of victimization. But grievances can also be

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individuals have been found to radicalize. For example, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev—one of the brothers who 'self-radicalized' and committed the Boston Marathon bombing (B. G. Williams, 2015)—was a promising student and was admitted as a fellowship to University of Massachusetts campuses (Klausen et al., 2018). Hence, even though poor education can be a source for grievances, it is not considered by most scholar as a significant cause for radicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2009).

global and shared experiences—for example, a strong disagreement vis-à-vis foreign policies of States. Focusing on Muslim radicalization in the West, Hafez and Mullins (2015) argue that one of the major personal grievances that could drive radicalization is the high unemployment rates among Western Muslims. Although many members in European Muslim populations are well-educated, there is a structural unemployment within the majority of these populations. According to Hafez and Mullins (2015) this is, in turn, associated with residential segregation and ultimately discrimination. Personal perceptions of discrimination and injustice are indeed considered to be related to support for (violent) radicalization (Alcalá, Sharif, & Samari, 2017; Bhui, Everitt, & Jones, 2014). In one of our recent studies on a sample of 2,037 Belgian young adults, we found that perceived discrimination on political views and during interactions with the police/justice system were associated with radicalism intentions (Frounfelker, Frissen, Vanorio Vega, Rousseau, & d'Haenens, 2019 (forthcoming)) However, grievances are not limited to economic discrimination only. They involve also more global frustrations. Sageman (2004), for example, mentions that deep-rooted frustrations towards foreign policy—i.e. presence of U.S. troops in the Arabian Peninsula, persecution of Palestinians, drone strikes—are crucial drivers for radicalization. Additionally, Hafez and Mullins (2015) discuss that an anti-Muslim climate within many Western societies should be seen as a source for grievances. Todd (2015), for example, has shown that the prominent prevalence of phenomena like anti-Muslim cartoons in the mainstream mass media, and moreover, the *en masse* support for them from society (e.g., *'Je suis Charlie'*), transform Muslims' sense of belonging and feed a sense of alienation. In turn, it is thought that such a condition is associated with another well-established concept in the literature which is the loss and subsequent quest of personal significance (Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman, & Orehek, 2009).

Significance quest

A well-established individual-psychological concept that is considered to be a

crucial cause for radicalization is the 'quest for (personal) significance' (Feddes, Nickolson, & Doosje, 2015; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Kruglanski et al., 2009; Pretus et al., 2018). Renowned terrorism expert Arie Kruglanski (2009, 2014) and colleagues argue that, although a radicalization process may differ from individual to individual, a quest for personal significance is the general motivating force underlying all radicalization processes, i.e. "the fundamental desire to matter, to be someone, to have respect" (Kruglanski et al., 2014, p. 73). A significance quest goes hand in hand with an ideological adherence. As argued by Jensen and colleagues, *"the presence of an ideological component [is] an appropriate means to gain (or regain) a lost sense of significance"* (2018, p. 3). Kruglanski et al. (2014) have argued that an ideology is crucial as it provides individuals with in-group/out-group identification, a victimization narrative, and sacred values.

Cognitive opening

Another typical individual-psychological cause that is well-supported in the literature and that is somewhat related to the previous is the hypothesis of a 'cognitive opening' (King & Taylor, 2011; Klausen, Libretti, Hung, & Jayasumana, 2018; Wiktorowicz, 2004). A cognitive opening refers to a mental state in which a person is rendered highly receptive to certain, new, radical, or extremist ideas. It is thought that a cognitive opening is the result of a personal crisis, disillusionment, and/or loss of significance (King & Taylor, 2011). Just like a quest of significance, a cognitive opening is considered to be present in all radicalization processes. A cognitive opening is typically closed or 'filled' with a dogmatic worldview[14] or ideology, and has been associated in recent studies with information seeking behavior, including "research about religion broadly and specifically about Salafi-jihadism" (Klausen et al., 2018).

Self-radicalization, information seeking

In this context we specifically need to look at another well-established concept in

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[14](see in paragraph 2.1.2.3 under *'collective action frames'*)

the literature, which is the process of 'self-radicalization'. Not that this is a *causal* factor—quite the opposite—but it is definitely a dominant preoccupation within the domain of individual-psychological studies of radicalization. In contrast to regular (non-self) radicalization, self-radicalization is thought of as a process whereby an individual radicalizes in isolation at home through the pursuit, adoption, and internalization of an extremist ideology (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Gendron, 2017; Klausen et al., 2018). A self-radicalization process can be understood as a process in which individuals with minimal –if any—links to terrorist networks, are drawn into extremism or terrorism through a "bottom-up" rather than "top-down" recruitment process (Gendron, 2017). Ahmed and George (2016) have provocatively referred to this phenomenon as 'bedroom radicals', as it is thought that individuals can self-radicalize in their bedroom in front of a computer screen. Along these lines, it has been said that self-radicalization is mainly driven by online information seeking behavior, meaning that individuals actively search for radical and extremist contents on the Internet and increasingly align their personal worldview with that of the literature and videos they consult (e.g. Bouchard & Levey, 2015). Indeed, the Internet and today's information and communication technologies are considered to play a fundamental facilitating role in this (Archetti, 2015; Awan, 2007; Weimann, 2014). Yet, until today we have insufficient empirical data to effectively back this claim[15].

That being said, self-radicalization does resemble some parts of what Bennett and Segerberg (2012) have called 'logic of connective action'. In contrast to the older idea of 'collective action'[16], these authors (2012)have argued that social/political movements now organize themselves around interpersonal networks that in fact have become the core organizations in their own right—the technology platforms have taken over the place of established organizations. Thus, 'connective action' means that activism is now energized by the digitally coordinated actions of many ordinary

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[15]A more detailed discussion can be found in paragraph 2.1.3.3 under the heading *'The Internet and cyberspace'* and in chapter 3

[16]See in the next paragraph under the heading: *'Group-level perspective'*

and interconnected people (cfr. 'networked individualism'). In the context of a Salafi-Jihadist movement, this self-radicalization through a logic of connective action has been called "Leaderless Jihad" (Sageman, 2008). I will elaborate further on the details of a (global) Salafi-Jihadist movement and the exact underlying ideologies and cultures in chapter 3.

Lastly, important to note here is that in essence the so-called 'lone wolves'[17] are often considered to have self-radicalized and may function as good examples for this logic of connective action (Danzell & Maisonet Montañez, 2016). But, again, it is of essential importance here to emphasize that self-radicalization should not be and cannot be equated with lone actor terrorism. To stress once more, even though many lone-actor terrorists are allegedly self-radicalized, we cannot assume that self-radicalization also leads to lone-actor terrorism. For example, in their seminal work, Hamm and Spaaij (2017) showed on the basis of a comparative analysis that the psychosocial make-up of lone-actor terrorists differs fundamentally from those operating as part of a (small) centralized terrorist organization or state. Hamm and Spaaij (2017) found that 40% of the lone-actor terrorists in their study suffered from mental illness or psychological disturbances (e.g. anxiety attacks and depression for nearly all; schizophrenia for only some) and are predominantly male, while (self-)radicalization as understood within the context of the current dissertation is thought to be (largely) independent of mental health as well as of gender (Conway, 2016; Haras & Malik, 2015; Horgan, 2008).

Crime-terror nexus and "fringe fluidity"

A growing body of research is providing support for the so-called 'crime-terror nexus' (Basra, Neumann, & Brunner, 2016). Background analyses of terrorists' profiles have increasingly point in the direction that criminal behavior—be it petty crime, or organized crime—precedes many cases of contemporary radicalization

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[17]'Lone wolves' is a problematic concept. As will be shown in chapter 4, the so-called 'Lone wolves' are in fact (1) not alone in their mind; they feel wired to a broader ideological movement (logic of networked individualism), and (2) they are, obviously, not 'wolves'; they are human beings. Labeling such individuals as wolves gives them predator-like qualities, which taps into the use of predator-like labels (e.g. Lions) that is common in Salafi-Jihadist propaganda narratives.

into terrorism. In Basra and colleagues' (2016) study, they found that 65% of the individuals in their database were in fact involved in violent crime before they radicalized into terrorists. A few vigorous examples of the crime-terror nexus are (1) the el-Bakraoui brothers and the network that is held responsible for the Paris and Brussels attacks of November 13th 2015 and March 22nd 2016, respectively (partly infused by members of the Zerkani cell, see Van Ostaeyen, 2016; Van Vlierden, 2015) and Amedy Coulibaly and the Kouachi Brothers, who committed the raid on Charlie Hebdo on January 7th 2015. Scholars assessing the crime-terror nexus believe that there are some crucial 'criminal skill transfers', such as the familiarity with violence, procuring firearms, staying under 'the radar', etc. that facilitate an effortless convergence from criminal to radical. Concretely, Van Ostaeyen (2016) wrote that *"Zerkani's recruits' history of petty criminality and gangsterism naturally equipped them with better tradecraft in operating clandestinely, helping them travel to and from Syria with ease"*.

Along these lines of thought, it is also mentioned that a radicalization process does not necessarily has to be driven by any one ideology. It seems to be rather driven by anti-mainstream—or in Aristotelian Ethics terms 'anti-common ground'—sentiments or rebellion. Indeed, some of those recent cases of radicalization[18] can be better understood as individuals from rebellious subcultures that combine antisocial behavior, such as drug-taking or (petty) criminality, with support for anti-mainstream rebels such as terrorist organizations (e.g. Al Qaeda and ISIS) (Hafez & Mullins, 2015).

In a very recent publication, Gartenstein-Ross and Blackman (2019) have come to very similar observations. They have found that in some cases of radicalization, individuals actually make a transition from embracing one form of violent extremism to another—a phenomenon that they have come to call *"fringe fluidity"*. The authors

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[18]It should be briefly mentioned here that for these cases a potential previous imprisonment might have played an important role (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). A vast majority of studies has proven that prisons are significant 'hubs for radicalization' (Olimpio, 2019) as they area also called 'universities for terrorists' (Cuthbertson, 2004). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation, however, to discuss the role of prisons further in to detail. More insight on the current state and trends of the association between imprisonment and radicalization can be found in Olimpio (2019).

argue that fringe fluidity is in fact so common that it should be understood as an independent and significant pathway to radicalization. They argue that *"with respect to radical beliefs, an individual who has already embraced some form of extremism may find it easier to accept another extremist outlook that is also deeply counter-normative"*. Concrete examples of fringe fluidity are cases in which individuals transform from neo-Nazism into militant Islamism (Gartenstein-Ross & Blackman, 2019). The authors argue that there has to be sufficient ideological convergence between the fringes before an individual can make the actual transition. Yet, it remains unclear how much overlap exactly is necessary to enable the transition. One hypothesis is that a shared out-group is pivotal. Obviously, a rejection of the center, the common ground and especially a shared enmity toward Jewish people lies at the epicenter of cases of Nazi–jihadist fluidity. Nevertheless, these insights are still somewhat premature to fully understand this fringe fluidity pathway into radicalization. Hence, future studies are needed in order to investigate both the phenomenon of 'the crime-terror nexus' as well as 'fringe-fluidity'. In chapter 7, I will undertake a first exploration of the association between youth's involvement in petty crime and their sympathies for violent radicalization.

Neurocognitive and neuroscientific advances

A last vigorous aspect of the individual-psychological perspective is the growing body of literature incorporating neurocognitive and neuroscientific data (Decety, Pape, & Workman, 2018; Harris et al., 2009; Pretus et al., 2018). For example, Dean's (2014) analysis enabled the development of a neurocognitive risk assessment toolbox (RAT). This RAT is designed to facilitate an early detection of individuals who may have the potential to engage in acts of violent extremism such as terrorism, militancy and 'active shooting' (Dean, 2014). This work is important, as Dean (2014) has indicated that the RAT is able to reliably discriminate between violent and non-violent radicalization by differentiating *"individuals who merely 'talk the talk' of violent extremism from those that are committed in their mind to 'walk the talk' of carrying out violently extreme actions[…]"* (Dean, 2014, p. 102). Other

research programs have zoomed-in even more on the brain—in the litteral sense—by using neuro-imaging techniques (Decety et al., 2018; Pretus et al., 2018). These (social) neuroscientific studies have tried to understand what happens in the brain 'during' radicalization. Typical for the individual-psychological research paradigm, most studies within this domain are firmly grounded in the tradition of radicalization of beliefs. For example, Harris and colleagues (2009) examined neural correlates of religious belief versus disbelief and found greater activity in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex for believers in the context of sacred values (e.g. God, Virgin Mary). This region in the brain has been considered to be an area that is crucial for self-representation, emotional associations, rewards, and goal-driven behavior (Harris et al., 2009, p. 2). Consequently, some neuroscientists have argued that such brain data should be considered as neurobiological support for Kurglanski's (2014) hypothesis for the quest for (personal) significance, as personal significance or self-worth may be associated with self-representation, reward sensitivity, and sacred values (Decety et al., 2018). In turn, neural activity associated with such sacred values has been found in one recent study as a vulnerability for recruitment into violent extremism (e.g. Pretus et al., 2018). It should be noted, however, that neurobiological data at this point in time is still too embryonic for a robust 'prediction' and explanation of radicalization. Nevertheless, these insights show that the human brain is *de facto* hardwired for some of the core elements of radicalization.

Lastly, it is important to underscore the fact that the individual-psychological research agenda has come under increasing criticism. A vast growing body of scholarship has argued that explanations for radicalization at the level of the individual psychology are problematic because they suffer from inconsistency and non-generalizability issues. An often heard credo in this context is: 'there is no such thing as a 'terrorist personality' (cfr. Horgan, 2008; Post, 2015). Another problem of the individual-psychology paradigm is the risk of pathologizing radicalization. As noted by Horgan (2008), many studies on radicalization (into terrorism) have departed from the idea that these individuals ought to be different

from 'normal people'; that there has to be some sort of sickness before one can engage in such 'shocking behavior'. Nevertheless, after more than a decade of radicalization research, it is now generally agreed on in the literature that radicalization—or extremism or terrorism for that matter—is not the result of psychopathology, such as depression or mood disorders, nor is it exclusive for the emotionally disturbed, or 'lunatics'. To put it in the words of psychiatrist Jerrold Post: *"it is not individual psychopathology, but group, organizational, and social psychology, with a particular emphasis on "collective identity," that provides the most powerful lens through which to understand terrorist psychology and behavior"* (Post, 2007, p.8). This quote leads us to the group-level explanations for radicalization.

2.1.3.2 Collective-group-level

As an alternative to the individual-centered approach, some scholars have developed group-level explanatory models. Studies following this research agenda, put their emphasis on concepts such as social/collective identity, intergroup conflict, collective grievances, norms and values, and group-based recruitment. As conspicuously put by Post (2015):*"The group is the basic unit of political life. And this is particularly true of the world of political violence"* (Post, 2015, p. 243). Indeed, numerous studies have indicated that social ties, interpersonal networks, and social/intergroup influences are central in the radicalization of individuals (Bakker, 2006; Bouchard, 2015; Ducol, 2015; Hegghammer, 2006; Sageman, 2004b, 2008). An oft-cited model within this paradigm is the pyramid model by Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko (2008). In contrast to the profiling tradition within the individual-psychology paradigm, these authors followed a so-called 'mechanisms' or 'pathways' approach. According to McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) radicalization has to be understood within a pyramid metaphor. The lower part of the pyramid, the base, consists of the group with all sympathizers with a given goal or cause. *"From the base to apex, higher levels of the pyramid are*

associated with decreased numbers but increased radicalization of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. Thus one way of thinking about radicalization is that it is the gradient that distinguishes terrorists from their base of sympathizers." (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008, p. 417). McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) have identified twelve mechanisms—or what could be seen as some sort of grand theoretical causes—that account for the explanation for how individuals move from the base to the apex, ranging from individual-level victimization to group-level grievances, to mass-level hate and martyrdom[19]. Without going much further into detail of all these mechanisms, radicalization through this lens becomes a symptom of intergroup dynamics and conflict with in-group/out-group identification and perceived threats (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008, 2011). It is important to note that this model leans strongly on the insights from the social movement theory. In fact, although previous works have proposed other categorizations (cfr. Jensen et al., 2018), nearly all studies that consider radicalization as a social and/or (inter)group phenomenon are to a greater or lesser extent grounded in the framework of social movement theory (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Tilly, 2003).

Social movement theory is—succinctly put—concerned with the way group identities (either political, religious, or other) are formed, how they become the basis for particular 'claims', and how mobilization of symbolic and material resources can lead to collective action. Within the domain of social movement theory, Charles Tilly's (2004, 2006) works are fundamental. Without having the possibility to go deeper into this theory, Tilly's (2004, 2006) thesis states that a social movement arises under a condition of 'contentious politics', i.e. intergroup conflict in McCauley and Moskalenko's (2008, 2011) terms. Crucial to the flourishing of a social movement are a variety of core 'ingredients' that do not exist in a vacuum but actively interact. Applied to a radicalization context, I will discuss a few of these elements here: collective identity, collective action frame and

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[19]See for the full model and a detailed explanation, McCauley, C. and Moskalenko, S. (2008). Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence,* 20(3), p.415-433.

frame alignment, repertoires for collective action.

Collective identity

In a very general way, the concept of social and/or collective identity can be seen as peoples' subjective sense of identification with a group (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). In a more precise way, collective identity can be defined as *"the process by which social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by other actors – as part of broader groupings, and develop emotional attachments to them"*(Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 91). This is in line with Tilly's notion of collective identity: *"Rather than living inside the human bodies, true identities invariably live in ties among persons"*(Tilly, 2002, p.48, cited in Archetti, 2013, p. 76). A collective identity is constructed on the basis of familiar symbols, worldviews, lifestyles and narratives, i.e. a set of frames (see below). Studies within this research domain have argued that collective identity forges strong links between sympathizers within the group whilst distinguishing from members from other social categories (Singerman, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2004). Consequently, collective identity has been found a crucial precursor for the engagement in (collective) action and (violent) radicalization (see for an overview: Della Porta & Diani, 2006; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Indeed, Tilly (2003) has argued that a substantial share of collective action de facto centers on collective identity claims, which is *"the assertion that a group or a constituency it represents is worthy, united, numerous, and committed (WUNC)."* (Tilly, 2003, p. 227). I agree; 'WUNC' sounds weird, but it represents actually something familiar. In the case of collective self-representations WUNC elements refers to identity artefacts that are recognizable for a broader audience (Tilly, 2004, p. 4):

 a) worthiness: sober demeanor; neat clothing; presence of clergy, dignitaries, and mothers with children;

b) unity: matching badges, headbands, banners, or costumes; marching in ranks; singing and chanting;

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c) numbers: headcounts, signatures on petitions, messages from constituents, filling streets;

d) commitment: braving bad weather; visible participation by the old and disabled; resistance to repression; ostentatious sacrifice, subscription, and/or benefaction.

For Tilly (2003) WUNC is an important aspect. In fact, it enables to quantify (and predict) the intensity of collective action. An example in his own words: *"If we thought of the four items as varying from 0 to 1 [...] then we could then [sic] compute WUNCness as a multiple of the four: .8x.6x.5x.9 = .216 for a demonstration with high worthiness and commitment but lower scores for unity and numbers."* (Tilly, 2003, p. 231).

On another note—albeit of essential importance when looking at collective identity vis-à-vis radicalization—, some authors have studied the balance between collective identity and personal identity (Jensen et al., 2018; Post, 2007, 2015). Jensen and colleagues (2018), have advanced the notion that when it comes to the balance of collective identity and personal identity, researchers should differentiate between group leaders and group followers. They argue that leaders are an important guidance for the followers when it comes to the construction and interpretation of collective identity and group norms/values. Similarly, group leaders are considered to be essential in defining the necessary characteristics for group membership as well as the behaviors that are considered (un)acceptable within the collective identity. This is in line with what Post (2007, 2015) has written on the subject. He has demonstrated that collective identity, especially in the case of followers, cannot be underestimated. More specifically, he argued that within the context of a radicalization process, followers subordinate increasingly their individual identity to the cause as articulated by a (charismatic) leader, which in turn creates a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves (Post, 2015). Subsequently, this process can rationalize violent action with ultimately self-sacrifice and 'martyrdom' (Aslan, 2009; Carson & Suppenbach, 2018; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).Here we see that the collective identity claim

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goes hand in hand with another crucial element of the social movement theory: the so-called collective action frames.

Collective action frames and frame alignment

As already briefly mentioned above, an important element in the construction of a collective identity is framing. Framing—just like radicalization—is a famously difficult concept to define, but the general agreement is that it refers to a process of meaning construction (Archetti, 2013; Berbers et al., 2015). Within the context of social movements, it is argued that extremist groups and their leaders play a fundamental role in the construction of the so-called collective action frames that give meaning to events, support the formation of collective expectations, and instigate actions (see for more detail: Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992). Based on Gamson's (1992) original definition, McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) refer to frames in a radicalization context as 'a syndrome of beliefs' in which members of a group see themselves as 'superior', but experience collectively a sense of 'injustice' and 'distrust', making them 'vulnerable' and which subsequently demands for 'collective action'. Indeed, within these collective action frames, studies have acknowledged the key role of personal and identity group grievances (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

In tandem with collective identity, these collective action frames facilitate a process of frame alignment, whereby the person regards the worldview of the social movement increasingly in line with his/her own views whilst considering other alternatives as detestable (King & Taylor, 2011). It is often observed that collective action frames grow in intensity and intolerance towards the outgroup especially in the case of prolonged contentious politics (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011). With an eye on the current dissertation, we could say that the idea of 'the other' within a collective action frame radicalizes towards dehumanization of the other in which the out-group is not even considered to be human anymore (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Accordingly, collective action frames are employed for the justification for inhumane behavior against 'the other'.

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Now, our understanding of the implications of a collective identity with a collective action frame is no matter of any imputable shortcoming in the social scientific literature. In fact, a few, now classical, social experiments have shown consistently that taking on a new identity with a clear action frame can indeed have powerful moral implications (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Midlarsky, 2011). Whether it is the famous experiment by Zimbardo and colleagues—dividing college students into prison guards and inmates, with appropriate uniforms— or Milgram's study—about obedience in the context of teacher and learner who has to give (fake) electroshocks— we observe an increasing radical behavior in which 'the other' gets harmed. These social experiments show without any doubt that radicalization of inhumane behavior can be socially and collectively arranged. In other words, the group-level perspective paradigm has a point: it might well be that it is not inherent personality flaws that drive people to cruelty. Moral theorists have shown that people tend to stick to a few moral disengagement practices to persuade themselves that their inhumane behavior in the context of collective action was/is morally acceptable (Bandura, 1999). In chapter 4, this moral disengagement practice will be examined further.

Repertoires of collective action

Collective action and social movement do not arise in a vacuum; they belong to a broader social milieu and culture that shapes the movement's dynamics (Wiktorowicz, 2004, p. 13). That is, culture provides a socio-cognitive apparatus on the basis of which social movements orient themselves in the world in terms of collective identity, collective action frames, and repertoires of collective action. Repertoires of collective action refer to "a 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action'" (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 73).

In Charles Tilly's terms, repertoires should be seen as a *"whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different types on different individuals"* (Tilly (1986, p.2) in Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 168). Commenting on Tilly, Archetti (2013) argues that repertoires are the tactics and means through which collective

actions are communicated. Examples for repertoires are, amongst many others, *"[the] creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, petition drives, statements to and in public media, and pamphleteering"*(Tilly, 2004, p. 3). Another example for a nonviolent repertoire would be 'participatory democracy': *"The right to influence decision-making processes comes from neither formal investiture nor intrinsic power but from force of commitment"* (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 176).

Repertoires for collective actions have transformed over time. It is generally assumed that the transformation in the tactics followed partly from the emergence of modern means of information and communication technologies (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). More specifically, it is argued that the logic behind some theatrical-type repertoires is to predominantly get covered by the media. Subsequently, when the media and communications landscape changes, these theatrical-type performances transform along.

Especially in the 21st century, social movements have shaped and adopted their repertoires of collective action in function of the emergence of 'the new media'. Tilly (2004) wrote that *"[...] the most telling effect of new media was not to reshape movements in the images of those media. It was instead to connect activists with the circumscribed audiences reached by those media and therefore to disconnect them from excluded by the same media."* (Tilly, 2004, p. 85). The new media molded, in that sense, the organizational structure and opportunities for the social movement. Along these lines, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) have demonstrated how contemporary social movements have come to integrate a new logic of connective action (as briefly described above) with the classical logic of collective action (as described here). Archetti (2013) concludes that these transformations have to be understood as a result of a process of mediatization (more in chapter 2.4).

In the case of violent radicalization and terrorism, collective action is generally following a theatrical-type repertoire which is in most cases (extremely) violent.

In these specific cases, the terrorists' repertoires of collective action are driven by a so-called logic of damage (see e.g. Della Porta & Diani, 2006). The logic of damage behind violent, theatrical-like repertoires is both symbolic and instrumental: *"Violence is justified often as a symbolic refusal of an oppressive system, but it is also used [...] to win specific battles, or to obtain media attention."* (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 174). A concrete example following the logic of damage and theatrical-like tactics is suicide bombing or 'martyrdom' (Kruglanski et al., 2009; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). This nexus of violent repertoires-media attention will be explored more in detail in chapter 2.2.3 *'Terrorism—a mass-mediated and mediatized phenomenon'*

Now, if all three elements are combined, they function as the key components that constitute together an ideology. Succinctly put, an ideology refers to some sort of master narrative about the world and one's place in it. Hafez and Mullins (2015) describe an ideology as a container concept whereby (1) collective action frames stress collective grievances, which in turn (2) intensify collective identity and demonize/dehumanize enemies, and (3) justify violent repertoires against them by incentivizing the sacrifice of 'the self'. As such, the concept of an ideology vis-à-vis radicalization functions as an important bridging role between the individual-psychological level and the group-level paradigms.

2.1.3.3 Social-communicative level

The Internet and cyberspace

A major locus of concern in the current wave of radicalization research (cfr. Schmid, 2016) is the role the Internet plays within the radicalization process. The Internet—whether approached as a communication technology or as a social institution—takes a dominant place in nearly all publications on radicalization and terrorism, and is generally considered as an obvious, self-evident, and self-explanatory factor. Even in publications by esteemed terrorism and radicalization scholars there are claims about the Internet's functions and effects

that are surprisingly casual and uncritical. For instance, in Alex P. Schmid's (2013) famous article he stated that: *"There is no doubt that the Internet with its low cost, ease of access, speed, anonymity, de-centralisation, size, global connectivity and weak or lacking regulation has played an important role in the dissemination of radical messages [. . .]"*(p.33) and *"The question is not whether the Internet has influence. We know for sure that it has a big and diverse influence on many of its users."* (p.34). While there might be some accurate and unquestionable observations in these statements that are true, such anecdotal(/hysterical?) claims of seemingly undeniable impact of the Internet within a radicalization process would go against the grain of any communication and media scholars. Unfortunately, however, claims of this sort are paramount in the radicalization literature. Some, as argued by Alava and colleagues (2017), have gone even so far to accuse the Internet—and social media companies in particular—for being responsible and accountable for radicalizing individuals.

Sure, at first sight it seems legit to make a causal connection between radicalization and Internet. After all, there is no shortage of media coverage of attacks by 'homegrown terrorists' claiming that these individuals have come to self-radicalize through watching extremist videos on YouTube and were inspired by "glossy" literature on extremist websites (cfr. Tsarnaev brothers, see Hamm & Spaaij, 2017; Jones et al., 2018). Likewise, there is a growing body of scientific literature that underscores the abundance and easy-accessibility of terrorist contents on the Web. In fact, we have increasing knowledge of *what* terrorist groups disseminate (Atwan, 2015; Ingram, 2016a; Wignell, Tan, O'Halloran, & Lange, 2017) and (2) *how* they disseminate (Atwan, 2015; Fisher, 2015; Shehabat & Mitew, 2018; Winter, 2015a; Zelin, 2015a). As a result, there is some general consensus within the field that radical contents are indeed readily available on the Internet. Unfortunately, some scholars in the field have also been eager to infer that availability of online radical contents must lead to radicalization. In other words, 'radical contents' become synonymous to 'radicalizing contents'. Clearly,

that is a problematic inference.

Connecting the Internet to radicalization in such simplistic terms seems in fact highly questionable to any communication scholar. The fact is that decades of communication and media effects studies have reliably shown that we cannot infer effects of communication on the basis of its contents, or its mere exposure to its contents. Such ideas are aligned with outdated mass communication theories, such as the *"magic bullet"* and *"hypodermic needle"* models (cfr. Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), that have proven to suffer from empirical support [20] . And yet, remarkably, such models are now being observed in a refurbished manner in order to explain the causal role of the Internet on radicalization and terrorism (Aly, 2017; Archetti, 2017).

Without arguing that the Internet's role is irrelevant or diminishable—that is absolutely not the case—there is, however, a need to put these claims in a more nuanced scientific perspective. That is, the role of the Internet as a causal driver for radicalization has not been investigated systematically enough to give us clarity on the current situation (Bouchard, 2015). The very few empirical studies that exist on the topic are more nuanced in their assumptions and claims than what we have read above. In fact, on the basis of a series of extensive experiments with young individuals, Rieger and colleagues (2013) solidly conclude that the effects of extremist contents[21] are pointing rather in the direction of rejection of these contents, because the stimuli have been found to produce adverse rather than radicalizing effects in their viewers. Also McCauley and Moskalenko (2008) as supported by Bouchard and Levey (2015) came to the conclusion that *"the Internet only gets you so far: far enough for the majority of individuals who may participate in online discussions or view content of an extremist nature but never truly "radicalize" themselves".* (2015, p. 1). In a more recent systematic review article, Conway (2016) has put it even a bit more bluntly: *"There is no yet proven connection[22] between consumption of and networking around violent extremist*

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[20](see for a detailed analysis of media effects literature: Bryant & Oliver, 2009)

[21]In these experiments, audiovisual stimuli were used for both Jihadist and right-wing extremist groups.

[22]Until now, see chapter 7 in this dissertation

online content and adoption of extremist ideology and/or engagement in violent extremism and terrorism" (Conway, 2016, p. 77).

That being said, it is important to stress here that it is not unimaginable that the Internet and its availability of extremist contents does have an important position within the complex equation of radicalization. As mentioned above, Klausen and colleagues (2018) have tentatively argued that the availability of radical content on the Internet can have serious consequences for those individuals who actively seek out for these contents. A clear and dangerous example can be found in the case of the Tsarnaev brothers who are held responsible for the Boston Marathon Bombing, 2013. It is said that the brothers were avid readers of the online Al-Qaeda magazine 'Inspire'—a magazine that claimed to promote an *"open source Jihad"* (Williams, 2015). The explosives that the brothers used were completely built on the basis of the instructions from one Inspire-article entitled *"How to Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom"*. Therefore, on the basis of such retrospective case studies it is not impossible that the Internet has a pivotal function from some elements in the radicalization process. However, it is important not to generalize from retrospective findings, as they cannot estimate prospective risks of a future event. Nevertheless, there is just not yet enough large-scale empirical data in support of concrete associations. Hence, in chapter 7, I will attempt to explore the association between information seeking and sympathies for violent radicalization, amongst others. In other words, the Internet's role as a supplier of radical—not necessarily radicalizing—materials within the radicalization process has to be put in better perspective and empirical data is indispensable for that.

A thesis that did receive a fair amount of empirical support—especially in the context of online radicalization—is the role that social networks (both online and offline) and subsequently 'echo chambers' play (O'Hara & Stevens, 2015; Sunstein, 2007, 2009). Thus, the Internet as a conduit for likeminded individuals and, in second order, a conveyer belt for radical contents. In the next paragraph, I will

discuss this assumption more in detail.

Social networks and echo chambers

One of the most robust agreements within the literature of radicalization is that social networks are nearly indispensable for a radicalization process (Bouchard, 2015; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Sageman, 2004, 2008). For nearly all forms of radicalism, activism, extremism, and terrorism, authors have acknowledged that deep friendships of trust and an affiliation with like-minded individuals, sharing similar traits, are crucial elements for a radicalization process and for the success of collective action / a terrorist organization (Bakker, 2006; Hegghammer, 2006; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011; Sageman, 2008). In fact, social movement theory emphasizes the importance of social networks as supporting structures that facilitate—and bolster at the same time— collective identities, collective action frames, and the collective repertoires of the group (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Tilly, 2004). Indeed, membership of a social group is a known way for coping with grievances, a loss of personal significance, and perceived alienation (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008). Along these lines, the general assumption in the literature is that individuals do not radicalize in solitude[23], but that an adherence to a radical group—preferably based on (preexisting) face-to-face interactions—is an important condition. In terms of radicalization, Mark Sageman's (2004, 2008) esteemed work has shown that networks are *the* fundamental tools for encouraging escalation of (collective) grievances to the point of extreme in-group love and out-group hatred (cfr. collective identity). On the basis of his analysis of Jihadist-networks he wrote: *"the interactivity among a "bunch of guys" acted as an echo chamber, which progressively radicalized them collectively to the point where they were ready to collectively join a terrorist organization"* (Sageman, 2008, p. 114).

Now, this is where the Internet becomes an important player within the radicalization process. Through the Internet, the establishment of social networks

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[23]Independent of perhaps lone actor terrorists. See for more information Hamm and Spaaij (2017)

has become increasingly effortless and has taken over offline social networks to certain extent. Sageman (2008) observed that *"Since physical militant sites, like radical mosques, are closely monitored by law enforcement authorities, militants have moved online. The new forums have the same influence that these radical mosques played in the previous generation of terrorists. It is the forums, not the images of the passive websites, which are crucial in the process of radicalization. People change their minds through discussion with friends, not by simply reading impersonal stories"* (Sageman, 2008, p. 114). Indeed, many studies exists that have shown that the Web is instrumental in bringing together networks of likeminded people into so-called 'echo chamber' (O'Hara & Stevens, 2015; Sunstein, 2007, 2009). Echo chambers could be seen as a symptom of a structural polarization and fragmentation of audiences and society (Garrett, 2009; O'Hara & Stevens, 2015). An echo chamber could be defined as virtual space in which likeminded individuals consequently filter out bits of ideologically incongruent information and only strengthen their already pre-existing world views. In his seminal work Cass R. Sunstein, (Sunstein, 2007, pp. 60–64) is particularly concerned with how these echo chambers lead to group polarization and radicalization whereby its members become increasingly less diverse over time, while the group becomes more coherent. In a more recent work, Sunstein (2009) has looked specifically at Islamist-inspired social networks online. Drawing on insights from Sageman (2008), he wrote *"Group members come to rely exclusively on one another to validate new information, and everything that they believe is a product of interactions within their enclaves. Thus "they discard information refuting their beliefs as propaganda from the West." Here is a clear case of biased assimilation, in a way that promotes group polarization."* (Sunstein, 2009, p. 52). Here we see that the Internet can indeed be a pivotal component for radicalization as it seems capable of tying together fundamental individual-level factors and crucial group-level mechanisms, creating potentially a toxic combination for a radicalization process.

Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the current thesis to discuss the exact

mechanisms of echo chambers vis-à-vis radicalization more in depth (cfr. the reinforcing spirals model by Slater, 2007), and how they are associated with certain cognitive biases that are undoubtedly also supportive to radicalization processes (most notably maybe attribution bias and confirmation bias, see Kahneman, 2011). Future studies are definitely encouraged to unravel this more in detail.

In any case, important to note here is that research tends to agree upon the fact that the Internet may very well act as a facilitator for the establishment of networks between likeminded radicals, but it is rarely an all-encompassing creator of radical offline behavior (Awan, 2007; Horgan, 2008; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Sageman, 2004, 2008). To give some background in the form of numbers: one Spanish study (Reinares, García-Calvo, & Vicente, 2017) has found that out of 119 imprisoned Jihadist-inspired terrorists, only 13% radicalized without any ties to a social network (neither offline nor online). Of the remaining 87%, the authors found that 19.5% radicalized merely online.

These insights are of essential importance because they give meaningful direction for counter-radicalization measures. Even though it is well-known that the Internet is an important supporting infrastructure for the terrorists' propaganda machinery (Ducol, 2015; Weimann, 2008, 2014), it is without any doubt its capacity to forge 'radio-active' ties between like-minded 'toxic' individuals by dividing audiences into ideologically-confined 'echo chamber'-networks that is the true power of the Internet within the radicalization process. Counter and prevention measures have to address this issue accordingly. Instead of endangering further fundamental democratic and human freedoms by for example (asymmetric) censorship, privacy intrusions, and the suppression of (some) radical ideological contents (see for example the U.N. report by Alava et al., 2017), counter radicalization measures should address polarization of audiences in 'echo chambers', information diversity, and individual and group cognitive biases in the first place (more in chapter 7/8)

2.1.3.4   Synthesis and the ten piece puzzle

In the discussion above, I have discerned all (causal) factors that have been associated with (violent) radicalization in the current state of the academic literature. Again, it is extremely crucial to stress here that our current understanding of radicalization and the etiology of radicalization has been largely fabricated with data of (would-be) terrorists and violent extremists, especially in a religious/Salafi-jihadist context. This makes the phenomenon de facto conceptually, ontologically, and methodologically impure. Nevertheless, the discussion above enabled me to develop a clear picture of what scholarship over the course of nearly two decades has considered to be fundamental conditions in which radicalization may occur.

Individual-psychological level	Collective-group level	Social-communicative level
Grievances/discrimination/alienation	Collective Identity	The Internet and Cyberspace
Significance quest	Collective Action Frames	Social networks and echo chambers
Cognitive opening	Repertoires	
Self-radicalization / information seeking		
Fringe-fluidity and criminality		

Table 2.1: Ten distinct radicalization components on three distinct levels of analysis

In sum, from now on, we will call these ten distinct factors in the literature 'components', clustered into three groups that refer to three levels of analysis (see table 2.1). We could say, in line with Hafez and Mullins (2015), that these components are the 'key variables' on which there is consensus —to a greater or lesser extent— in the literature. However, this says nothing on how these components produce factually radicalization.

In the literature, a paradigm shift can be observed from scholars that have argued that radicalization is best understood as a 'linear process' (King & Taylor, 2011; Moghaddam, 2005; Silber & Bhatt, 2007) to the notion that radicalization consists of a set of different non-linear 'mechanisms' and 'pathways' (Horgan, 2008; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

Building further on these insights, Hafez and Mullins (2015) advocated for a new paradigm. They consider radicalization as if it were a 'puzzle' whereby the full

image can only be revealed when the (most crucial) jigsaw pieces are put in the right place. Hafez and Mullins (2015) considered four pieces to be pivotal: grievances, ideology, networks, and enabling environments. While this provides us already with an interesting set of radicalization puzzle pieces, I believe that we need a more fine-grained—however still parsimonious—explanatory model for radicalization. Hence, I believe that the puzzle metaphor is useful but that a refinement is of essential importance.

First, the puzzle metaphor is useful because radicalization is, just as a jigsaw puzzle, a multifactorial and contextual phenomenon. It is multifactorial, because just as a 'one-piece-puzzle' cannot really be considered a puzzle, one component on its own does not yet constitute radicalization. Indeed, radicalization driven by only one single component from the list above is very rare, if not inexistent in the literature. It is contextual, because by looking at only one puzzle piece that is taken out of its context we still know nothing of the total picture. Indeed, by concentrating only on one single component above, we will not be able to fully understand radicalization. Similarly, counter radicalization programs that tackle only one component, obviously miss out on a lot of other components, that potentially undermine their well-intended efforts.

Furthermore, I believe that the puzzle metaphor is useful because it underscores the interdependent nature of the separate components (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). Whereas one puzzle piece already reveals some crucial information of the adjacent pieces, so will one radicalization component reveal information of another. For example, we can see that the *grievances*-component is strongly interrelated with the *collective identity*- and *collective action frames*-components, whilst the literature has also highlighted that 'echo chambers' prerequisite some form of a 'cognitive opening' and amplify collective identity and grievances (Sageman, 2008; Sunstein, 2009).

Second, Hafez and Mullins' (2015) puzzle has to be refined because their four puzzle pieces are very large and abstract components that are not very helpful in analytical terms (e.g. how to define ideology?). Above that, in their puzzle model

nearly all advances within the individual-psychological field have been ignored, thereby missing out on a lot of explanatory power on the individual level. Moreover, they do not give concrete examples of how the puzzle can be put together. For example, are all four puzzle pieces needed to produce radicalization? Or can two or three already be sufficient? And if so, can we identify what pieces are more crucial than others? Hence, further theoretical and empirical refinement is needed.

First, as shown in table 2.1, I suggest to be more fine-grained. In that sense, I believe that there are ten concrete components instead of four abstract ones. Yet, for the sake of parsimoniousness, these components can be aggregated into three interconnected levels of analysis, i.e. individual-psychological level, collective-group-level, and social-communicative level. Then, as Hafez and Mullins (2015) have already argued, these components do not operate in a vacuum but actively interact.

Second, and potentially more controversial, I suggest—based on the literature review above—that at least one component from every level is needed in order to produce the puzzle of radicalization. That is to say, in terms of risks, the risk for radicalization is the highest when at least three puzzle pieces—one from each level—collide. If not, it seems safe to claim that the risk of radicalization at least increases by every extra piece from another level. Let us look at some examples:

•**Cases with two same-level components**: It is very unlikely that an individual radicalizes with only a 'cognitive opening', and 'information seeking behavior' (both individual-psychological level components) (Sageman, 2004b). Similarly, decades of research have shown that an individual's 'collective identity' together with 'collective action repertoires' (both collective-group level components) are not sufficient to radicalize someone into (violent) extremism (Tilly, 2003).

•**Cases with two components from different levels**: Having a 'criminal past' (individual-psychological component) and engaging with radical materials on 'the Internet or in cyberspace' (social-communicative component) is not yet sufficient for a radicalization process to start, although it can be tentatively argued that it

increases the likelihood for it. Similarly, an individual who expresses a strong 'collective identity' (collective-group component) and adheres to a 'social network or echo chamber' (social-communicative component) is highly likely not a radical. Nevertheless, the potential that this individual adopts another puzzle piece, especially over the course of time, increases the likelihood for radicalization.

- **Cases with at least one component of each level**: In the case that an individual experiences 'a loss of significance' (individual-psychological component) to which he/she responds by adhering to a 'social network' (growing increasingly into an 'echo chamber') (social-communicative component), that in turn facilitates the internalization of 'collective action frames' (collective-group component) has a high risk for radicalization. Similarly, an individual with a 'criminal background' who adopts 'collective action repertoires' becomes a high risk for radicalization when he/she actively engages in cyberspace with radical contents or networks.

Third, I suggest to update Hafez and Mullins' (2015) work because their puzzle is developed with an exclusive focus on (violent) radicalization of Muslims in the West. Of course, the components as proposed here are still based on a body of literature that suffers from a severe overrepresentation of studies on Muslims and violent radicalization only. However, I believe that the renovated structure as proposed in this dissertation is meaningful for a broader range with other forms of radicalization that are not *per se* religiously-inspired, nor violent. More concretely, the ten piece puzzle that is proposed here enables us to transcend the ideological barrier that is present in Hafez and Mullins' (2015) puzzle. A concrete example can be found in the stories of Khalid and Ibrahim el-Bakraoui, the brothers who detonated almost simultaneously two suicide bombs on March 22nd 2016—Ibrahim on the national airport and Khalid in the Brussels metro. The two appear to have an impressive background in violent crime in the years before the attacks, including armed bank robberies with Kalashnikovs, kidnappings, trafficking, and carjacking (Blaise et al., 2016). Even though they were both raised in a Muslim family, these brothers did not show much of a sign of devotion to an ideology or an

adherence to Islam (Basra et al., 2016). In fact, it was not until their membership of the Zerkani network [24] that they turned their predilection for local violence into transnational violence and booked a trip to Syria as foreign terrorist fighters. Upon their return, the el-Bakraoui brothers understood that the Belgian authorities were chasing their fellow Zerkani members one by one. With the capture of Salah Abdeslam—the only surviving perpetrator of the Paris attacks—on March 19th 2016 the brothers and two remaining members of the Zerkani cell (Najim Laachraoui[25] and Mohamed Abrini[26]) accelerated the execution of their suicide attack plans on the airport and the Brussels metro (Van Ostaeyen, 2016). Along the lines of the puzzle model proposed above, it can be argued that for Khalid and Ibrahim el-Bakraoui not so much a puzzle piece of an ideology has played a role (cfr. Hafez and Mullins (2015)), but rather the interaction of the puzzle pieces of a 'criminal background', 'social networks', and 'violent theatric-like repertoires' helps explaining their radicalization. Ultimately, I would argue that the ten-components structure as proposed in this dissertation may also help explain other non-violent radicalization or non-violent radical behaviors, for example ultra-marathoning and veganism (cfr. Tufekci, 2018). But, I leave it for future studies to examine that.

To sum up, on the basis of a literature review of nearly two decades of radicalization research, a taxonomy of ten key components in the etiology of radicalization was made. These ten components are divided over three underlying levels of analysis, which are the individual-psychological, collective-group, and social-communicative level. Building further on Hafez and Mullins' (2015) puzzle framework, a refined and updated puzzle model is proposed that can be applied to both Muslim and non-Muslim as well as to violent and non-violent radicalization processes. In the upcoming section, a I will show why a 'socio-epidemiological' framework is necessary to investigate this radicalization puzzle thesis.

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[24]See Van Ostaeyen (2016) for a detailed account on the Zerkani network and other dominant terrorist networks in Belgium.

[25]Najim Laachraoui was allegedly the bomb maker of the network and got killed during the suicide mission at the national airport of Zaventem (Van Ostaeyen, 2016).

[26]Mohamed Abrini gained world fame as 'the man with the hat' when global news media were extensively reporting on the manhunt of Abrini after the Brussels attacks (Evans et al., 2016).

2.1.4 'Socio-epidemiological' and public health approach

As explained in the last chapter, at least three puzzle pieces—one from every aggregated level of analysis—are needed for a radicalization process. In fact, the more components we add to the radicalization puzzle, the clearer the picture becomes and the more 'toxic' the environment. It is in this light that the opening quote of this dissertation, by Dr. Laszlo Kreizler, becomes highly relevant. It is only with the right (or wrong) combination of components that the 'raw materials' become combustible. But, how can we study this? This dissertation takes for that sme inspiration from (socio-)epidemiological literature.

Over the course of the last two decades, the vast majority of the studies on radicalization has either gravitated to a focus on the individual level or to a focus on the group-level. However, more recently, a significant group scholars have averred that it is more meaningful to treat (violent) radicalization as a public health issue (Price, 2017; Cécile Rousseau et al., 2017; Stares & Yacoubian, 2007). Looking at radicalization through the lens of epidemiology or public health seems fruitful because (a) this perspective tends to situate itself on the intersection between the individual-psychological level and the group-level explanations, and (b) it provides a scientific basis to model how the different puzzle pieces may interact with each other. More specifically, Stares and Yacoubian (2007) have argued that the mechanisms through which an individual comes to adopt a radical militant belief system is much like the dynamics underlying the process of contagion by an infectious diseases (Stares & Yacoubian, 2007). In their perception, radicalization should be viewed as a 'social contagion phenomenon' in which radical beliefs spread through social ties from one person to another

[27](Brodie, 2009; Goffman & Newill, 1964; Jenkins, Li, Domb Krauskopf, & Green,

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[27]The notion that beliefs or ideas spread from individual to individual like an infectious disease is of course not new. Fact is, it can be traced back to Richard Dawkins's (1976) definition of a 'meme'. A meme should be seen as a cultural analogy to a gene. It is a piece of socio-cultural information that spreads, replicates, and mutates among people by means of imitation and 'cultural selection' (Blackmore, 1999; Dawkins, 1976). Bluntly stated, memes can be seen as the artefacts or building blocks that together constitute (1) collective identity, (2) collective action frames, (3) repertoires. In recent years, a growing body of research in the social sciences has come to examine these social

2009).

Stares and Yacoubian (2007) advance the argument that radical beliefs neither arise nor spread in a vacuum. Borrowing general insights from the epidemiological sciences, these authors deconstruct the outbreak of radical beliefs into four fundamental and dynamically interconnected dimensions: the agent, the host, the vectors, and the environment. Stares and Yacoubian (2007) particularly have applied to a militant Islamist-inspired context.

- *The agent* is what in epidemiology refers to the pathogen or the virus. For Stares and Yacoubian (2007) the role of the agent is played by the radical belief system or 'ideology'. As seen above, an ideology should be seen as a container concept consisting of the concepts of collective identity, collective action frames, and repertoires. In this case, a Salafi-Jihadist ideology could be considered as a 'pathogen'.

- *The host* refers to the individual or the group that is 'infected' by the agent. The authors consider everyone adhering to Salafi-Jihadist beliefs and behaviors as infected. However, Stares and Yacoubian's (2007) model lacks some necessary nuance. In the light of the above literature review, we have come to understand that those who hold (violent or non-violent) radical beliefs are not necessarily likeminded to those who engage in (violent or non-violent) radical behavior (e.g. Horgan, 2008; Knefel, 2013). Furthermore, social and complex contagion literature has suggested that the spread of behavior through a social network does not necessarily follow the same spread dynamics as with belief (Centola, 2010, 2018).

- *The environment* makes reference to broader factors within the Muslim world that stimulate the exposure to the pathogen, which are real-world realities such

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contagions vis-à-vis the spread of beliefs and behaviors. In his recent book, "How Behavior Spreads: The Science of Complex Contagions" Damon Centola (2018) has successfully demonstrated that the underlying spread dynamics of behavior are significantly different from the spread dynamics of beliefs. Both dynamics can be studied with computational methods such as Agent Based Modeling (ABM). Hence, in order to bring some clarity to the controversy and polemic surrounding of the conceptualization of radicalization (belief vs. behavior debate), future studies may want to apply ABM or social contagion approaches in order to finally distinguish between violent and nonviolent radicalization.

as (intergroup) conflict, social alienation (Teich, 2016), targets of surveillance in the context of a state of hyper-security (see chapter X above, and Kundnani, 2014).

- *The vectors* should be defined as the structural conduits within the ecosystem that actively propagate the ideology and associated action agendas, *"such as mosques, prisons, madrassas, the Internet, satellite television, and diasporic networks"* (Stares & Yacoubian, 2007, p. 9).

Now, in contrast to Stares and Yacoubian (2007), Price (2017) suggests a modification to this infectious-disease approach. Also standing on an epidemiological basis, Price (2017) argues that radicalization-terrorism should not be compared to an infectious disease, but to a 'chronic' disease. He suggests that causes for terrorism share more similarities with a cancer than with infectious diseases [28]. Is important to advance this idea here in Price's (2017) own words:

> *"Cancer is a disease caused by mutations of normal cells, just like terrorists are "mutated," distorted versions of what are otherwise "normal" people.[. . .] [A]nyone can contract cancer, but some individuals are genetically more predisposed to contracting cancer than others. Sometimes cancer mutations are triggered by internal mechanisms, such as inherited mutations, hormones, immune conditions, and mutations that occur from metabolism. [. . .]. In other cases, mutations occur because of external factors, such as exposure to carcinogens. [. . .]. Similar dynamics are found in terrorism. In terrorism, however, we do not call it mutation; we call it radicalization, and just like cancer, all types of people are susceptible.*
> (Price, 2017, pp. 4–5)

In epidemiological terms, as lined out above, according to Price (2017)

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[28] One could take fault in defining cancer as a 'chronic disease'. Indeed it is arguable that in some cases the tumors are manageable and cancer can be viewed as an ongoing, 'chronic' condition. Nevertheless, medical literature suggests that only certain types of cancers can be viewed in terms of a chronic illness. Other types of cancers are known for few treatment options and prove to be fatal in the near term (see for example, Bernell & Howard, 2016).

radicalization does not take place in the transmission or adoption of a pathogen, i.e. radical ideology, that lingers around in the environments or social networks, but within the hosts themselves on almost a cell-based level, and in some cases—just like a cancer—independent of external factors. According to Price's (2017) hypothesis, personal predispositions, such as socio-psychological development in adolescence (cfr. Huesmann, 2010), render someone intrinsically more susceptible to radicalize, or to 'mutate' in his terms. In other words, Price (2017) avers that radicalization can occur completely independent of external factors—and totally within the limits of someone's person. Despite the fact that the vast majority of psychological and psychiatric sciences strongly refute that idea (Borum, 2004; Horgan, 2005, 2008; Post, 2007), I would argue that Price (2017) makes another important and dangerous reasoning error.

He argues that exposure to external factors, such as radical propaganda, triggers radicalization like exposure to carcinogenic factors could cancer cells to mutate. This analogy is flagrantly false. Exposure to external carcinogenic factors—e.g. asbestos—is indeed a well-established risk for cancer, i.e. malignant mesothelioma (Noonan, 2017). To put it even stronger, studies have shown that there is nearly no other cancer that has such a direct causal relation with exposure to a defined carcinogen as mesothelioma has with exposure to asbestos—not even lung cancer with cigarette smoking (Kao et al., 2010). Mesothelioma is an aggressive, treatment-resistant cancer. It is a universally fatal disease with a median survival rate of 9–12 months from presentation (Kao et al., 2010). Now, the difference with radicalization seems obvious. It is safe to claim that individuals who are diagnosed with malignant mesothelioma did never consciously or actively choose for it—it just happened to them; bad luck; unfortunate; *'sh*t happens'* [29]. Now, even if Price (2017) was right and radicalization should be seen as something 'fatal', 'aggressive', and 'treatment resistant' (which it is obviously not, see Hoeft, 2015; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Weggemans & Graaf, 2017), it is still important

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[29]On July 3rd 2013, my mother was diagnosed with malignant peritoneal mesothelioma. Ten months later, on May 14th 2014 we had to let her go. Aggressive, not-treatable, fatal.

Chapter 2.1.4

to realize that individuals that radicalize have made a very conscious decision and are not unwitting, passive receptors as is the case with a destructive cancer. Hence, I believe that Price's (2017) cancer analogy is not that insightful and may even be counter-productive vis-à-vis counter-radicalization. More research and review is necessary, however.

Nevertheless, the infectious disease-metaphor seems applicable to radicalization research. Studying radicalization through this lens is highly pertinent for a few reasons. First, several scholars have argued that population dynamics underlying the diffusion of ideas holds many characteristic parallels to those involved in the spread of infections (Bettencourt, Cintrón-Arias, Kaiser, & Castillo-Chávez, 2005). Second, by studying the rise and spread of radicalization as an epidemic-like outbreak, we can understand the phenomena and their diffusion patterns better. This can lead to the development of early-detection tools that form the basis for effective counter-radicalization strategies. Lastly, an epidemiological approach seems to fit neatly into the nomenclature of the research discipline concerned with the spread of radical ideologies, as a significant amount of studies has unanimously adopted a lexicon with words such as 'virulent ideology', 'epidemic', 'mutating', 'contagion', 'parasitic', and 'incubators', to just name a few (Price, 2017; Stares & Yacoubian, 2007). Surprisingly, only very few studies exist that incorporated socio-epidemiological principles in their investigation of information disorder traits and their spread dynamics.

Beyond these metaphorical appeals, there are more practical appeals to choose for an epidemiological approach to understand radicalization (Stares & Yacoubian, 2007).

First, epidemiologists strive for an understanding of the derivation, dynamics, and propagation of a specific disease. Their main objective is to comprehend the origins and contours of an outbreak: for example, where does a disease start, how is it transmitted, and who is most at risk or "susceptible" to infection (vs. who is less susceptible/immune). Applying the same methodological approach to mapping and

understanding radicalization could yield immediately adequate guidance on where and how to counter it.

Second, epidemiologists believe that a disease evolves as a result of a complex interactive process between people, pathogens, and the environment. They rather recognize that there is a "web" of direct and indirect factors at work. Within the communication literature, similar ideas exist. For example the differential susceptibility to media effects model (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) describes direct, indirect and conditional effects of media on the individual level. Nonetheless, such a holistic approach does not exist for differences in radicalization and radical beliefs transmission.

So, on the basis of all paragraphs above, it is clear: radicalization is a 'catch-all-concept' for which a 'one-size-fits-all' explanation does not exist. As a matter of fact, the literature has clearly demonstrated that radicalization has multiple causal factors that—only when they coincide in a specific way—exert a decisive causal force. Hence, I propose a multifactorial and contextual approach by considering radicalization as if it were a complex and infectious jigsaw puzzle that can only be understood through a socio-epidemiological lens. This means that we have to give radicalization first a place in a broader terrorism-communication spectrum before embarking on the empirical data.

Chapter 2.1.4

2.2 Terrorism

Believe it or not—terrorism is even harder to define, to theorize, to explain, and to model than radicalization. Some scholars have called it a 'slippery eel' because it has become inordinately problematic to get grip on what terrorism exactly is (Dean, 2014). That is not to say that there have not been any attempts. For example, Schmid (2011) has been able to list and compare a whopping 250-plus different definitions for terrorism that were available in academic and governmental literature, including documents of national and international laws and international conventions.

Now, in contrast to the relatively detailed analysis in chapter 2.1 on the 'roots' and 'routes' of radicalization, I am going to scratch only the surface of the debate surrounding the conceptualization and theories of terrorism. Clearly it is beyond the purpose of the current dissertation to get a definitive answer to the question of what exactly constitutes terrorism [30]. Rather, I will concentrate on one of the most central functions of terrorism for which broad and unanimous consensus in the literature exists: the communicative nature and aspects of terrorism (Archetti, 2013; Bassiouni, 1981; de Graaf, 2010; Weimann, 2008). In fact, it has been argued that terrorism can be seen as a form of psychological warfare that is de facto rooted in a complex communication process (Horgan, 2005). To put it even more bluntly: terrorism is communication (see for example, Archetti, 2013).

This chapter consists of three subsections. In the first part, I will highlight two reasons why terrorism is so famously difficult to define. In doing so, I will unravel the shared denominator for nearly all terrorism incidents over time: it is aimed at 'people watching'. Hence, in the next part, I will use communication as the dominant framework to analyze terrorism. Third, talking about terrorism and people watching, the role of 'the media' cannot be neglected. However, in

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[30]I would need another four years and a second dissertation to do this. In fact, there is no shortage of books and dissertations that have actually addressed this question. Good starting points would be Ganor (2002) and Schmid (2004, 2011).

hovering over the current state of the literature it becomes immediately clear that the relationship between 'the media' and terrorism is precarious.

2.2.1 (The struggle of) Defining terrorism

Probably in the most general and inaccurate terms, we could say that *"terrorism involves the use or threat of use of violence as a means of attempting to achieve some sort of effect within a political context."* (Horgan, 2005, p. 1). However, if the desire is to be less broad and more accurate—which is preferable from a scientific, analytical perspective—the problems, disagreements, and controversies within the literature immediately come to surface. Indeed, we do not have to dig deep to understand that the discipline studying terrorism is being plagued by an epistemic, social-constructionist, and semantic crisis since its first publication in the 1970's (e.g. Crenshaw, 1972). It has been often heard that the field got stuck in a 'political game' in which the term 'terrorist' is assigned as a pejorative label to political opponents who do not align with the dominant political discourse of those in charge of finding a definition (Schmid, 2011). In that sense, what constitutes terrorism is completely in the eye of the beholder. An often heard phrase in this context is *"One man's terrorist, is another man's freedom fighter"* (Ganor, 2002). According to this school of thought, the question of who should be considered a terrorist is entirely dependent on the subjective outlook of the definer. Likewise, this school of thought argues that *"it is sufficient to say that what looks like a terrorist, sounds like a terrorist, and behaves like a terrorist is a terrorist."* (Ganor, 2002, p. 287). Horgan (2005, p. 1) refers in this context to Wittgenstein's aphorism *'let the use of a word teach you its meaning'*.

Self-evidently, such an attitude toward a social scientific phenomenon does not contribute anything to the understanding of it. In her seminal work, Liza Stampnitzky (2013) makes clear that the *'one man's terrorist is one man's freedom fighter'*-credo is not only a useless cliché sentence but that it also feeds directly into a social constructionist-driven frustration within the field of terrorism studies.

However, by looking at why it is so famously difficult and contentious to define terrorism, we can surely identify two prominent and interrelated reasons: (1) the politicization of the debate and (2) the protean nature of the phenomenon.

First, one of the main problems that immediately comes to surface is the political discourse in which the definer is anchored—both within and outside academia. Specifically, one school of thought has argued that the purpose of defining terrorism is to serve one's political ends (e.g. Crenshaw, 1995). States that are involved in sponsoring terrorism will do their utmost to make sure that terrorism will be defined in such a way that the groups that are receiving the state's support would fall outside of the definition (Ganor, 2002). *"Countries such as Syria, Libya, and Iran have lobbied for such a definition, according to which 'freedom fighters' would be given carte blanche permission to carry out any kind of attacks they wanted kind of attacks they wanted, because a just goal can be pursued by all available means"* (Ganor, 2002, p. 288). As becomes naturally clear, such a way of normative thinking can only lead to a consistent and limitless lack of consensus.

This brings us to the second reason. Of course, it is arguable that a lack of scholarly agreement is to some extent inescapable, given the broad diversity of terrorist groups, behaviors, and strategies (Victoroff, 2005). Consider for example the following list by Borum and Neer (2017), *"a commercial airliner is hijacked and intentionally steered into an occupied building. A woman, disguised as being pregnant, approaches a head of state and detonates explosives she has strapped around her waist. A government microbiologist sends letters contaminated with anthrax to politicians and media outlets.[. . .] A former Army soldier drives and detonates a truck full of fertilizer-based explosives in front a federal official building on homeland soil."* (2017, p. 729). Each one of these cases will be nearly unanimously labeled as 'terrorism' [31]. And yet, the actions, the personas, the

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[31]One of the most widely accepted definitions is the one that has been put forward by Boaz Ganor (2002, p.288): 'Terrorism,' would be defined as 'the deliberate use or the threat to use violence against civilians in order to attain political, ideological and religious aims (an attack aimed against government personnel should therefore be defined as terrorism if the target was not in a decision

tactics, the weapons, the victims, the locations, and probably also the underlying motives differ significantly from incident to incident. How will it ever be possible then, if the nature of the phenomenon is so diverse and dynamic, to come to a meaningful definition? Well, one way of looking at it is to conclude that *"terrorism is not, and will never be, a conceptually clean label"* (Parker & Sitter, 2016, p. 211). As these authors argue, terrorist organizations evolve and mutate over time while they exist in many different forms. This is in line with what esteemed terrorism researcher Jessica Stern (2003) wrote. She called terrorism and the threat it poses for (inter)national security a Protean Enemy, referring to the constantly changing and adapting appearance and form.

Indeed, independent of how we define it, incidents of terrorism tend to change over the course of time and along geographical lines (LaFree, Dugan, & Miller, 2015). In general, it is assumed that modern terrorism has occurred in four distinct and consecutive waves (Rapoport, 2001, 2002). The influential terrorism scholar David Rapoport (Rapoport, 2001, p. 47) has defined a terrorist wave as *"a cycle of activity in a given time period – a cycle characterized by expansion and contraction phases"*. According to this scholar, each wave of terrorism commences after a 'political turning-point' and is associated with a unique ideological movement and a set of tactics. The four waves that Rapoport distinguishes are: (1) *the Anarchist Wave (1880s-1920s)*, starting with the Russian populist group Narodnaya Volya (the People's will). Their preferred tactic was the targeted killings of government officials and creating chaos through violence. Their demand was reforms under the regime of Czar Alexander II—who they eventually came to assassinate; (2) *The Anti-Colonial Wave (1920s–1960s)* replaced the first wave as the issue of the time shifted from anarchy to anti-colonialism. This era was nationalist/separatist inspired and emerged at the end of World War I, when imperialistic empires were forced to divest themselves from their colonies (e.g. Algerian FLN). The tactics used were violence against local institutions and symbols of colonial power (Borum

making position of the state's Counter-Terrorism policy)'

& Neer, 2017); (3) *The New Left Wave (1960s–1980s)* was anchored in Marxist-Leninist or far left-wing ideologies and was born out of the resistant movement by the Viet Cong against the French (and American) occupations. It is, however, mainly characterized by the Baader-Meinhof Gruppe/Rote Armee Fraktion (in Germany) and The Brigato Rosso (in Italy). Tactics became here more theatric-like, such as hijackings, kidnappings, and hostage takings; and (4) *The Religious Wave (1990s to Present)*, finding traction in the 1980s with the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the successful resistance of the Mujahideen against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Obviously, these key events gave birth to groups such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State, and, more generally, to a global Salafi-Jihadist movement. In order to underscore the protean nature of the groups within this latter wave (cfr. Stern, 2003), some scholars have found it meaningful to divide the religious wave further into unique sub-waves (Robinson, 2017; Rudner, 2013). In chapter 3, I will come briefly back to this.

Clearly, these insights demonstrate that terrorism is difficult to define because of the (1) heavily politicized nature of the debate and (2) the continuously shifting nature of the incidents and groups. Yet, if we look once more back at the examples in the lists above we can uncover one factor that remains constant across all cases and throughout history: the fact that they are all 'aimed at people watching' (Archetti, 2013). Indeed, all of these cases can be considered as a medium through which a message is conveyed to an audience that goes far beyond only those that are directly involved in the incidents. Therefore, terrorism is often considered to be an act of communication. Hence, instead of trying to unravel the one true definition of terrorism, I will focus now only on the communicative aspects of terrorism here. In that sense I will use communication as a framework to unpack terrorism.

2.2.2 Terrorism as/is communication

Rather than getting caught up in the debate on whether someone is a terrorist, a guerilla fighter, or a freedom fighting rebel, it is the purpose of this part of the

dissertation to look at the quintessential function and nature of terrorism: communication. Many scholars have asserted the point that terrorism is a successful though precarious mix of violence and communication (see Schmid, 2013). It is a tactic and a violent means in order to achieve a more distant political goal.

According to Horgan (2005, p.2) *"terrorist violence is predicated on the assumptions that apparently random violence can push the agenda of the terrorist group onto an 'otherwise indifferent public's awareness', and that faced with the prospect of a prolonged campaign of terrorist violence, the public will eventually opt for an acceptance of the terrorists' demands"*. The latter feature is pivotal to terrorism: the ability or the aspiration to ascertain heightened levels of fear and sensitivity that are disproportionate to the actual or intended threat posed by the terrorists. Often heard in this context is that terrorists *"want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead"* (Jenkins, 1985, p. 4). After all, the very word terror comes from the Latin word terrere, meaning literally 'to frighten' or 'to scare' (Weimann, 2008). What follows from this is that terrorism has a serious mass psychological aspect: it needs to maintain effectively a climate of heightened fear, uncertainty and psychological arousal, as that gives the terrorists the power they desire. It is therefore often said that terrorism is a form of sophisticated psychological warfare (Horgan, 2005) in which the (intended) impact goes far beyond the mere victims and violence of the immediate event. Along these lines it has been argued that terrorism is a tactic tool of communication.

In the context of a tactic tool of communication, it has been provocatively stated that terrorists are in the 'communication business' (Zekulin, 2018). Their business model is rooted in communication to a wider audience. Indeed, scholarship tends to converge around the point that terrorism should be seen as a 'language of symbolic action' or as a 'staged theatre performance' (e.g. Cui & Rothenbuhler, 2018; O'Shaughnessy & Baines, 2009; Weimann, 2008; Zekulin, 2018). As argued by O'Shaughnessy and Baines (2009), it is not only the terrorist

deed in itself, but it is—and maybe even more so—the visual celebration of the spectacle. In that sense, these authors suggest that the vocabulary of terrorism is symbolic on two interrelated levels: *"1) the deed itself and 2) the many ways in which electronic communication enhances and retails that deed to the global audience"* (2009, p. 2). Cui and Rothenbuhler (2018) added that it is *de facto* the death and the violent disruption of people's ordinary lives that have a symbolic value and that make terrorism communicative in nature (Cui & Rothenbuhler, 2018). More specifically, they argue that through a very conscious selection of symbolic targets and methods terrorists can immediately increase the communicative value of their acts. Consequently, the higher the communicate value, the more media coverage and audience reach their work will generate. In turn, the more people reached, the more substantial and widespread the psychological shock will be (Cui & Rothenbuhler, 2018). Looking back at the discussion of the social movement theory (seen chapter 2.1.3), terrorism is anchored in the cinematogenic and theatrical-style collective action repertoires that follow a 'logic of damage' in order to assure that it they are propagated to a broader audience (Della Porta & Diani, 2006).

However, regardless of how symbolic and theatrical-like these acts may be, there is no guarantee that they will have an impact beyond the lives of those directly involved. Indeed, 'merely killing people or blowing up things' does not automatically achieve the terrorists' purpose of 'pushing the agenda' (cfr. Horgan, 2005; Seib & Janbek, 2011). Seib and Janek (2011) have proposed to apply a model of concentric circles to understand the wider impact and effects of terrorism. This model assumes that in the core circle there is the damage of the incident itself, which is either deaths and/or physical destruction. At this inner circle level, a terrorist attack affects only those that are immediately involved, i.e. the people who have lost their lives and/or property, and their network such as family members and direct friends. Without the intention of minimizing the significance of the actual loss of human life and property, but if the incident does not get traction outside of the inner circle, the

terrorists have only had limited and narrow 'success' in terms of broader impact of their message (Seib & Janbek, 2011). Here it becomes unequivocally clear that terrorists are strategic communicators with a dependency on the media.

2.2.3 Terrorism: a mass-mediated and mediatized phenomenon

"When one says 'terrorism' in a democratic society, one also says 'media'. For terrorism by its very nature is a psychological weapon that depends upon communicating a threat to the wider society.This, in essence, is why terrorism and the media enjoy a symbiotic relationship."

Paul Wilkinson, 2001, p.147

In the previous section terrorism has been characterized as communication; as a tactic to get the attention of society; as a form of psychological warfare; and ultimately as a strategy to push an agenda to a public in various political environments. In this chapter, the dynamics of the media within this communication process will be analyzed.

When it comes to the kind of violent actions as mentioned before, it becomes clear that terrorism could be studied in the context of contentious politics and potentially even within the umbrella framework of social movements (see Nacos, 2016; Tilly, 2004). In fact, the esteemed social movement scholar Sidney Tarrow (together with his colleagues Charles Tilly and Doug McAdam), have averred for an *"integration of social movement studies with the analysis of more violent forms of contention"* (Tarrow, 2011, p. xvii), and Nacos (2016) counts terrorism into that category.

Without going too deep into the social movements framework, one part of that theory is of interest though, which is that social movements—whether they are violent or not—are in need of public attention. Thereby, they are constantly trying

"[. . .] to stage mass-mediated events to propagate the worthiness of their motives, the strength through unity, numbers, and commitment to their causes [i.e. WUNC, see chapter 2.1.3]*"* (Nacos, 2016, p.52). In the following paragraphs, terrorism will be discussed as a mediatized and mass-mediated phenomenon. Special attention will be drawn on the role of propaganda.

2.2.3.1 Mass-mediated / media-centeredness

Nacos (2016) has identified four media-centered goals for terrorism. First, 'public attention and intimidation'. As already described above, terrorism should be considered as a form of psychological warfare for which the outcome is heightened levels of fear in society. Terrorists will adapt their tactics in terms of spectacle, violence, and lethality in order to generate as much buzz in the media as possible and consequently as much anxiety and intimidation as possible. Furthermore, the logic behind many terrorist groups is that the mere threat of future violence is already sufficient to generate greater anxiety in the population.

Second, 'recognition of grievances and demands'. As soon as the perpetrators have the attention of the target audiences, they will announce their motives and reasons behind the violence. The terrorists' goal is to get their grievances and reasons for their actions out there. For this, the groups do not only rely on the news media, and the so-called 'propaganda by the deed', but also actively run a propaganda machinery on the side. 'Propaganda by the deed' refers to the idea launched by anarcho-communist Pyotr Kropotkin that through *"actions which compel general attention, the new idea seeps into people's minds and wins converts. One such act may, in a few days, make more propaganda than thousands of pamphlets"*(Kropotkin, cited in Post, 2007, p. 101). In other words, terrorists will exploit as many types of media as possible to assure a widespread propagation of their grievances and demands.

Third, 'respect and sympathy'. When terrorists strike, they do not want to be loved by their target audiences; they want to be feared and taken seriously. At

the same time, they aim for increased respectability and sympathy among those on whose behalf they claim to act. In this context, Islamist-inspired terrorists try to 'win the hearts and minds' of the Muslim communities that experience similar grievances (cfr. Adrian Cherney & Povey, 2013).

And four, 'a degree of legitimacy'. The last media-centered goal is to receive a legitimate status. If the terrorists demands and grievances are so widespread in the news media, government officials have to react and interact. This gives the terrorists a (quasi-)legitimate role in (inter)national affairs.

2.2.3.2 Mediatized terrorism

Indeed, publicity is key to what terrorists do. However, Archetti (2013, p.95) argues along these lines that *"publicity is not the real cause of a group's increased political visibility. In fact, while high tension and human drama might secure a few immediate headlines, the very fact of getting access to the news in the longer term is not only the result of spilling blood."* Of course, it is often said that 'if it bleeds, it leads' (Archetti, 2013; E. Crenshaw & Jenkins, 2008), but in order to induce society-wide terror, the attacks have to be specifically 'composed for the media' (Cui & Rothenbuhler, 2018; Stańco-Wawrzyńska, 2017). In communication scientific terms this is called the mediatization of terrorist actions (Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2014). In the next chapter 2.3 a closer look will be taken at this theory, but broadly speaking, mediatization can be defined as *"the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic"* (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 2013). This logic of the media (e.g. Altheide & Snow, 1979) is closely related to the 'language symbolic action' (Cui & Rothenbuhler, 2018; O'Shaughnessy & Baines, 2009) and 'the logic of damage' in collective action repertoires (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). More specifically, it is not so much the amount of blood spilled, but it is rather the symbolic value of the immediate targets and victims that make the terrorist actions comply with the logic of 'the media'. Cui and Rothenbuhler (2018) have identified three sorts of

symbolic value that directly tap into the media logic and whereby the media thus influences the form and nature of the terrorist act: (1) the selection of iconic landmarks and symbols (e.g. the World Trade Centers in New York; Charlie Hebdo news room); (2) acts during symbolic events (e.g. Bastille Day in Nice, France or the Christmas market in Berlin, Germany), or (3) the disruption of ordinary people's (leisure) lives (e.g. Bataclan shooting in Paris, France; Airport and metro bombings in Brussels, Belgium) (Cui & Rothenbuhler, 2018).

As a result of the rapid changes in media and communication technologies, many scholars have also observed a significant transition of the degree to which terrorist acts have been designed and conducted to maximize media coverage, e.g. most notably the recent use of trucks as lethal weaponry (Cui & Rothenbuhler, 2018; Nacos, 2016; Schmid, 2013; Weimann, 2008). As early as 1985 Jenkins described the tactics used by contemporary international terrorism as significantly changing in function of technological developments (i.e. not only referring to new weapon technologies, but also to *"radio, television, and communication satellites"* (1985, p.2), which laid the basis for the notion that terrorism is increasingly mediatized.

A good example of mediatization of terrorist acts is the phenomenon of beheading videos (Koch, 2018). The brutal beheading of the U.S. hostage Nick Berg in 2005, allegedly by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi himself (the future leader of Islamic State), was the first known beheading caught on camera (Stern & Berger, 2015). Facilitated by numerous online file sharing platforms, and with the evolution of the Internet, the video was downloaded over 15 million times upon release which granted the material a considerably higher publicity profile than could have possibly been envisaged (Awan & Al-Lami, 2009). As a consequence, some terrorist groups considered this act of terrorism as highly fruitful for gaining the publicity that they desired. Especially the Islamic State has made a milk cow out of beheading videos in the recent years. And with success: this genre of videos was epidemically spread over the Internet and generated thereby even more of such acts. Remarkably, the very concept of beheadings was virtually non-existent a few

years ago (Koch, 2018). Here we see that the ease of recording short videos and the traction it can gain within the new media ecosystem shapes in fact the very nature of the terrorists' violent acts.

2.2.3.3 Celebrity culture, media bias, copy cats, and contagion

It is of special interest here to discuss our current understanding of the role of the media in the creation of a celebrity culture around a terrorist attacker. As analyzed by Nacos (2016), the excessive media coverage of terrorist attacks makes the perpetrators of those hyper media-genic acts excellent candidates for a celebrity status. For example, it has been argued that the news media have been instrumental in granting Osama Bin Laden a worldwide celebrity status.

Similarly, having the knowledge that one could enjoy a celebrity status or even be immortalized by the media can function *de facto* as a motivation for a would-be terrorist actor. That is to say, receiving fame in the media might very well inspire an individual to commit certain acts of violence, but that does not automatically mean that these acts are truly 'terrorism'. It is in this context that it has to be mentioned that the news media tend to be structurally biased in their labeling of an event of violence as an act of terrorism (Kearns, Betus, & Lemieux, 2017; Nacos, 2016; Winter & Ingram, 2016). In a recent publication, Kearns and colleagues (2017) assessed 2,413 news media articles that covered 89 terrorist attacks in the United States between 2011 and 2015. Their findings show that if the attack was perpetrated by a Muslim, it received on average 449% more coverage than attacks by other perpetrators. Important to note however, is that the biased framing of an attack as terrorism is not innocent, because it may blur the lines between a factual terrorist event and a copy cat-like phenomenon of a mass-shooting.

A good example here is the case of Omar Mateen, who is the gunman of the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida, on June 12th 2016. In the analyses of the media coverage alongside the forensic reports we can see that two different motivations and consequently 'frames' of the perpetrator arise. Winter and Ingram

(2016) wrote that   *"When rumors of his ideological inclination first went public, observers stopped talking about him as if he was an "ordinary" mass shooter and effectively put the full force of ISIS behind him. He stopped being a mere man with a gun and was transformed, via the media and politicians, into a full-fledged ISIS operative, a human manifestation of the group's international menace."* And, whilst ISIS indeed claimed responsibility for the attack about 12 hours later via their official channels, experts immediately observed a different body and tone of the statements in comparison to the official claims after the Brussels and Paris attacks, four and seven months earlier respectively. These experts soon raised the question was Mateen actually directed by ISIS's central command—as was the case by some of the Paris and Brussels attackers—or was he merely inspired by their propaganda output?

An investigation into Mateen's background strongly suggests the latter (Winter & Ingram, 2016). Mateen appears to have been a confused young man with a weak understanding of his own motivations. Not only did Mateen never pledge official allegiance to the Islamic State, he also claimed to sympathize with Jabhat al-Nusra (one of ISIS's enemies on the ground in Syria) and has pledged allegiance to Hezbollah (a Shia extremist organization) a few years earlier. Hence, the investigation exposed a rather ideological incoherent individual and definitely not an 'ISIS mujahideen'.   However, in the eagerness to jump on the *'it's ISIS'*-bandwagon, the media weaponized itself as an instrument of the caliphate's propaganda by the deed. Winter and Ingram (2016) concluded by saying that *"Portraying self-starters as calculating, zealous operatives instead of the muddled individuals that they often are, only magnifies the impact of their attacks and incentivizes copycats. Crude political rhetoric, exacerbated by certain types of media coverage, feeds this vicious cycle."*

In this context, the media have often been 'accused' for being the terrorists 'best friends'. In fact, a vast number of scholars have argued that media and terrorism hold a symbiotic relationship (Archetti, 2013; Weimann, 2008; Wilkinson, 1997). In

the next paragraph, I examine this thesis more in detail

2.2.3.4 The media-terrorism symbiosis: myth or reality?

As seen in the opening quote of this chapter, the relationship between the media and terrorism has often been regarded as a symbiosis: a relationship or interaction between two parties that is mutually beneficial to both. While it can be argued on the basis of the discussion above that there is compelling evidence that the media is beneficial to terrorism in terms of publicity for their motives and to achieve the state of anxiety and intimidation that they desire, in the literature the role of the media tends to be perceived in distinct ways.

Archetti (2013) examined how scholars define the media's role in terrorism. In her analysis she comes to the conclusion that there are two diametrically opposed schools of thought. The first argues that the media is in the camp of the terrorists. For the authors on this side of the debate, the media are indeed culpable and should be seen as instrumental to terrorism. The second school of thought argues that the media is antiterrorism and should be seen *"as vulnerable victims themselves of manipulation by terrorists"* Archetti (2013, p.38). But the general tendency in the literature seems to be for the former. For example, Archetti (2013) refers to the work of Raphael Cohen-Almagor (2005), who described the coverage of terrorism in the news media as "problematic and irresponsible. *"The "troubling episodes" he describes range from endangering lives in situations in which hostages are taken, indulging in "dangerous speculations," to paying terrorists in order to get interviews, and using irresponsible terminology [. . .]"* (Archetti, 2013, pp. 39-40). The case of Omar Mateen as described in the previous section could in fact be considered as an example for this. Hence, in the terms of a symbiotic relationship, the vast majority of the scholars tends to agree on the fact that the media is beneficial to terrorism. But, is terrorism alsp mutually beneficial to the media?

This is a difficult question to answer, as empirical data run short on this topic. Yet, the general debate in the literature tends to gravitate more to a 'yes' than

to a 'no'. More specifically, it has been posited that terrorism is inevitably part and parcel of the media's business model. For example, Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2007) are clear in their point: *"The business of reporting news has increasingly become entwined with an amplification of the actuality of 'terrorism'. Is there a more effective means of spreading terror than through the news media's inability or unwillingness to prevent itself from being the principal publicity of those acts it abhors but which are key to its own economy?"* (2007, p. 102). Now, empirical data on what would happen if we were to take terrorism completely out of the news media does not exist. Yet, the esteemed scholars Shanto Iyengar (1991) has demonstrated that a substantial proportion of the news is nonetheless preoccupied with stories of terrorism (see Nacos, 2016, p. 99). More specifically, the evening news on three TV networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) spent significantly more attention to terrorism than to other societal relevant issues, such as poverty, unemployment and crime for example. This has not changed, according to Nacos (2016). On the basis of an analysis of all newspaper articles from the New York Times and the Washington Post in the year 2014, she found that terrorism and articles about ISIS/Islamic State were indeed paramount. In fact, the New York Times published more articles about terrorism and ISIS/Islamic State than articles on health insurance, Medicare and poverty together. This suggests that the news media do in fact partly drive on terrorism as a key component of their programs. Similarly, the media's overemphasis on terrorism tends to provide the terrorists with the publicity they desire. This discussion tends to cautiously support the idea that he terrorism and the media hold indeed a symbiotic relationship. Nevertheless, it is evident that more empirical studies on this subject are needed.

In this chapter we have come to understand that terrorism is in fact communication. It holds thereby a symbiotic relationship with the media in which both parties benefit from the relationship. It has also been stressed that terrorism is both mediated—i.e. vehiculated by the media—as well as mediatized—i.e. shaped in function of the changing nature of the media. In the next chapter I will

elaborate on the theory of mediatization and will attempt to apply it on both the concept of radicalization as well as to terrorism.

Chapter 2.2.3

2.3   Mediatization

"Verby nouns make me nervous. "Mediatization" is one of them. It is a Frankenstein's monster of a word, with the bolts, blood and stitching of language left visible, dripping and decaying."

(Barbazon, 2012, about Andreas Hepp's 'Cultures of Mediatization')

Studying and understanding the nature and relationship between the media and, well, everything else, has always been the main locus of concern for all communication and media scholars. However, the way in which this relationship should be theorized and studied has differed in great lengths. Traditionally, we could say that the relationship between the media and the people has been conceptualized in roughly two distinct ways.

The first is what became known as the so-called 'media effects' paradigm. This school of thinking looks at the media in terms of what they are doing with the people. Traditionally, studies within this paradigm center around the question of how media contents are influencing people's cognitions, emotions, and/or behaviors. Remarkable thereby is that, despite one could list a number of potential beneficial effects of the media, the media effects literature tends to be structurally skewed towards an overrepresentation of studies investigating rather the negative consequences of media use (see for more critique: Ferguson, 2007). Typical media effects research is, for example, concerned with the impact of violent video games on player's aggression (e.g. Anderson & Bushman, 2001a; Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004), with exposure to (news) media and fear reactions in young people (e.g. Custers & Van den Bulck, 2012; de Cock & Kok, 2016), or with right-wing populist advertising and its impact on anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g. Schmuck & Matthes, 2017) (see for a more examples and a broader discussion of the field: Bryant & Oliver, 2009b). Nearly all explanatory frameworks and underlying theoretical models within this paradigm—whether it be *social cognitive theory* (Bandura, 2009), *cultivation theory* (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, &

Shanahan, 2002), or the *Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model* (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013)—treat both 'the media' and 'the people' as two factors that are separate from one another. The general idea is then that the media as external technological factor affects the people who got exposed to it, either immediately or in the long-term; directly or indirectly via moderating factors; and with either positive or negative consequences on cognitions, emotions or behaviors.

The second paradigm is what frequently has been referred to as the 'active audience' paradigm. This school of thought inquires the relationship between the media and the audience in somewhat the opposite direction: whereas the media effects paradigm investigates what media do with people, the active audience paradigm questions what people do with media (Storey, 2014). This paradigm assumes that *"[a]udiences do not passively receive media content but rather actively interpret it in light of their own values and predispositions."* (Feldman, 2014, p. 14). Fundamental to this paradigm is, amongst others, Hall's work on the distinction between encoding and decoding within mediated communication (1973). It looks at the differences between the encoding processes and message formulation on the media side and the decoding and interpretation practices on the people side. Furthermore, this paradigm hosts the branch of research that investigates underlying motivations for people's consumption of the media, oft-times referred to as Uses and Gratifications research (see for a seminal work on this topic: Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Consequently, prototypical active audience research is concerned with, for example, the question whether exposure to specific media messages is predetermined by people's prior political attitudes, i.e. selective exposure (Tsfati & Chotiner, 2015); or with the individual reasons and motivations behind the utilization of mobile dating apps (Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017); or with the why and how youngster participate in online media for self-representation and/or identity expression (e.g. Buckingham, 2008; Valkenburg, Schouten, & Peter, 2005).

Even though both paradigms treat the relation between the media and the people

in very different ways, they share a very rudimentary theoretical argument. That is, both ways of thinking see both key ingredients, the media and the people, as fundamentally separate entities. More specifically, the arguments that the media is either a source for effects or a source for consumption conveys the notion that the media and the people are conceptualized as two sovereign entities: the media *"[. . .] is either an outside variable that influences our behaviour or it is a technology we introduce from outside with which we do things."* (Storey, 2014, p. 110).

In contrast, the idea of mediatization (Hepp, 2013; Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2014) presupposes a fundamentally different relationship between media and people. Its most-central premise is that media are now increasingly entangled in almost all aspects of people's everyday life. Again, mediated communication is not an independent factor but an integral part of how people's everyday living. That is, everyday life is no longer simply a place that media influence or where media are used, it is where the acts and interactions of people are now almost unthinkable without media. Let us take this last idea as our theoretical departure for this dissertation: that acts and interactions of terrorists, or terrorist organizations are (now) almost unthinkable without media.

In his seminal work, Hepp (2013) discusses the relation between media and people from a Medium Theorist perspective. This perspective assumes that modern day cultures have transformed into "media cultures", in which *"the media—or, more exactly communication via media—have increasingly left their mark on our everyday life, our identity and the way in which we live together"* (Hepp, 2013, p. 1). Media cultures, then, have to be understood in terms of the increasing omnipresence of media communication and that the media and those who use them are no longer separate factors. Put simply: in today's cultures, the media and the people's lives cannot be detached from one another, and a change in the one inevitably leads to a change in the other (Hepp, 2013, p. 10).

Taking this argument further, we arrive at the core of what the Media Theorists have called mediatization: "a systematic cultural transformation" as a

result of—or, at the very least coincided by—changes in mediated communication. A classic example here is the transformation into modern Europe in the late 15th century as a consequence of the rapid developments in print technology which suddenly facilitated symbolic production, re-production, and circulation (Lundby, 2014, p. 6). It is exactly this conception of a sustained meta-process of change of culture through (a change in) the media that is called mediatization (Hepp, 2013, p. 29;69).

Crucial here is to understand the differences between *mediation* and *mediatization*. In general discussions (see for example Hjarvard, 2014), mediation is considered as the utilization of a given medium for communication and social interaction. Mediatization, on the other hand, is understood as long-term structural transformations of media's roles in modern day cultures and societies. Then, as summarized by Lundby (2014, p.7): "Mediated communication turns into a process of mediatization when the ongoing mediations mould long-term changes in the social, cultural, or political environment. Mediatization is change. As long-term processes of sociocultural change are deep or lasting, they may rather be characterized as transformations rather than simply as 'changes'" (Lundby, 2014, p. 7).

Particularly important here is that notion of the *moulding forces of the media* (Hepp, 2013, p. 54). This phenomenon specifically refers to the pressure that 'the media' exert on the way people communicate, or more generally on the way society communicates. The mediatization paradigm sees 'the media' here as social institutions upon which societies become dependent. Then, "[b]*y the mediatization of society, we understand the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to, or becomes dependent on, the media and their logic. This process is characterized by a duality in that the media have become integrated into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social institutions in their own right. As a consequence, social interaction – within the respective institutions, between institutions, and in society at large – take place*

via the media" (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 113).

In particular Andrew Hoskins' (2014) take on the matter is relevant for the current dissertation. Even though he is best situated at a side of the debate that takes a more nuanced, critical stance toward the theory of mediatization—it is often suggested that the theory lacks conceptual clarity and analytical power, whilst being a 'frankenstein's monster of a word' (Barbazon, 2012; Hoskins, 2014)—, Hoskins (2014) argues that mediatization should be understood as a form of hyper-connectivity: *"a process of shifting interconnected individual, social, and cultural dependency on media, for maintenance, survival, and growth."* (Hoskins, 2014, p. 662). This is exactly what 'Wired for terror' in the current title refers to. It is the idea that terrorism and the responses to terrorism are mediatized through a state of hyper-connectedness—in which individuals, the media, and society are dynamically wired with one another.

Hence, in sharp contrast to the media effects paradigm, the mediatization paradigm suggests that if we want to adequately gauge the relationship between the media and today's 'people', we should shift our attention from a focus on media contents as the primary source of media effects to the characteristics of the very relationship itself. This notion brings us to the theoretical foundation of the current study.

2.4 Toward a cyclic model of radicalization: the flywheel

Based on the preceding literature review, it appears that a grand theory for the mediatized roots and routes of radicalization is lacking. A particular shortcoming in today's state of the art is a bird's-eye view perspective on the subject. In this chapter, a first attempt is made to synthesize the findings from the current state of the art into a more holistic, social scientific framework. More specifically, I will make a first suggestion for a cyclic model of radicalization. Important to note, however, is that the arguments put forward in this chapter should be regarded as 'thinking-out-loud' by the author. It has been written with the mere intention to structure thoughts on the basis of the overwhelming amount of insights and information from the preceding literature review. In that sense, the current chapter remains in continuous flux and is still being shaped and adapted in the light of new information. That being said, this thought-structuring process has proved to be meaningful for the formulation of three general research propositions that will tie together the upcoming empirical chapters. I will first start with the suggestion of a cyclic model.

The dynamic relationship between radicalization, terrorism, and mediated communication seems best structured in a holistic, dynamic, cyclic model. On the basis of the literature discussion above, we can identify five mediatized and interrelated social phenomena that form a cyclic ensemble. These phenomena are: 1) Radicalization, 2) Terrorist events, 3) State of hyper-security, 4) Intergroup dynamics/conflict; and 5) Social movements/collective action. Each of these phenomena can be regarded as an equally important stage in the cyclic process that feeds naturally into the next (see figure 2.1).

For the sake of the argument, and with an eye on the central topic of the current dissertation, we suggest letting the cycle start with the stage of radicalization. Even though we have seen that no such thing as a direct linear relationship between
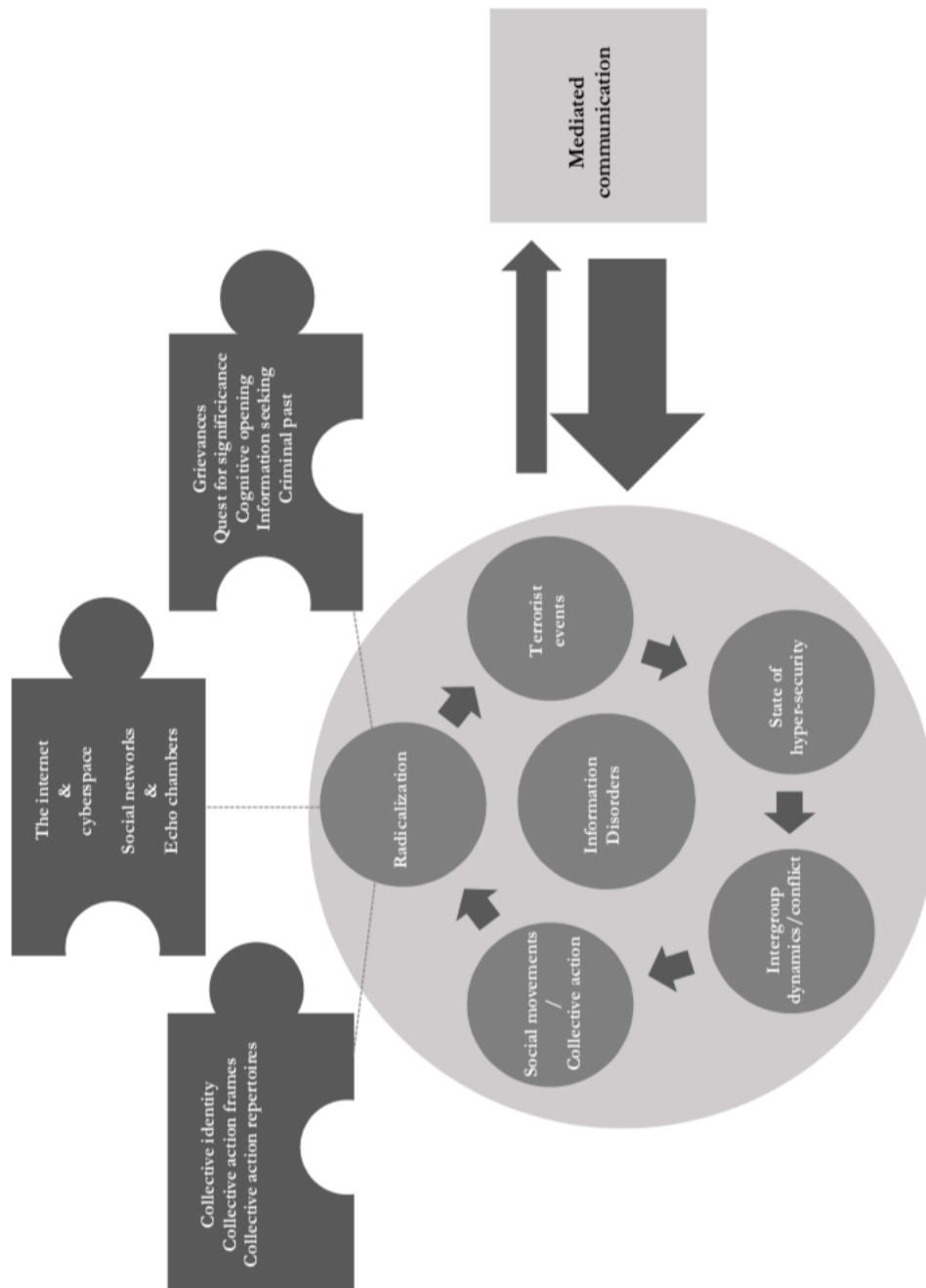
Figure 2.1: The proposed cyclic model of radicaliaztion—the flywheel model

radicalization and terrorism exists, the literature does agree that terrorist events do not arise in a vacuum but may very well result from a complex, contextual, conditional, radicalization puzzle (Hafez & Mullins, 2015; King & Taylor, 2011). Hence, the stage of radicalization could be seen as a precursor that feeds into the stage of terrorist events.

Subsequently, Awan and colleagues (2011) have suggested that the intangible threat of early 21st century terrorism has resulted in a mediatized state of 'terror' and hyper-security in contemporary Western societies. The fundamental disruption of society by symbolic acts of terrorism—and the increasingly pervasive flows of information and disinformation of such events in people's everyday life—have been held accountable for causing society-wide terror and for feeding directly into a state of hyper-security (cfr. Awan et al., 2011; Cui & Rothenbuhler, 2018). At the same time, a state of hyper-security feeds directly into an endless hunger for information, certainty and security. It is in this context that societies are considered to be susceptible to information disorders, i.e. misinformation (false or misleading information) and disinformation (false or misleading information that is purposely spread to deceive and manipulate) (Benkler et al., 2018; Lazer et al., 2018). In fact, according to the World Economic Forum, information disorders are at the very epicenter of global threats, such as terrorism, cyber warfare, and the failure of global democratic governance in general (World Economic Forum, 2013). Several authors have pointed specifically to information disorders (within the condition of hyper-security) as a fundamental cause for the polarization and radicalization of society (Benkler et al., 2018; Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Brody & Meier, 2018; Zannettou et al., 2018).

Here we see that a next phase in the cycle starts to emerge. Radicalization, feeds into terrorism, which feeds in to a state of hyper-security, which in turn—with the aid of pervasive information disorders—polarizes society into opposing groups. Indeed, intergroup dynamics and conflict have been regarded as both a cause and an outcome of radicalization, terrorism, and a state of hyper-security. Whereas

intergroup conflict and in particular out-group hostility have been demonstrated to fuel radicalization in several ways (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008), it has been argued that the very existence of the label of 'radicalization'—and the near-exclusive use of it for Muslims and Islam—has fueled intergroup conflict, cfr. Muslims as the 'ideal enemy' etc. (Coolsaet, 2016; Fadil et al., 2019; Huntington, 1996; Kundnani, 2014).

Such societal dynamics cannot be seen independent of contentious politics. As a result, the cyclic relationship can be extended still. Specifically, intergroup dynamics fuel directly collective identities and collective actions (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Tilly, 2003, 2004). Indeed, without intergroup dynamics no collective actions. In fact, collective actions center on collective identity claims, which is *"the assertion that a group or a constituency it represents is worthy, united, numerous, and committed (WUNC)."* (Tilly, 2003, p. 227). If the group is WUNC enough, the collective action becomes a true social movement which ultimately could inspire individuals to engage in political violence. As marked by Post (2015, p.243), *"The group is the basic unit of political life. And this is particularly true of the world of political violence".*

Now, important to note here is that this cyclic, rotating movement is not necessarily self-propelling. It should rather be seen as a heavy mass of social phenomena that needs to be put into motion by an external energy source. This is where mediated communication comes into play. As we have seen before, the social fabric of all these phenomena is *de facto* driven and molded by the media—they are mediatized (cfr. Hepp, 2013). Then, it is the mediatized condition of these phenomena that supplies the driving force for the rotational energy of this process. In that sense, this model is much like a flywheel whereby the media provide the initial energy supply to get the flywheel in motion—and provide additional kinetic energy to keep it in motion. The stronger the driving force the more kinetic energy is built up in the cyclic process, and the more inertia the flywheel possesses. That also means that even if the driving force is briefly taken away, the flywheel will remain in motion for a short period of time. Nevertheless, in full abstinence of the

driving forces of the media, the flywheel will eventually slow down and be brought to a stop. Thus, it is through the driving forces of the media that the flywheel builds up kinetic energy and keeps in motion.

A terrorist understands this cyclic process as no one else (Nacos, 2016). It has often been theorized that terrorist communication—be it 'propaganda by the deed' or 'propaganda by the word'—is composed to bolster the kinetic energy and to keep the flywheel in flux (Cui & Rothenbuhler, 2018). However, as already said before, empirical research to assess this in a holistic way is lacking (Sageman, 2008). Therefore, I offer three general research propositions to inspire future empirical work aiming to investigate the flywheel model or parts of it. These propositions are based on the assumption that if we wish to understand this flywheel principle in depth, we have to examine the most fundamental part of the flywheel which is the terrorists' mediated communication process itself. Hence in the three propositions below the unit of analysis is the terrorists' mediated communications process.

It is important to stress that these propositions should not be understood as fixed and testable hypotheses that either confirm or falsify the flywheel model—it is not a theory after all —but they should be seen as guiding or inspiring principles for future empirical research. The upcoming chapters make a first step hereto.

Proposition 1: Terrorists' mediated communication is composed for—and feeds into—radicalization

To examine this proposition, we look at two sides of the terrorists' mediated communication process: the message-side (chapter 4 and 5) and the audience-side (chapter 7). Specifically, we will use ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria)—so far the most vigorous and media-savvy terrorist group (Atwan, 2015)—as a case study. More specifically, an in-depth assessment will be conducted of the moral-psychological (chapter 4) and religious (chapter 5) **collective action frames** in ISIS' communication materials that may feed into radicalization. In chapter 7, we will examine to what extent these **collective action frames** are

indeed related to the audience's levels of radicalization (n=1872), by taking into account the additional puzzle pieces **information seeking**, **cognitive opening**, and **criminal past**.

Proposition 2: Terrorists' mediated communication is composed for—and feeds into—a state of hyper-security

For proposition 2, we will look again at a message-side and an audience-side, be it from two separate terrorists' communication processes. More specifically, we look at the message-side in the context of propaganda-by-the-word and at the audience-side in the context of propaganda-by-the-deed. For the propaganda-by-the-word context, we will investigate in chapter 4 the extent of moral-psychological **collective action frames** that potentially feed into a state of hyper-security (chapter 4). For the propaganda-by-the-deed context, we will analyze to what extent mass-mediated acts of terrorism (**collective action repertoires**) are related to a state of cognitive hypervigilance in news media audiences (n=747).

Proposition 3: Terrorists' mediated communication is composed for—and feeds into—intergroup conflict

Our final proposition concentrates on the intergroup dynamics-phase of the flywheel model. We propose again a two-sided perspective on the communication cycle. First, in Chapter 4, we will assess the **collective action frames** in ISIS's communiques that dehumanize the out-group, and make inhumane, violent behavior morally acceptable, and as such potentially feed into intergroup conflict. In chapter 8, it is our ambition to investigate whether mass-mediated terrorism can affect youth's Anti-Muslim hostility .

PART II

ROUTES

3 | The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)

"I say to you: that we are in a battle,

and that more than half of this battle

is taking place in the battlefield of the media.

And that we are in a media battle

in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma;"

These were the words that Ayman al-Zawahiri—co-founder of al-Qaeda and then deputy to Osama bin Laden—wrote in a 2005 letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of what was then al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

The letter was a direct response to the unprecedented barbaric approach by their al-Qaeda affiliate al-Zarqawi and his followers—amongst other a series of cruel hostage beheadings—and specifically its global media attention. The videotaped decapitation of Nicholas Berg, for example, was covered in numerous mainstream news media around the world, and was downloaded over 15 million times upon release (Awan & Al-Lami, 2009). As Post (2015) notes, *"Captivating media audiences around the world, Zarqawi's violent unbounded approach to waging war against the infidels on the battlefield of Iraq, including Shi'a brethren, provided a stark contrast to the deeply ideological principles of Islamic Jihad as espoused by bin Laden"* (Post, 2015, p. 223). Al-Zawahiri, clearly aware of the potential effects of the media, expressed in his letter his concerns that this bloody militant behavior would threaten the reputation of al-Qaeda, and would especially be

counterproductive for their reputation in the Muslim world—*"for the hearts and minds of our Umma"*. Zawahiri added: *"Among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable—also—are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages.... And your response, while true, might be: Why shouldn't we sow terror in the hearts of the Crusaders and their helpers"*.

Clearly, Zarqawi's stance on this was different. In his opinion *"the Crusader forces will disappear from sight tomorrow or the day after,"* the Shi'a will remain *"the proximate, dangerous enemy of the Sunnis...The danger from the Shi'a...is greater and their damage worse and more destructive to the [Islamic] nation than the Americans"* (Bunzel, 2015, p. 14).

Hence, Zawahiri's words could not bring Zarqawi to change his mind. In contrast, Zarqawi continued the sectarian excesses. In fact, in the context of the direct aftermath of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and the concurring insurgency war, this new approach to jihad was welcomed by an emerging generation of Jihadis adhering to a more extreme and more severe anti-Shi'a version of Salafi-Jihadism (Bunzel, 2015). As a result, Zarqawi's "charismatic", heroic, and mediatized approach to jihad attracted an increasing amount of fighters from all over the world (Post, 2015), allowing Zarqawi to take a significant offensive position within the so-called battlefield of the media (Zelin, 2015).

When al-Zarqawi got killed in a U.S.-led airstrike about a year later, the organization cut officially all ties with the al-Qaeda network and got 'rebranded' into *Islamic State of Iraq* (ISI). This rebranding was a key moment for the group. It flagged, still in Zarqawi's spirit, the beginning of an ambitious and determined political project: the founding of an Islamic state in Iraq, *"a proto-caliphate [...] that would ultimately expand across the region, proclaim itself the full-fledged caliphate, and go on to conquer the rest of the world"* (Bunzel, 2015, p. 4). Even though it remained largely unnoticed in international media realms, it was strongly marketed and celebrated in online jihadi media. As Bunzel (2015) notes in his detailed analysis: *"Leading jihadi online forums soon displayed a banner [...]: '[a*

certain number of] days have passed since the announcement of the Islamic State and the [Muslim] community's coming hope. . . and it will continue to persist by the will of God'"(2015, p. 19). As a direct consequence, an unprecedented amount of recruits and resources naturally gravitated towards this proto-caliphate, reinforcing its rapid expansion within the Iraqi borders, but also beyond into Syria in 2013. At that point in time, Zarqawi's 'offspring' renamed itself the *Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham* (ISIS), and in less than a year, in August 2014, it declared itself the caliphate, with Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its caliph.

In sum, three essential ingredients have led to the success of the Islamic State: 1) the vacuum that follow in the direct aftermath the US-led invasion in Iraq, 2) a more brutal and anti-Shi'a Salafi-Jihadist approach, 3) the global amplification via the media.

Then, after reading this brief history above, one may raise the theoretical question: "What would have become of ISIS if we would take "the media" out of this equation? Would ISIS have become what it is today without it's savvy use of Internet and mediated communication techniques? Scholars have indeed argued that the *"Islamic State could never have achieved its territorial ambitions, nor could it have recruited such a large army in so short a time, without its mastery of the Internet."* (Atwan, 2014).

In the current chapter we briefly look into this question. We do this in three steps. First, we start off with a short description of what Salafi-Jihadism is and how it serves as the ideological backbone for ISIS. Second, we will briefly discuss the history of Global Jihadism as a social movement. Third, we will present the argument that both the centralized Caliphate-project as well as the decentralized Leaderless Jihad-ambition are fundamentally dependent on a tactical exploitation of today's media ecosystem (i.e. they are mediatized).

This chapter serves mainly the purpose of bridging between the Roots and Routes parts, and thereby setting the scene for the empirical works in the upcoming chapters.

3.1   Salafi-Jihadism: an ideology

The current study concentrates predominantly on the Islamic State (ISIS) in the context of terrorism and radicalization. Even though ISIS and its brutal behavior seem novel and unprecedented, its fundamental guiding principles can be traced back in a long tradition of Sunni Islam (Bunzel, 2015; Ford, 2016; Maher, 2016).

In his seminal book Shiraz Maher attempts to unravel the exact nature of Salafism and Salafi-Jihadism. He describes Salafism as *"a philosophy that believes in progression through regression. The perfect life is realized only by reviving the Islam of its first three generations."* (Maher, 2016, p. 7). Salafis are purists who's ultimate goal is to bring back Muslims to the 'authentic' and 'pure' Islam of the al-salaf al-sālih ["the righteous predecessors", i.e. the first three generations Muslims]. In general, it is believed that there are different approaches to achieve the Salafi goal. According to Maher (2016) these approaches are inevitably political in nature. Building further on Quintan Wiktorowicz' (2006) three-fold classification, Maher (2016, p.10) suggests that there are four different 'types' of Salafis[1]: (1) Quietist-advisors, (2) activist-challengers, (3) violent-challengers, (4) violent rejectionists. Only the latter category, violent-rejectionist, is considered to be the Salafi-Jihadis. Until recently, al-Qaeda was the most prominent Salafi-Jihadi group, alongside al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. However, in recent years, ISIS has taken over this role. ISIS, following a method that is more brutal and uncivilized than any Salafi-Jihadist group before, strives to overthrow politics and the international system (Bunzel, 2015; Maher, 2016). In order to understand how Salafi-Jihadism came to this point, it is necessary to give first a brief history of the social movement that forms the basis for a global jihad.

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[1]For a more detailed discussion of this typology, see Shiraz Maher (2016). Salafi-Jihadism : The History of an Idea. Hurst and Company, London.

3.2 Salafi-Jihadism: a brief history of a global social movement

Contemporary Salafi-Jihadism appears to find its roots in Islamism that came up in the late 1920's with Hasan al-Banna as critical thinker and founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (Robinson, 2017). As sociopolitical movement, Al-Banna's idea of Islamism was a reaction to problems such as imperialism, modern states, rapid urbanization and the rise of mass societies. It was not necessarily predicated to the use of violence to achieve political ends at this point in time (Robinson, 2017).

Violence as a necessity to accomplish socio-political goals only entered the Islamism collective repertoires in the 1960's as a way to fight against local, so-called 'apostate' regimes. One of the key thinkers that laid the foundation for this new form of Islamism was Sayyid Qutb. In fact, Qutb is considered to be the intellectual father of contemporary radical Islam (Lawrence, 2017). He has been profoundly influential in the thinking and activities of Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden (Midlarsky, 2011). Qutb's thinking was mainly driven by his outrage against the new regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser that came to power in Egypt through a military coup in 1952. He bundled his vision in a book entitled *Maalim f'il-Tariq* ('Milestones'). One of the key messages of this book was that Nasser's regime had to be violently overthrown because it was *Jahili*, i.e. anti-Islamic. As became evident only years later, *Maalim f'il-Tariq* provided the intellectual underpinnings for a *"call to arms for jihadis throughout the Sunni Muslim world"* (Robinson, 2017, p.70). Not long after the release of his seminal book, Qutb was imprisoned and eventually executed by Nasser's regime in 1966.

In the 1970's and 1980's, the growing power of Saudi Arabia and other conservative oil states in the Middle East—amongst other reasons—gave rise to an upsurge in Islamism and militant jihadism in the Sunni Muslim world. Whilst originally focusing only on local enemies, militant jihadism now also develops a global interest. Perhaps the most crucial reason for this was the Soviet invasion in

Afghanistan in December 1979 (Hegghammer, 2010). For many Islamists all over the world, this was a compelling and symbolic example of the constant losses of Muslim territory to non-Muslim powers. According to Hegghammer's (2010) estimates, an unprecedented amount of 5,000 - 20,000 foreign fighters flocked to Afghanistan to fight against the Soviet occupation. From this moment on, Robinson (2017) argues, Global Jihadism went through four waves: (1) Jihadi international (1979-1990), (2) America first (1996-2011), (3) Caliphate Now! (2003-2017), and (4) Personal Jihad (2001-present). Without going too deep into each wave (please see Robinson (2017) for an accessible and detailed analysis), it is important to discuss a few key points in the history of Salafi-Jihadism as global social movement here.

Wave one was mainly driven by the classical idea of anti-Colonialism. Its ambition was to free all occupied Muslim territory around the world. During this wave, Abdullah Azzam was the key ideologue who provided the intellectual foundation for this worldwide jihadi project. In Wave two, Osama bin Laden reshaped Azzam's ambitious project. Instead of fighting local, 'apostate' regimes, Bin Laden considered America as the real enemy, because of their support to the local authorities in the Middle East (Robinson, 2017). This far-enemy strategy resulted in the terror attacks by Bin Laden's organization al-Qaeda on September 11th, 2001. Soon after, and as a result of the War on Terror, al-Qaeda lost its strength. With the execution of Bin Laden in 2011, the far-enemy wave came fully to an end. Wave three and four started simultaneously, but differ fundamentally in their Salafi-Jihadist ideology. Whereas wave three believed in a centralized, local reunification of Muslims and the immediate establishment of a Caliphate/Islamic State, wave four's locus of concern was on a decentralized fragmentation into small, individual, leaderless cells. Both waves converge, however, when it comes to their tactical use of new media and communication technologies. As will become clear in the next two sections, the success of both the centralized Caliphate-project and the decentralized personal jihad tactic is fundamentally dependent on the

contemporary media ecosystem.

3.3 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's and ISIS' mediatized version of Salafi-Jihadism

Bin Laden's and al-Qaeda's far-enemy strategy had proven to be rather destructive to the social and political fabric of the Middle East and to the global jihad project. Now, there was room for a revivalist form of Salafi-Jihadism. Specifically, there was again a need for a less global and a more local project (Robinson, 2017). The failure of Bin Laden's far-enemy project gave rise to a collective desire of an own territorial state; a Caliphate. ISIS, the former al-Qaeda affiliate in Iraq and Syria, known for its particular barbaric behavior, would answer this desire.

According to Bunzel (2015) the fact that ISIS adheres to a specific barbaric form of Salafi-Jihadism is mainly attributable to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. As we have discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Zarqawi was mainly driven by an anti-Shi'a and sectarian interpretation of Salafism. Whilst he was mainly influenced by Islamist scholars Ibn Taymiyyah (1263 A.D.–1328 A.D.) and Muhammad ibn 'Abd-al Wahhab (1703/04 A.D.–1792 A.D.) (Ammar & Xu, 2017; Midlarsky, 2011), Zarqawi's main worldview was shaped by his mentor: jihadi scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi[2].

Perhaps even more than his hostility towards Shi'ites and other ethnic groups, Zarqawi was mainly driven by an exceptional media-savviness. He had an extraordinary intuition for the 'if it bleeds, it leads'-credo (see section 2.2.3.2). As no Jihadi-leader before him, Zarqawi understood how he could penetrate and exploit the media ecosystem as effective as possible. As noted above, the beheading of Nicholas Berg in 2004, for example, was covered in numerous mainstream news media outlets around the world, and was downloaded over 15

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[2]Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi remains still a prominent jihadi scholar. He has been influential for several jihadi networks in Europe. In the Netherlands, the Hofstad group was strongly leaning on Maqdisi's body thought. The leader of this network, Mohammed Boyeri, is known for his killing of the Dutch Filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in 2004 (Cesari, 2013)

million times upon release (Awan & Al-Lami, 2009). For Zarqawi it became clear that videotaping ruthless violence was *de facto* a vigorous and efficient way of attracting global attention and support. As a consequence, he gradually fine-tuned and adapted his interpretation of Salafism in function of the media logic (cfr. Altheide & Snow, 1979) and ISIS continued on this path. One could hypothesize that instead of using Salafi-Jihadist ideology or scholarship as a guiding principle, the social movement had now entered an era in which the contemporary media ecosystem became the locus of concern. Zarqawi's and thus later ISIS' conduct became in fact primarily orchestrated with the aim to attract media attention and horrify the world. For a first time in the history of the global jihad movement, one could state that in this phase the theological foundation comes only on a second place.

A case that backs this claim well is the event in January 2015 where ISIS burned the Jordanian pilot Moaz al Kasasbeh alive (see also chapter 4.3). The event has been recorded in a 22-minute video entitled *"Healing of the Believers' Chests"*. The video has an exceptionally high production value and uses a Hollywood-style cinematic suspense. It consists of three parts. In the first part, we see a digitally composed opening sequence. It shows fast-paced video footage of the U.S.-led coalition in Syria and Iraq. This part of the video sets immediately a geo-political tone, rather than a (strict) Salafi-Jihadist one. Second, we get a ten-minute interview with a heavily beaten up Kasasbeh. During this interview, special effects that visualize a *"crusader coalition"* are edited in. Most notably, at the end of the interview, the viewer is exposed to very graphic video footage of the airstrikes and their destructive consequences (e.g. dead or dying children). The third and last part of the video consists of a 8-minute scene in which Kasasbeh is burned alive. It should be noted here that the scene is fully scripted. The director makes use of multiple camera angles and several takes. From a purely cinematographic perspective, the video makes use of a formidable cinematography

and is edited as if it was a blockbuster horror movie. The scene unfolds as follows. First, we see Moaz al-Kasasbeh arriving in an area covered in debris and surrounded by destroyed buildings. In line with other ISIS execution videos, he is wearing the typical orange prisoners' suit. A group of about ten to twenty masked and heavily armed men surround him. Second, the director cuts back to the graphic video footage of the airstrikes. It is obvious that this has been done to remind the viewer of the actions for which Kasabeh is held responsible. In the third and final part, we see that Kasasbeh is locked in a large cage and his orange suit is now drenched in oil. In front of the cage, a long line of woodchips leads up to two masked men. In the next shot, the two men lite a torch. In slow motion, and with additional image and sound effects, the line of woodchips is set on fire. During the three minutes that follow, the video pictures Kasasbeh who is overrun by flames and fights for his life.

Important to note here is that the full scene in which Kasasbeh is immolated must have been recorded with at least four different camera's at the same time. Even more so, it is striking to realize that the whole event is not only videotaped by several people, but that also somebody must have been sitting behind a computer to spot the best frames; to cut them in the right length; to color correct them; to add sound effects on the right moments; to 'glue' all images back together into one solid story line, etc. Despite the fact that the cinematographic ingredients elicit the impression that we are watching fiction, this is in fact reality television.

Instantly after the video was released it did exactly that what it was produced for. It horrified the world. It received significant global attention in the news media and on social media. However, Muslims all around the globe, including other Salafi-Jihadi groups, nearly unanimously condemned the action. The main theological argument was that *"No one may punish using fire other than the Lord of the Fire".* (Creswell & Haykel, 2017, p. 40; El-Badawy, Comerford, & Welby, 2015, p. 51). As a reaction, ISIS published several lengthy propaganda articles in which they try to justify their action with different Islamic scriptures such as the

Hadith[3] and the scriptures of Ibn Taymiyyah (see for the exact argumentation rhetoric they used chapter 4 of this dissertation). Nevertheless, most Salafi-Jihadi scholars turned against ISIS, claiming that this propaganda stunt had nothing to do with Salafi-Jihadism. In fact, in the direct after math of Kasasbeh's immolation, Salafi scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi—who was the spiritual mentor of ISIS' founding father al-Zarqawi—now condemned the full ISIS project. To illustrate this, it seems relevant to quote al-Maqdisi in his own words. Below is the English translation of an exclusive interview that was aired on the Jordanian News Channel *Roya TV*[4] about the immolation of Moaz al Kasasbeh. The host asked the question, *"why did they use this method to kill him?"*. Maqdisi replied as follows:

"Those people made [sic] very bad things in the name of Sunna[5] - which are not Sunna. The first thing they called a Sunna was slaughtering people. They slaughtered their enemies and also slaughtered a huge number of other Jihadis in Syria. Even people started to believe that slaughter is a Sunna inherited from our prophet [sic]. [. . .] ISIS don't [sic] pay attention to what Prophet Mohammed did. Instead they make a Sunna out of one word he said[6]. They let everyone believe that we can't be Jihadists unless we kill and slaughter people, which isn't right. [. . .]. When they first made Slaughtering a Sunna they slaughtered hundreds of their enemies and showed that on TV, which made people wonder if this is truly what Islam is. This obliged us to persuade people that what these people do has nothing to do with Islam. They killed other Jihadists and innocent people without telling who are these people [sic]. People are being killed without trials or condemnations and now they invented a new Sunna which is burning people. Now

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[3]The Hadith are the collections of the teachings, traditions, sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad (Maher, 2016, p. xvii)

[4]At the time of writing this dissertation, the interview was available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIVZmmetXIQ. The translation is generated through YouTube services.

[5]The Sunna refers to 'the practices of the prophet'. Together with the Hadith and the Qur'ān, the Sunna form the fundamental source for Shari'a jurisprudence and the traditional, social, and moral customs and practices in Islam (Messick, 1993).

[6]In chapter five, we will present the results of an in-depth analysis of ISIS' worldview and to what extent it is grounded in a cut-and-past version of Salafi-Jihadist ideology

people will do as ISIS did and believe that burning people alive is a Sunna. Although Prophet Mohammed said: "The only one who punishes by fire is the one who created it (ie: Allah). They cite a sentence said by Ibn Taymiyya; a sentence that is taken away from its context. They use the words of Ibn Taymiyya over what our Prophet said. Is this Salafist? This isn't Salafi-Jihadism. This has nothing to do with the Salafist movement. The Prophet Mohammed denied burning not only humans, but also animals. [. . .]. I wanted [the Jordanian audience of the TV show] to know that....that ISIS have [sic] nothing to do with the Salafist Jihadist Movement. And we condemn the actions they do."

The interview clearly demonstrates how other jihadi groups and even renowned scholars condemn the horrifying media performance of ISIS' slaughtering. Al-Maqdisi especially expresses his concern for the negative repercussions that the broadcasting of such acts may have on the Islam as a whole. As discussed by Ammar and Xu (2017), Al-Maqdisi already tried in 2013 to discourage Mujahideen to record and disseminate scenes of killings and torture, *"because such acts would enable the enemies of the Mujahedeen to rally support against them and against Islam."* (Ammar & Xu, 2017, p. 50). This discourse clearly supports the notion that ISIS' form of Salafi-Jihadism is subject to *'the moulding forces of the media'* (Hepp, 2013, p.54). The changing media ecosystem (e.g. cheaper production costs; fast, effortless, and cheap online distribution possibilities; direct entrance into mainstream news media outlets; online likes and shares; etc..) gradually molds Salafi-Jihadism into a different entity—into a 'media culture', instead of an ideology. In terms of media theory, it is arguable that ISIS' form of Salafi-Jihadism is in fact mediatized. Yet, more qualitative and especially longitudinal research is needed to test this hypothesis more rigorously.

3.4 Abu Musab al-Suri and the Logic of Leaderless Jihad

Besides ISIS' mediatized form of Salafi-Jihadism, we have also witnessed an upsurge in 'lone actor', or 'lone wolf' jihadism (Bakker & De Graaf, 2011; Hamm & Spaaij, 2017). This form of jihad is based on the idea of small, autonomous cells that act in name of a larger global movement. This type of Salafi-Jihadism constitutes the fourth wave, that started in 2001 and continues to the present day (Robinson, 2017). Even though this organizational structure is relatively recent for Salafi-Jihadist groups, the tactic of individual lone actors or lone wolfs is in fact deep rooted in other resistance movements.

The term 'lone wolf' was popularized by Tom Metzger and Alex Curtis in the late 1990s to inspire fellow white supremacists to commit violent crimes but to operate in solitude for tactical security reasons, e.g. a stealthier approach by 'staying under the radar' (Bakker & De Graaf, 2011). Ever since, the term 'lone wolf' has been used by policy makers, scholars, and journalists alike to refer not only to white supremacists but for a broad range of other terrorist actors, ranging from anarchists, to animal rights extremists, to jihadists. Even though the point has been made that the term lone wolf in itself may be problematic and should be better jettisoned—or to be avoided at least (see chapter 4)—it is nonetheless essential to discuss briefly the phenomenon in which individuals come to operate and act in a presumably solitary manner.

The lone actor phenomenon is best understood within the context of the theory of 'leaderless resistance', introduced and popularized by white nationalist and former Ku Klux Klan member and leader Louis Beam[7] in 1992 (Beam, 1992). Beam's (1992) idea of leaderless resistance was originally developed with the purpose *"to defeat state tyranny"*. He proposed a structure of 'phantom cells' in which *"all individuals and groups operate independently of each other, and never report to a*

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[7]Louis Beam has been called the Godfather of the contemporary alt-right (Smith, 2017).

central headquarters or single leader for direction or instruction, as would those who belong to a typical pyramid organization". He adds that *"it becomes the responsibility of the individual to acquire the necessary skills and information as to what is to be done. [...]"* (Beam, 1992, paras. 15–16).

The idea of a decentralized network for violent resistance has also proven to be quintessential for the development of the global jihadist movement. Contemporary global jihadism is considered to be strongly influenced by the works of Abu Musab al-Suri (Lia, 2007; Masoud, 2013; Robinson, 2017). In his magnum opus of 1600 pages entitled 'Call for Global Islamic Resistance' ('*dawat al-muqawama al-islamiyya al-alamiyya*')—published on the Internet in 2004—al-Suri advocated explicitly for a networked but decentralized personal jihad ('*jihad fardi*'), operated by individuals in small autonomous cells. He explicitly referred to this structure as the 'leaderless resistance' or 'leaderless jihad' (Bakker & De Graaf, 2011; Sageman, 2008).

This specific restructuring of the global jihad movement was driven by the defeat of the Taliban and the loss of the Afghan emirate in 2001 as both signified a brusque end to the idea that a global jihadist territory would be feasible within a foreseeable future. To keep the movement alive, al-Suri believed that it was necessary that individual Muslims and networks of like-minded jihadis would undertake small-scale violent acts around the world under the banner of global jihad (Robinson, 2017). Even though he understood that such 'small' acts could never be capable of endangering the West existentially, he was convinced that they would elevate and maintain fear in the minds and societies of the enemy whilst at the same time they would inspire other Muslims to undertake similar actions. In recent years, numerous Western societies have experienced attacks of such a leaderless jihad. Well known examples are the attack in Nice, France, on July 14th 2016 whereby Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel killed 86 people, whilst injuring more than 400 others (Renard, 2017), and the Christmas market attack in Berlin on December 19th, 2016.

The 'architect for global jihad', as how al-Suri has been called as well (Lia,

2007), put a specific emphasis on the media, Internet and new information and communication technologies for marketing, recruitment, and network purposes. He believed that Ayman al-Zawahiri's seriousness and heavy theological speeches could not inspire a younger generation of Muslims to take up arms for Jihad. Rather, he suggested that Salafi-Jihadism had to be revitalized in function of the upcoming internet and new media platforms. It is arguable that the organizational structure of a 'leaderless jihad' is in fact invigorated by the infrastructure of the contemporary media ecosystem. In that sense, this form of Salafi-Jihadism is similar to Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) 'logic of connective action.' It is the online information ecosystem that facilitates connections between likeminded individuals. The Salafi-Jihadist movement now structures its communicative and political actions according to this logic of 'connective action' (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In contrast to the idea of 'collective action' (see chapter 2), Salafi-Jihadism is now organized in function of interpersonal networks that themselves have become the core organizations in their own right; the technology platforms have taken over the place of established organizations, such as religious authorities. Thus, in this case 'connective action' means that Salafi-Jihadism is now energized by the digitally coordinated actions of independent but interconnected individuals. It cannot go unmentioned here that this is another example of the hypothesis that contemporary Salafi-Jihadism—or at least some form of it—is mediatized.

So, we have come to unravel here that two of the most recent and vigorous forms of contemporary Salafi-Jihadism would perhaps not have existed, if it was not for the mediated communication processes underpinning them. In the next chapters, we will present the results of five empirical studies concentrating on ISIS' mediated communication processes.

4 | Legitimizing the Caliphate and Inhumanity with Moral Disengagement Rhetoric

"Every Muslim should get out of his house, find a crusader, and kill him. It is important that the killing becomes attributed to patrons of the Islamic State who have obeyed its leadership. This can easily be done with anonymity. Otherwise, crusader media makes [sic] such attacks appear to be random killings."

(Dabiq 4, 2014, p. 44, "Reflections on the Final Crusade")

4.1   Introduction

The abovementioned arousing excerpt from ISIS's fourth Dabiq publication is rich in many ways. Not only is it an overt call-to-action for undertaking a violent terrorist deed, it also provides useful advice on how to make the murdering of another human being less morally objectionable: i.e. the victim is linguistically reduced to a 'crusader', the responsibility is displaced and diffused to the 'patrons

of the Islamic State' rather than to the actual lone individual, and by using the words *"Every Muslim should [...]"* the deed is presented as a moral religious obligation for all devout believers.

Furthermore, the above excerpt clearly demonstrates ISIS's in-depth understanding of the media logic of Western media (Altheide & Snow, 1979). By explaining how potential followers should orchestrate their acts in order to have them effectively portrayed by the 'crusader media', ISIS underlines the idea that the media might serve as 'oxygen' to terrorist organizations (Nacos, 2016). This idea, also known as 'propaganda by the deed', suggests that news media provide a podium for terrorist organizations by extensively covering their terrorist deeds. In that sense, the terrorist deed becomes a form of public communication or a *"language of symbolic action"* for a terrorist organization (O'Shaughnessy & Baines, 2009, p. 1).

According to Europol (2016), between the exclamation of the Caliphate in June 2014 and December 2015, ISIS inspired or orchestrated more than 50 terrorist plots in 18 different countries, thereby killing 1,100 people and injuring another 1,700. In Western Europe only, over 5,000 people left to fight in Syria and/or Iraq. More than the half, 3,700, came from just four European countries, i.e. Germany, France, UK and Belgium. The latter has the most departures per capita (Neumann, 2015).

It is suggested that the catalyzing factor behind both the wave of ISIS-inspired terrorist plots in the West and the significant outflow of ISIS-minded foreign fighters is ISIS's tactical use of different media sources as part of their propaganda and public communications strategy (Ingram, 2016b). *Dabiq* is seen as one of the most prominent and seemingly appealing media sources for ISIS's ideology (Gambhir, 2014).

In this study we explore what rhetoric devices are adopted in the propaganda 'flagship' *Dabiq* to inspire like-minded individuals in Western nations to conduct terrorist deeds in their home society, or to convince and recruit foreign fighters to join the ISIS ranks in the jihadist battlefields of Syria and Iraq. By means of a newly

developed coding tool we content-analyze fourteen publicly available issues of the *Dabiq* magazine, looking into the most frequently used legitimizing arguments, their development over time, and their interrelationships. Specific attention is devoted to (1) the dominant themes, (2) the core religious texts referred to, and (3) the legitimizing arguments for the use of extreme violence. We aspire to reveal an answer to the question 'why does ISIS what it does?'. To answer this question we follow Bandura's (1999, 2002, 2004) logic implying that terrorists will intend to explain and legitimize their violence and inhumanities by selectively operating eight justification practices. Furthermore, we discuss to what extent the legitimizing rhetorical devices in *Dabiq* facilitate analogous legitimizing reasoning among its readers, by presenting appealing arguments that could make the plotting of terrorist attacks in Western societies or joining the battlefields in Syria and Iraq less morally objectionable. It is important to understand these mechanisms well, among other things, to develop meaningful counter-narratives in the context of terrorism prevention or intervention programs.

4.1.1 *Dabiq*'s language use and rhetoric

The literature on radicalization and terrorist recruitment acknowledges that mediated communication, such as propaganda, functions to some extent as a facilitator for inspiring extremist ideation and terrorist mobilization (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). The authors argue for example that the rhetoric used in this form of communication creates a sense of belonging for otherwise alienated individuals. Islamist propaganda, they say, give ordinary Muslims the impression that they can turn into 'heroic jihadis' who stand up for a worldwide Muslim community that is humiliated by a global war on Islam. As a central player in ISIS's public communication strategy, *Dabiq* and its content already received some analytical attention.

In one of the first publications scrutinizing the content of the first issue, Van Ostaeyen (2014) discusses how *Dabiq* was drenched with religious narratives and

theological references to legitimize the re-establishment of the caliphate. In this study, the author demonstrates that ISIS's rhetoric at that time was predominantly religious in nature. These findings were also underlined by Gambhir's (2014) background analysis of *Dabiq* issues 1 and 2. She concludes that ISIS is *"investing significant resources to explain why it is religiously justified and superior to rival organizations."* (2014, p. 10). However, she also argues that *Dabiq* devotes a serious amount to military and political justification themes, whereby she encourages future research to examine the balance between these themes. These two studies offered a useful theoretical reflection upon the *Dabiq* rhetoric. However, because they were both more popular scientific in nature, they remained also limited in their methodology as their findings were not grounded in systematical empirical analysis.

One of the first systematic empirical studies of *Dabiq*'s rhetoric was reported by Vergani and Bliuc (2015). In their quantitative analysis, the authors focused on the emotional and psychological language components in *Dabiq*'s rhetoric and the extent to which that had evolved over the course of 11 issues (Vergani & Bliuc, 2015). They conducted their study by means of computerized text analysis and digital linguistic methods. However, how the authors selected, operationalized and measured their key concepts remained vague. Notwithstanding these reservations, the authors came across some noteworthy changes in the language use. Their data show that the *Dabiq* authors are increasingly using emotional-oriented narratives to explain and inspire collective action and political behavior (Vergani & Bliuc, 2015). In the same vein, the authors found that affiliation-oriented language, dealing with group cohesion and identity, strongly increased in the course of eleven issues, much in line with Ingram's abovementioned findings (2016a, 2016b). Furthermore, the analysis showed that religion-oriented language peaked only in issue one, then slowly decreasing, until it dropped to a low in issue six, to remain constant over the course of the next issues.

Novenario (2016) and Ingram (2016a) studied the *Dabiq* series not in isolation

but in comparison to other terrorist magazines such as the al-Qaeda's magazine Inspire. The focus of Novenario (2016) was on the exploration of Kydd and Walter's (2006) principal strategic logics of terrorist campaigns and how al-Qaeda and ISIS differ from one another. The authors' analysis reveals that both groups' strategies are geared towards distinctly different goals. al-Qaeda consistently prioritizes attrition, i.e. persuading opponents that *"the terrorists are strong enough to impose considerable costs if the enemy continues a particular policy"* (Kydd & Walter, 2006, p. 51), aiming to force the West to change its war on terror and aggression towards the Ummah. ISIS mainly uses outbidding and intimidating strategies, i.e. engaging in the use of extreme violence to signal their strength and abilities to fight the enemy more effectively than other rivalry groups, and able to convince as many Muslims as possible to join their ranks under its rule of the Caliphate. Ingram (2016a) supports these findings and argues that by showing its own strength and superiority ISIS, more than al-Qaeda, is significantly more in-group than out-group oriented than al-Qaeda. He takes this analysis even further: in a more recent study on the first nine issues of textitDabiq, Ingram (2016b) discusses the us-them dichotomy narratives more concretely, and demonstrates how that contributes to the overall polarization. It is then argued that this polarization taps into the minds of the readers and helps shaping an in-group versus an out-group identity. This study seems mainly occupied with the extent to what *"radical narratives seek to leverage identity constructs as a means to radicalise their audiences towards support of 'the cause' and engagement in politically motivated violence"* (Ingram, 2016b, p. 5). Ingram (2016b) tends to reduce the phenomenon of radicalization to primarily a process of identification and 'othering', in which radical narratives seem to function as beacons for radical thought and behavior. Building on Ingram's analysis, we argue that the us-them polarization together with its mechanism of 'othering' are only one of the many rhetoric devices within a broader theoretical framework known as the Selective Moral Disengagement theory (Bandura, 1999). Besides us-them thinking as

exemplified in the dehumanization of the other, several other cognitive mechanisms
can be activated in order to become involved in the perpetration of inhumanities in
general, or terrorism in particular, without being hindered by personal moral
barriers.

4.1.2 Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities and terrorism

A meaningful framework to study to what extent ISIS justifies and legitimizes its use
of violence, and to what degree this can trickle down in its supporters' perception
of terrorism, is Bandura's theory of selective moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999,
2002, 2004). The central argument in this theory suggests that people have a natural
sense for moral standards and that an internal moral agency with self-regulatory
mechanisms guides us in judging what conduct is reprehensible and what not. These
so-called self-regulatory mechanisms work in two directions. First, they refrain most
people from behaving inhumanely towards others; second, they possess proactive
guidance power to stimulate behaving humanely. In general, these mechanisms
are associated with psychological discomfort and do therefore not come into play,
unless they are activated (Bandura, 2002). This is the case when people transgress
their inner moral standards. When, for example, people use violence towards the
other, personal moral barriers are transgressed and self-regulatory mechanisms will
be activated to disengage from immoral conduct and in order to restore psychological
comfort. The activation of these mechanisms is a highly selective process, and can
take many forms. In general, there are three sets of disengagement practices. The
first set operates on the level of the cognitive restructuring of inhumane conduct,
including:

1. *Moral justification*: Harmful behavior towards others is made personally
   and socially acceptable by describing it as serving a noble or moral purpose.
2. *Sanitizing language*: Referring to the idea that deeds take on a different
   appearance when they are simply called differently. A positive metaphorical

label can make a deed look more respectable and can reduce personal responsibility.

3. Advantageous comparison: This mechanism makes uses of the idea that some destructive behavior is perceived as more righteous when it is contrasted with even worse immoral conduct.

A second set of moral self-sanctions concentrates on disavowal of the personal agency and on downplaying the agentive role in the harm one causes. This set includes:

4. Displacement of responsibility: This is a mechanism in which people perceive their own actions as a reaction to a chain of command by a higher authority, rather than being personally responsible for them.

5. Diffusion of responsibility: Hereby, the personal agency gets obscured by attributing the responsibility to a collective action.

6. Disregard or minimizing the consequences: In this practice the harmful consequences are simply minimized and the effects of the inhumane conduct are downplayed.

The third and last set of disengagement practices is oriented on the recipients or victims of the conduct. This includes two concrete mechanisms:

7. Dehumanization: If one identifies one another as human, spontaneous feelings of empathy are activated through perceived similarity. This naturally functions as a moral barrier for destructive behavior towards the other. Hence, by stripping the other of his/her humanity, violent behavior can be made significantly more morally acceptable.

8. Attribution of blame: This mechanism departs from the idea that one's self was victimized first. By portraying violent behavior as a defensive reaction, it becomes less morally objectionable.

According to Bandura (2004), involvement in terrorism-related violence can be made socially and personally acceptable only through a process of self-regulation by selectively activating abovementioned mechanisms. Bandura (1999) underlines hereby that this is often not an ad-hoc decision but an incremental process over

time. Thus, *"the process of radicalization involves a gradual disengagement of moral
sanctions from violent conduct"* (1999, p. 12).

Accordingly, Weimann (2008) launched the idea that terrorist propaganda is
pre-eminently an environment where these disengagement practices are
disseminated to vulnerable readers. Based on a large-scale qualitative exploration
of Islamist terrorist websites, Weimann (2008) found that mechanisms such as
displacement of responsibility and attribution of blame are vastly prominent in
Islamist rhetoric. Remarkably, however, not much systematic quantitative data
exists on this innovative idea. Particularly in the case of Islamic State propaganda
such an analysis is lacking.

Research questions

In light of the above, we propose the following research questions in order to address
this lacuna in the contemporary radicalization literature. This brought us concretely
to the central research question: What specific rhetorical devices are applied in ISIS's
propaganda magazine *Dabiq* to explain and justify their existence and their deeds?
We will try to answer this question by first trying to answer a few more specific
research questions:

RQ1 What kind of generic themes are leading in ISIS's *Dabiq*?

> **RQ1.1** Being a Salafi-Jihadi inspired organization that maintains a statehood
> in the Middle East, does ISIS use themes that are rather grounded in a
> political contextual background or in a religious contextual background?
>
> **RQ1.2** Considering this political-religious justification spectrum, are there
> specific religious texts that are more often cited than others, and if so, which
> ones?
>
> **RQ1.3** To what extent are these religious texts figuring at the core of Islamic
> State's discourse connected to each other?

RQ2 According to the literature, terrorists will justify their extreme violence by following several moral disengagement practices. Are these practices also used by ISIS, and if so, in what ways, and which ones are the most dominant?

RQ3 Are the generic themes and specific disengagement practices associated with each other, or do these rhetoric devices appear independently from each other?

4.2   Method

The reason for selecting *Dabiq* as our research subject is twofold. First, *Dabiq* is seen as ISIS's *'flagship'* English written propaganda piece (Ferrara, Wang, Varol, Flammini, & Galstyan, 2016), officially and centrally distributed through *'al-Hayāt Media Centre*, the leading media branch of Islamic State's central leadership (Vergani & Bliuc, 2015; Winter, 2015b). Second, the magazine is supposed to be one of the richest sources of ISIS's political, military, and religious ambitions (Gambhir, 2014) and therefore functions as a fundamental background for its central mission and behavior (Weiss & Hassan, 2015, p. 176). This study concentrates on the textual elements in *Dabiq*. Hereby, the central argument in the current study is derived from Weimann's (2008) logic that moral disengagement practices are vastly present in terrorists' rhetoric. To test this assumption empirically, an interpretive framework was developed based on the Selective Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 1999). Concretely, we designed a coding instrument in which the eight disengagement practices were adopted as initial coding categories. Further, we added additional variables that allowed us to contextualize and characterize the textual elements more precisely, such as the generic theme of the article, the character count, and the registration of the surahs and ahādīth. The coding was carried out at the sentence level, while the principal unit of analysis was the article. Additionally, the data was aggregated on issue level, with a view to a trend analysis over time.

4.2.1 Corpus

At the time of analysis, fourteen issues of *Dabiq* had been released. Every
publication was obtained through the publicly accessible website *Jihadology.net*, a
popular-science weblog serving as a *"clearinghouse for Jihadi primary source
material"* (Zelin, 2016). Because the main unit of analysis was the article, the
issues were divided into separate articles, resulting in a total sample size of n=279
(Mean number of articles per issue= 19.93; SD= 4.01; Min= 13, Max= 25) (see
table 1). Article length was measured with the number of characters. This resulted
in an average article length of 7,854 characters (SD 10,181; Min=143,
Max=77,443). Considering the severe variance in characters per article and the
increasing length per issue, the character count will be treated as a co-variate in all
statistical analyses.

Issue	Title	Release date	#articles	#characters
*Dabiq*1:	The Return of the Khilafah	July 5, 2014	21	57,197
Dabiq 2:	The Flood	July 27, 2014	20	75,403
Dabiq 3:	A Call to Hijrah	August 31, 2014	23	76,641
Dabiq 4:	The Failed Crusade	October 12, 2014	15	114,053
Dabiq 5:	Remaining and Expanding	November 22, 2014	16	70,345
Dabiq 6:	Al-Qa'idah of Waziristan: A Testimony from Within	December 30, 2014	13	154,981
Dabiq 7:	From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone	February 12, 2015	23	194,285
Dabiq 8:	Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa	March 30, 2015	19	185,305
Dabiq 9:	They Plot and Allah Plots	May 21, 2015	25	198,707
Dabiq 10:	The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men.	July 13, 2015	22	253,100
Dabiq 11:	From the Battle of al-Azhab to the War of Coalitions	September 9, 2015	24	214,837
Dabiq 12:	Just Terror	November 18, 2015	25	252,996
Dabiq 13:	The Rafidah: From Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal	January 19, 2016	18	165,482
Dabiq 14:	The Murtadd Brotherhood	April 13, 2016	15	185,917

Table 4.1: Corpus description Dabiq 1 - 14

4.2.2 Analyses

To begin with, we classified all articles according to a generic genre, as proposed in
Dabiq. This method of classification yielded six genres: (1) foreword, (2) news
report, (3) interview, (4) homage, (5) contextual feature and (6) advertising.
However, a more detailed exploration of the data showed a broad variety of
subgenres. Therefore, after a second walk-through we developed a more detailed
classification system, resulting in thirteen different genres (see table 4.2).

We performed a systematical deductive content analysis of the articles, following the Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 2002). A vast part of our categories of inquiry were pre-defined in our coding tool, i.e. **(1) moral justification**, e.g. *"We call them [all Muslims] and remind them to fear Allah, for their emigration is wajib 'ayni (an individual obligation), so that they can answer the dire need of the Muslims for them."* (Dabiq 1, 2014, p. 11, "A call to all Muslim" [sic]), **(2) sanitizing language**, e.g.*"[. . .], where they were greeted by a car-bomb that was waiting for them outside the hotel."* (Dabiq 7, 2015, p. 41, "Major Operations in Libya and Sinai"), **(3) advantageous comparison**, e.g. *"Just three young Muslims brought an entire country to its knees while in the Middle East a billion- dollars' worth of bombs have been dropped in the last three months alone."* (Dabiq 7, 2015, p. 76, "The Angor Factory"), **(4) displacement of responsibility**, e.g. *"the eyes of the Islamic State were scanning East and West, preparing for the expansion that – by Allah's permission – would put an end to the Jewish State"* (Dabiq 5, 2015, p. 3, "Foreword"), **(5) diffusion of responsibility**, e.g. *"[. . .]the soldiers of the Khilāfah struck again and succeeded in eliminating an officer[. . .]"* (Dabiq 13, 2016, p. 16, "Military Operations"), **(6) minimizing the consequences**, e.g. *[. . .]As such, the Islamic State actively works to educate its citizens, preach to and admonish them [. . .]* (Dabiq 3, 2014, p. 17, "Da'wah and Hisbah in the Islamic State"), **(7) dehumanization**, e.g. , *"the plans of the West and its puppets in the Gulf"* (Dabiq 9, 2015, p. 71, "Interview with the Amir from the Yarmuk Camp Region"), and **(8) Attribution of blame**, e.g. *"Even if it takes a while, we will take revenge, and every amount of harm against the Ummah will be responded to with multitudes more against the perpetrator"* (Dabiq 12, 2015, p. 4, "Foreword")

After a first explorative walk-through of the sample, we complemented the initial eight theoretical and overarching categories with a few specific sub-classifications. These include a 'fine-grained' specification of dehumanization. After discovering the vast amount of widely varying derogatory names for different opponents, and their subtle connotative differences, we found it meaningful to split

Generic genres		Occurrence in %
Foreword		3.68
Newsreport	News story	2.31
	Islamic State report	3.78
	War report	5.87
Personality cult	Interview	6.73
	Homage	3.46
Contextual feature	Opinionated item from internal actor	8.10
	Opinionated item from external actor	9.08
	Religious contextual background	24.21
	Political contextual background	17.25
	Dispute with al-Qaeda	9.79
Persuasive text		5.73

Table 4.2: Prevalence generic genres in the total sample (in %)

the category of dehumanization into four distinct classes: (1) dehumanization in
the context of local adversaries, e.g. "[. . .] shake the tawāghīt [derogatory name
for tyrannical regimes, or a ruler who does not rule by Islamic law] and cleanse the
Muslims' lands [. . .]" (Dabiq 6, 2014, p. 28, "Action in the New Wilayat"); (2)
dehumanization in the reference to the crusades "[. . .]in order to terrorize the
crusaders waging war against the Muslims" (Dabiq 7, 2015, p. 73, "Interview with
Abū 'Umar al-Baljīkī"), (3) dehumanization of Western entities, e.g. "[. . .]the dog
of the White House [. . .]." (Dabiq 10, 2015, p. 42, "They Are Not Lawful Spouses
for Another"), and (4) dehumanization in general, e.g. a devastating cancer has
emerged, mutated, and spread, attempting to drown the entire Ummah [. . .]
[about the Muslim Brotherhood]." (Dabiq 14, 2016, p. 28, "The Murtadd
Brotherhood").

Furthermore, we suggest that a new and essential category should be
considered when studying Bandura's (2002) container concept of 'dehumanization'
in a contemporary terrorists' context. Rather than stripping victims from their
human characteristics, dehumanization might also be powerfully applied by

attributing superhuman or predatory qualities to the perpetrator, e.g. "The lions of the Islamic State advanced and continued capturing one position after another [. . .]"(Dabiq 2, 2014, p. 42, " Islamic State News"). This idea of 'predatorizing' the self, might potentially be a an effective way to commit immoral conduct (B. Bastian et al., 2013), as well as an appealing recruitment narrative for readers who feel victimized or humiliated in Western (host) societies (Hafez & Mullins, 2015).

In sum, our framework consisted of twelve distinct moral disengagement categories. The coding and counting were performed manually and sentence by sentence, using the NVivo10 software for Windows. Because concepts could appear more than once per article, all categories were treated as discrete ratio variables. For the basic statistical analyses, we used IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows. Additionally, we performed a correspondence analysis for the core concepts with R (R Core Development Team, 2013) using the FactoMineR package.

4.2.2.1   Reliability

To assess the relevance of the coding categories and the quality of the data, an intercoder reliability test was performed. A subsample of approximately 10% of the total articles was randomly chosen in order to test coding uniformity between the coders. Overall, this test yielded acceptable results, ranging from Krippendorff's α=0.673 to α=0.963 for the moral disengagement variables (average α= 0.75). Also for the other variables, such as the reference to religious texts, the test showed good interrater consistency with Krippendorff's α= 0.89 for the Surah, and Krippendorff's α=0.869 for the Hadith.

4.3   Results

In reference to our first specific research question, we explored whether politically-tinged stories are more prevalent than religious ones over time. We first looked at the total sample. Not surprisingly, the three leading stories are: religious contextual background, political contextual background, and the dispute between ISIS and al-

Qaeda (see also table 2). More specifically, items that contextualize ISIS and its behavior from a religious perspective, such as *"Hijrah to Sham is From the Millah of Ibrahim"* (Dabiq 3, 2014, pp. 10–11), are the most prevalent, representing 24.21% of the total text. The second most dominant story is political contextualization, taking up 17.25%, with articles such as *"From the Battle of Ahzāb to the War of Coalitions"* (Dabiq 11, 2015, pp. 46–54). Furthermore, nearly 10% is dedicated to the dispute with al-Qaeda, e.g. *"The Allies of Al-Qa'idah in Shām"* (Dabiq 8, 2015, pp. 7–11), which situates itself on the intersection between politics and religion.

A comparative analysis across the issues shows that the prevalence rates of these three leading stories are highly dynamic, and vary strongly across publications. Figure 4.1 visualizes the proportion of the three stories for each *Dabiq* issue. The horizontal axis represents each issue of *Dabiq* ranging from number 1 to number 14, and the vertical axis shows the percentage of the stories per each Issue. Three elements are particularly remarkable in this plot. First, issue 4 shows a sudden increase in politically-tinged stories, and a strong drop of religion-oriented ones. This declination is mainly caused by the fact that issue four concentrates on the military and political consequences of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. Second, when taking a closer look at issue 6, we see that while both religious and political stories drop to a low, the dispute with al-Qaeda peaks with 59.86%. This can be explained by the fact that issue six is clearly a thematic issue. In this publication ISIS focuses on the differences between the two Islamist-inspired organizations and reduces al-Qaeda to "Jihad-claimants" while attributing unique Salafi-Jihadist characteristics to itself. Third, issue 13 concentrates on the Sunni-Shi'a conflict, resulting in a higher prevalence of religious oriented articles, in comparison to the other two themes.

Taking a closer look at the trend lines, we see that the proportion of stories dedicated to political contextualization shows a significant increase over time ($\beta=$ 0.560, p>0.05, R2=0.313). Remarkably, however, this does not necessarily lead to a displacement of religiously-tinged stories: even though religious contextualization decreases over time, the trend appears to be statistically non-significant ($\beta=$ 0.257,
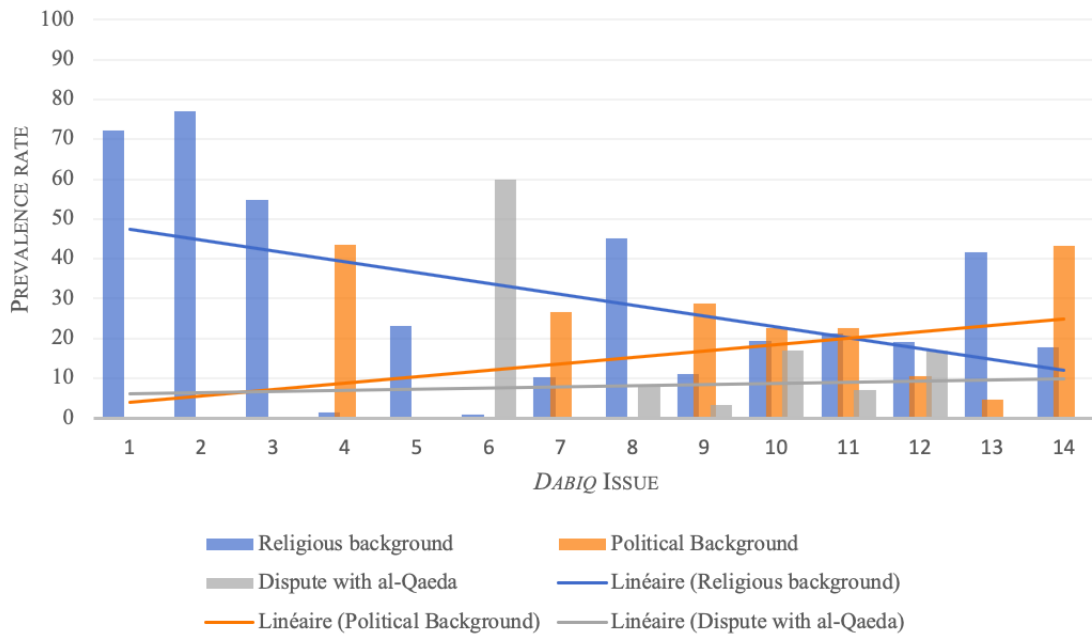
Figure 4.1: Plot depicting the dynamic prevalence rates of the main stories throughout the Dabiq-series.

p>0.10). Lastly, the prevalence of al-Qaeda-related stories shows no significant positive or negative trend, but stays rather independent of time (β= 0.158, p>0.10).

In order to investigate whether *Dabiq* devotes significantly more attention to its political foundations, we conducted a binary logistical regression analysis. This method enables to predict a probability for a categorical dependent variable, given a specific unit increase in another variable. We use these statistics to predict the probability that an article is either religiously or politically-tinged. Table 4.3 shows a summary of the statistics of this method. We found that the issue number was in both cases a significant predictor for the odds that an article is either focusing on religious versus political content. We found that the odds that an article was dealing with the religious contextual background were 0.895 times lower (95% CI 0.836 – 0.959) per new issue (e^{β}religious=0.895; βreligious=-0.111; p<0.005). In contrast, we found that the odds for politically contextualizing articles were significantly greater with 1.201 times (95% CI 1.033 - 1.397) per issue (e^{β}political=1.201; βpolitical=0.183; p<0.005). In other words, with the release of each new publication, the odds that an article deals with political content increases with about 20%.

Model 1: Religious contextual background	B	SE	OR	(95% CI)	Wald
Issue number **	-0.111	0.035	0.895**	(0.836 ; 0.959)	10.003
Constant	-0.228	0.275	0.796		0.688
Model 1: Political contextual background	B	SE	OR	(95% CI)	Wald
Issue number ***	0.183	0.077	1.201**	(1,033 ; 1,397)	5.643
Constant****	-4.414	0.805	0.012***		30.089
	Model 1			Model 2	
Hosmer-Lemeshow Goodness of fit: χ^2 (df=8)	12.054			5.965	
Omnibus test Model χ^2	10.374*** (df=1)			6.644** (df=1)	
Nagelkerke R2	0.053			0.066	

Table 4.3: Binary logistic model with theme as dependent variable.

In pursuance of answering our next research question, we were interested in the specific religious foundations on which ISIS claims to base its ideology on. Additionally, we wondered whether and if so, to what extent the shift from religious rhetoric to political rhetoric coincided with a decrease in referring to religious texts. For these two interests we studied the frequencies of citing (1) Qur'ānic verses and Surahs (chapters in the Qur'ān), and (2) the Hadith (collections of the teachings, traditions, sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad (Maher, 2016, p. xvii)).

A first quantitative assessment shows that the number of Qur'ānic citations more than doubled the frequency of Hadith citations. In total we came across 566 references to the Surah and 276 to the Hadith in all fourteen *Dabiq* issues. Over time, and controlling for the amount of characters, it appeared that the number of Hadith citations steadily and significantly decreased (β= -0.478, p>0.01, R2=0.042), while the references to Qur'ānic texts varied randomly and not significantly (β= -0.080, p>0.10, R2=0,621). The plot in figure 4.2 shows the trends in citation frequencies, weighted in reference to the amount of characters per issue, for both religious sources. It appears that the surah-citations are paramount throughout the *Dabiq* series. In the next chapter (chapter 5) we will scrutinize these religious references more in detail.

In reference to our second research question, we followed Weimann's (2008) logic suggesting that in terrorist communication several of Bandura's (2004) moral disengagement mechanisms are propagated in order to legitimize violent deeds,
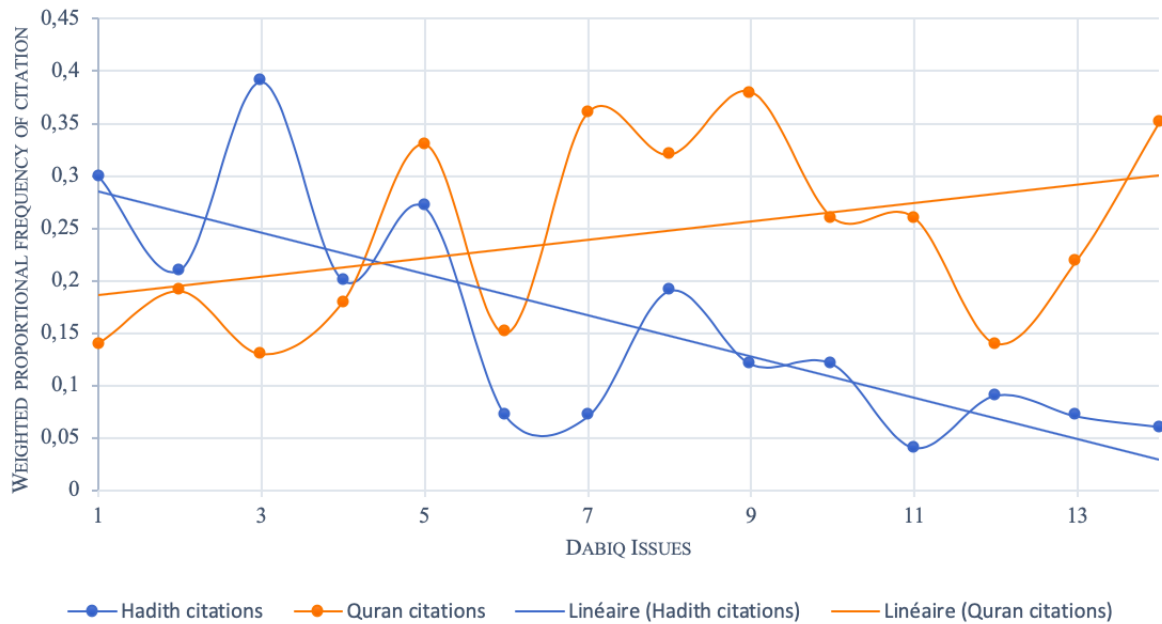
Figure 4.2: Trend lines of weighted frequencies of citations to Qur'ān and Hadith

activities and behavior. Specifically, we were interested in the prevalence of each of these mechanisms and which are the most dominant in the *Dabiq* texts. The results are derived from several explorative analyses.

In general, over the course of fourteen issues, we found that in fact all moral disengagement practices appear in *Dabiq*'s narratives. However, the relative presence of these practices seems to vary severely, particularly when following our subdivision of dehumanization. Dividing dehumanization into four subcategories clearly enables a more detailed and complete analysis of opponent-oriented disengagement practices, however, because of its extreme dominance in ISIS's narratives, it also biases and skews the findings to some extent.

Table 4.4 compares the frequencies and percentages of the moral disengagement mechanisms with and without the subdivision of dehumanization within the total sample of 279 articles. Based on the serious differences we decided to break down our analysis in two steps. First, we will explore the standard moral disengagement practices, including the extension of perpetrator-oriented components. Second, we scrutinize the detailed opponent-oriented dehumanization practices in order to come to a clearer picture.

Chapter 4.3.0

		Without detailed dehumanization subdivisions		With dehumanization subdivisions	
		Frequency	In% of total	Frequency	In% of total
Behavior-oriented	Moral justification	291	15.11	291	6.17
	Sanitizing language	510	26.48	510	10.81
	Advantageous comparison	155	8.05	155	3.29
	Displacement of responsibilities	243	12.62	243	5.15
	Diffusion of responsibilities	211	10.96	211	4.47
Effects-oriented	Disregard of consequences	73	3.79	73	1.55
Opponent-oriented	Dehumanization: general	111	5.76	111	2.35
	Dehumanization: crusaders	-		651	13.80
	Dehumanization: local adversaries	-		2,064	43.77
	Dehumanization: the West	-		75	1.59
	Attribution of blame	299	15.52	299	6.34
Perpetrator-oriented	Dehumanization/Predatorization: lion	33	1.71	33	0.70
Total		1,926	100	4,683.00	100

Table 4.4: Moral disengagement practices and the frequencies

First, a global overview shows that the *Dabiq*-producers are indeed very selective in their use of moral disengagement arguments. In general, five mechanisms are responsible for a bit more than 80% of the legitimizing rhetoric. That is, (1) sanitizing language (26.48%); (2) Attribution of blame (15.52%); (3) Moral justification (15.11%); (4) Displacement of responsibility (12.62%); and (5) Diffusion of responsibility (10.96%). These numbers suggest that *Dabiq* predominantly activates justification arguments that are behavior-oriented. When plotting these arguments over time and per issue and weighing for the number of characters used per issue (see figure 4.3), three remarkable findings deserve an explanation. First, the graph reveals that both sanitizing language and attribution of blame remain the most dominant disengagement tools in the majority of the *Dabiq*-issues. Apparently, the authors of the *Dabiq*-series tend to use mainly disengagement language that helps to overcome personal victimization. This can be clearly demonstrated in the case of suicide attacks, for example. In *Dabiq*, ISIS frequently uses sanitizing language techniques, such as specialized jargon, to elevate terms such as suicide or death. That is, these actions are consequently labeled as "istishhādī operations", which is the Arabic term for 'martyrdom operations'. Obviously, the fatal consequences inextricably connected with these deeds are not described as such.

The latter are labeled as heroic sacrifices that do not lead to fatality, but to eternity in *"the loftiest chambers of Jannah [paradise]"* (Dabiq 13, 2016, p. 20, "The best of shuhadā'"). Second, another finding that deserves some clarification is the peak in issue seven. In general, when looking at the global trend of attribution of blame, the data show a gradual decline. However, issue seven shows a sudden peak in comparison to the surrounding issues. This peak is due to the fact that this issue predominantly devotes attention to the ISIS propaganda stunt in which they burn the Jordanian military pilot Moaz al Kasasbeh alive. In this issue's reports, ISIS purely justifies this violent action as retribution. Their logic states that because the pilot conducted airstrikes above Syria and Iraq, whereby he
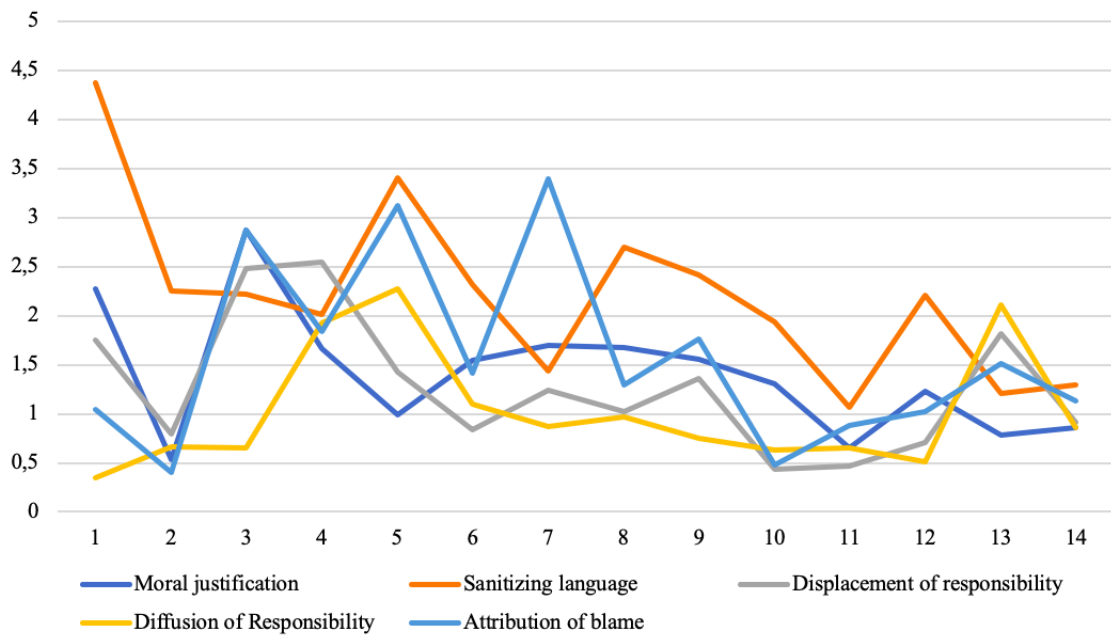
Figure 4.3: Trend lines based on the relative weighted frequencies for the five dominant disengagement practices.

inevitably killed many innocent women and children, he deserves to die in the same way. Hereby, the *Dabiq* authors explicitly refer to the Islamic concept of qisās, which is the Islamic equivalent of "an eye for eye". In other words, they justify the killing of Kasasbeh with the idea that his punishment should equal the trauma he caused. This disengagement practice is not only dominant in the reports of Kasasbeh's killing. Namely, right before the release of the seventh issue, the shooting at the offices of the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo in Paris had taken place. Even though these attacks were claimed by AQAP (al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), in *Dabiq* issue seven, they are blessed and explained. Again here, the inhumanities are legitimized by attributing the blame on the cartoonists themselves. Specifically, these shootings are justified as retaliation for mocking with the Prophet Muhammad. Hence, the unexpected peak in the trend of the attribution of blame is a direct consequence of the fact that the topic of retaliation and retribution plays a very central part in this issue. Third, the most interesting result to emerge from the data is the remarkable change in the narrowing differences of the occurrence of the different disengagement practices. For example, issue one shows a relatively large distribution of the different disengagement

practices. However, in issue thirteen, the extent to which the different moral disengagement arguments are activated has declined and converged steadily, with the articles becoming more politically contextualizing. These findings may be the result of a displacement effect. In other words, these disengagement practices may slowly be replaced by other more dominant components, for example by the opponent-oriented moral disengagement arguments. We wonder therefore whether this decline and convergence in these disengagement arguments are mirrored by an increase of selective activation of opponent-oriented or dehumanization narratives? This brings us seamlessly to the second step of the results for RQ2.

The second step concentrates on the prevalence of the subdivisions of the several dehumanization practices. These included derogatory names for local opponents, dehumanizing labels for the West and references to the crusades. The right columns in table 5 show the striking frequencies for these types of arguments. In fact, when including these opponent-oriented disengagement practices in the analysis, we see that 67.85% of the total disengagement tools in *Dabiq* is devoted to this specific set of dehumanizing practices. In other words, *Dabiq*'s narratives are drenched in this kind of terminology. In line with the expectations, the most central dehumanizing tools are directed towards local opponents in 43.77% of all articles. These are for example *Tawaghit* (referring to the corrupt regimes or false rulers), *Kufr* [disbelievers] and *al-Salul* (derogatory name for the Saudi royal family). The fact that this kind of disengagement language is so prevalent in *Dabiq* fits perfectly to ISIS's core military strategy that in its nature is not aimed at the far enemy (i.e. the West) but rather at the local opponents. Hereby, their military and political strategy differs strongly from al-Qaeda who predominantly aimed at destabilizing the Western powers that back and bolster the local regimes.

Plotting these disengagement practices on a timeline, and standardizing them in reference to the amount of characters used per issue, we see that especially the dehumanization of the local opponents increases and climaxes in issue 13 (figure
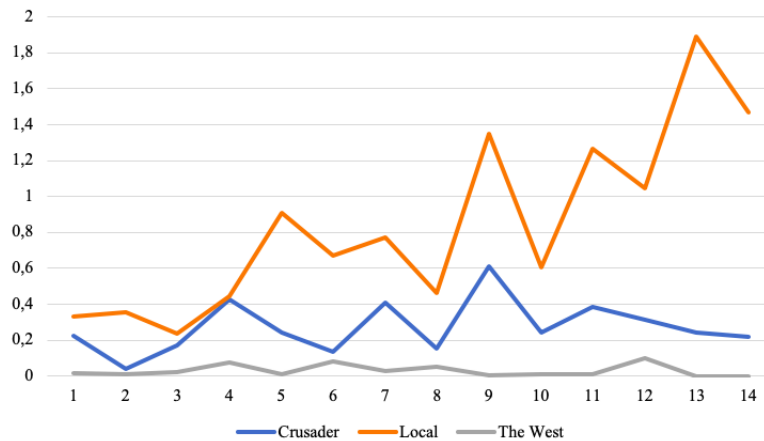
Figure 4.4: Trend lines based on the relative weighted frequencies for the for the
opponent-oriented disengagement practices

4.4). This is because issue 13 is a thematic issue predominantly concentrating on the
deep-rooted Shia-Sunni divide and on the religious foundations, according to ISIS,
that suggest that Shia Muslims are 'Rafidah' [rejecters]. Furthermore, the chart in
figure 5 also points out that the highest number of references to the crusades or
crusaders are found in issue four and issue nine. This is because both issues are
strongly criticizing the invasion of Iraq and the military intervention by the United
States and the coalition forces. An interesting example is the lengthiest article in
issue 4 entitled "Reflections on the Final Crusade" (Dabiq 4, 2014, pp. 32–44). The
fact that this theme is so dominant in this issue can be partially explained by the
military developments on the ground in Syria and Iraq. More specifically, the U.S.
began their airstrikes campaign on September 27th 2014 and the coalition forces
significantly severed their air offensive on October 7th-8th, only four days before
the release of this issue (Wilson Center, 2016).

In sum, the most striking insight emerging from these data is that there is a
significant shift visible in disengagement arguments over time. In the beginning of
the *Dabiq*-series, the practices that are used are more in-group focused, behavior-
oriented and defensive, e.g. using sanitizing language. In the later series, there is less
variance in the relative prevalence of the different disengagement practices, and the
in-group oriented and defensive language tend to be replaced by opponent-oriented
and more offensive language, i.e. dehumanization of the opponents. In that sense,

a displacement effect emerges at the cost of behavior-, effects- and perpetrator-oriented disengagement mechanisms and at the benefit of opponent-oriented moral disengagement language.

Lastly, in reference to our third RQ, we aimed to explore the central rhetoric dimensions in *Dabiq*, and the extent to which the rhetoric devices were associated with each other. For this we performed an explorative correspondence analysis (CA). This method is known as a meaningful way to investigate patterns within corresponding data, while its application within media research is fairly new but increasingly popular (Baxter, 2014). In the case of *Dabiq*, we wanted to explore to what extent the generic genres (rows) correspond with the activation of moral disengagement practices (columns). In order to get common values and make both rhetoric devices comparable, we follow Baxter's (2014) tradition to scale the row totals up to 500. Thereafter, the data were mapped in a graph for interpretation (see figure 4.5).

The red dots in the plot correspond to the generic genres (the labels are shortened versions of the full names (see table 2)). Genres close to each other on the plot have similar moral disengagement profiles; genres with a greater distance between each other indicate comparatively different profiles. The same is true for the moral disengagement arguments, that are represented by the blue pyramids: the less distance between any two points, the more their profiles are similar.

Concretely, two main axes emerge out of the CA. For exploratory interpretation purposes, these axes can be labeled in order to understand the spread of the data points. This is of course a subjective process. In the case of *Dabiq*, after an in-depth analysis of the different data points, we decided to treat the first dimension, the x-axis, as a semantic differential axis ranging from defensive to offensive language.

The further a point is mapped on the x-axis, the more it can be classified as offensive in its rhetoric style (e.g. most dehumanization practices are situated on the offensive side). The y-axis represents the second dimension that we labeled as in-group/us-oriented rhetoric versus out-group, them-oriented rhetoric (e.g. Islamic
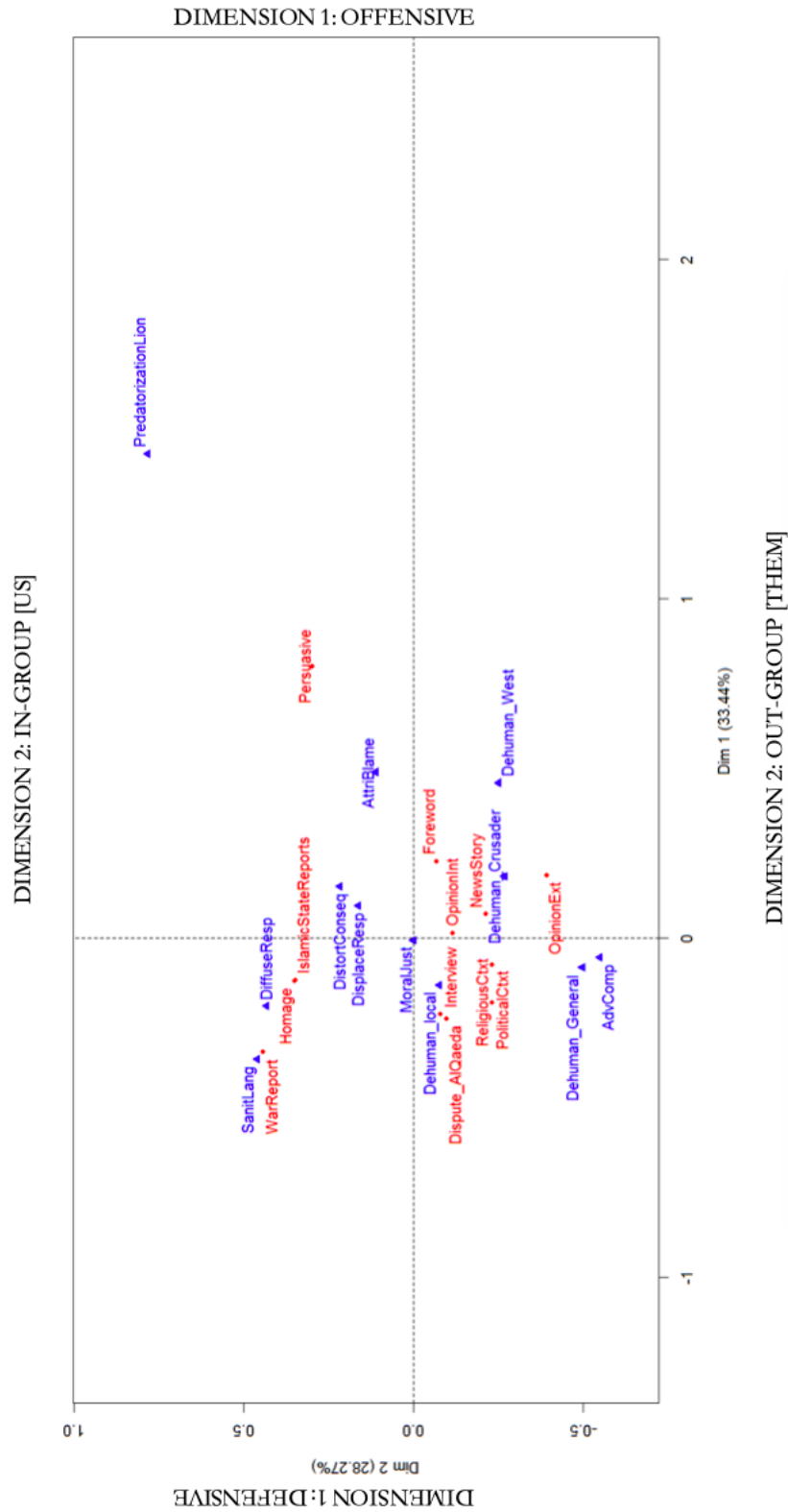
Figure 4.5: Visualization of the correspondence analysis between generic genres
(RQ1) and moral disengagement practices (RQ2)

state reports and war reports are dealing more with the(ir) self than the articles that literally deal with the out-group/context, political contextualization for example). The most surprising and striking result to emerge from this plot is the distinctiveness of *predatorization*. Based on the corresponding data, this disengagement practice loads exceptionally high on both axes, suggesting a highly offensive rhetoric style focused on the in-group. Apparently, proposing the Self as a predator or lion is a similar but unique form of moral disengagement. Nevertheless, because of the fact that this item loads on both axes, as expected, a more qualitative analysis of this disengagement practice is commendable.

Overall, the CA shows that the two rhetoric devices in this study, generic genres and moral disengagement practices, correspond significantly ($\chi^2 = 1281.911$; p>0.000), and that both dimensions together explain 61.71% of the variance.

4.4   Discussion and conclusion

This study set out with the aim of assessing the different types of legitimizing rhetoric and their importance in Islamic State's propaganda output. For this, we conducted a systematic quantitative analysis of fourteen available issues of ISIS's magazine *Dabiq*. As suggested by Weimann's (2008) study on the psychology of terrorism, we applied Bandura's (1999, 2002, 2004) selective moral disengagement theory as theoretical lens through which we scrutinized 279 unique articles. The scientific contribution of our study lies in the application of this social cognitive and behavioral framework as a lens for an empirical text-based examination. The data of our analysis show that moral disengagement arguments are indeed vastly prominent in *Dabiq*'s rhetoric. In contrast, however, to what Bandura and Weimann (2008) theorized on the basis of the propaganda of former Islamist-inspired extremist groups, ISIS does not emphasize its own weaknesses. On the contrary, as Lister (2015) clearly demonstrated, ISIS's military and political strategy differ strongly from that of its predecessors. Whereas al-Qaeda considered themselves as powerless against the local regimes, and therefore

orchestrated its military actions to attrite the Western powers that support them,
ISIS feels sufficiently empowered to stand up against these local tyrannies. This is
reflected in our data and supports the previous findings by Novenario (2016). In
the first issues, we found that ISIS's rhetoric gradually becomes more brutal and
hostile. In the beginning, mainly sanitizing language is activated in order to make
specific deeds more respectable. For instance, ISIS consequently refers to
"istishhādī operations", or martyrdom operations, in order to portray suicide
bombings as noble deeds. The use of these kind of labels replaces the idea of
fatality with eternal living in paradise. In the later issues, the vast majority of
disengagement mechanisms that were communicated aimed at dehumanizing the
enemy, whilst suggesting personal invulnerability. We also found that real-life
developments on the battlefield, for example when the coalition ramped up the
airstrikes in Syria and Iraq, can cause short-term changes in *Dabiq*'s
disengagement rhetoric. In these periods we see small peaks in
crusader/politically-oriented dehumanization practices and fluctuations in the
levels of attributing the blame. Apparently, when ISIS is attacked, it portrays its
own violence as a defensive reaction to the violence by the coalition forces.

Besides the evolution in moral disengagement rhetoric, our study aimed to assess
the prevalence of generic themes in ISIS's propaganda, and in particular the political
and religious foundations of the group's existence. Our analysis showed that *Dabiq*'s
central message is becoming less religious and increasingly military-political. This is
a remarkable fact, especially from a radicalization perspective. Many cases of foreign
fighters and home-grown terrorists are known in which the individuals developed an
Islamist-extremist thought without proper prior religious knowledge: e.g., the two
young British foreign fighters who ordered the book "Qur'ān for Dummies" just
before they left off to Syria (M. Robinson, 2014). Also Hafez and Mullins (2015)
acknowledge that an ideology is often present but not always necessary in order to
become an extremist. Future research should therefore focus on profiling the readers
of *Dabiq*, in order to examine to what extent the shift in *Dabiq*'s contextual themes is

a tactical anticipation to the pre-existing knowledge of its potential audience. Lastly, besides Holbrook (2010) this is one of the few studies exploring the references to religious texts in Islamist propaganda in a quantitative manner. The finding that a surah like at-Tawbah is so dominant in *Dabiq* may not surprise, but does certainly need a more qualitative in-depth assessment of the different surahs and their ayat in relation to the context in which they appear. After all, there is a long tradition in decontextualizing and misusing religious texts by extremist minds (Holbrook, 2010), which might also be the case in ISIS's *Dabiq*. In the next chapter we look more into depth in this.

Ultimately, what does this study mean for counter terrorism initiatives? One of the often heard arguments in contemporary radicalization research suggests: *"[r]adical action depends partly on new ways of seeing the world"* (Hafez & Mullins, 2015, p. 967). Moreover, one of the most cited theories in communication research, the cultivation theory, argues: media became one of the most important sources for information about the real world (Gerbner et al., 2002; Van den Bulck, 2013). Therefore, in order to understand whether and how extremist ideation can be socialized, and respectively be dissocialized, through propagating different world views, we first need to understand what these world views exactly look like.

The current study revealed a small part of the ISIS world, by scrutinizing it through a social cognitive lens. We demonstrated with our analysis of moral disengagement practices that the contemporary ISIS world seems to be increasingly allergic to feelings of empathy for the other. With their predilection for dehumanization practices, the *Dabiq* architects seem to do their utmost to strip the opponents from their human characteristics, while they slowly lose connection with their religious foundations. Countering violent extremism initiatives should therefore invest in the development of rhetoric devices that:

1) are able to activate empathy and sympathy for 'the other' and for the opponent in the eyes of ISIS-sympathizers and like-minded

individuals.

2) call a spade a spade, i.e. a fatal suicide operation a fatal suicide
operation; vivid enough to counter the deep-rooted sanitizing
language tradition of ISIS.

3) promote credible religious voices/role models in order to restore
the imbalance in the contextualization of Islamic religious texts.

Ultimately, we extended Bandura's (1999) original framework with a novel
category that was more perpetrator-oriented. That is, ISIS often transcends
personal moral responsibility by attributing predatory-like characteristics to
themselves. A reoccurring form of this *predatorization* of the self was found
throughout most issues of *Dabiq*, where soldiers of the Islamic State were
portrayed as a pack of mighty lions. In this context, we recommend to be cautious
with the use of the concept "lone wolf terrorism". This recommendation is mainly
directed to policy-makers, news media and state officials. From a critical linguistic
perspective, the metaphor of a wolf, which is a predatory animal, might activate
specific cognitive schemata and a semantic web of associations that might be
appealing to certain group of already vulnerable individuals. This might
specifically be the case with individuals who are gripped by the *predatorization*
narratives of devouring lions in ISIS's propaganda. In this sense, we have to be
watchful that specific language elements and frames (Berbers et al., 2015) in
(counter-)terrorism discourses and in mainstream media do not provoke what they
wish to prevent.

5 | Legitimizing the Caliphate and Inhumanity with the Qur'ān

"The belief that certain books were written by God (who, for reasons difficult to fathom, made Shakespeare a far better writer than himself)leaves us powerless to address the most potent source of human conflict, past and present.""

(Sam Harris (2004), *The End of Faith*, p. 35)

5.1   Introduction

Words have power—especially when they come from God—, and jihadis understand that. The power of these words became recently very apparent, as numerous events of jihadist terrorism worldwide were vigorously inspired, justified and glorified by the words of God (Hassan, 2017). Hereby, Internet-based communication technologies and radical virtual communities have emerged as key instruments in the limitless distribution of a modified and truncated version of the words of God that laid the foundation for a global jihadist doctrine—now known as *"Electronic Jihad"* (Rudner, 2017). This phenomenon has been held responsible for having a multiplier effect on global jihadism, instigating terrorist acts

worldwide, and for catalyzing cases of (online) violent radicalization (Reinares et al., 2017). ISIS is considered to be one of the key players waging an Electronic Jihad, reaching and mobilizing an unprecedented amount of sympathizers worldwide to actively support their Caliphate and their interpretation of a Salafi-jihadist ideology, which is more severe and brutal than any of its predecessors (Bunzel, 2015). In this light, both academia and countering violent extremism (CVE) initiatives have shifted their attention specifically to understanding and curtailing the circulation of jihadist materials online. Surprisingly, however, a solid understanding of the exact ideology that circulates within these online realms remains so far seriously underexplored. In the current study, we aim to bridge this gap. We set out to investigate to what extent ISIS is bolstering its jihadist ideology on a "cut-and-paste" or 'cherry picked' version of Islam (e.g. Rashid, 2017) in their renowned online propaganda magazine Dabiq. The main objective hereby was to examine in a systematic and quantitative way to what extent ISIS utilizes the Qur'ān—the most important scripture in Islam—In an atomistic, truncated and tailored manner to bolster its religious legitimacy. It should be mentioned here that this study will not spend much attention to how these media circulate online (cfr. Gendron, 2017) or how they potentially influence their audiences (e.g. Aly, 2016), acknowledging, however, the urgency and multidimensionality of the phenomenon of online violent radicalization. Rather, the locus of attention of this study remains with the message-side, and more specifically with the Qur'ānic parts therein that are exploited as an ideological backbone to bolster that apparently appealing jihadist doctrine.

Lastly, before reading the current study, it is important to bear in mind that what follows is not a vivisection of the Qur'ān itself, nor are our findings representative to all texts in the Holy Book of Islam. Quite the opposite: the source for this study was jihadist propaganda material by ISIS, and the isolated scrutiny of these verses is exactly the purpose of our study.

5.1.1 The Qur'ān and applying it for violence and online terrorist recruitment

Until so far, only a few studies looked systematically into the way of how online charismatic preachers or jihad-inspiring media utilize Islamic scripture. In a first qualitative analysis, Holbrook (2010) studied the Qur'ānic referencing in thirty different militant Islamist communication materials from different time periods, including modern adaptations of medieval works (e.g. ibn Taymiyyah), Soviet invasion-era books (e.g. Abdullah Azzam) and post 9/11 media (i.e. *As-Sahab by al-Qaeda)*. The focus was on the Āyāt, i.e. Qur'ānic verses, quoted by these sources in which acts of violence and fighting are explicitly promoted. The set of verses an-Nisā' 74-75 (Q4:74-75) appeared to be the most cited in the texts under study, together with Āyah al-Anfāl: 60 (Q8:60), al-Baqarah 190-191 (Q2:190-191) and the controversial Āyah of the Sword, at-Tawbah: 5 (Q9:5). The author argues that this is not surprising given the central dominance of grievances in militant Islamist narratives and the fact that these Āyāt stress a grievance-based violent response. Holbrook's analysis showed that these verses were truncated and tailored in an effort to serve a militant Islamist message to promote acts of terrorism. Holbrook's (2010) study concludes that the militant Islamist narrative that al-Qaeda and older Salafi-jihadist sources advance, is following a severely de-contextualized and more politically tailored application of the Qur'ān, which paradoxically violates the strict Salafist tradition in which a literal application of the Qur'ān is requested. Because Holbrook's findings (2010) were based on a rather limited sample, the method used was predominantly qualitative in nature, and the focus on propaganda material by al-Qaeda, now one of the major opponents of ISIS, it seems yet premature to assume that the same Qur'ānic referencing practices are copied in ISIS's communiqués.

Rather than examining what specific Qur'ānic verses or chapters ISIS used, Wagemakers (2015) studied how they claim legitimacy in Islamic traditions such as

the Caliph, the Caliphate and specifically Bay'ah [the pledge of allegiance to a ruler or Caliph]. Wagemakers (2015) examined what ISIS's ideologues and pro-ISIS scholars understand by the concept of Bay'ah to "Caliph" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and how other radical Salafi-jihadist critics respond to that. Based on an extensive analysis, the author concludes that the interpretation of Bay'ah by ISIS and its critics might be not too different from each other, but it does, however, fundamentally deviates from a classical interpretation of the concept within early Islam (Wagemakers, 2015).

In an effort to combine efforts in the abovementioned studies, a recent report by the Tony Blair Foundation (El-Badawy, Comerford, & Welby, 2015), examined both references to Islamic scripture and various moral and traditional concepts of the jihadi ideology. El-Badawy and colleagues (2015) studied this in a much broader sample than the studies above, including both al-Qaeda and ISIS media sources. Here, a first attempt was made to quantify findings of referencing the Qur'ān. One of the first findings that the authors point out, is that the Qur'ānic citations outnumber the Hādith references or other citations to other Islamic Scholarship. Second, in their sample of 114 propaganda sources of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, they found references to the Holy Book of Islam in exactly 50% of the cases. Specifically, the authors note the remarkable variety of different citations, as 63 unique Sūrahs were found. Somewhat in line with the findings of Holbrook (2010), the most prevalent Sūrah appeared to be al-Baqarah (Q2) in 15,6% of the cases. Furthermore, the jihadis seem to refer 10% of the times to Sūrah Āl 'Imrān (Q3), 7,2% to an-Nisā' (Q4), and 6,9% to al-Anfāl (Q8). Remarkably, in contrast to Holbrook's (2010) findings, Sūrah at-Tawbah (Q9) is less prevalent and only referred to in 5,9% of the times.

This discrepancy is potentially provoked by two fundamental differences between the two studies. First, whereas Holbrook (2010) investigates Qur'ānic referencing on an Āyah-level, El-Badawy and colleagues (2015) aggregated their findings on a Sūrah level. A difference in findings can then be expected as some references consist of a

few citations to many different Āyāt within one Sūrah while in other cases only one or a few Āyāt get cited many times, neglecting the rest of the Sūrah. An analysis on both levels seems therefore warranted in order to develop a more consistent understanding of Qur'ānic referencing. Second, both studies seem to use a sample of different sources. Not only are the source materials between the two samples fundamentally different, also within the samples the research subjects differ, as in both studies media outlets are selected that were released by different—sometimes ideologically opposing—groups. To overcome the barrier that findings might be affected by different levels of analysis and fundamental differences within the sample, it seems not implausible to conduct a study that (1) examines both references on an Āyah and on a Sūrah level, and (2) concentrates on only one propaganda outlet by one Salafi-jihadi group.

This brings us to the aim and research question of the current study. The main objective of our study is to examine in quantitative way whether ISIS is grounded in a cut-and-paste Islam and whether they utilize Islamic scriptures in an atomistic, truncated and tailored manner. Our main research question is twofold. First, based on the anthology of the studies conducted so far, it remains somewhat underexplored what the dominant ideological and Qur'ānic foundations are that ISIS uses to build its jihadist doctrine on. RQ 1 aspires to bridge this gap in the literature:

RQ1: What are the dominant Qur'ānic references in ISIS' online disseminated jihadist doctrine?

Second, to the best of our knowledge, there is only a limited understanding of how ISIS exactly cut, paste and specifically merge parts of Qur'ānic chapters in creating their own reading of Salafi-jihadist ideology. Therefore, we aspire to scrutinize how Qur'ānic chapters bundle together in ISIS's jihadist-inspiring media:

RQ2: How are the different Qur'ānic chapters related to one another based on their co-occurrences in Dabiq?

5.2 Method

5.2.1 Corpus

In Table 5.1, a summary can be found of the exact corpus that was used for the current study, showing the titles of the analyzed issues, the number of articles and words per issue, and the number of Qur'ānic references, in both absolute values and in proportion of the amount of words used in each Dabiq issue. As a more systematic-quantitative analysis of the matter seemed to be needed, the current study followed a quantitative content analysis approach, in which we combine quantitative content analysis with a social network analysis. For this, every single reference to the Qur'ān in Dabiq was registered. Each reference represented a quote or citation from an Āyah, or from a series of consecutive Āyāt, i.e. verses in a paragraph within a Sūrah. This process was not limited to the registration of the specific Āyāt and Sūrahs, it also enabled us to mine the verbatim textual content of the Qur'ānic quotes throughout all issues of Dabiq.

This method resulted in registering a total of 23,944 words, within 700 observed in vertbatim Qur'ānic references, of which 579 were unique Āyāt. For the purpose of our specific relational analyses, all Qur'ānic citations were aggregated from an Āyah-layer (i.e. paragraph) to their Sūrah-layer (i.e. chapter), resulting in n=72 unique Sūrahs.

5.2.2 Analyses

Given the diverse nature of our different research questions and the multi-layered structure of our data (i.e. Sūrahs and Āyāt), it is necessary to follow a funnel model approach for our analysis phase. This means that in two consecutive phases,

Issue	Title	Release date	# articles	# words	# Qur'ān citations (proportions)
Dabiq 1:	The Return of The Khilafah	July 5, 2014	21	9,838	9 (0.915)
Dabiq 2:	The Flood	July 27, 2014	20	11,704	14(1.196)
Dabiq 3:	A Call to Hijrah	August 31, 2014	23	12,983	11(0.847)
Dabiq 4:	The Failed Crusade	October 12, 2014	15	19,466	22(1.130)
Dabiq 5:	Remaining and Expanding	November 22, 2014	16	12,043	23(1.910)
Dabiq 6:	Al-Qa'idah of Waziristan: a Testimony from Within	December 30, 2014	13	26,367	24(0.910)
Dabiq 7:	From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone	February 12, 2015	23	33,276	77(2.314)
Dabiq 8:	Shari'ah Alone Will Rule Africa	March 30, 2015	19	28,151	58(2.060)
Dabiq 9:	They Plot and Allah Plots	May 21, 2015	25	30,447	79(2.595)
Dabiq 10:	The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men,	July 13, 2015	22	40,953	67(1.636)
Dabiq 11:	From the Battle of al-Azhab to the War of Coalitions	September 9, 2015	24	32,132	58(1.805)
Dabiq 12:	Just Terror	November 18, 2015	25	39,522	39(0.987)
Dabiq 13:	The Rafidah: From Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal	January 19, 2016	18	29,069	40(1.376)
Dabiq 14:	The Murtadd Brotherhood	April 13, 2016	15	35,114	70(1.994)
Dabiq 15:	Break the Cross	July 16, 2016	15	44,977	109(2.423)
	Total =		294	406,042	700

Table 5.1: Corpus description Dabiq 1 - 15

the analyses will depart from a broad contextual exploration of the Sūrahs towards a more detailed textual examination of the Qur'ānic Āyāt in Dabiq. The coding process took place in *NVivo 10* for Windows and all basic statistical analyses were performed in *IBM SPSS Statistics 24* for Windows. In this phase also data cleaning and data-aggregation took place. To explore a network of interrelations between the Qur'ānic references in Dabiq, a social network analysis was performed on the aggregated data. For the visualization and mapping of the network, we used *Gephi,* an open source software package that enables network visualization and manipulation (Bastian, Heymann, & Jacomy, 2009). *Gephi* is primarily used for force-directed graph drawing by means of network data transformation into a visual map (Jacomy, Venturini, Heymann, & Bastian, 2014), and is consistently applied in social scientific research contexts (Imani Giglou, Ogan, d'Haenens, & Van Gorp, 2014). In the second phase, we broke down our data into the different Āyāt that are cited in Dabiq. In this phase of the study we analyzed the in verbatim texts from the Qur'ān and the extent to which they can be contextualized historically and in ISIS' discourse.

5.3   Results

Given the varying levels of aggregation in our analysis, we will first discuss our findings on an aggregated Sūrah level, with a focus on the dominance of the different chapters from the Qur'ān and the extent to which they fit together. Furthermore, we

will also devote attention to the contextualization of the referenced chapters within the broader ideological framework of the Qur'ān. Second, we will concentrate more on the Āyah-level and on some of the language and lexical elements of the Islamic scriptures that ISIS refers to in Dabiq.

5.3.1 Sūrah level

At first sight, it seems that Qur'ānic citations are paramount throughout the Dabiq series. In exactly 700 instances, scattered across fifteen online magazine releases and almost 300 articles, ISIS refers to one or more consecutive Āyāt and/or Sūrahs. A more detailed look at the data, however, shows us that the religious foundations in Dabiq consist of a rather thin and fragile layer. Specifically, the 700 Qur'ānic references consists of a total amount of 23,944 words. Taking into account the total number of words in Dabiq (n=406,042 words), it seems that the verbatim Qur'ānic quotes take up only 6% of the total amount of text. Of course, it should be noted here that ISIS not only leans on Qur'ānic scripture, but also refers to Hādith collections or Salafi scholars. However, as recent studies illustrated, these sources are subordinate to the Qur'ānic referencing in jihadi media outlets (e.g. Frissen & d'Haenens, 2017).

In the same vein, we might falsely conclude that the amount of Qur'ānic references increases over time (see Table 5.1, and that therefore Islamic texts become increasingly important for the Dabiq producers. However, controlling for the total amount of words in each issue, citations appear to vary rather randomly from issue to issue with no statistical significant increase over time (β= 0.090, p>0.10, R^2=0.668). Nevertheless, given the fact that these citations are used instrumentally to justify acts of inhumanity, it seems necessary to inspect the specific Qur'ānic texts that ISIS refers to in more depth.

5.3.1.1 Qur'ānic Surahs in Dabiq

ISIS's selection of Sūrahs appears to vary only slightly and seems to be extremely conscientious if we look at the data at an aggregated chapter level. More specifically,

we found that a little bit less than 50% of all Qur'ānic citations in Dabiq refers to only 6 different Sūrahs (see Table 5.2).

Top 10	Title	Place or chapter in the Qur'ān	Period	Frequency of references in Dabiq	Proportion of Total Citations	Cumulative proportion
1	At-Tawbah	Q 9	Medinan	76	10.9	10.9
2	Al-Baqarah	Q 2	Medinan	66	9.4	20.3
3	Āl 'Imrān	Q 3	Medinan	63	9.0	29.3
4	An-Nisā'	Q 4	Medinan	61	8.7	38.0
5	Al-Anfāl	Q 8	Medinan	42	6.0	44.0
6	Al-Mā'idah	Q 5	Medinan	38	5.4	49.4
7	Al-A'rāf	Q 7	Meccan	21	3.0	52.4
8	Al-Ahzāb	Q 33	Medinan	21	3.0	55.4
9	Al-An'ām	Q 6	Meccan	21	3.0	58.4
10	Al-Hashr	Q 59	Medinan	14	2.0	60.4
	Total =			294	406,042	700

Table 5.2: Top 10 surahs that are cited throughout all 15 Dabiq issues

Going even a bit further into detail, the majority of the Sūrahs that ISIS cites (68,73%) refer to Medinan chapters in the Qur'ān. That is, these Sūrahs were revealed by Allah after the Prophet Muhammad had performed his Hijra from Mecca to Medina (i.e. the exodus of the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims to Medina in order to escape persecution in Mecca (Maher, 2016, p. 39)). The Sūrahs and Āyāt that were revealed to the Prophet in Mecca are known as "Meccan", while the ones that were revealed in Medina are know as "Medinan". A small selection of Sūrahs are compiled with both Meccan and Medinan Āyāt. According to a Western classification of the Qur'ān, i.e. Nöldeke's Chronology of the Qur'ān (Donner, 2011), 24 out of the 114 Qur'ān chapters are Medinan, while the most of the Qur'ān was revealed in the Meccan period. In general, much of the material at the end of the Qur'ān is from the Meccan era, whereas much of the long Sūrahs at the beginning were revealed in the Medinan era. This seems important, given the fact that the Sūrahs and verses that are revealed to the Prophet in the Medinan period are fundamentally different from the Sūrahs that were revealed in the Meccan period. It is self-evident that during the Meccan period the Qur'ān introduces to the small Muslim community the basic belief system of Islam, with themes such as the existence of God, the unity of God (tawhid), the People of the Book (Ahl Kitab), the prophethood of Muhammad, and the belief in resurrection after death (Abdel Haleem, 2005 : xvii - xviii). However, after the Hijrah, and thus during the Medinan period, other subjects will be added. Medinan Sūrahs

deal more with (1) civil, criminal and international law, (2) the command to fight against the enemies, and (3) jihad rulings (Holbrook, 2010).

If our aim was to explore which of these Qur'ānic passages ISIS prefers, it is necessary to study which Sūrahs they quote and which parts they rather avoid. In general, the Qur'ān consists of 114 unique Sūrahs that are divided into 6,236 verses or Āyāt (Bergsträßer & Pretzl, 1926; Nöldeke, 1860). As mentioned above, Dabiq cited 72 different Sūrahs and 579 unique verses. Taking the verses as a reference, this means concretely that about 9.28% of the complete Qur'ān is used as a religious foundation in Dabiq's discourse. In other words, roughly more than 90% of the Qur'ān texts seems not fit for ISIS's interpretation of Islam. Hereby, the Dabiq editors have a tendency to predominantly quote the first half of the Qur'ān and therein specifically the first 10 chapters (see also table 4) , which are predominantly Medinan. Aiming to visualize ISIS's selective Qur'ānic referencing, Figure 5.1 shows all the Sūrahs in the Qur'ān and the frequency in which they appear in Dabiq.

The graph vividly demonstrates that the distribution of the Sūrahs that are structurally paraphrased in Dabiq is strongly skewed to the left or to the first set of chapters in the Qur'ān. This can be partly explained because Sūrahs that are organized in the beginning of the Qur'ān in general tend to be revealed in the Medinan period. Given this indication of selectivity, it seems appropriate to explore which Sūrahs attract the most attention and to what extent they cluster together. For this we will perform a network analysis.

5.3.1.2   Network analysis of the Sūrahs

In order to analyze which Sūrahs are the most dominant and how these different Qur'ānic chapters cluster together, we need to perform a network analysis. For this part of the study we used the open-source software package *Gephi* version 0.9.1 (Bastian et al., 2009). For our analysis, we specifically wanted to investigate how one Qur'ān citation relates to another, given their co-occurrence in Dabiq articles. A first step is to create an adjacency matrix that enables us to summarize relationship
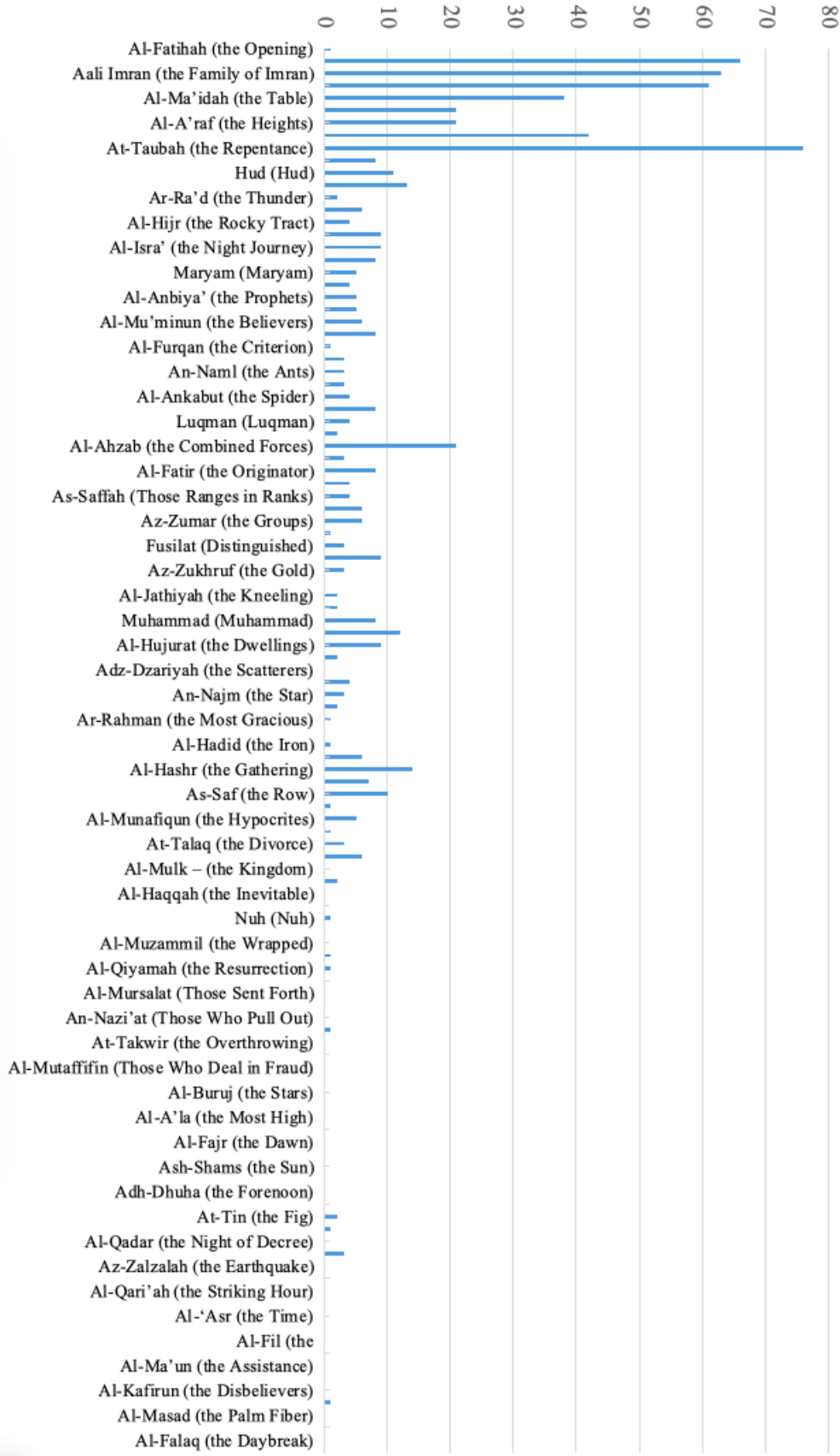
Figure 5.1: Histogram with all Qur'ānic referencing in Dabiq. The vertical axis represents the frequency in which a specific surah is found in the data. On the horizontal axis, the full Qur'ān is plotted. Note: Not all 114 surahs are mentioned by name. However, every tick mark represents one surah.

data in a symmetric network for the identification of corresponding data elements. Since we are only focusing on relationships and co-appearance and not on ties with directed associations, we will treat the relations in our data as undirected. Then, *Gephi* will translate the adjacency matrix into its primary data elements which are the actors, called "nodes", and ties, called "edges". Together these nodes and edges are used to build up a "system", or a network of relations. In our case, we created a network of Sūrah quotes, in which every Sūrah becomes a node and every interconnection between the Sūrahs becomes an edge. All edges will be weighted according to the strength of it, which is the frequency in which some Sūrahs are appearing together, i.e. the more often two Sūrahs appear together, the stronger the edge will be in the system. After filtering out noisy data and the not-connected nodes in the network, *Gephi i*dentified 71 nodes, each corresponding to one unique Sūrah, and 918 edges.

For the lay-out of our network, we used the Force Atlas 2 algorithm which is the default lay-out algorithm in Gephi (Jacomy et al., 2014). Just like other force-directed algorithms, e.g. Fruchterman-Reingold (Fruchterman & Reingold, 1991), Force Atlas 2 aims to simulate a "real life" physical system in which nodes that are interconnected are drawn as close as possible to each other, while at the same time, the edges should overlap each other as little as possible. To do this, nodes simulate particles that have electrical loadings that will initially repel each other in the case that they come too close. The edges function as springs that organically attract related nodes according to the strength of their relation. Additionally, for the visualization of our final network model, we used the LinLog mode. In this mode, Gephi lays out a network structure according to the Force Atlas 2 algorithm but places the nodes in the most readable positions (Jacomy et al., 2014). For this, the placement of the nodes is dependent on the community structure of the network. In other words, nodes that hold stronger associations are gravitating more closely to one another. In figure 5.2 the network graph of interrelated Sūrahs in Dabiq can be found.

Figure 5.2: Network graph of interrelated Sūrah references in ISIS's Dabiq magazine. Size of the nodes varies according to their degree centrality. The color indicates the communities according to the modularity class: Red = (predominantly) Meccan Sūrahs; Blue = (predominantly) Medinan Sūrahs; Yellow = Less often cited Sūrahs, from both Meccan and Medinan periods

On the basis of this analysis, we were able to examine which Sūrahs are the most central in the network and to what extent they are interconnected with each other. To do this, we needed to (1) mark every node's importance in the total system, by measuring its degree centrality, and (2) cluster groups of stronger related nodes together into different communities, by using modularity statistics.

Most central Sūrahs in Dabiq

We used the degree centrality to adapt the size of the node. This measure is based on the number of connections, i.e. edges, that one node has with other nodes in the network. Given the fact that we study co-occurrences, our graph is undirected and therefore the in-degree and the out-degree measures are equal. Based on the degree centrality, sizes vary according to the amount of edges: the more edges a node possesses, the higher its centrality in the network, and accordingly, the bigger its size. In the current case, larger Sūrah nodes in the graph are the most central vertices in the network as they hold the most connections with other Sūrahs in Dabiq. As can be seen in our network (Figure 5.2), the Sūrahs with the highest degree centrality in the network are al-Baqarah (Q2), an-Nisā' (Q4), and at-Tawbah (Q9), and Āl 'Imrān (Q3).

Sūrah al-Baqarah

When we take a more detailed look, it appears that the node in the network with the highest degree of connections is Sūrah al-Baqarah (Q2; translation: "The Cow"). Sūrah al-Baqarah is the second most cited Qur'ān chapter in Dabiq, (after at-Tawbah), but it is the most central Sūrah in the network, co-appearing with other Sūrahs in 60 instances. As already pointed out by El-Badawy and colleagues (2015), al-Baqarah is an essential justification instrument in many jihadi propaganda outlets. In Islam, al-Baqarah is one of the most important Sūrahs given its extensive discussion of other religions, as labeled in the Qur'ān as "the People of the Book". This matter is mainly discussed from a theological

perspective, with themes such as the duration of one's stay in Hell and the status of angels. The important rituals that are mentioned in this Sūrah include the pilgrimage, the Ramadan, and the direction to Mecca (*qiblah*). For Salafi-jihadists, this Sūrah is considered to be one of the most inclusive chapters in the Qur'ān, as it deals with much of the practices of what they might consider 'the pure Islam', such as Monotheism, life after death, the stance towards Jews and hypocrites, and jihad (Ayatullah Kamal Al-hajj Sayyid Imani, 1991a). Also in the current data, al-Baqarah is applied within a broad range of different contexts. Among the 66 cited Āyāt, about 25% of them deals with God's existence, *tawhid* [unity of God], and prophethood. Thirty-three percent discusses the topic of the People of the Book and the *munafiqun* [hypocrites]. Another 25% focuses on *amel-i salih* [good deeds and practices].

Despite the richness of different topics in al-Baqarah, the few verses that deal with fighting are the ones that ISIS cites most frequently. Āyah 194 and Āyah 217 are among the top referred al-Baqarah Āyāt—they appear both three times in Dabiq. These verses discuss a rather legal framework in which fighting becomes more socially and morally acceptable. As can be read in here in Q2: 217:

> *"They ask you about the sacred month – about fighting therein. Say, "Fighting therein is great [sin], but averting [people] from the way of Allah and disbelief in Him and [preventing access to] al-Masjid al-îaram and the expulsion of its people therefrom are greater [evil] in the sight of Allah. And fitnah is greater than killing." And they will continue to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able. And whoever of you reverts from his religion [to disbelief] and dies while he is a disbeliever – for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally."*
>
> (Sūrah al-Baqarah, Q 2:217)

Besides that, they are more symbolically quoted to legitimize acts of killing as an answer to oppression, which is more in line with the historical meaning behind them (see for an extensive discussion e.g. Lawrence, 2017).

The āyah was revealed during the early period of Islamic history—a time in which Muslims were continuously persecuted and met with violence. After fleeing to Medina, the Meccan enemies barred Muslims from their hajj [pilgrimage] to the Meccan *al-Masjid al-Haram* [the Sacred Mosque] (Fachrodin, 2015; Maher, 2016). Up to this time, actively engaging in violence was only justified as a defense, yet strictly forbidden in the sacred month (Lawrence, 2017). However, when in December 623 followers of the Prophet disobeyed this divine principle and killed members of a Meccan caravan, Muhammad felt responsible for their deeds and turned towards God for guidance. As described by Lawrence (Lawrence, 2017), Allah replied in a "clear and compelling" fashion by revealing the abovementioned Āyah. This verse is also considered as one of the first revelations in which a Muslim-initiated warfare became justified. More specifically, the oppression or the hindrance of Muslims from their way to God becomes worse than killing. It is exactly this meaning that is attributed to the verse in a contemporary context. Q2: 217 is quoted to legitimize acts of killing in comparison with oppression. For example in the feature article in Dabiq issue 7, *"The Extinction of the Grayzone"*, al-Baqarah: 217 is used to justify the existence of the Caliphate, and specifically, the sacrificial violent operations of the mujahidin against "the crusaders" and "the West", who—in ISIS's eyes—oppress Muslims in the Middle East.

Furthermore, the Dabiq editors cited al-Baqarah mainly in combination with other Qur'ānic chapters (in 60 out 66 cases (90.9%)). As can be seen in Figure 5.2, al-Baqarah holds not only many fine edges with smaller nodes in the network, it also holds thicker relations with the other top-ten Sūrahs, such as at-Tawbah, Āl 'Imrān, and an-Nisā'. The connection appears to be the strongest with this latter Sūrah. More concretely, our data shows that an-Nisā' and al-Baqarah appear

alongside each other in twenty-one occasions. In other words, for every three references to al-Baqarah, the Dabiq media team also refers to Sūrah an-Nisā'. To explain this finding, we need to take a closer look at what parts of this Sūrah are particularly cited.

Sūrah an-Nisā'

Just like Sūrah al-Baqarah, Sūrah an-Nisā' (Q4) ("The Women"), deals with a broad diversity of topics. An-Nisā' is one of the fundamental Sūrahs for Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) because of its extensive attention devoted to legislative aspects. Additionally, the Sūrah deals with the topic of war and peace and provides specific information on how Muslims should act during both of these states. Just as in many of the other Medinan Sūrahs, as in An-Nisā', the situation of the people of the Book and hypocrites (munafiqun) is largely covered. For example, one of the topics in this Sūrah is the vision of Islam on Christianity and specifically on the crucifixion of Jesus (Q4: 157), which is also discussed in the ISIS magazine (Issue 5, *"Yahya: Lessons From A Shahid"*, p. 4). In Dabiq, the most recurring an-Nisā' citations refer to those parts of the chapter that discuss particularly the vigilance and defense against Jews and hypocrites. Based on our data, 37.7% of all an-Nisā' quotes in Dabiq refers to Āyāt 73 - 100 and 24.6% to Āyāt 136-175. According to the Tafsir of Maududi (2006), these two groups of Āyāt deal in particular with encouraging Muslims to fight for the cause of Islam.

Sūrah at-Tawbah

The most-cited Sūrah in Dabiq, however to a lesser extent connected to other Sūrahs in the network, is at-Tawbah ("Repentance"). The major part of this Medinan Sūrah contains verses on topics such as (1) the conduct of war, (2) the relationship with opponents during peacetime, and (3) the fight against the idolatrous Arabs and the "People of the Book". All of these topics are recurrent themes in Dabiq. Another explanation for why Dabiq regularly leans on at-Tawba,

is because of the Āyāt on jihad, and legal issues for warfare, such as "Āyah of the sword" (Q9: 5), which is the most-cited at-Tawbah verse. In the next section we will discuss this Āyah more in detail.

Other Sūrahs

Finally, not all top-ten Sūrahs are equally connected, i.e. equally central components, in the network. For example, despite the fact that the Sūrahs such as al-Hashr (Q59; "The Exile") or al-Anfāl (Q8; "The Bounties", or "Spoils of War") are one of the most-cited ones in Dabiq, they are only to a limited extent connected with other vertices in the network. In other words, the visualization of the data shows that ISIS has a clear tendency to cite a subset of the more prevalent Sūrahs rather in isolation. Or else, if they are cited in combination, they are flanked by only a small group of other Sūrahs. A good illustration of this can be found in the differences between the uses of Sūrah al-Anfāl (Q8) and of Sūrah Hūd (Q11; "Hūd" [name of the prophet]). Whereas al-Anfāl (Q8) appears in Dabiq forty-two times, Hūd is only cited eleven times. In the network, however, it can be clearly seen that Sūrah Hūd (Q11) has a larger node and thus has a higher degree centrality than al-Anfāl. This suggests that a frequently cited Sūrah like al-Anfāl can be used in a given Dabiq article as the only reference to the Qur'ān, without being surrounded by other Sūrahs. In contrast, Sūrah Hūd is cited four times less frequently, but if it is cited, it will be alongside other Qur'ānic references. In the context of our central research question, this finding seems important. However, an analysis on a more detailed Āyah-level is necessary in order to unravel why some Sūrahs, such as al-Anfāl, are more likely to be mentioned exclusively. In the next section of this paper, we will consider this more concretely.

Clusters of Sūrahs in Dabiq

In order to develop an in-depth understanding of groups of Sūrahs that are more strongly related to one another, we identified the different communities in the network with different colors. To distinguish between clusters, we used the

modularity class tool in *Gephi*. Modularity is a method based on the concept of collective proximity to structure (or cluster) the data into communities (Jacomy et al., 2014). Following the modularity algorithm, a community is composed when the modularity, or the collective proximity, of the relations between the nodes within a group is higher than the modularity *outside* of the group (See for a more extensive discussion of the matter, Newman 2006)). As can be seen in Figure 5.2, we were able to identify significantly three clusters in our Sūrah network, that can be roughly organized as (1) central, strongly interconnected Sūrahs from the Meccan period, (2) central, strongly interconnected Sūrahs from the Medinan era, and (3) more isolated Sūrahs from either one of these two periods.

Cluster of Meccan Sūrahs

First, we identified the red community, labeled as the "Meccan cluster" (40,28% of the nodes) because majority of the dominant Sūrahs in this cluster were revealed in the Meccan era. This cluster is overwhelmingly comprised with Sūrahs that refer to several Islamic prophets, such as Hūd (Q11; "Hūd"), Ibrahim (Q14; "Abraham"), Yunus (Q10; "Jonah"), Yusuf (Q12; "Joseph") and, in the smaller nodes, Nuh (Q71; "Noah"). However, the most central node in this cluster, al-Ar'af (Q7; "The Heights"), with 21 appearances in Dabiq, is not explicitly referring to a Prophet. Nevertheless, a closer inspection of the topics within this Sūrah shows that this finding is logically explainable. The principal subject in Sūrah al-Ar'af is considered to be the divine message of God and in particular the warning of rejecting it (Maududi, 2006). The Sūrah's main theme is about obeying the messenger(s) of God. Many verses in this chapter deal with events and the lives of many well-known prophets, such as Nuh and Hūd.

Cluster of Medinan Sūrahs

Second, the modularity algorithm identified the blue community, or the "Medinan cluster" (36,11% of the nodes). In contrast to the red cluster, nearly all central

Sūrahs in this cluster are revealed to the Prophet in the Medinan era. In this group, the most frequently quoted Sūrahs in Dabiq, i.e. al-Baqarah (Q2), at-Tawbah (Q9), an-Nisā' (Q4) and Āl 'Imrān (Q3) cluster together in this group. We found two main reasons of Dabiq's preference for these Medinan Sūrahs and why they are tied together in this cluster.

First, these Medinan Sūrahs are complementary to each other given the similarity of the topics they deal with. This is specifically the case for their attention devoted to other religions, such as Judaism and Christianity, also called "the People of the Book". Al-Baqarah is one of the most important Sūrahs considering this topic with its extensive discussion of the history of the Children of Israel. Similarly, Sūrah Āl 'Imrān deals with the history of the Christians such as the birth of Jesus, his miracles, and his relationship with the apostles. Sūrah al-Mā'idah discusses the normalization of relations with the People of the Book, for example marriage and treaties with them. Lastly, in Sūrah an-Nisā' a new category is introduced which is called the hypocrites (munafiqun) and a great deal of the Sūrah devotes attention to Muslims' relations with this group. Consequently, these typical Medinan topics, such as the stance towards the People of the Book, the Children of Israel and the munafiqun are very present in all Dabiq issues.

Second, these Sūrahs contain various rituals and legal prescriptions concerning the pilgrimage, lawful foods, intermarriage, ritual purity, family relations, and moral issues of cowardice, hypocrisy and worldly attachment. In Dabiq, moral issues of cowardice and worldly attachment, God's reward and trust, are cited in almost every single article by giving reference to the Qur'ān.

Nonetheless, even though this cluster is marked by a rich diversity of fundamental ideological and spiritual concepts, the passages on international relations, the "rules of engagement" in the context of battles and in which fighting with non-Muslims are the main themes appear to be the crucial reason for why these Sūrahs are tied to each other, and to other, less central nodes, such as al-Anfāl (Q8), al-Ahzāb (Q33) or al-Munāfiqūn (Q63).

Cluster of less prevalent Sūrahs

Third, the yellow community (23,61% of the nodes), or the "cluster of less prevalent Sūrahs" comprised of Sūrahs that are less frequently cited in Dabiq and are more weakly connected to other Sūrahs. In this community there are Sūrahs from both Medinan and the Meccan period, with the latter outnumbering the former just a little bit. Rather than the period of revelation, this cluster is marked by the fact that these Sūrahs are less prevalent in Dabiq, and therefore also less connected with other nodes in the network. The nodes that are more connected in this cluster, such as al-Isra, az-Zumar, and al-Hajj, appear in Dabiq writings equally along both Medinan and Meccan Sūrahs.

This might be the case because the chapters in this cluster deal with both Medinan and Meccan themes. For example, Sūrah al-Hajj (Q22) is known to possess both Medinan as well as Meccan characteristics as it is allegedly revealed around/during the Hijrah (Maududi, 2006). A first exploration shows that the quotes from this Sūrah in Dabiq seem to cover largely the topic of submission to Allah and that Allah will reward the True Believers while punishing those who humiliate Him. Clearly, this is a theme that is more straightforwardly applicable in different types of narratives and contexts in Dabiq. When taking the historical background into account, however, al-Hajj seems to be also a symbolic Sūrah for the ISIS-editors. According to Maududi (Maududi, 2006) al-Hajj is a unique Sūrah in the sense that it contains verses that are revealed to the Prophet directly after the Hijrah. After establishing a community of Muslims in Medina, Prophet Muhammad had no other choice than to start fighting his Meccan enemies, who kept on pursuing him and the Muslims (Lawrence, 2017). As a consequence, a great proportion of the verses that were revealed in that period and are represented in al-Hajj deal with the ideological conflict between the believers and disbelievers and the result thereof. More fundamentally, in Sūrah al-Hajj God declared for the first time his permission for an armed conflict and allowed to wage war with

disbelievers (Maududi, 2006): *"Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory ."* (Q22:39) Accordingly, the shift to a more muscular narrative led scholars to believe that this part of al-Hajj can be identified as first Qur'ānic verse of Jihad (Maher, 2016). We doubt, however, the extent to what al Hajj is cited metaphorically in Dabiq. Closer inspection of the cited al-Hajj verses shows that they cite 4 unique ayat, but not in a single instance this specific verse mentioned. In order to explore the use and meaning of individual Sūrah passages, or Āyāt, more in detail, we will break our data down for analysis on the Āyah-level.

5.3.2 Āyah level

To develop a better understanding of why some of the Sūrahs are so dominant and how they are clustering together, we need to take a closer look at what ISIS exactly is citing. For this we will take a look at the more structurally quoted Āyāt or verses (see table 5.3). We want to discuss a few remarkable findings here in more detail.

	Surah	Place in the Qur'ān	Ayah	Period	Frequency
1	Al-Anfāl	Q 8	39	Medinan	12
2	Al-Mā'idah	Q 5	51	Medinan	11
3	Al-Hashr	Q 59	14	Medinan	9
4	At-Tawbah	Q 9	5	Medinan	9
5	Āl 'Imrān	Q 3	103	Medinan	8
6	Al-Anfāl	Q 8	73	Medinan	6
7	Al-Mā'idah	Q 5	54	Medinan	5
8	Al-Mujādila	Q 58	22	Medinan	5
9	An-Nisā'	Q 4	76	Medinan	5
10	An-Nisā'	Q 59	97	Medinan	5
11	At-Tawbah	Q 9	123	Medinan	5
12	At-Tawbah	Q 9	24	Medinan	5
13	Fātir	Q35	43	Meccan	5
14	Yūsuf	Q12	21	Meccan	5

Table 5.3: Summary of the most-quoted ayat in Dabiq. Only showing here those ayat that are cited five times or more.

First, as can be seen in Table 5.3, some of the findings from our Sūrah analysis differ from our Āyah analysis. Whereas al-Baqarah was the second most-cited Sūrah and the most centrally connected vertex in the network, it does not at all appear in the table with frequently cited Āyāt. The most cited al-Baqarah verses appeared only a maximum of three times in Dabiq. As our cut-off point for the Āyah-analysis is a minimum of five citations, al-Baqarah does not appear on the list above, indicating that it has a broader diversity of rather fewer Āyāt references. The top-three most frequently cited Āyah in Dabiq, however, belong to al-Anfāl 39 (Q8: 39), al-Mā'idah 51 (Q5: 51) and al-Hashr 14 (Q59: 14). In this section of the paper, we will focus particularly on al-Anfāl 39, given its dominance in the Dabiq narratives. With twelve citations, it is the most-cited Āyah. This Āyah is revealed to the Prophet shortly after the battle of Badr, which is regarded as one of the first major confrontations between Muslims and non-Muslims (Ayatullah Kamal Al-hajj Sayyid Imani, 1991b). As in this battle the Muslims were strongly outnumbered by the Meccan opponents, a victory for the Muslims seemed beyond the bounds of possibility. However, through divine intervention, 'and through God's Will only' (see Q3: 123), the Muslims were able to defeat their Meccan enemies and win the battle with great success and few losses. After the battle, and in a state of euphoria, Muhammad turns to God for guidance and Āyah al-Anfāl 39 was revealed.

> "And fight them until there is no fitnah and [until] the religion [i.e., worship], all of it, is for Allah. And if they cease – then indeed, Allah is Seeing of what they do." [1]
>
> (al-Anfāl, Q8:39)

In this verse, God addresses Muhammad and his followers to continue their military campaigning. As described in several Tafsir (e.g. Ayatullah Kamal Al-hajj

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[1] For all Qur'ānic references in this study we used the official English translation as published by Saheeh International (2004))

Sayyid Imani, 1991b), in Islam the objective of a military campaign has never been the occupation of lands, but the intent is rather the expansion of religion and the dissemination of God's word. Interestingly, it is exactly that interpretation that ISIS gives to the Āyah. For example, in Dabiq issue 10, in the feature article "The Law of Allah or the Laws of Men" (pp.), this Āyah is put forward more than five times in order to legitimize and emphasize the idea that their warfare is a religious obligation.

> *"[...] the obligation to fight the resistant parties, "This is because Allah said in His book, And fight them until there is no fitnah and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allah [Al-Anfāl: 39]. So, if some of the religion is for Allah and some of it is for other than Allah it becomes obligatory to fight them until the religion is for Allah alone."*

Diving a bit deeper into Dabiq, and the contexts in which this verse is referred to, shows that its selection could be indeed religiously inspired, but that also historical and geo-political elements may be at play.

> *Shaykh Abū Mus'ab az-Zarqāwī (rahimahullāh) said, "We do not perform jihād here for a fistful of dirt or an illusory border drawn up by Sykes and Picot. Similarly, we do not perform jihād for a Western tāghūt to take the place of an Arab tāghūt. Rather our jihād is loftier and more superior. We perform jihād so that Allah's word becomes supreme and that the religion becomes completely for Allah. And fight them until there is no fitnah and [until] the religion, all of it, is for Allah [Al-Anfāl: 39].*
> (Dabiq issue 8; "Foreword", pp.)

In this part, the Dabiq editors quote the ISIS founding father Abu Musab az-Zarqawi (Atwan, 2015), who undoubtedly seems to emphasize a religious

outcome, backed by a reference to al-Anfāl. However, through denying, and thereby emphasizing the Sykes-Picot agreement and the unjustly installed 'Western *tawāgīt* [false rulers]' he puts forward the implicit drivers behind their battle as well. In that sense, this seems to provide evidence for the idea that ISIS may not be entirely motivated by religion alone, but at least also partly by (geo-) politics. This then also explains the dominance of both al-Maida 51 [2] and al-Hashr 14 [3], who both deal with being vigilant towards the enemies of Islam and interrelations among them.

Second, more in line with our findings on a Sūrah level, the majority of the most cited Āyah in table 5 is from Sūrah at-Tawbah (Q9) (translation: "The Repentance"). At first sight, this might not be all too surprising, as it is known that at-Tawbah (Q9) is one of the most influential Islamic scriptures for opponents of jihad (Lawrence, 2017), and has been found to be a recurring reference in different types of jihadi communiqués (El-Badawy et al., 2015). Also in ISIS's Dabiq, about 11% of all Qur'ānic citations are alluding to this Sūrah (n=76). A more detailed inspection of the Sūrah in the Qur'ān and the way it is represented in Dabiq, reveals further proof for the assumption that ISIS's ideology is based on a cut-and-paste Islam. In the Qur'ān, at-Tawbah (Q9) consists of 129 verses. In Dabiq, we came across 42 references to unique at-Tawbah (Q9) verses. In other words, for every three at-Tawbah (Q9) verses in the Qur'ān, ISIS refers to only one Āyāt. Furthermore, it seems that Dabiq picks its Qur'ānic references very consciously. In Dabiq, Āyah 5 appeared to be the most-cited at-Tawbah (Q9) verse with 9 citations. The controversy about this verse ((Q9: 5)), that is sometimes referred to as the "Āyah of the Sword", comes from its summoning language for sacrificial violence against non-Muslims (Meyer, 2017) and aggressive word use in the case of waging war against polytheists and idolaters (Abdul-Rahman, 2009;

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[2]"O you who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you – then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people."(al-Maida; 51)

[3]"They will not fight you all except within fortified cities or from behind walls. Their violence [i.e., enmity] among themselves is severe. You think they are together, but their hearts are diverse. That is because they are a people who do not reason." (al-Hashr; 14)

Maher, 2016).

> *"And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."*
> (Sūrah at-Tawbah, Q9:5)

While the verse in its full form is quoted only in a few instances, Dabiq is predominantly referring to only a specific sentence, or to a carefully chosen snippet of the total.

> *"And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the mushrikīn wherever you find them."* (Dabiq 7, p. 20).

> *"Then kill the mushrikin wherever you find them."*
> (Dabiq 13, p.8)

> *"Then kill the pagans wherever you find them."*
> (Dabiq 15, p.63).

It cannot go unmentioned here that ISIS seems to have a strong preference for the most violent sentences of the verse, whilst leaving out the rest. The evidence of the fact that Qur'ānic citations are selectively paraphrased is of course not entirely new (e.g. Holbrook, 2010). However, it is noteworthy here that, independent of the empirical proof for selective and decontextualized referencing, the data further reveals that the interpretation of the verse by ISIS is not necessarily in line with alternative Salafi interpretations. A meaningful example for this can be found in

the following quote, where the Dabiq authors clearly show their interpretation of who they consider to be "them" in Q9: 5:

> *"Know well that our fight will continue until you are defeated and submit to the rule of your Creator, or until we achieve martyrdom. Allah has made our mission to wage war against disbelief until it ceases to exist, as he has ordered us to kill all pagans wherever they are found"*
> (Dabiq 15, p. 63).

In ISIS' interpretation, "them" is referring to all "disbelievers"—all non-Muslims, or to everybody within the category of the People of the Book, i.e. Jews and Christians. However, both Islamic and Salafist scholars have argued that this is too broad and that the historical context should be taken into account. This Sūrah was revealed around the year 9 AH (or 631 AD). In that time, Islam was rapidly expanding throughout Arabia. Out of fear for its power, Meccan opponents broke the peace treaty of Hudaibiyah, in order to actively wage war against Islam and to stop its expansion (see also Abdul-Rahman, 2009). According to former Islamist scholar Rashid Rida, and in sharp contrast to ISIS' interpretation, the "them" in at-Tawbah is not referring not non-Muslims but only to the opponents of that time who betrayed the Muslims by breaking a peace treaty and actively invited Islam to combat (Fachrodin, 2015). It is therefore crucial to emphasize here that the selectivity in which ISIS uses these verses, is not representative for the whole Qur'ānic statement about the People of the Book nor for the relations with non-believers.

Furthermore, from a linguistic perspective and concerning Dabiq's actual readership, a meaningful element in above mentioned Dabiq-quote (Q9:5) should be highlighted here. Research on audiences of online terrorist propaganda states that these jihadist media outlets, such as Dabiq, are used as recruitment tools, targeting young vulnerable likeminded extremists (Aly, 2017). On the other hand,

scholars argued that Dabiq is merely a form of costly signaling and impression management (see for example Novenario, 2016), for which its actual audience is rather political opponents in the West. In the abovementioned quote, this latter idea seems undoubtedly the case. The word use of "our fight", "you" and "we" shows clearly that the author of the article is conscious about the potential background of the reader of the online magazine. This form of communication provides further evidence for the assumption that Dabiq's main aim is not to directly target likeminded individuals, but rather to impress and intimidate opponents. In the current case, supported by its title "Breaking the Cross", the article seems to be addressing "Christians", or "crusaders" which in turn signify Western political powers.

5.4   Discussion and conclusion

Internet-based communication technologies and radical virtual communities have emerged as key instruments in the limitless distribution of a modified and truncated version of the Qur'ān that laid the foundation for a global jihadist doctrine—now known as *"Electronic Jihad"* (Rudner, 2017). ISIS is considered to be one of the key players waging an electronic jihad, reaching and mobilizing an unprecedented number of sympathizers worldwide to actively support their Caliphate and their interpretation of a Salafi-jihadist ideology. The current study set out to investigate to what extent ISIS is bolstering its jihadist ideology on a "cut-and-paste" or 'cherry picked' version of Islam. Our analyses showed that this was indeed the case. By means of an empirical and quantitative analysis we developed an innovative taxonomy of Qur'ānic chapters (i.e. Sūrahs) on basis of their appearance in Dabiq. We argue that the findings of the present study make a noteworthy contribution to the current state of the art by drawing three central conclusions: (1) a thin, Medinan-dominated religious layer, (2) de-contextualization and Āyah mutilation, and (3) clustered versus exclusive mentions.

Thin, Medinan-dominated religious layer.

Our data seems to confirm the assumption from previous studies by Holbrook (2010) and El-Badaway and colleagues (2015) that ISIS is exploiting Qur'ānic references extensively and vigorously. Nevertheless, it becomes apparent here that concentrating on both levels of analysis (i.e. Āyah level and aggregated Sūrah level) at the same time is imperative. Looking at the Sūrah level only, in a similar vein as El-Badawy et al. (2015), we would inadequately conclude that ISIS refers to a broad part of the Qur'ān, by citing 72 of the 114 unique chapters in the Qur'ān. However, after zooming-in on the different Āyāt that are cited in Dabiq, a much more nuanced picture comes to the surface. Of the 6,236 Āyāt in the Qur'ān, ISIS makes mention of only 579 unique Āyāt in Dabiq. This shows that only less than 10% of the Qur'ān is applicable to the ISIS discourse. As our analyses laid bare, the small selection of Āyāt that ISIS refers to were predominantly preoccupied with fighting for the cause of Allah and relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. Observed by this tremendously narrow connection with Islam, we argue that, paradoxically, a pure religious narrative is only a thin and fragile layer in ISIS' Salafi-jihadist doctrine.

A similar trend was found in the reference practice to Medinan Sūrahs versus Meccan Sūrahs, with the first significantly outnumbering the latter. Despite the fact that the majority of the Sūrahs in the Qur'ān were revealed to the Prophet in the Meccan period, ISIS seems to have a strong preference for the Medinan Sūrahs, that deal in comparison with Meccan Sūrahs more with (1) civil, criminal and international law, (2) the command to fight against the enemies, and (3) jihad rulings (Holbrook, 2010). Also, it is said that the language in the Medinan Sūrahs follows a more muscular approach (Maher, 2016). In this light, an interesting finding emerged from our network analysis. Based on the clusters that were exposed in our network analysis, it appears that, in Dabiq, Medinan Sūrahs are rather flanked by other Medinan Sūrahs than by Meccan Sūrahs, and vice versa.

This finding underlines once again the selective and narrow application of Qur'ānic passages, as themes within the Sūrahs that are revealed in the same time period might function as echo chambers to one another. These findings seem particularly important for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives that aim to develop counter-narratives. Given the fact that ISIS and its supporters are principally susceptible for Medinan themes and Sūrahs, we would encourage CVE-programs to come up with counter narratives that are also grounded in Medinan Sūrahs, and thus match the same ideological style, language and vigor as ISIS' religious claims (cfr. Hassan (2017)).

De-contextualization and Āyah mutilation

ISIS seems to structurally decontextualize Qur'ānic references. This insight might be not entirely new or surprising. Although, our analysis showed that the practice of Qur'ānic de-contextualization occurs on at least three levels. First, the context of early Islam in which the key foundations for the religion, amongst others the unity of God (Tawhid), were laid out (i.e. in the thirteen years of Meccan revelations (Abdel Haleem, 2001:5) is structurally neglected, by exploiting predominantly Sūrahs that were revealed in the Medinan period. Second, the most cited Qur'ānic chapters in Dabiq—Sūrah at-Tawbah (Q9), Sūrah al-Baqarah (Q2), Sūrah Āl 'Imrān (Q3), Sūrah an-Nisā' (Q4)—are known for their richness and extensive discussions of many different religious traditions. However, ISIS decontextualizes these Sūrahs by distilling only those parts that deal with warfare, believer-disbeliever relations, and the rules of engagement. Third, the quoted Āyāt are in most cases cited in a truncated and abridged manner—a practice that could be called Āyah mutilation. A strong and illustrious example can be found in the consequently mutilated version of Āyah of the Sword (at-Tawbah, Q9:5), whereby ISIS cites only the parts of the verse where the command to kill is given: "Then kill the mushrikin [polytheists] wherever you find them." Hereby, ISIS not only neglects the premise of waiting until "the sacred months have passed", that

precedes this passage in the Qur'ān, they also structurally cut out the part that follows in which leniency and 'goodwill' towards enemies is commanded: "But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful." In the same nature, the Dabiq-editors seem to conflate historical enemies unwittingly with contemporary opponents, in which they falsely converge the "them" in at-Tawbah to non-Muslims in general. However, as Fachrodin argues (Fachrodin, 2015), the "them" in this verse should be strictly interpreted within its historical background, and thus only as the Meccan opponents that actively sought to persecute Muslims.

This second main conclusion has important implications on two points. First, CVE-initiatives should invest in programs aiming to guarantee that ISIS-sympathizers and jihad supporters are conscious about this phenomenon of Āyah mutilation and Qur'ānic de-contextualization, as it goes against strict Salafist principles of literal application of the Qur'ān. If successfully addressed, this strategy could partly diminish the influence of an ideological factor in (online) violent radicalization processes. Second, the same atomistic reading of the same 10% Qur'ānic verses can be found in the rhetoric of anti-Islam critics and some (Western) politicians who pursue to advance populist and islamophobic sentiments (Fachrodin, 2015). Without arguing that these violent Qur'ānic verses, or religion in general, cannot be subject to criticism—they should be— it seems, nevertheless, about time that the other 90% of the Qur'ān's message is being heard. Both CVE-initiatives but also mainstream media can play an important role here by putting the mutilated verses back in context and by shifting attention to Qur'ānic messages that promote nonviolent responses. It seems not unusual to assume that this could contribute to a reduction of an anti-Muslim sentiments that seems so apparent in numerous Western societies (Ciftci, 2012).

Clustered vs exclusive mentions

Lastly, as the co-occurrence network pointed out, the most frequently cited Sūrahs are most of the time flanked by at least one reference to another Sūrah. This

method provided us with three clusters of often co-occuring Qur'ānic references. This, however, does not mean, that the most-cited Sūrah are also the most-networked Sūrahs. al-Anfāl (Q8) seems to be a perfect exemplary case for this. Even though it is among the most-frequently cited Sūrahs in Dabiq, the network analysis revealed that al-Anfāl is not among the most-connected Sūrahs. This can be explained by zooming-in on the Āyah-level. On basis of our data, we found that the most frequently cited Āyāt, were not necessarily in line with the most frequently cited Sūrahs. Whereas Sūrah al-Anfāl was only fifth in line of the most cited Sūrah, Āyah al-Anfāl 39 was the most prevalent Qur'ānic reference in Dabiq. This suggests that a frequently cited Sūrah like al-Anfāl, and specifically Āyah al-Anfāl 39, can be used exclusively and as the only reference to the Qur'ān in a given Dabiq article. This seems to be in contrast with Sūrahs that appear more embedded in a broader religious referencing pattern. Nevertheless, the fact that some Āyāt, like al-Anfāl 39, are put forward as the only religious claim in a vast amount of Dabiq articles bolsters clearly the assumptions that ISIS utilizes isolated and exclusive parts of the Qur'ān. Hence, based on the empirical findings as discussed in present study, it seems safe to conclude that ISIS deliberately cuts-and-pastes, tailors, and even mutilates the Qur'ān's message in favor of its own, instead of the other way around.

5.4.0.1 Limitations and directions for future research

In the present study, we consciously limited our scope in several ways. First, we studied only ISIS's references to the Qur'ān. This means that all data in this study have been scrutinized by looking purely through a Qur'ān-lens, thereby not taking any of the referred Hādith into account. We do acknowledge that this approach has its limitations as classical Qur'ānic exegesis states that the message of the Qur'ān cannot be correctly interpreted without studying the inter-textuality with the Hādith, and vice versa (Ayatullah Kamal Al-hajj Sayyid Imani, 1991a; Fachrodin, 2015). We do also acknowledge that the political atmosphere in Dabiq's writings,

in which Hādith and other Islamic scholars are also fundamental resources, possibly demands for a study in which a broader palette of Islamic scriptures is taken into account. For example, most political cleavages in Dabiq (such as conflicts with other major Islamist groups or madhabs [schools for fiqh—Islamic jurisprudence) are carried by references to both Qur'ānic source as well as to Hādith collections, underlining the assumption that Qur'ānic exegesis and Hādith are inseparable entities. However, we deliberately chose to not look at the interrelation between Hādith and Qur'ānic in Dabiq, because (1) the Qur'ān—the word of God—is the most central scripture in Islam and the Hādith collections are considered as secondary source for Islamic teachings (Fachrodin, 2015), (2) previous studies consistently showed that Hādith are far less mentioned in ISIS's discourses than Qur'ān (El-Badawy et al., 2015; Frissen & d'Haenens, 2017), leaving also in ISIS media the Qur'ān the most central Islamic reference point. This, however, does not take away the importance for future studies to investigate the inter-textuality between all Islamic scriptures in Salafi-jihadist communiqués.

Furthermore, at the time of analysis, the central ISIS media center replaced the Dabiq magazine series with a new collection under the name of Rumiyah (Wignell et al., 2017). Even though Wignell and colleagues (2017) argued that there are not many fundamental differences between the two magazine series, we limited our sample to only the fifteen Dabiq issues as the main corpus of attention. We did this because Dabiq is still considered to be one of the richest sources for ISIS' body of thought and ideology, especially during their glory days (Gambhir, 2014; Ingram, 2016b; Novenario, 2016). The magazine received significant scientific attention and has been seen as an essential stage platform for charismatic preachers to glorify the necessity for jihad (Gendron, 2017). Likewise, the magazine is held partly responsible for the recruitment, mobilization, and radicalization of English speaking jihadist sympathizers (Europol, 2016; Feddes et al., 2015), implying that it is a fundamental and urgent subject for scrutiny. This, however, doesn't take away the fact that the findings of the present study are

limited to Dabiq only, while it is likely that a different sample would come up with different results. Even though these findings can be clearly used as indications, we do not want to generalize and extrapolate our findings to Salafi-jihadist thought in general. Lastly, and perhaps the most crucial comment to bear in mind here, the current study is by far a 'vivisection' of the Qur'ān itself, nor are our findings representative to all the texts in the Holy Book of Islam.

We do, nonetheless, encourage future studies to conduct a similar analysis on a different sample, and suggest to specifically shift the locus of attention from Salafi-jihadist communiqués to anti-Islam materials or anti-Muslim discourses as main subject of analysis. It could be of unmeasurable importance to investigate whether the critics of Islam attack a faith on basis of a set of arguments that it for over 90% does not preach nor practice.

6 | 'Measuring our Measures': Violent Radicalization Scale

6.1 Introduction

There has been a worldwide upsurge in violent radicalization and polarization, leading to an increase in acts of terrorism and terrorism-related deaths (Alcala, Sharif & Samari, 2017; NCSTRT, 2015). In addition to premature mortality, violent radicalization results in other violent and nonviolent outcomes, including incidents of hate crimes and psychological distress in the general population and marginalization and exclusion of stigmatized minority groups (Bhui, Hicks, Lashley & Jones, 2012; Felton, 2004; Samari, Alcala & Sharif, 2018). To date, most of the research on this topic has focused on the small group of individuals who have already committed acts of violence (Horgan, 2008; Rousseau, Hassan & Oulhote., 2017; Silver, Simons & Craun, 2018). What is known about the trajectories and constellation of risk factors, such as sympathy for violent radicalization, varies depending upon specific cultural and social contexts (Hafez &

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The title for this chapter has been inspired by the title of Dr. Lennert Coenen's (2017) dissertation title: *"Questioning our Questions: A levels-of-analysis-perspective on meaning and measurement in cultivation research"* (KU Leuven)

Mullins, 2015; McGilloway, Ghosh & Bhui, 2015). In the past few years, there has been more emphasis on identifying populations vulnerable to extremist ideologies in order to develop effective prevention and intervention policies and programs (Bhui & Jones, 2017). While authors have warned about the potential risk of stigmatizing vulnerable populations through this process, it is important to critically assess the tools being used to identify at-risk populations.

6.1.1 Context of violent radicalization in Canada and Belgium

Since the early 2000's, concern over violent radicalization has grown in Europe and Belgium more specifically (Schmid, 2013). Belgium has the highest number of foreign terrorist fighters volunteering in Syria per capita in Europe (Neumann, 2015). Simultaneously, Belgium has witnessed an upsurge in right wing extremism and (neo-) Nazism (Pano, 2018). As a consequence, the topic of violent radicalization is a priority for policy makers, national security services, and scholars alike. In Belgium, the national security services announced a fundamental reorganization in the coming years (*known as 'plan VSSE2021'*) and for the year 2018 they have received a historically high budget (Bové, 2018). In addition, Belgian has developed a more comprehensive counterterrorism approach, focusing on more prevention of radicalization measures (Coolsaet & Renard, 2018).

In autumn 2014, two attacks perpetuated by lone actors in St-Jean (Québec) and Ottawa (Ontario) brought violent radicalization under the spot lights in Canada. Subsequently, the departure of youth to join ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) in 2015 and the deadly attack against a mosque in Quebec in 2017 highlighted the increasing attraction exerted by different extremist discourses (extreme right and religious) in Quebec youth. In 2016, the Quebec government launched a national plan of action to prevent the upsurge in radicalization leading to violence, mobilizing the health and the education sectors through a series of measures (Gouvernement du Quebec, 2017).

6.1.2 Assessing sympathy for violent radicalization

There is a need to develop assessments that accurately identify population trends in the earlier phase of the radicalization process in order to prevent violence. Researchers recently carried out a systematic review of the quality and psychometric properties of 30 instruments designed to assess attitudes, opinions, and readiness to engage in acts of radicalization and extremism (Scarcella, Page & Furtado, 2016). The two main findings from the review included: limited transparency around the description and development of instruments, and poor quality of assessment of their psychometric properties (Scarcella et al., 2016). Conducting research on violent radicalization requires considerable sensitivity and consideration of complex ethical issues. It is critical to balance the benefits of identifying risk factors at the population level for violent radicalization with the potential harm associated with developing profiles of at-risk groups that can lead to discrimination, marginalization, and an increase in social conflict (Aggarwal, 2018; Qureshi, 2016; Rousseau, Ellis & Lantos, 2017). As such, in this high-stakes field, it is imperative that instruments undergo rigorous and transparent psychometric testing.

6.1.2.1 Sympathy for Violent Radicalization Scale

In 2014, researchers in England created the Sympathy for Violent Radicalization Scale (SyfoR) to measure level of endorsement of violent actions by others, theorized as a pre-cursor and risk factor for future personal involvement in violence (Bhui, Warfa & Jones, 2014a). Rationale for developing the scale included that most previous measures were developed and used in Middle-East or Muslim majority countries and, in addition, measured commitment of the respondent to violent action as opposed to earlier stages of the radicalization process (Bhui et al., 2014a). Details on the development of the SyfoR can be found elsewhere and included consulting with both Muslim and non-Muslim researchers on how to best measure radicalization and conducting focus groups with Muslim individuals with

expertise in mental health, social science, and/or public health to identify indicators of sympathy for violent radicalization (Bhui et al., 2014a). A final 16-item scale of radicalization was piloted in English and designed to ask respondents about sympathies for or condemnation of 16 different actions that fall within a range of behaviors engaged in by extremists, including committing terrorist acts and violently protesting perceived injustices committed by police and government officials (Bhui et al., 2014a).

The SyfoR was subsequently used in an epidemiological study of Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and women ages 18-45 (Bhui et al., 2014a). Researchers used principal component analysis with an orthogonal rotation to identify a 4-factor model, with factors labeled Radicalization, Defensive violence, Going to another country to fight British troops, and Sending British troops to another country. The 11 items comprising the first two factors (Radicalization and Defensive violence) were used as the outcome measure in a study investigating the relationship between socioeconomic factors, self-reported health (both physical and mental), and sympathy for violent radicalization. The Cronbach's α of the 11-item scale was .89, with an inter-item covariance of .85 (Bhui et al., 2014a).

Since developing the scale, Bhui and colleagues have published a second study on sympathy for violent radicalization within the context of the British South-Asian Muslim diaspora using this assessment (Bhui, Everitt & Jones, 2014b). In addition, researchers in Belgium and Canada translated the assessment into Dutch and French and adapted the scale to be administered in surveys to Belgium and Quebec youth and young adults (Blinded for Review, 2018). These surveys provide the opportunity to assess the psychometric properties of the SyfoR in different cultural and linguistic contexts, as well as among groups of diverse, predominantly non-Muslim populations.

6.1.2.2 Current study

The aims of this study were to examine the factor structure of two adapted versions of the SyfoR, study the scale's internal consistency reliability and validity, and assess the association of the SyfoR with a second measure of violent radicalization, the Radicalism Intention Scale (RIS), in two samples of youth and young adults in Belgium and Quebec.

6.2 Method

6.2.1 Participants

Belgium. Participants included students at 38 secondary schools (including a school for adult education) in Flanders and Brussels Capital Region from 2017 to 2018. We recruited a total of 2218 young adults between 16 and 30 years old for the study. Only respondents that completed the SyfoR scale in Dutch are included in this analysis (n=2014).

Quebec. College students from twelve colleges in Quebec, Canada participated in the study from 2016 to 2017. Participants were eligible to participate if they were registered as full-time students in one of the participating colleges. Response rate varied greatly between the colleges, ranging from 2 to 19%. Only respondents between ages 16 and 24 who completed the SyfoR scale in French and had complete data on the SyfoR and Radical Intention Scales are included in this analysis (n=1364).

6.2.2 Measures

Sociodemographic characteristics. In both countries, participants self-reported sex, age and current religious affiliation. Sex is measured as a binary variable (female/male); religion is a categorical variable and included the following options: None, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Other. In Quebec,

age was measured as a categorical variable with options including ages 16–18, 19–21, and 22–24. In Belgium, age was measured as a continuous variable; for purposes of comparison with the Quebec sample, this was transformed into a categorical variable including the age groups 16–18, 19–21, and 22–30.

Sympathy for Violent Radicalization Scale (SyfoR). The SyfoR scale begins with the statement, *"To what extent do you approve or reject the following behaviors?"* Participants are then asked to document their level of support for different violent behaviors such as the use of violence in the context of political protest, and committing terrorist acts. For the current study the scale was adapted in three ways. Because the decision for the present cross-national psychometric comparison was only made after data collection was done in both countries, two of the three adaptations in Belgium and Quebec differ slightly.

First, researchers in both Belgium and Quebec dropped four items specific to British activity against violent radicalization to assess the reliability and validity of the scale in a different cultural context. That resulted in a final scale as used in Belgium containing 12 questions related to degree of sympathy or condemnation of acts of protest ranging from nonviolent to progressively more extreme acts.

Second, in Quebec, the final scale contained only nine of these 12 questions. Three questions related to extreme acts of violence (item four, six, and eight), including threatening to commit terrorist acts, committing terrorist acts, and use of suicide bombs to fight injustice, were removed per the recommendation of the ethics committee.

Third, while in Quebec the SyfoR scale was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1= *I disagree completely* to 7 = *I agree completely*). Belgian researchers opted for a 5-point Likert-scale (1=*Total disapproval* to 5 = *Total approval*). The rationale behind this decision was to avoid respondents' fatigue with a corresponding risk for drop-out (Birkett, 1986). Research indicates that data characteristics remain comparable between 5- and 7-point Likert scales (Dawes, 2008). In both settings, higher scores indicate greater sympathy for violent radicalization. The final French

and Dutch versions of the scale can be found in Appendices A and B.

Radicalism Intention Scale. The Radicalism Intention Scale (RIS) is a 4-item subscale of the Activism and Radicalism Intention Scales (ARIS) developed and validated by Moskalenko and McCauley (2009). The RIS assesses an individual's readiness to participate in illegal and violent behavior in the name of one's group or organization. For instance, one question asks about level of agreement with the following statement: *"I would continue to support an organization that fights for my group's political and legal rights even if the organization sometimes breaks the law"* (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009). The scale has been used by researchers in a variety of contexts with different populations and exhibits good psychometric properties (Ellis et al., 2016; Moyano & Trujillo, 2014). Because of the independently conducted data collection methods in Belgium and Quebec, participants in Belgium, rated their response on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Total disapproval to 5 = Total approval) while in Quebec, participants rated their response on a 7-point Likert scale (1= I disagree completely to 7= I completely agree). Higher total scores indicate more support for violent radicalization. Cronbach's alpha for the RIS was .79 in the Quebec sample, and .79 in the Belgium sample. French and Dutch versions of the scale can be found in Appendices C and D.

6.2.3 Procedures

In Canada, the study protocol and procedures were approved by the Ethics Committee [blinded for review]. In addition, the research ethics board of each of the twelve colleges gave approval prior to data collection. In Belgium, the research ethics board of [blinded for review] approved the study. Because the data collection in both countries was conducted independently and without prior intentions for a cross-national comparison, the briefing and informed consent differed slightly.

Belgium. Researchers administered the survey as an on-line questionnaire in schools. Participants were provided with a written briefing, stating the purpose and the nature of the study. To avoid priming respondents and biasing data, the briefing

simply stated that the survey was about their everyday lives and their thoughts about contemporary society. Additionally, the briefing statement accentuated that participants' anonymity was guaranteed and that they could discontinue at any time they wanted. Active informed consent was obtained before respondents could start the survey.

Quebec. Researchers uploaded the questionnaire on an intranet portal used by colleges to communicate with students and remained online for a month. The project was described as a research study on adaptation to the current social context in Quebec. Students were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that their responses would be confidential. Students consented to be part of the study via a consent form on the first page of the survey. Participants were able to discontinue the survey at any time. Contact information of research team and ethics board members were made available to answer any questions or concerns regarding the study.

6.2.4   Data analysis

Analysis of Belgium and Quebec data was done in tandem and included the following steps. First, we used univariate descriptive statistics to describe the samples and individual distributions of the responses on the SyfoR. Polychoric correlations were computed and served as the basis for factor extraction analysis as this approach leads to more accurate and robust estimation of associations than raw data (Holgado-Tello, Chacon-Moscoso, Barbero-Garcia & Vila-Abad, 2010). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed on the reduced polychoric correlation matrix data to identify factor structure. We used maximum likelihood and determined factors by assessing eigenvalues and visually inspecting scree plots. Criteria for a factor were: a latent construct with at least two indicators, an eigenvalue greater than 0 (given we were using matrix data), and appearance on the scree plot to the left of the "elbow" (DeVellis, 2012). Our choice of a latent construct having a minimum of two indicators was based on guidelines presented by Marsh, Hau, Balla and Grayson

(1998) given our large sample size. We rotated our model using oblique rotation. We then performed parallel analysis on the data to confirm factor structure obtained during EFA (Hayton, Allen & Scarpello, 2004). If individual items loaded onto a factor at or above .30, it was interpreted as indicating the item belonged within that factor. If an item loaded onto more than one factor at .30, it was allocated to the factor with the higher loading.

After extracting factors, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on the raw data using maximum likelihood with a Satorra-Bentler estimation to adjust for the non-normality of the data (Satorra & Bentler, 1994). We used a number of model fit indices, specifically the chi-square statistic, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the comparative fit index (CFI) to determine how well the model fit the study data. Criteria for model fit were: χ^2 p >.05, RMSEA <.10, SRMR <.08, and CFI >.90 (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011). In order to assess internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the total SyfoR scale. Internal consistency was considered satisfactory if Cronbach's alpha was $\geq$ .70 (DeVellis, 2012). Specific to the Belgium analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and test of internal consistency reliability was conducted on both the final 11-item SyfoR and the reduced 8-item SyfoR used in Quebec to facilitate comparisons between the two data sets.

Next, we used item response theory (IRT) to estimate two parameters (discrimination and difficulty) for a graded response model for scale items (Yen and Fitzpatrick, 2006). As item response theory assumes unidimensionality, IRT parameters were estimated separately for each SyfoR factor. Within the context of this study, higher discrimination parameter values indicated an item provides more information about the latent trait (sympathy for violent radicalization) compared to items with lower discrimination values. Since assessment items are polytomous, the discrimination parameter value indicates how accurately an item can detect which "interval" (less than the b-parameter for the score of 1, between the b-parameters of the scores 1 and 2, etc.) a theta score falls based on the rating on

the item. As there are seven response categories for the SyfoR used in Quebec, six item difficulty parameters were estimated for each threshold. In Belgium, four item difficulty parameters were estimated for each threshold. Item difficulty parameters can be understood as an indication of sympathy for violent radicalization. For example, the first difficulty parameter estimate (≥ 2) can be interpreted to mean that a person with the given theta value has a 50% chance of being rated a 1 on her or his answer versus scoring greater than or equal to 2. These graded response models were used to generate theta values (θ) for each factor. Analysis of Belgium data included the extra step of determining parameters and theta values for both the 11 and 8-item SyfoR.

In order to assess validity, we first estimated Spearman's correlation coefficients between SyfoR factors and the RIS (RIS theta (θ) values). Next, we used linear regression models to examine associations between SyfoR factor IRT scores (θ) and participant reported ratings on the RIS. When analyzing SyfoR 8-item scale data for Quebec and Belgium, we estimated four models, including a model with only the first SyfoR factor as the independent variable, a second model using only the second SyfoR factor as a predictor of RIS scores, a model with only the third SyfoR factor as a predictor of RIS scores, and a fourth model with all three factor scores. Analysis of the 11-item SyfoR scale data from Belgium included the estimation of five models. The rationale for this approach was the desire to investigate the direction and magnitude of association between the RIS separately for each factor, as well as assess the magnitude and direction of a combined model. In this way we compared the relative strength of the associations between each factor and RIS as well as determined if the model with RIS regressed on all SyfoR factors adds value above and beyond the use of any one factor.

Statistical analyses were conducted with STATA version 15 software (StataCorp, 2018). Polychoric correlations were obtained with the polychoric package (Kolenikov, 2018). Additional analyses were conducted using the ltm package in R (Rizopoulos, 2017).

6.3 Results

Characteristics of study participants can be found in Table 6.1. The Belgium sample was overall younger than the Quebec sample, with 88.0% participants between the ages of 16 and 18, compared to only 47.0% in Quebec. In Belgium, there were close to equal numbers of male and female participants, and 314 (15.6%) students identifying as Muslim. In contrast, the majority of respondents in Quebec were female (71.3%). In both countries, the majority of participants self-identified as either Christian or no religious affiliation.

Belgium (N=2014)		Quebec (N=1364)*	
	n (%)		n (%)
Gender			
Female	969 (48.1)		969 (71.3)
Male	1045 (51.9)		390 (28.7)
Age			
16-18	1773 (88.0)		641 (47.0)
19-21	224 (11.1)		574 (42.1)
22-30	17 (.8)	22-24	149 (11.0)
Religion			
None	1153 (57.3)		853 (64.3)
Buddhist	15 (.7)		5 (.4)
Christian	458 (22.7)		403 (30.4)
Hindu	9 (.5)		0
Jewish	4 (.2)		0
Muslim	314 (15.6)		41 (3.1)
Other	61 (3.0)		24 (1.8)
*Numbers do not total 1364 for each variable because of missing data			

Table 6.1: Sociodemographic characteristics of study participants in Belgium and Canada (Quebec)

As expected, the item-level distribution of responses in both samples was considerably skewed (see Table 6.2). In the Quebec data, 89.2% of participants responded *I disagree completely* to the question on organizing radical terrorist

groups without personally taking part. The second most skewed item was *"use of bombs to fight injustice,"* with 86.5% reporting that they completely disagreed with such activity. Responses in Belgium were most skewed for the three SyfoR items dropped in the Quebec study. A total of 78.2%, 75.5%, and 73.9% of participants responded *Total disapproval* to actions of committing terrorist acts, threatening to commit terrorist acts, and use of suicide bombs to fight injustice, respectively.

Table 6.2: Item level response distributions for SyfoR Scale in Belgium and Quebec

	Belgium (N=2014)		Quebec (N=1364)	
	Response Option	N (%)	Response Option	N (%)
(1) Take part in non-violent protest	Total disapproval	296 (14.7)	I disagree completely	51 (3.7)
	Disapproval	283 (13.1)	I disagree to some extent	18 (1.3)
	Neutral	693 (34.4)	I disagree a little	17 (1.3)
	Approval	399 (19.8)	I neither disagree nor agree	60 (4.4)
	Total approval	343 (17.0)	I agree a little	47 (3.5)
			I agree to some extent	212 (15.5)
			I agree completely	959 (70.3)
(2) Commit minor crime	Total disapproval	567 (28.2)	I disagree completely	705 (51.7)
	Disapproval	703 (34.9)	I disagree to some extent	275 (20.2)
	Neutral	571 (28.4)	I disagree a little	150 (11.0)
	Approval	127 (6.3)	I neither disagree nor agree	73 (5.4)
	Total approval	46 (2.3)	I agree a little	53 (3.9)
			I agree to some extent	80 (5.9)
			I agree completely	28 (2.1)

Table 6.2 – *Continued from previous page*

	Belgium (N=2014)		Quebec (N=1364)	
	Response Option	N (perc)	Response Option	N (%)
(3) Use violence	Total disapproval	804 (49.9)	I disagree completely	953 (69.9)
	Disapproval	633 (31.4)	I disagree to some extent	221 (16.2)
	Neutral	464 (23.0)	I disagree a little	78 (5.7)
	Approval	76 (3.8)	I neither disagree nor agree	45 (3.3)
	Total approval	37 (1.8)	I agree a little	21 (1.5)
			I agree to some extent	39 (2.9)
			I agree completely	7 (.5)
(4) Threaten to commit terrorist acts	Total disapproval	1,520 (75.5)		
	Disapproval	129 (6.4)		
	Neutral	295 (14.7)		
	Approval	40 (2.0)		
	Total approval	30 (1.5)		
(5) Organise radical terrorist groups with--out personally taking part	Total disapproval	1,124 (55.8)	I disagree completely	1217 (89.2)
	Disapproval	396 (19.7)	I disagree to some extent	76 (5.6)
	Neutral	408 (20.3)	I disagree a little	26 (1.9)
	Approval	53 (2.6)	I neither disagree nor agree	22 (1.6)
	Total approval	33 (1.6)	I agree a little	6 (.4)
			I agree to some extent	13 (1.0)
			I agree completely	4 (.3)
(6) Commit terrorist acts	Total disapproval	1,575 (78.2)		
	Disapproval	85 (4.2)		
	Neutral	285 (14.2)		
	Approval	37 (1.8)		
	Total approval	32 (1.59)		

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Chapter 6.3.0

Table 6.2 – *Continued from previous page*

	Belgium (N=2014)		Quebec (N=1364)	
	Response Option	N (perc)	Response Option	N (%)
(7) Use of bombs to fight injustice	Total disapproval	1,223 (60.7)	I disagree completely	1180 (86.5)
	Disapproval	273 (13.6)	I disagree to some extent	83 (6.1)
	Neutral	387 (19.2)	I disagree a little	32 (2.4)
	Approval	71 (3.5)	I neither disagree nor agree	34 (2.5)
	Total approval	60 (3.0)	I agree a little	13 (1.0)
			I agree to some extent	16 (1.2)
			I agree completely	6 (.4)
(8) suicide bombs to fight injustice	Total disapproval	1,488 (73.9)		
	Disapproval	150 (7.5)		
	Neutral	307 (15.2)		
	Approval	41 (2.0)		
	Total approval	28 (1.4)		
(9) Violence to protect family	Total disapproval	165 (8.2)	I disagree completely	230 (16.9)
	Disapproval	183 (9.1)	I disagree to some extent	297 (21.8)
	Neutral	795 (34.5)	I disagree a little	126 (9.2)
	Approval	574 (28.5)	I neither disagree nor agree	164 (12.0)
	Total approval	397 (19.7)	I agree a little	146 (10.7)
			I agree to some extent	298 (21.9)
			I agree completely	103 (7.6)
(10) Violence by organized groups to protect own race or religious group	Total disapproval	484 (24.0)	I disagree completely	536 (39.3)
	Disapproval	466 (23.1)	I disagree to some extent	309 (22.7)
	Neutral	750 (37.2)	I disagree a little	130 (9.5)
	Approval	235 (11.7)	I neither disagree nor agree	143 (10.5)
	Total approval	79 (3.9)	I agree a little	99 (7.3)
			I agree to some extent	124 (9.1)
			I agree completely	23 (1.7)

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Table 6.2 – *Continued from previous page*

	Belgium (N=2014)		Quebec (N=1364)	
	Response Option	N (perc)	Response Option	N (%)
(11) Violence to fight police injustice	Total disapproval	505 (25.1)	I disagree completely	609 (44.7)
	Disapproval	501 (24.9)	I disagree to some extent	257 (18.8)
	Neutral	680 (33.8)	I disagree a little	130 (9.5)
	Approval	215 (10.7)	I neither disagree nor agree	140 (10.3)
	Total approval	113 (5.6)	I agree a little	98 (7.2)
			I agree to some extent	84(6.2)
			I agree completely	46 (3.4)
(12) Violence to fight government injustice	Total disapproval	536 (26.6)	I disagree completely	634 (46.5)
	Disapproval	509 (25.3)	I disagree to some extent	254 (18.6)
	Neutral	673 (33.4)	I disagree a little	130 (9.5)
	Approval	199 (9.9)	I neither disagree nor agree	129 (9.5)
	Total approval	97 (4.8)	I agree a little	80 (5.9)
			I agree to some extent	94 (6.9)
			I agree completely	43 (3.2)

6.3.1 Factor structure

In the Quebec sample, both EFA with an oblique rotation and parallel analysis indicated a 5-factor model. Item one, "Taking part in non-violent protest," was dropped from the analysis for a few reasons. First, the item loaded separately onto its own factor; second, the item was poorly correlated with other scale items (see Table 3) and had an item-rest correlation of .15. Finally, removal of the item improved internal consistency reliability of the scale from .85 to .87. This makes sense, as strong positive endorsement of this item indicates support for nonviolent, as opposed to violent, action to support social and political change. Of the remaining four factors, one contained only a single scale item that loaded at .30 or higher, question number two, "Committing a minor crime." In addition to the factor failing to meet our criteria of having at least two items, question number two loaded stronger onto

one of the other three factors (.42 compared to .35). Researchers moved forward with a final, 3-factor model for further analysis.

In the Belgian sample, using the same 9-item SyfoR, the EFA with oblique rotation and parallel analysis also indicated a 5-factor model. Aligned with Quebec, we dropped item one from the scale based on the same criteria as in the Quebec analysis: the item loaded separately onto its own factor, it was poorly correlated with other scale items (see Table 6.3), and it had an item-rest correlation of .22. Additionally, the internal consistency reliability of the scale improved from .85 to .87 after removing item one. Of the remaining four factors, one had no items loading $\geq .3$ and was subsequently removed. Thus, in alignment with the Quebec data, researchers moved forward with a 3-factor model for further analysis, with factors labeled Radicalization (item two, three, five, and seven), Defensive Violence (items nine and ten), and Injustice (items eleven and twelve).

Both EFA with oblique rotation and parallel analysis yielded a factor structure of the 12-item scale used in Belgium that differed from the factor structure of the reduced 9-item scale in both the Belgium and Quebec contexts. Item one, "Taking part in non-violent protest", was once again removed before further analysis on the basis of three indications: it loaded on a single-item factor, it showed a item-rest correlation of .16, and the internal consistency reliability of the entire scale improved slightly from .88 to .90 when it was removed. Of the remaining 11 items, four factors were retained, with questions number two and three, "Committing a minor crime" and "Use of violence" in political protest, loading onto their own factor. We labeled this factor Violent Protest (items two and three). The three items not included in the 9-item SyfoR, item four "Threaten to commit terrorist acts," item six, "Commit terrorist acts," and item eight, "Use of suicide bombs to fight injustice," loaded onto the Radicalization factor (items four, five, six, seven, and eight). The Defensive violence and Injustice factors (items nine and ten, and items 11 and 12, respectively) remained the same as in the 9-item scale.

Given that item one was dropped from both the 12-item and 9-item scale, we

Belgium (N=2014)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Syfor1	1											
Syfor2	.29	1										
Syfor3	.17	.77	1									
Syfor4	-.08	.56	.70	1								
Syfor5	-.04	.65	.81	.78	1							
Syfor6	-.13	.56	.70	.94	.80	1						
Syfor7	.06	.55	.65	.78	.68	.78	1					
Syfor8	-.08	.55	.68	.91	.76	.91	.82	1				
Syfor9	.25	.29	.27	-.08	.13	-.10	.16	-.08	1			
Syfor10	.19	.51	.56	.43	.54	.44	.53	.44	.55	1		
Syfor11	.25	.51	.60	.48	.49	.45	.57	.46	.49	.66	1	
Syfor12	.28	.56	.64	.48	.50	.47	.61	.50	.45	.67	.88	1
Quebec (N=1364)												
Syfor1	1											
Syfor2	.25	1										
Syfor3	.16	.77	1									
Syfor4												
Syfor5	-.06	.66	.82		1							
Syfor6												
Syfor7	.08	.59	.75		.78		1					
Syfor8												
Syfor9	.26	.37	.49		.44		.45		1			
Syfor10	.22	.43	.58		.59		.58		.74	1		
Syfor11	.26	.54	.72		.58		.72		.58	.67	1	
Syfor12	.24	.55	.74		.61		.75		.57	.67	.92	1

Table 6.3: Polychoric Correlation Matrices of 9 and 12 item Sympathy for Violent Radicalization Scale in Belgium (N=2014) and Quebec (N=1364)

will continue our discussion by referring consistently to the 8-item Quebec scale, and the 8-item and 11-item Belgium scales.

6.3.2   Reliability and validity

CFA was conducted on a 3-factor model with the remaining 8 –item scale in the Quebec and Belgium data, and both samples had adequate fit statistics except the chi-square, which was attributed to sample size (see Table 6.4).   In Quebec, Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was .87; the Cronbach's alpha for the Radicalization factor was .80, also meeting cut-off criteria of greater than .70. Spearman correlation coefficients were computed for the remaining two factors, with the two Defensive Violence items correlated at .66, and the Injustice items correlating at .87. In Belgium, Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale 8-item scale was .87; Cronbach's alpha for the Radicalization factor was .85.   Spearman correlation coefficients for the defensive violence and injustice factors were .44 and .84, respectively. CFA was also conducted on a 4-factor model with the 11-item SyfoR using data from Belgium. Internal consistency reliability of the entire scale and Radicalization factor were good (α=.90 and α=.92, respectively).   However, the 4-factor model met desired fit statistic cut-off scores for only one out of the four criteria, the CFI.

6.3.3   Item Response Theory

Concerning the 8-item SyfoR, in both the Belgium and Quebec samples the most discriminating item in the Radicalization factor was item three, "Use of violence." In Quebec, the Defensive Violence factor item "Violence by organized groups to protect own race/religious group" was more discriminating than "Violence to protect family." This was reversed in the Belgium sample, with the item on violence to protect your own race/religious group having a relatively poor discrimination value. Item 11, "Violence to fight police injustice," was slightly more discriminating than the item "Violence to fight government injustice" (item 12) in the Injustice factor in both

Belgium (N=2014) (11-item)

	Violent Protest	Radicalization	Defensive Violence	Injustice
Syfor2	.76	-	-	-
Syfor3	.92	-	-	-
Syfor4	-	.94	-	-
Syfor5	-	.70	-	-
Syfor6	-	.93	-	-
Syfor7	-	.71	-	-
Syfor8	-	.91	-	-
Syfor9	-	-	.56	-
Syfor10	-	-	.86	-
Syfor11	-	-	-	.91
Syfor12	-	-	-	.93
χ^2	$\chi^2(38) = 827.02$, p< .05			
RMSEA	.102			
CFI	.923			
SRMR	.091			

Belgium (N=2014) (8-item)

	Radicalization	Defensive Violence	Injustice
Syfor2	.75	-	-
Syfor3	.91	-	-
Syfor4	-	-	-
Syfor5	.78	-	-
Syfor6	-	-	-
Syfor7	.65	-	-
Syfor8	-	-	-
Syfor9	-	.55	-
Syfor10	-	.88	-
Syfor11	-	-	.91
Syfor12	-	-	.93
χ^2	$\chi^2(17) = 288.53$, p< .05		
RMSEA	.089		
CFI	.958		
SRMR	.049		

Quebec (N=1364) (8-item)

	Radicalization	Defensive Violence	Injustice
Syfor2	.68	-	-
Syfor3	.90	-	-
Syfor4	-	-	-
Syfor5	.71	-	-
Syfor6	-	-	-
Syfor7	.70	-	-
Syfor8	-	-	-
Syfor9	-	.74	-
Syfor10	-	.90	-
Syfor11	-	-	.94
Syfor12	-	-	.94
χ^2	$\chi^2(17) = 149.56$, p< .05		
RMSEA	.076		
CFI	.962		
SRMR	.037		

Table 6.4: Estimated standardized factor loadings and model fit statistics for 8 and 11 item SyfoR using CFA in Belgium (N=2014) and Quebec (N=1364)

samples.

Spearman correlation coefficients between the 8-item SyfoR factors and the RIS are presented in Table 6.6 The factor Radicalization had the strongest correlation with the RIS in both Quebec and Belgium. In regression models, all three factors were independently associated with the RIS at p < .001, with the strongest association found with the Radicalization factor. In a fourth joint model, all three factors were associated with the outcome (see Table 6.7).

Turning to the 11-item SyfoR used in Belgium, the most discriminating item in the 5-item Radicalization factor was one not included in the 8-item SyfoR version, item four, "Threaten to commit terrorist acts." In contrast to the 8-item SyfoR, the unique factor Violent Protest had the strongest correlation with the RIS. In regression models, all four factors were associated with the RIS; the Violent Protest factor had the strongest association with the RIS in both independent and joint models (see Table 6.7).

	Belgium(11-item)	Belgium(8-item)	Quebec(8-item)
Violent Protest factor			
Syfor2	2.80	-	-
Syfor3	3.55	-	-
Radicalization factor			
Syfor2	-	2.41	1.76
Syfor3	-	3.61	3.40
Syfor4	3.98	-	-
Syfor5	2.05	3.29	2.78
Syfor6	3.00	-	-
Syfor7	2.03	1.86	1.93
Syfor8	2.84	-	-
Defensive Violence factor			
Syfor9	6.12	6.12	2.57
Syfor10	0.94	0.94	3.59
Injustice factor			
Syfor11	3.93	3.93	3.71
Syfor12	3.50	3.50	3.66

Table 6.5: Estimated item response theory graded response model discrimination parameters for 8 and 11 item SyfoR in Belgium (N=2014) and Quebec (N=1364)

Belgium– 11 item SyFoR	'VR'	'DV'	'R'	'I'	RIS
SyfoR 'Violent Protest'	1	-	-	-	-
SyfoR 'Defensive Violence'	.30**	1	-	-	-
SyfoR 'Radicalization'	.67**	.16**	1	-	-
SyfoR 'Injustice'	.57**	.49**	.50**	1	-
Radical Intention Scale	.57**	.27**	.50**	.46**	1
Belgium– 8 item SyFoR					
SyfoR 'Defensive Violence'		1	-	-	-
SyfoR 'Radicalization'		.28**	1	-	-
SyfoR 'Injustice'		.49**	.59**	1	-
Radical Intention Scale		.27**	.59**	.47**	1
Quebec– 8 item SyFoR					
SyfoR 'Defensive Violence'		1	-	-	-
SyfoR 'Radicalization'		.47**	1	-	-
SyfoR 'Injustice'		.64**	.61**	1	-
Radical Intention Scale		.41**	.55**	.51**	1

** $p < .05$

Table 6.6: Spearman correlation coefficients between 8 and 11 item SyfoR factors and RIS theta values in Belgium (N=2014) and Quebec (N=1364)

Belgium-11 item SyFoR	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	.001	0.45	.30	.14	.29
SyfoR 'Violent Protest'	.56**	-	-	-	.35**
SyfoR 'Defensive Violence'	-	.36**	-	-	.14**
SyfoR 'Radicalization'	-	-	.54**	-	.18**
SyfoR 'Injustice'			-	.43**	.14**
R2	.32	.08	.21	.22	.37
Adjusted R2	.32	.08	.21	.22	.37
Root MSE	.71	.82	.76	.75	.68
Belgium-8 item SyFoR					
Intercept	.45	-.02	.14	.16	-
SyfoR 'Defensive Violence'	.36**	-	-	.12**	-
SyfoR 'Radicalization'	-	.57**	-	.46**	-
SyfoR 'Injustice'	-	-	.43**	.14**	-
R2	.08	.34	.22	.37	-
Adjusted R2	.08	.34	.22	.37	-
Root MSE	.82	.69	.75	.68	-
Quebec-8 item SyFoR					
Intercept	.03	.03	.21	.10	-
SyfoR 'Defensive Violence'	.42**	-	-	.10*	-
SyfoR 'Radicalization'	-	.61**	-	.41**	-
SyfoR 'Injustice'	-	-	.54**	.22**	-
R2	.18	.33	.28	.38	-
Adjusted R2	.18	.33	.28	.38	-
Root MSE	.78	.71	.73	.68	-

*p= .001 **p < .001

Table 6.7: Estimated standardized regression coefficients and associated model fit statistics for SyfoR factors predicting RIS theta values in Belgium (N=2014) and Quebec (N=1364).

6.4 Discussion

This study assessed the psychometric properties of the Sympathy for Violent Radicalization Scale adapted for use in Canada (Quebec) and Belgium (Flanders and Brussels Capital Region). In both Quebec and Belgium, the 8-item SyfoR has a 3-factor structure, labeled Radicalization, Defensive violence, and Injustice. The scale exhibited good model fit statistics using CFA, and good internal consistency reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha. Each of the three factors was positively correlated with the RIS, with the strongest correlation between the Radicalization factor and RIS theta scores.

The factor structure of the 11-item SyfoR in Belgium did not replicate the findings of Bhui et al. (2014a) using principal component analysis. Bhui and colleagues found a 2-factor structure using the 11-item scale, with factors labeled Radicalization and Defensive violence. Using these same 11 items, data from this Belgium sample indicates a 4-factor structure, with two of Bhui's Radicalization factor items forming their own factor, labeled Violent protest. In addition, Bhui's Defensive violence factor is further separated into two factors, labeled Defensive violence and Injustice. This 11-item scale had poor model fit statistics.

The correlations between RIS and SyfoR factors were statistically significant but modest, with the strongest relationship between the RIS and the Radicalization factor in the 8-item Quebec and Belgium data, and between the RIS and the Violent protest factor (ρ=.57) in the 11-item SyfoR used in Belgium. This suggests independence between the SyfoR and RIS. One possible reason for the independence between these scales is that each was designed to measure a different construct. The RIS is aimed at identifying the readiness of a respondent to participate in illegal and violent behavior (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009). In contrast, the SyfoR was designed to measure the construct of sympathy for those who engage in such behavior. This may have important implications: because of the complexity of the phenomena, there may be utility in using both scales in

epidemiological studies on violent radicalization as opposed to only one of them, to understand better the yet relatively unknown process leading from approval of violence, toward intention of engaging in it, and further to action.

Given the potential applications of the SyfoR for determining risk factors for radicalization and guiding programmatic and policy interventions, it is important to critique the degree to which the SyfoR has content validity in this regard. Researchers and theorists define sympathy as an emotional response, namely sorrow or concern, for another group or individual's welfare (Lee, 2009; Vossen, Piotrowski & Valkenburg, 2017). What is important in this definition is that sympathy requires knowledge of the suffering of people or other living things. Scales designed to assess sympathy typically ask participants to indicate the degree to which they feel sorrow and/or concern for an individual or group because of the way they are treated or their current state of well-being (physically or emotionally unwell) (Vossen, Piotrowski & Valkenburg, 2015). Some questions on the SyfoR imply, but do not make explicit, the suffering of others as the rationale behind violent actions. Questions related to defensive violence to protect one's family or race/religious group come closest in this regard. Other questions, such as "threatening to commit terrorist acts" and "commit terrorist acts" provide no such context. In addition to this shortcoming, the SyfoR asks respondents to indicate a level of approval of, not sympathy for, violent behavior. Approval, defined as a positive or negative opinion of something, is not synonymous with sympathy. One can have sympathy for a person's condition, but not approve of behavior that is a result of suffering. Thus, it may be more accurate to describe the SyfoR as a measure of the construct of approval of violent radicalization, not sympathy. Furthermore, this semantic discussion indicate that it could be pertinent in future studies to introduce a measure of subjective understanding of perpetrator motives separate from a measure of approval of violence, and to study the relations between those constructs.

6.4.1 Limitations

This study has important limitations. First, reliability of the scale was assessed solely with Cronbach's alpha, as our study design did not allow for assessment of test-retest or inter-rater reliability. Additionally, we were only able to assess validity of the SyfoR in relationship to youth self-report on the RIS. Also, although we make comparisons between the 8-item SyfoR results in Belgium and Quebec, this should be interpreted cautiously, as the scale was administered in different languages, with slightly different interpretations from the original English, and different Likert-scale response options. Inconsistencies in results might be due to these factors, and not the inherent psychometric properties of the scale. In addition to being a study limitation, this highlights the importance of promoting greater communication and collaboration among researchers in the field of violent radicalization moving forward in order to facilitate transnational comparisons.

6.4.2 Implications and future research

This study has implications for using the SyfoR as a measure of approval for violent radicalization and suggests several avenues of psychometric research on the SyfoR itself. First, based on our findings regarding model fit, the reduced 8-item, 3-factor structure SyfoR has more robust psychometric properties than the 11-item, 4-factor structure scale. This is promising, as the three items removed to create this shorter scale are perhaps the most controversial to ask of respondents from an ethics perspective and also may be the most susceptible to social desirability response bias. The fact that SyfoR item one, "support for non-violent protest," loaded separately onto its own factor illustrates that not all forms of political protest should be considered as predictors of violent radicalization, and that their inclusion in scales measuring this concept may lead to a problematic amalgamation between social protest and violence. Nonviolent protest may on the contrary constitute an alternative avenue to challenge and overcome other

grievances. Including some of these alternative avenues in scales assessing radicalization (violent and nonviolent) would be very pertinent if conceptually these constructs are identified as distinct. The variability of the factor structure of the scale among different samples and the modest correlation between the SyfoR and RIS does suggest caution in the use of this assessment. As mentioned earlier, the questions on the SyfoR are perhaps more accurately measuring approval of violent radicalization, as opposed to sympathy. More detailed cognitive testing of scale items among diverse populations is warranted in order to more clearly understand how individuals are thinking about and interpreting scale items when providing responses. Cognitive testing might suggest refinements to the scale to more precisely measure the construct of interest. Additionally, research is needed on the reliability and validity of the SyfoR in a wider array of settings (including low- and middle-income countries) as well as a wider age range. Such studies can provide more information on construct validity, indicate context-specific adaptations to the scale, as well as assess test-retest reliability and inter-rater reliability.

6.5 Conclusion

Measurement of perceptions, attitudes and intention around violent radicalization is delicate and can be a double-edged sword. On one hand the risk of stigmatizing certain ethnic, religious, or age groups is significant if the underlying constructs are not clarified in specific social and cultural settings. On the other hand, the absence of data, and of comparative data, opens the door to speculations which are most of the time the product of circulating fears and ideologies and have proved to be quite harmful (Ragazzi, 2016). Disentangling concepts and rigorously testing instruments is a necessary first step to resolve this double bind

7 | The Information Seeking – Violent Radicalization Nexus

"As a rule, [most academic experts on terrorism] are good at generating hypotheses, but not in testing them."

(Marc Sageman (2008), p.27)

7.1 Introduction

In chapter 2.3 of this dissertation, we have presented the results of an extensive review of the literature on radicalization. Broadly speaking, we could state that two main conclusions can be drawn from that chapter. The first is that radicalization is a multifactorial and contextual phenomenon. Thus, in order to understand why and how individuals radicalize, we need to take into account not only individual-psychological factors, but also collective-group and social-communicative factors. In that sense, radicalization should be studied as a complex jigsaw puzzle whereby at least several puzzle pieces together are needed in order to reveal and understand the full picture of radicalization.

The second conclusion is that the scientific literature focusing on radicalization and terrorism is plagued by a serious lack of empirical data and analyses. As

reflected by the opening quote of this chapter, we have come to understand that our current understanding of radicalization is almost uniquely based on theoretical and hypothetical accounts that—if at all based on data—are derived from retrospective case studies with terrorists. As a result, it has been stressed more than once that empirical studies within the general population are needed in order to develop a better understanding of the antecedents of radicalization.

In this chapter we aim to incorporate both these conclusions in our research design. More specifically, it is the purpose of the current chapter to empirically explore some of the hypothesized associations between pieces of the radicalization puzzle by means of cross-sectional data from school-going youth in Flanders. The puzzle pieces that we will focus on here are (1) information seeking, (2) moral disengagement (cfr. collective action frames), and (3) previous involvement in crime or delinquent behavior. Given the context of the current dissertation, we will mainly concentrate on jihadist information seeking and radicalization. Nevertheless, the findings that will be presented in this chapter can also function as a foundation for future studies exploring non-jihadist radicalization.

7.1.1 Online jihadist information seeking

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Salafi-jihadist groups are omnipresent on the Internet (Alava et al., 2017; Aly, Macdonald, Jarvis, & Chen, 2017; Ducol, 2015). Through the dissemination of glossy magazines, Hollywood-style films, and decapitation videos amongst others, these groups aim to communicate with like-minded individuals. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, ISIS has been found to be particularly present online and skillful in mastering the Internet for the spread of their propaganda materials and the potential recruitment of support (e.g. Atwan, 2015; Nacos, 2016).

As a result, a growing body of scientific research has focused on the contents of these messages that are disseminated on the Internet. Indeed, we have a relatively good understanding of what these groups exactly communicate (see chapters 4 and

5) (Frissen, Toguslu, Van Ostaeyen, & d'Haenens, 2018; Ingram, 2016a; Wignell et al., 2017) and where their material is disseminated (Fisher, 2015; Klausen, Barbieri, Reichlin-melnick, & Zelin, 2012; Zelin, 2015).

Remarkably, much less is known about who actually is exposed to these materials and what types of materials are mostly consulted online. Maura Conway (2016) stated bluntly that *"[t]here is no yet proven connection between consumption of and networking around violent extremist online content and adoption of extremist ideology and/or engagement in violent extremism and terrorism"* (Conway, 2016, p. 77). Indeed, only very few empirical studies exist examining the association between exposure to such materials on the one hand and radicalization on the other. One cross-sectional survey study by Pauwels and Schils (2014) has attempted to examine the relationship between communication with extremists on social media and self-reported political violence towards persons and property. Even though they find some correlational support for this relationship, their study is not sensitive enough to differentiate between jihadist and non-jihadist contexts nor do they include active information seeking for such materials in their study. Hence the question what types of online contents would be most strongly associated with radicalization remains unanswered. Furthermore, Pauwels and Schils' (2014) dependent variable measures exclusively one's previous engagement in acts of political violence. However, as already extensively discussed in chapter 2.1, political violence cannot be equated with radicalization and vice-versa (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Horgan, 2008).

Borrowing insights from the domain of health communication, it seems meaningful to distinguish between accidental and passive exposure to specific information online and actively seeking out for this information. Several studies have shown that specifically seeking information online can hold strong relations with behavioral and attitudinal outcomes in the domains of suicide and suicide prevention (Arendt & Scherr, 2017), drug use (Martinez & Lewis, 2016), and disease prevention (Shim, Kelly, & Hornik, 2006). When it comes to jihadist materials, however, not much is known about actively seeking out for jihadist

information. Klausen and colleagues (2018) have found in their analysis of biographical data and court documents of Salafi-Jihadist terrorism offenders in the United States that information seeking has played a role in the radicalization process of 55.6% of the individuals in their database. In their conclusion they argue that actively seeking out for jihadist information online should be considered as a serious risk behavior for Salafi-jihadist terrorism. However, more research on this phenomenon is needed, especially beyond the retrospective case evidence of terrorist offenders.

Hence, the association between pro-active information seeking of different types of jihadist materials online and support for radicalization remains under-researched in the current literature. To address this subject, we have formulated two interrelated research questions and one hypothesis based on the beforementioned discussion:

RQ1.1 What type of Jihadist materials is most often sought online?

RQ1.2 What type of online Jihadist material is most strongly associated with radicalization?

H1: *Seeking online jihadist materials is associated with violent radicalization*

7.1.2 Moral disengagement as collective action frames

One mechanism that has received reasonable attention within the literature of terrorism and radicalization is 'moral disengagement' (see also chapter 4) (Bandura, 1999, 2002, 2004; Weimann, 2008). As we have seen before, violent radicalization—whether it ends in acts of terrorism or not—is not necessarily a phenomenon for the mentally disturbed or 'the lunatics', but rather for normal individuals (J. W. Jones, 2008; Post, 2007). But if there is not some kind of 'sickness', how can we understand and explain that seemingly normal people radicalize and eventually even engage in such 'shocking' behavior (cfr. Horgan,

2008)? For this, moral disengagement has been considered a crucial psychological process (Bandura, 2004). To put it in simple terms, Albert Bandura (1999) has argued that all human beings possess universally an internal moral compass (i.e. moral agency) with moral standards that serve as guiding principles for their conduct. This moral compass functions as a self-regulatory mechanism on two levels: (1) it proactively forces people to behave humanely, whilst (2) it directs to abstain from inhumane behavior (Bandura, 2002). Acts in which other human beings are harmed, damaged, or even killed are considered nearly universally as inhumane and thus as a violation of the internal moral standards. As a consequence of violating the internal moral standards, the self-regulatory mechanism comes into play by either self-condemning/self-sanctioning or by self-justifying/self-exonerating processes. Because human beings naturally tend to avoid negative self-sanctions, it is mainly this latter process of self-justification that is activated in the context of inhumane conduct. This is where moral disengagement comes into play. According to Bandura (2002) moral disengagement centers on *"[. . .] on the cognitive restructuring of inhumane conduct into a benign or worthy one by moral justification, sanitising language and exonerative social comparison; disavowal of personal agency in the harm one causes by diffusion or displacement of responsibility; disregarding or minimising the injurious effects of one's actions; and attribution of blame to, and dehumanisation of, those who are victimised."* (Bandura, 2002, p. 101). As we have seen in chapter 4, these moral disengagement mechanisms are omnipresent in Jihadist communiques in order to self-justify their acts of terrorism (Frissen & d'Haenens, 2017; Weimann, 2008).

Within the context of radicalization and socialization into political violence/terrorism it is also believed that these moral disengagement mechanisms play an indispensable role. In these terms, moral disengagement arguments are in fact no different than collective action frames. As already briefly discussed in chapter 2.1.3, it has been hypothesized within the framework of social movement theory that putting the enemy in a separate moral category, and subsequently

dehumanizing them, bolsters one's collective identity and increases the likelihood to behave violently against the so-defined enemy (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Olesen, 2009). However, it cannot go unmentioned that nearly any empirical studies exist on the associations between moral disengagement and exposure to jihadist materials on the one hand and radicalization on the other.

There are some studies, though, that have tried to investigate the role of moral management and especially moral disengagement in the context of violent media use and exposure (e.g. Klimmt, Schmid, Nosper, Hartmann, & Vorderer, 2006; Tamborini, 2012). For instance, Klimmt and colleagues (2006) have demonstrated that moral disengagement arguments are commonly expressed by violent video game players in order to justify the enjoyment of the violence in these games. However, by no means this association is transferable to a context of jihadist media exposure and information seeking. Similarly, two meta analyses within the field of (cyber) bullying have demonstrated that moral disengagement is one of the key components that has been broadly associated with aggressive and bullying behavior against others (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014; Kowalski et al., 2014). But, again, aggressive bullying behavior cannot be seen as a proxy for (violent) radicalization, and similar empirical works with radicalization as the outcome are in fact rare. Hence, to the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first academic empirical studies associating moral disengagement with the consumption of jihadist media as well as with sympathies for violent radicalization.

H2: *Seeking online jihadist materials is associated with moral disengagement.*

H3: *Moral disengagement mediates the relation between seeking online jihadist materials and radicalization.*

7.1.3 Previous involvement in crime and delinquent behavior

The recent locus of attention within the radicalization literature has shifted to the crime-terror nexus. Recent case reports of Jihadists' radicalization have pointed nearly unanimously in the direction that previous involvement in criminality is a

precursor for radicalization into terrorism (Basra et al., 2016; Rostami, Sturup, Mondani, Thevselius, & Edling, 2018). For example, Rostami and colleagues (2018) have found that more than two thirds of the Swedish foreign terrorist fighters had been held accountable for at least one crime before leaving to Syria and/or Iraq. Most of these crimes were violent such as robbery and assault (Rostami et al., 2018, p. 9). This corroborates with the analysis of Basra and colleagues (2016) of the terrorists that were involved in Paris and Brussels attacks (see chapter 2.1.3). The point that these others are making is that there are some crucial 'criminal skill transfers', such as the familiarity with violence, procuring firearms, staying under 'the radar', etc. that facilitate an effortless convergence from criminal to radical. Similarly, Basra and colleagues (2016, p.11) have noted that *"criminal and terrorist groups have come to recruit from the same pool of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps that have consequences for how individuals radicalise and operate.".*

As becomes evident, our sole understanding of a potential relationship between radicalization and criminality—if any—is exclusively based on retrospective case reports of recent jihadist-inspired terrorists. This, however, does by no means suggests that radicalization is de facto associated by delinquent behavior (cfr. Selection bias, see chapter 2.1.2). As such, this chapter aims to explore the association between adolescent delinquent behavior and radicalization in a more prospective, cross-sectional survey design. Our hypotheses are as follows:

H4: *Seeking online jihadist materials is associated with delinquent behavior.*

H5: *Delinquent behavior mediates the relation between seeking online jihadist materials and radicalization.* **H6:** *Moral disengagement mediates the relation between seeking online jihadist materials and delinquent behavior.*

7.1.4   Media (&) violence

A legacy of several decades of media effects research enables us to safely claim that exposure to violent media has serious effects on attitudinal and even behavioral
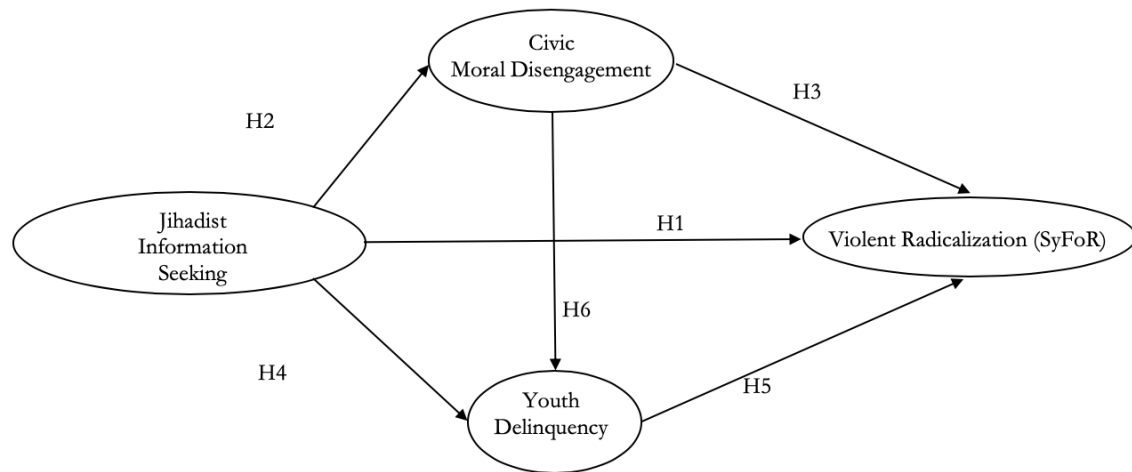
Figure 7.1: Visual representation of the proposed hypotheses

outcomes (see for an extensive discussion on the subject: Anderson & Bushman, 2001b; Bender, Plante, & Gentile, 2018; Bryant & Oliver, 2009a; Exelmans, Custers, & Van den Bulck, 2015; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003; Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011; Weber, Ritterfeld, & Mathiak, 2006). Without going too deep in the discussion on media violence and its effects—that would be for another dissertation— a vast majority of studies has demonstrated that exposure to violence in media messages could be considered as a significant risk factor for aggressive behavior, especially in the case of active involvement with such media, e.g. gaming (Exelmans et al., 2015) or information seeking. In terms of early risk assessment of radicalization, such media effects studies then corroborate the points made earlier by Klausen and colleagues (2018) that jihadist information seeking could be considered a risk factor for violent radicalization in a later stage.

That being said, even though the effects of media violence are well-established in the literature, it is important to stress here that recent studies in the field continue to nuance our understanding of this relationship by demonstrating that the effects are rarely direct and monolithic, but rather complex and conditional (Bender et al., 2018; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Especially in the context of violent jihadist media more clarity and empirical data is needed to explore whether such media is associated with outcomes such as violent radicalization.

7.2 Method

7.2.1 Sampling procedure

Because the ultimate goal of this study was to gain insight into radicalization in the context of Salafi-Jihadist information seeking, we decided upon a convenience sample with a conscious overrepresentation of young people with Arab or Muslim backgrounds. This was necessary to make comparisons between groups of Muslims and non-Muslims statistically valid. Unlike a systematic random sample, this method enables one to engage with highly targeted respondents having specific demographic characteristics. Since the metropolitan areas in Belgium are known for their diversity we decided to draw our sample form from secondary schools of inter alia Brussels and Antwerp. This method resulted in a sample of 2,236 respondents. After a thorough inspection of the data, incomplete questionnaires were removed, leaving the final usable responses numbering 1,872.

7.2.2 Description of sample

Of the total 1,872 respondents, there were 977 (52.2%) men and 895 women (47.8%). Their average age was 17.14 years (n = 1872; min = 15, max = 25, M = 17.14, SD = 1.12), and the vast majority (97.6%) was still in high school. Of these, 34.4% followed the ASO direction (i.e. general secondary education), 35.2% the TSO direction (i.e. technical) and 27.8% the BSO (i.e. vocational) direction. Out of the respondents who confessed a religion, the majority appeared to be Christian (22.4%), and Muslims were second (15,9%). The other religions were less represented: less than 5% of other faiths (Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist or otherwise). The largest group in the sample (57.4%) reported not being religious.

7.2.3 Instruments of measurement

The concepts in the current investigation were studied by means of various existing as well as new metrics. Taking current state of the art ideas as a point of departure, this study took up a number of key concepts, or in imitation of Hafez and Mullins (2015), studied the following 'puzzle pieces': (1) jihadist information seeking, (2) moral disengagement, (3) youth delinquency, and (4) sympathies for radicalization. These were measured by validated scales from previous social science research and / or psychology literature.

Puzzle Piece 1: Jihadist information seeking. First, the respondents were introduced to six different kinds of jihadist materials, i.e. Dabiq (Islamic State's magazine), Inspire (al-Qaeda's magazine), jihadist videos, beheading videos, Salafi-jihadist fora, and Salafi-Jihadist Facebook groups. Then, they were presented with a scale of different media channels (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Blogs, YouTube, through friends/family and other websites). Respondents had to indicate whether they sought for the specific jihadist material on these channels or not. If they searched for it, it was coded as "1". If they did not is was coded as "0". Next, we calculated for each respondent a total score for every jihadist material that they sought (e.g. if a respondent searched for Dabiq on Twitter, and Facebook, and on Blogs he/she received a score '3', whilst a respondent who indicated that he/she did not search for this material received a score '0'). Then, this total score was dichotomized in order to distinguish two groups: those who sought for the specific material through any one medium (score $>= 1$) and those who never sought for it (score $=0$). In a final stage all dichotomized variables where summed in order to calculate a total score for jihadist information seeking for each respondent (e.g. those who searched for all jihadist materials received a score $= 6$, and those who never searched any of them received a score $= 0$). This scaled show a strong internal consistency of Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$.

Puzzle piece 2: Moral disengagement. In connection with the theoretical lens from chapter 4, the Selective Moral Disengagement Theory, the Civic Moral Disengagement Scale (Caprara, Fida, Vecchione, Tramontano, & Barbara Martinelli, 2009) was used in this questionnaire study. This scale can be used to measure the extent to which people employ moral disengagement arguments to justify inhumane and uncivilized behavior. Today, it seems the most applicable measurement to assess one's acceptance of socially undesirable behavior, found to consistently correlate with delinquent and aggressive behavior in youngsters (Pelton, Gound, Forehand, & Brody, 2004). The CMD-scale consists of 32 items: four items per disengagement argument. Each item is a statement such as *"People who evade taxes need not be punished because tax money is also wasted by the government"* (distortion of consequences), and respondents were required to answer on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = totally disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Caprara and colleagues (2009) have argued that the scale should be used as a one-dimensional construct. However, parallel analysis to determine the factor structure in the current data suggested a three-factor structure. Closer inspection of the factor structure showed that most item (n=24) loaded on the first factor, six items loaded on the second factor, and two items on the third factor. We choose to work only with the first factor of 24 items for the CMD-scale, as this is most closely related to the original one-dimensional nature of the scale in Caprara and colleagues' (2009) study. This decision was corroborated with the result of an internal reliability analysis showing a very strong internal consistency of Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$ for the 24-item CMD-scale. Nevertheless, we actively encourage future studies to assess the psychometric properties of the CMD-scale more in detail.

Puzzle Piece 3: Youth delinquency. For the measurement of youth delinquency, we used the validated Dutch 'Crime-Questionnaire' of Baerveldt, Van Rossem, & Vermande (2003). In this questionnaire, young people are presented

with nine items following the question *"Have you done any of these things in the last year?"* Sample items include: *"Stolen something from a store"* or *"deliberately beaten or kicked someone on the street, in the disco, in the pub, or at school."* Respondents were then able to respond with 1 = *'never'* to 4 = *'4 times or more'*. Parallel analysis of the current data showed that the crime-list was indeed a one-dimensional construct with a good internal consistency of Cronbach's α = 0.83.

Puzzle Piece 5: Sympathies for violent radicalization. For the last puzzle piece, we used our validated subscale for violent radicalization from the Sympathies for Radicalization Scale (SyFoR), originally developed by Bhui et al. (2014). For more information and psychometric properties of this scale see chapter 6. We focused here only on the radicalization subscale as it appeared to be the purest form to measure support for violent radicalization. In the current data, the subscale had a strong internal consistency of Cronbach's α = 0.85 which is in line with our analysis of chapter 6.

7.2.4 Analysis

In the pursuit of the research questions we start with purely descriptive statistical analyses. We will examine which jihadist materials are most sought online and to what extent seeking these materials is associated with violent radicalization by means of t-test statistics. To test the proposed hypotheses, a structural equation model was constructed using the lavaan-package in R (Rosseel, 2012). Age, gender, and religion (i.e. Muslims yes/no) were controlled for. Maximum likelihood, which is a relatively robust estimator concerning the non-normality of the data, was used to estimate the model. However, fit measures and p-values might still be biased due to non-normality. To correct this potential bias, the fit measures were bootstrapped draws using the Bollen-Stine method (Bollen & Stine, 1992). To test

the significance of the regression coefficients, 90%, 95% and 99% confidence intervals were bootstrapped as well. Both bootstraps contain 10.000 draws.

7.3   Results

In table 7.1 the results are presented for our two research questions. In reference to RQ1 (i.e. what jihadist material is most sought online?), it becomes clear that different genres of jihadist materials are sought to different degrees. The magazine-genre (Dabiq and Inspire) appears to be the least popular. However still one in ten respondents sought for these materials. Jihadist fora and Facebook groups are sought for about 12% and 14%, respectively. In the same range of interest are the jihadist videos with nearly 17% of the respondents that have indicated to have looked for them. But the genre of beheading videos clearly stands out. Almost 40% of all respondents have actively sought for audiovisual materials of beheadings. This seems a strikingly high percentage. Therefore, in response to our first research question, without any doubt we can state that beheading videos are the most sought jihadist material for the respondents in the current sample.

	Information seeking	N (%)	Mean violent radicalization	T-test
Dabiq	Not sought	1666 (89%)	1.82	$t(237) = -10.19$ ***
	Sought	206 (11%)	2.55	
Inspire	Not sought	1688 (90.17%)	1.82	$t(207) = -10.40$***
	Sought	184 (9.83%)	2.62	
Jihadist videos	Not sought	1555 (83.07%)	1.83	$t(404) = -7.82$***
	Sought	317 (16.93%)	2.28	
Beheading videos	Not sought	1196 (63.89%)	1.80	$t(1191) = -7.19$***
	Sought	676 (36.11%)	2.09	
Jihadist fora	Not sought	1641 (87.67%)	1.82	$t(268) = -9.28$***
	Sought	231 (12.34%)	2.47	
Jihadist Facebook groups	Not sought	1601 (85.52%)	1.82	$t(330) = -9.14$***
	Sought	271 (14.48%)	2.39	

Table 7.1: Descriptive statistics of all jihadist materials.

However, when we look to the extent to which these different jihadist materials are associated with violent radicalization (RQ2) a somehow different finding emerges from the data. As demonstrated by the density plots in figure 7.2, the distribution of the radicalization scale differs strongly for respondents that have actively looked for a specific jihadist medium and those who did not. For example, if we look at the

genre of beheading videos (figure 7.2, pane D), we clearly see that even though both means differ significantly (see also t-test values in table 7.1), the distributions of the radicalization scale does not differ substantially in both groups. This is different for the magazine genre (see figure 7.2 pane A and B). More specifically, the density plots show that the respondents who actively seek out for Dabiq and Inspire tend to score significantly and substantially higher on the radicalization scale than those who do not. This is not only true for the mean. Indeed, the density plots show clearly a heavier tail for the group that actively seeks out for these magazines, suggesting that there is more variance in the extremes than in the group who does not seek the materials. Hence, even though the magazine-genre is the least sought by the respondents in our sample, it appears that these materials are most substantially associated with higher levels of violent radicalization. These findings are of essential importance for potential counter-radicalization measures that aim to curtail the influence of online jihadist materials. In the discussion we will discuss this topic further.
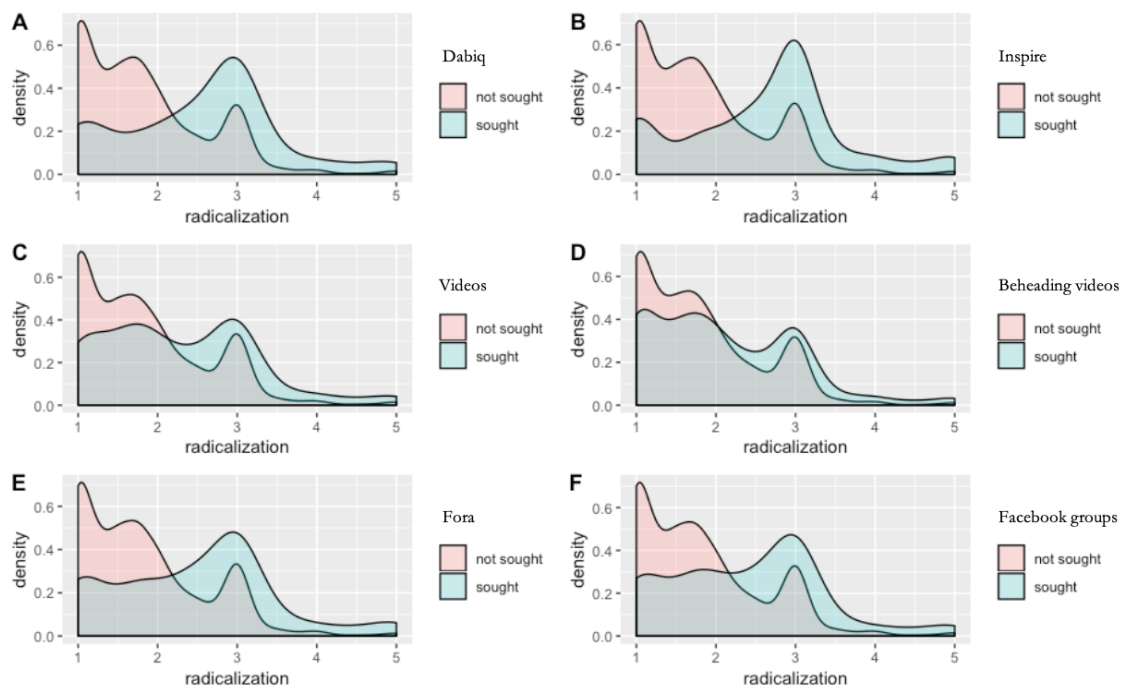
Figure 7.2: Density plots for the distributions of the radicalization subscale (SyfoR) within the groups that have sought and that have not sought different jihadist materials.

In order to discuss the relationship between jihadist information seeking and violent radicalization more in depth we will now look at the result of our structural equation model.

In reference to our six hypotheses, we conducted a structural equation model between jihadist information seeking, moral disengagement, youth delinquency and the SyfoR subscale for violent radicalization. The results of this model can be found in table 7.2 and a visualization is presented in figure 7.2. It should be stressed here that this model is based on cross-sectional data. That means that the arrows in our model are merely hypothesized directions and do not indicate any causal effects. In fact, it is perfectly arguable that all hypothesized relationships could be manifested in the other direction than what we propose, e.g. individuals who score higher on violent radicalization are perhaps more inclined to search more jihadist media—cfr. selective exposure or patterns of communicative choice (e.g. Slater, 2007)—than the other way around. Nevertheless, as already mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the current analysis should be situated within the media effects paradigm that considers media generally as an independent variable rather than as an outcome.

Criterion	Predictor	b	SE	β	Explained variance
Moral disengagement	Jihadist information seeking	0.535***	0.056	0.245	
	Gender (1=M, 2=F)	-0.245***	0.027	-0.222	
	Age	-0.002	0.011	-0.005	
	Muslim (0=no, 1=yes)	-0.058	0.035	-0.038	
					R^2= .124
Youth delinquency	Jihadist information seeking	0.505***	0.062	0.202	
	Moral disengagement	0.413***	0.034	0.360	
	Gender (1=M, 2=F)	-0.219***	0.029	-0.172	
	Age	-0.034***	0.013	-0.060	
	Muslim (0=no, 1=yes)	-0.149***	0.040	-0.086	
					R^2 = .291
Violent radicalization	Jihadist information seeking	0.365***	0.063	0.128	
	Moral disengagement	0.687***	0.043	0.528	
	Youth delinquency	0.176***	0.030	0.155	
	Gender (1=M, 2=F)	-0.067*	0.030	-0.047	
	Age	-0.001	0.013	-0.002	
	Muslim (0=no, 1=yes)	0.024	0.040	0.012	
					R^2 = .464

Note. A significant b-weight indicates the β-weight is also significant. b represents unstandardized regression weights. β indicates the standardized regression weights. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 7.2: Regression results using Radicalization (subscale SyfoR) as the criterion

First of all, the hypothesized model had a good fit to the data (χ^2 765)= 987.5;

CFI=0.99, CI[0.98:1.00]; TLI=0.99, CI[0.98:1.00]; RMSEA=0.01,CI[0.00:0.02]). Similarly, we are able to explain a relatively high proportion of the variance (46.4%) in the radicalization scale. In terms of hypothesis testing, jihadist information seeking was indeed a significant direct predictor for violent radicalization (β=0.128, b=0.365, SE=0.063, p=0.000), for moral disengagement (β=0.245, b=0.535, SE=0.056, p=0.000), and for youth delinquency (β=0.202, b=0.505, SE=0.062, p=0.000). Thus, our H1, H2, and H4 were confirmed. More specifically, the more different types of jihadist materials that respondents sought the more they were inclined to agree with moral disengagement statements, the more they have been involved in minor crime in the last six months, and the higher their violent radicalization-scores. These associations were all under control of age, gender, and whether the respondent was Muslim or not.

In a second step, confirming our hypotheses H3 and H5, moral disengagement and youth delinquency did indeed partly mediate the relationship between jihadist information seeking and violent radicalization as they were both directly associated with radicalization and information seeking. Especially the association between moral disengagement and radicalization appeared to be strong (β=0.528, b=0.687, SE=0.043, p=0.000), suggesting that the two puzzle pieces are indeed strongly interrelated. However, the relationship between youth delinquency and radicalization was not unsubstantial either (β=0.155, b=0.167, SE=0.030, p=0.000). Especially this latter association is in line with recent developments within the literature arguing that most jihadist radicals from recent years were previously involved in criminality and delinquent behavior (i.e. crime-terror nexus) (Basra et al., 2016; Klausen et al., 2018). In other words, these findings provide support for the idea that the mere act of seeking multiple types of jihadist materials is associated (a) directly with higher levels of violent radicalization but also (b) indirectly via a rather cognitive route (moral disengagement) and a behavioral route (youth delinquency).

Furthermore, in line with our expectations (H6) moral disengagement was a

significant predictor for youth delinquency (β=0.360, b=0.413, SE=0.034, p=0.000), thereby partly mediating the relationship between information seeking and delinquent behavior. These results suggest that delinquent behavior is both directly predicted by jihadist information seeking as well as indirectly through a cognitive route of moral disengagement.

The hypothesized direction behind these findings is that the more jihadist material is sought, the more respondents internalize the moral disengagement arguments that have been shown to be omnipresent in these media, the more they engage in delinquent behavior, and ultimately the more they are in support for violent radicalization through a complex combination of these associations. Given the substantial explained variance in the violent radicalization measure (46.4%) we can conclude that these puzzle pieces together are indeed important predictors for violent radicalization.

Finally, in all previous steps we have controlled for age, gender, and religion (i.e. Muslim or non-Muslim). That means that our hypothesized model can be interpreted as 'independent' of a respondents' socio-demographic make-up. Nevertheless, it seems important to highlight some of the associations that have emerged from our analyses. First, respondents' gender appeared to be a significant confounder for moral disengagement in the sense that female respondents tend to be slightly less morally disengaged than male respondents (β=-0.222, b=-0.245, SE=0.027, p=0.000). The same trend was found for the youth delinquency measure (β=-0.172, b=-0.219, SE=0.029, p=0.000), and the violent radicalization measure (β=-0.047, b=-0.067, SE=0.030, p=0.023). These findings suggest that there might be—at least to some degree—a gender-effect at play when it comes to these puzzle pieces of the radicalization puzzle. Furthermore, youth delinquency tended to be negatively associated with being Muslim and age, suggesting that delinquent behavior is more present in non-Muslims and older respondents. Finally, we need to underscore here that religion (i.e. Muslim or not) was not significantly associated with violent radicalization in our data (β=0.012, b=0.024,
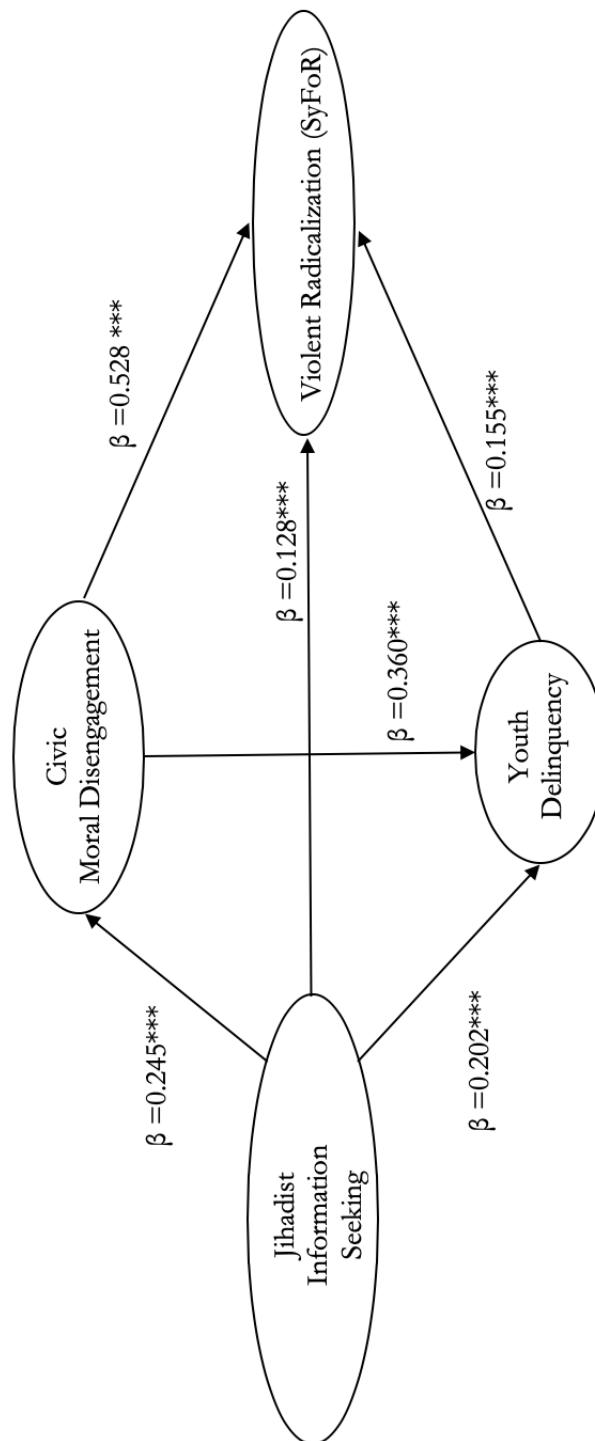
Figure 7.3: Results of the SEM analysis. Controlled for sex, age, and religion. (χ^2 (765)= 987.5; CFI=0.99, CI[0.98:1.00]; TLI=0.99, CI[0.98:1.00]; RMSEA=0.01,CI[0.00:0.02]).

SE=0.040, p=0.542). These findings corroborate recent suggestions in the literature that religion is not a core component, nor an exclusive predictor, for violent radicalization.

7.4 Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to bring our updated version of the puzzle-theory to the test (Hafez & Mullins, 2015). More specifically, it was the purpose of this current study to explore the associations between three predictor puzzle pieces (i.e. jihadist information seeking, moral disengagement, and youth delinquency) and one outcome puzzle piece (i.e. violent radicalization). For this we conducted a cross-sectional questionnaire study within a sample of 1,872 school going youths from Flanders and Brussels capital region. A SEM analysis was performed to test all hypothesized relations. In the first phase of this chapter we explored what exact types of jihadist materials are most searched online. The data were surprising.

First, beheading videos appeared to be the most sought jihadist material for the youngsters in our sample. About 36.11% had indicated that they had ever looked for these videos. This suggests that interest in beheading videos is perhaps not a rare phenomenon, but rather a relatively common practice. This may seem paradoxical, as these videos may be considered as the most repulsive genre of all jihadist materials under scrutiny. However, at the same time, these findings potentially corroborate an observation made by Koch (2018) that jihadist beheadings have become mainstreamed in recent years. Koch (2018) made the point that beheadings have now found their way into Western popular culture such as in film, television, and football—mostly, however, in a satirical context (see Koch, 2018, p. 24). Indeed, beheading videos have a somewhat 'contagious' nature as they are both easily spread and available on the Internet (Awan & Al-Lami, 2009; Koch, 2018). Furthermore, mainstream media have also played an important role in disseminating images of such videos. As observed by Friis (2015, p. 726)"[...] *carefully cropped screen-grabs from the videos have repeatedly been*

shown across print, broadcast and online media, thus establishing the images of the kneeling, orange-clad hostages as the predominant visual icon of the war against ISIS.". Hence, from all proposed jihadist materials, the beheading videos might very well be the most well-known for the respondents in the current study. The fact that these videos are sought by such a substantial proportion of the sample could be interpreted as a sense of curiosity, rather than as a precursor for violent radicalization. Indeed, our data have shown that seeking beheading videos was the least associated with violent radicalization. Nonetheless, in order to understand why young people search for these materials, we encourage more in-depth research on the underlying motivations for seeking brutal executions.

Second, and in contrast to the beheading videos, the magazine genre was the least sought in the current study. The Islamic State's Dabiq magazine was sought by 11% and the al-Qaeda's Inspire magazine was consulted by 9.83% of the youngsters in the current study. Even though these percentages are about three times lower than for beheading videos, it can still be argued that a substantial amount of the young adults actively seek out for these magazines. Furthermore, the group that actively sought for these magazines showed the highest levels of violent radicalization. This was found both for the mean which was significantly higher than in the group that did not seek for these magazines as well as for the tail of the distribution.

In terms of Klausen and colleagues (2018) who described information seeking as a risk factor for violent radicalization, it seems safe to claim that there are differential roles for varies genres of jihadist materials. More specifically, actively seeking for beheading videos might be more innocent than the active search for jihadist magazines. This is a meaningful finding with an eye on prevention / counter-radicalization measures and early-detection programs. Whilst videos of masked men decapitating another human-being might be described as the most violent and radical form of any of the jihadist materials, they are, paradoxically, the least predictive for violent radicalization. On the contrary, whilst a magazine might seem boring and static at first sight, the small group of individuals that

actively seeks out for these materials is significantly more violently radical than the majority who does not.

Our speculation is that this has something to do with the intended purpose of both materials. Indeed, as we have seen in chapter 4 and 5 jihadist magazines use a plethora of psychological and dogmatic rhetoric with the sole purpose to recruit, inspire, and radicalize their audiences (Frissen & d'Haenens, 2017; Frissen et al., 2018). On the other hand, the brutal execution of hostages, or threatening doing so, serves not the immediate purpose of terrorist recruitment—although that might be an occasional side-effect of the contagious 'propaganda by the deed' (Koch, 2018). They are rather instrumental for attracting broad public attention and for subsequently pressuring the international community to comply with the terrorists' demands [1](Friis, 2015; Koch, 2018). Hence, our findings point in the direction that both materials tend to do what they are 'designed' for: beheadings attract attention within the general public, and magazines radicalizes audiences within a 'niche market'. Nevertheless, these findings have to be interpreted as preliminary insights. More research is needed to explore these associations more in depth. For example, why is interest for such brutal execution videos so wide-spread? What makes youth interested in such videos? Can this be explained by a general predilection for violence and gore online? How can we understand why some people seek jihadist magazines? Especially in-depth research efforts could be meaningful to answer these questions.

In the second phase of this chapter we tested a part of the radicalization puzzle by means of a structural equation model. Our results show that a substantial proportion, almost 50%, of an individual's violent radicalization can be predicted by the complex interplay of (1) jihadist information seeking, (2) moral disengagement, and (3) youth delinquency. More specifically, as we had expected on the basis of the literature, all three puzzle pieces were directly and independently associated with radicalization. The acceptance of moral

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[1]Such demands can be, for example, requesting multimillion dollar ransoms for the hostages that the terrorists can use to finance their activities (Callimachi, Kirkpatrick, & Pérez-Peña, 2019)

disengagement arguments proved to be the strongest direct predictor for violent radicalization. This confirms the central role that moral reasoning may play within a radicalization process. As noted before, although perhaps a cognitive process in essence (Bandura, 2002), moral disengagement is typically inspired by collective-group mechanisms such as collective identity and collective action frames. Social movement theory suggests that morally categorizing 'the other' as the enemy, for example is crucial to instigate collective action against the enemy whereby violence can become morally justified (Horgan, 2005; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Olesen, 2009). Also Hafez and Mullins (2015, p. 967) note that such collective action frames under the banner of an ideology are *"[. . .]necessary for demonizing or dehumanizing enemies and enabling moral beings to engage in otherwise immoral violence"*. Hence, the data presented in this chapter underline these theoretical assumptions. Even though a relation between moral disengagement and aggressive behavior is well-established in the literature (Gini et al., 2014; Pelton et al., 2004), to the best of our knowledge, this is one of the first empirical tests associating the concept with violent radicalization.

Youth delinquency was also a significant direct predictor for violent radicalization. This means that youth who had engaged in petty crime and minor delinquent behavior in the past six months prior to the questionnaire had higher violent radicalization scores. In line with the suggestions for a so-called crime-terror nexus in the literature (Basra et al., 2016; Van Ostaeyen, 2016), these findings corroborate the hypothesis that criminal involvement—even only petty crime—is key puzzle piece in the radicalization puzzle.

Jihadist information seeking was also directly associated with violent radicalization. The more different jihadist materials are sought the more this individual is violently radicalized. In that sense, the mere act of seeking jihadist information is already a related to a higher support for violent radicalization. Nevertheless, jihadis information seeking was also indirectly associated with the outcome via three routes. The first could be called the 'cognitive-route'.

Individuals who actively seek out for more jihadist materials tend to be cognitively more engaged in the process of moral disengagement. As we have seen in chapter 4, moral disengagement rhetoric—in particular the dehumanization frame—is omnipresent in jihadist materials. The SEM results demonstrate that those who got actively exposed to such materials show also higher involvement in *'cognitive restructuring [...] inhumane conduct into a benign or worthy one [...]'* (Bandura, 2002, p.101). Hence, our model suggests that jihadist information seeking is associated with violent radicalization, through a cognitive process of moral disengagement. The second route is the 'behavioral-route'. Our analyses show that jihadist information seeking is positively associated with youth delinquency. More concretely, individuals who sought more jihadist materials were more involved in petty crime and minor delinquent behavior, such as fights, and stealing. Even though we do not have a lot of data to compare this finding to, it seems that this route supports the hypothesis that radicalization is a phasic trajectory whereby an individual gradually adopts risk behaviors ranging from the active search of radical information, to criminality, and, ultimately, to political violence (Klausen et al., 2018).

The third route could be called the cognitive-behavioral-route. Through information seeking of more jihadist materials, individuals become more cognitively disengaged from their moral standards, which in turn increases their involvement in uncivilized, delinquent behavior, which in turn makes them more prone to violent radicalization. Indeed, such cognitive-behavioral associations have been well-established in the literature for a broad range of aggressive and delinquent behaviors (see Pelton et al., 2004), but for violent radicalization these pathways are merely theorized and rarely tested (cfr. Sageman's (2008) critique on the field of terrorism and radicalization:*"As a rule, [most academic experts on terrorism] are good at generating hypotheses, but not in testing them."*).

Finally, the data of the current study have shown that the violent radicalization puzzle is rather independent of one's religion. In all steps of the model, we

controlled for whether an individual was Muslim or non-Muslim. No statistical significant associations were observed for violent radicalization and moral disengagement with one's identification as Muslim. Youth delinquency appeared to be negatively associated with being Muslim, suggesting that Muslims had lower scores for youth delinquency. Therefore, it is arguable that violent radicalization is indeed independent of whether someone is Muslim or not. These results are in line with our findings from chapter 4 and 5, where we have been able to demonstrate that religion is only a very thin layer in radical jihadist materials. Hence, after an analysis of jihadist materials and their audiences we cannot but conclude that it is not religion that matters but it is moral disengagement (frames) and inhumane behavior that play the first fiddle in the context of violent radicalization.

7.4.1   Limitations and implications

The results presented here are subject to some limitations but can also function as a basis for future research and counter-radicalization measures. First and foremost, all analyses have been conducted on cross-sectional data. That means that the associations that have been presented here should be interpreted as correlational and not as causal. In other words, based on these data we cannot say anything of the direction of the presented associations. The arrows that have been drawn in the model (figure 7.3) should be interpreted as hypothesized directions. It is perfectly arguable, however, that the associations may very well go in the opposite direction: e.g. individuals that are more disengaged from their moral standards are more likely to seek jihadist materials that confirm already their pre-existing beliefs (cfr. confirmation bias, selective exposure, and reinforcing spirals (Kahneman, 2011; Slater, 2007; Song & Boomgaarden, 2017). Yet, our analysis should be situated within a theoretical paradigm assuming that exposure to media contents has socializing and cultivating effects on the consumers (e.g. Van den Bulck, 2013). Nevertheless, future studies are encouraged to investigate these associations within a longitudinal research design in order to evaluate the exact directions of the

associations between the puzzle pieces. Furthermore, the question of who exactly seeks jihadist media and for what reason remains a blind spot. Our data do not provide information of which individual profile is more likely to seek these jihadist materials. A follow-up study could conduct for example in-depth interviews with active information seekers in order to understand why and how these individuals seek for jihadist information. Finally, the current findings are developed in a jihadist context. Even though we have come to demonstrate that religion does not play a crucial role in our model, it is unclear whether these findings remain robust in a non-jihadist radicalization context. For example, it could be meaningful to investigate whether the results of this study can be replicated with extremist right information seeking.

That being said, a few recommendations can be distillated from the current study. First, merely taking down or censuring jihadist materials seems not only an infraction of fundamental democratic rights (e.g. freedom of speech), it may also be ineffective. More specifically, whilst it can be argued that beheading videos should be taking down because of human rights violations and hate speech-regulations (cfr. Alava et al., 2017), the magazine-genre does not necessarily fall within that category. Paradoxically however, our data demonstrate that it is not seeking beheading videos but the act of seeking magazines that is most strongly related to violent radicalization. Furthermore, counter-radicalization initiatives should not focus on religious counter narratives, but on 'moral engagement' frames. For example, it has been shown that promoting moral standards and learning to be empathic towards 'the other' can function as an antidote towards dehumanization and radicalization (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2011; Pelton et al., 2004).

In any case, the current chapter shows that youth can be both wired (infoseeking) and hardwired (moral disengagement) for terror.

8 | The 'Terror in the News' – 'Terror in the Mind'-Nexus

"Bullets and shrapnel will slash and pierce all those whom Allah's

soldiers reach. Survivors will be scarred physically and mentally,

haunted whenever their eyes are closed, whenever they blink."

(Dabiq 14 (2016), p. 5, about the Brussels bombings (March 22nd,

2016)

8.1 Introduction

In the direct aftermath of the Islamist inspired bombings on the national airport and on the Brussels public transport network, Belgian society was fundamentally disrupted. One of the terrorist suspects—who enjoyed global and continuous media attention by the name 'man in the hat' (Evans, Farmer, & Willgress, 2016)—was still a fugitive. As a consequence, the police received over 650 phone calls per day from people who were either convinced to have seen 'the man in the hat', or who found an 'Arabic-looking man with a bag' very suspicious (Bolle, 2016; Regenmortel,

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2016). Within only a few hours after the attacks, Belgian society was in a state of hypervigilance and almost every Muslim man walking the streets risked to be reported as a terrorist.

This is a perfect example of what Awan and colleagues (2011) have called the 'mediatized condition of hyper-security'. The immediacy of contemporary news media flows that penetrate the lives of their audiences without any spatial or temporal restrictions and the ease with which one can communicate (facilitated by limitless communications technologies such as mobile phones, social media, etc.) with each other directly feeds into such a state of hyper-security.

In the current chapter we aim to explore this mediatized condition of hyper-security. More specifically, the current study sets out to investigate whether the 'Muslim as a dangerous other' narrative in the news media is associated with the 'Muslim as a dangerous other' schema or anti-Muslim sentiments in young adults' minds. Even though, some studies have already demonstrated that terrorism news coverage is associated with anti-Muslim sentiments (von Sikorski, Schmuck, Matthes, & Binder, 2017), the potential underlying processes remain largely underexplored. Research on the psychology of terrorism has theorized that a cognitive preoccupation or hypervigilance after a terrorist attack, a phenomenon that became known as terrorism catastrophizing, might be a key, mediating factor within this relationship (Sinclair & LoCicero, 2007). To date, however, these presumably strongly associated concepts have received limited scientific attention.

Therefore, the objective of the current study is twofold: First, we aim to assess whether exposure to terrorism news coverage–which was said to be sensational and structurally conveying anti-Muslim sentiments (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Mertens & De Smaele, 2016)—is associated with a state of hypervigilance, i.e. terrorism catastrophizing and with anti-Muslim hostility, i.e. Islamoprejudice. Second, it is our ambition to assess whether this state of hypervigilance mediates the relationship between terrorism news media exposure and Islamoprejudice. On the basis of a cross-sectional survey study within a sample drawn from the general young adult

population (n=747) we developed a structural equation model that enabled us to test the associations hypothesized above. Limitations and implications for future research are discussed.

8.2 Status quaestionis

8.2.1 Covering terrorism in a post 9/11 world

Terrorism is communication. It is unique in its ability to shock and scare. Statesmen, journalists and citizens often overreact, with a fear and a feeling of being threatened that are far disproportionate to the actual risk level (UNESCO, 2017). Especially news media have the tendency to be extremely sensationalist and graphic in the context of terrorism coverage (Nacos, 2016; Silver, Holman, McIntosh, Poulin, & Gil-Rivas, 2002). This is exactly the terrorists' goal, following the characteristics provided by Moeller (2009: 19): *"the deliberate targeting of civilians; the goal, beyond the victims, of affecting public opinion as broadly as possible and the intention to create a psychological impact that is greater than the physical damage caused."* We can infer from the terrorists' priority to get as much media coverage as possible, and from the media tendency to seek the greatest audience possible and to be magnetically attracted by violent issues, that the relationship between both groups may be fraught and sometimes symbiotic and perverse (UNESCO, 2017).

As Jenkins already wrote it in 1975, "terrorist attacks are often carefully choreographed to attract the attention of the electronic media and the international press. [...] Terrorism is aimed at people watching, not at the actual victims. Terrorism is theater" (Jenkins, 1975: 4). According to Weimann (2008: 69), this theater-of-terror metaphor has been widely adapted to "examine modern terrorism as an attempt to communicate messages through the use of orchestrated violence". In that sense, terrorism has been considered to be "a language of symbolic action: in the choice of the victims, in the choice of terrorist act, the drama created and the various official responses sought" (O'Shaughnessy & Baines,

2009: 1). Media practitioners have long underestimated their responsibility in this great propaganda game. They should be careful not to contribute to polarization and panic by publishing shortcuts, amalgams, blames on "suspect communities", prejudices, ideological and political biases, and retaliation incitement. Terrorist attacks often reveal the underlying prejudices in a society, and have the potential to amplify them (UNESCO, 2017). The adopted news frames and tone are crucial to keep the reactions within the population and the policymakers proportionate, and to prevent fear from turning into panic. This starts already with carefully choosing the words that set a frame. Framing an event as terror is not harmless, and it often takes place in the very first phase of media coverage (Hervik, 2017). Furthermore, framing an event as terror seems more likely when the perpetrator is a Muslim. A recent study found that when an attack was carried out by a Muslim, it received 449% more coverage than an attack by a non-Muslim perpetrator (Kearns et al., 2017). The authors conclude that *"Regardless of other factors, attacks perpetrated by Muslims receive a disproportionate amount of media coverage. In the present data, Muslims perpetrated 12.4% of the attacks yet received 41.4% of the news coverage"* (Kearns et al., 2017: 11). Given this fundamental distortion in the news media coverage of terrorist events, it seems necessary to explore how Muslims are represented in the news in general.

8.2.2   Media representations of Muslims

In their recent and seminal work, Mertens and De Smaele (2016) give a comprehensive (transnational) overview of the status quaestionis on the subject of media representations of Muslims and Islam. By means of detailed analysis and nuanced discussion, the authors conclude that Muslims appear in the news predominantly—or almost exclusively—within a discourse of violence (Mertens, 2016). In a similar vein, Tsagarousianou (2016) pointed out that when Muslims are represented in the news, they particularly feature in the context of a securitization-, terrorism-, and/or radicalization-narrative in which they are

inevitably portrayed as (national) security threats (Tsagarousianou, 2016). This corroborates with the conclusions that Ahmed and Matthes (2017) recently drew on the basis of their critical meta-analysis of the subject: (1) Muslims are mainly negatively portrayed in news stories on 'terrorism' and 'war', and (2) the Islam is structurally framed as a violent religion. In that sense, there seems to be a solid consensus in the field that media advance a recurring theme in which Muslims and Muslim values impose a threat to "western" values (Ichau & d'Haenens, 2016).

The idea that the media are biased in their representations of minorities and '(exotic) others' is not at all new (Said, 1978; Van Dijk, 2000). Or, as Freeman and Freeman (2008: 50) coined it: "Every age has its bête noire." Today, or in the 'post-9/11 Western society', it is said that the Muslim population has become the scapegoat for "all the anxieties and uncertainties of living in a globalized world" (Poole, 2016: 31; Khiabany & Williamson, 2015). Accordingly, Muslims are represented in the media as a legitimate target for suspicion and mistrust (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2009).*"Public 'debates-cum-panics' almost invariably exoticize European Muslims, focusing on what appears to be mysterious, alien yet seductive about their cultures and practices."*(Tsagarousianou, 2016: 17). As a direct consequence, the prevalence of these 'Muslims as an alien'-caricatures leads to the idea that media and Western governments structurally advance a Muslim paranoia narrative (Aistrope, 2016). Especially in the case of terrorism, news coverage appears to be biased towards anti-Muslim sentiments. Ruigrok and van Atteveldt (2007) discuss how news media capitalize on *"[. . .] the framework of the War on Terror to interpret the "friends" and "enemies" of a state, easily expanding the notion of "enemy" to include all Muslims both in the Middle East and the West."* More specifically, it is suggested that Islamophobic frames that reflected neo-colonial assumptions surfaced through media coverage of the War on Terror, and nourished a growing anti-Muslim feeling (Said 2008; Henry & Tator 2002; Kellner 2004; Norris, Kern & Just 2003; Nacos 2002; Paletz 1992; Picard 1993).

Journalists are not always aware of all these potential biases that inherently

belong to the story-telling process: selecting what does matter and omitting or under-reporting what does not, then framing this information with a specific tone, with selective explanations, details and links given as the only existing or valuable ones, stressing some aspects of the news detrimental to other ones, naming events, causes and stakeholders with a specific and sometimes loaded vocabulary, rushing to identify culprits, juxtaposing issues, failing to expand news to broader contexts, etc. (UNESCO, 2017; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010).

These invisible editorial choices (Fairclough's "power-holders", 1989) have a cumulative effect that can greatly impact public opinion (Fairclough 1989; Steuter & Wills, 2009; Luhmann, 2015), public life (Fairclough, 1989; Reese, Gandy & Grant, 2001), and the policy alike (Baum & Potter, 2008).

8.2.3 The potential effects of the 'Muslim as a dangerous other' narrative

Only limited empirical support exists for the assumption that terrorism news coverage impacts society. For example, studies showed that exposure to terrorism news consumption evokes direct fear responses (de Cock & Kok, 2016; Nellis & Savage, 2012) as well as anti-Muslim prejudice (von Sikorski et al., 2017). There are, however, two obstacles within the current state of the art.

First, several longitudinal studies have shown that the fear reactions after a terrorist attack are rather short-term effects, in which societal levels of fear indeed culminate as a direct consequence of a terrorist event—and of exposure to the coinciding news media coverage about that event—, to decrease soon after (Schuster et al., 2001; Silver et al., 2002). In contrast with these rapidly changing fear levels, Sinclair and LoCicero (2007) found that a terrorist threat is much more salient on a cognitive spectrum than on an emotional one. When fear levels decrease to baseline measures, people tend to remain cognitively involved—or hypervigilant—with the 'idea' of a terrorist threat—a process that is coined as *terrorism catastrophizing* (Sinclair & LoCicero, 2007). In that sense,

catastrophizing goes beyond the mere fear for terrorism. It differentiates from an emotional reaction as it is rather an overly cognitive preoccupation or state of rumination and magnification vis-à-vis the terrorist threat. The process that is thought to take place is that exposure to terrorism, either directly, or indirectly through the media, provides maladaptive schemas of danger that elicit acute stress reactions and collective trauma (Garfin, Holman, & Silver, 2015; Holman, Garfin, & Silver, 2014; Pfefferbaum et al., 2014; Solberg, Blix, & Heir, 2015). As a way to cope with these stressors, one develops a hypervigilant cognitive state in order to selectively monitor potential danger in the world. In turn, this state of hypervigilance has been found to coincide with avoidance behavior towards people from other cultural or ethnic backgrounds (Sinclair & LoCicero, 2007). Remarkably however, the relationship between terrorism news exposure and terrorism catastrophizing is empirically underexplored. To the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have associated both concepts. Nevertheless, based on the theoretical assumptions above, it seems more than warranted to explore the pathways between the two.

Second, an on-going (and maybe endless) debate on the definitions of anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia shows the challenges of outlining and measuring such a difficult and delicate phenomena (Uenal, 2016). The difficulty lies in the multidimensional nature of those concepts. For example, integrated threat theory suggests that anti-Muslim sentiments is a complex multilayered concept that results from three distinct intergroup threat perceptions: perceived terroristic threat, perceived symbolic threat and/or perceived realistic threat (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999; Velasco González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008). In the same vein, authors have argued that Islamophobia cannot be seen as a monolithic construct in that sense that a subtle distinction exists between attitudes towards a religion (Islam) and attitudes towards the people who follow that religion (Muslims) (Uenal, 2016). Sensitive to these subtle nuances, Ciftci (2012) argues that the most comprehensive theoretical definition of

Islamophobia consists of eight elements:

1. *Islam is seen as a monolithic bloc, static, and unresponsive to change.*

2. *Islam is seen as separate and "other".*

3. *Islam is seen as inferior to the West and is seen as barbaric, irrational, primitive, and sexist.*

4. *Islam is seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, and supportive of terrorism.*

5. *Islam is seen as a political ideology and is used for political or military advantage.*

6. *Criticisms made of the West by Islam are rejected out of hand.*

7. *Hostility toward Islam is used to justify discriminatory practices toward Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society.*

8. *Hostility to Muslims is seen as natural or normal.*

Putting the theory to the test, Imhoff and Recker (2012) developed a measurement tool to investigate these elements. Remarkably, they found that these eight points are indeed different but similar entities. More specifically, the authors show that these elements are in fact influenced by one underlying concept that they label Islamoprejudice, or a set of negative and hostile beliefs about Islam and its followers. Consequently, anti-Muslim or anti-Islam sentiments are not necessarily based on a 'phobia', a fear, or a perceived threat, but are rather a set of unreasonable and deep-rooted hostile convictions that Muslims and the Islam are primitive, violent, and potentially dangerous (cfr. Zimmerman, 2008). This aside, it cannot go unmentioned here that having the conviction that others purposely want to do harm or have bad intentions is called paranoia in psychiatric literature (Freeman & Freeman, 2008). Yet, the extent to which news media impact those specific hostile anti-Muslim and anti-Islam convictions remains so far unrevealed. Hence, the assumption that terrorism news exposure affects terrorism

catastrophizing (instead of fear for terrorism) and Islamoprejudice (instead of a phobia or perceived threat for Islam and Muslims) seems a hypothesis worth exploring.

Taken together, and based on literature discussion above, it seems safe to claim that a 'Muslim as a dangerous other' narrative is substantially prevalent in Western news media, especially in the context of terrorism news coverage. Consequently, scholars have theorized that this form of terrorism news coverage affects a state of cognitive preoccupation or hypervigilance in society, in which people tend to stay longer preoccupied with the terrorist threat on a cognitive level rather than on an emotional level. At the same time, it is thought that a 'Muslim as a dangerous other' discourse is associated with Islamoprejudice. In order to assess Islamoprejudice and to what extent it is affected by terrorism news coverage we will treat the it as a multidimensional phenomenon. Our main research question is:

RQ: To what extent is exposure to the ubiquitous "Muslim as a dangerous other"-narrative in the news media associated with "Muslim as a dangerous other"-belief (Islamoprejudice) among its viewers, and what is the role of cognitive hypervigilance (terrorism catastrophizing) in this association?

We will attempt to answer this research question by means of three testable hypotheses:

H1: *More exposure to terrorism news media is associated with higher levels of terrorism catastrophizing.*

H2: *More exposure to terrorism news is associated with higher levels of Islamoprejudice.*

H3: *Terrorism catastrophizing is associated with higher levels of Islamoprejudice.*

It cannot go without mention that the hypotheses and assumed associations in this study do not reflect any causal relationship. All of the tests will be performed on cross-sectional data, which does not provide any evidence for causality. Even though it seems warranted to assume that terrorism catastrophizing terrorism is a result of the overwhelming media attention related to the event, or that paranoid thoughts are influenced by a state of vigilance, one could perfectly argue that inverse effects might be true as well, e.g., somebody who is cognitively more preoccupied or hypervigilant to the terrorist threat might be more inclined to proactively follow media coverage of terrorism as a way of coping with the perceived threat. Nonetheless, for the sake of consistency with the dominant discourse within both the media and communication effects and psychology of terrorism literature, we treat media exposure as a hypothesized predisposition and the other variables as possible outcomes. Having said that, and with respect to the correlation-causation debate, we encourage future research to test the proposed associations over time by means of a longitudinal research design that enables to infer causality.

8.3 Material and methods

8.3.1 Data collection protocol

Respondents were recruited through secondary schools, youth organizations, university graduate students, and social media channels. A team of researchers actively visited schools in metropolitan areas, such as Brussels and Antwerp, as well as in smaller cities such as Mechelen. The questionnaire was available online from April to May 2017. During this period, we were able to recruit a random sample of 1,146 participants. All participants were invited to take part in the questionnaire. We provided the participants with a written briefing, stating the purpose and the nature of the study, which served also as an interactive informed consent form. This form also included a statement emphasizing that participants'

anonymity was guaranteed at any stage of the research process. At the same time, participants were informed that even if they consented to take part in the study, they could discontinue at any desired moment. To avoid priming respondents, the briefing stated very simply that the aim of our study was to gain understanding on news media usage and on certain private feelings or thoughts. The current study has been conducted in the context of a broader project aimed at assessing the influences of media and communication on polarization and extremism for which all ethical protocols have been approved by the Ethics Committee of the KU Leuven.

The first step in the pursuance of testing our hypotheses was to trim down our data by cleaning out unfinished responses, inattentive respondents, extreme outliers, and participants who fell beyond the scope of our 16-35 age range. This resulted in a final dataset of 747 meaningful cases. The sample distribution of the demographic variables showed a small overrepresentation of women (60.9%). The age of the respondents was also mildly skewed to the left with a mean age of 20 years old (Min=16 years; Max=35 years; M=20.34, SD=3.74 Median= 19.93). The majority of the respondents had a secondary school diploma as highest degree or was still in secondary school (62%). Nearly one in four (24.7%) obtained a bachelor degree and 13.1% of the respondents had a master's degree.

8.3.2 Measurements

Exposure to terrorism news coverage
In order to measure news media exposure to terrorism news coverage, respondents were provided with a list of 18 different types of global and national media and information sources. They were asked to respond by means of a 5-point Likert scale (1=*"Never"*; 5=*"All day"*) to what extent they use these media sources in the case of terrorist attacks. The five most frequently reported media were Facebook (M=3.92, SD=1.139), national television news (M=3.80, SD=1.038), national

newspapers online version (M=3.75, SD=1.038), national radio (M=3.48, SD=1.241), and national newspapers paper edition (M=3.28, SD=1.038). Together these media are aggregated into one composite score that we labeled 'exposure to terrorism news' (M=3.65, SD=0.871).

Terrorism Catastrophizing Scale (TCS)

The TCS (Sinclair & LoCicero, 2007) is one of the most inclusive self-report methods for a detailed assessment of the cognitive-behavioral effects of a terrorist threat in society. The TCS consists of 13 statements such as *"I have difficulty keeping the threat of terrorism out of my mind"* and *"I worry that terrorism will only get worse as time passes"*. Answer categories ranged from 1= "Strongly Agree" to 5= "Strongly Disagree". The authors suggest that the scale can either be used as unidimensional construct or as three parallel subscales, measuring different catastrophizing sub concepts: Rumination, Magnification and Helplessness. Results from Principal components analyses (PCA) using varimax rotation and parallel analysis show that 3 factors (rumination, magnification, and helplessness) should be extracted. These factors serve as lower-order latent variables that load on the higher-order latent variable terrorism catastrophizing. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the fit of the proposed hierarchical factor structure. To correct potential biases from the non-normality of the data, the fit measures were bootstrapped using the Bollen-Stine method with 10.000 draws (Bollen & Stine, 1992). The results showed that the terrorism catastrophizing scale had a good fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 76.75$, df = 63, p > 0.05; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.015. Internal consistency analysis yielded also satisfactory results (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$).

Islamoprejudice

To measure our outcome variable, we used the so-called Islamoprejudice scale, as introduced and validated by Imhoff and Recker (2012). With nineteen items, such

as *"The Islamic world is backward and unresponsive to new realities"* and *"Today it is not uncommon to be suspicious of Muslims"* the scale is an exhaustive measurement for all the sub elements of anti-Islam sentiments and stigmatic thinking about Muslims (Imhoff & Recker, 2012). According to the authors (2012, p. 814) the scale assesses: *Islam as an unprogressive monolithic bloc* (items 1-3), *Islam as separate and other* (items 4–5), *Islam as inferior* (items 6–8), *Islam as violent* (items 9–10), *Islam as mere political ideology* (items 11–12), *unscreened rejection of any criticism made by Islam* (items 13–14), *justification of discriminatory practices towards Muslims* (items 15–17), and *acceptance of anti-Muslim hostility* (items 18–19). All nineteen items were scored on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1= *"totally agree"*, to 5= *"totally disagree"*, and eight items had to be reversed-coded (i.e. items 2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 14, 17, 19), such that higher scores indicated a higher Islamoprejudice.

Whereas all 19 items loaded on one single factor in the original study by Imhoff & Recker (2012), parallel analysis and PCA using varimax rotation yielded a significantly different factor structure in the present data. Parallel analysis suggested a 3-factor structure. Using a factor loading of 0.40 as the cut-off, we found that 8 items (item 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 17) did not load on any factor and were subsequently dropped for further analyses. We labeled the remaining factors as *"Islam as an inferior, violent political ideology"* (items 1, 6, 7, 8, 10), *"discriminatory practices towards Muslims and anti-Muslim hostility"* (items 15,16, 18, 19), and *"Islam as unprogressive"* (items 2 and 3). Each of these factors served as lower-order latent variable loading on the higher-order latent variable Islamoprejudice. A CFA was conducted to test the fit of the proposed hierarchical factor structure. To correct potential biases from the non-normality of the data, the fit measures were bootstrapped using the Bollen-Stine method with 10.000 draws (Bollen & Stine, 1992). The proposed factor structure for Islamoprejudice had a good fit to the data (χ^2 = 49.23, df = 42, p > 0.05; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.013) and the Islamoprejudice scale had a good internal consistency

(Cronbach's α= 0.85)

Prior personal contact with Muslims

Following the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Christian, Lapinski, & Isacksen, 2003), stating that direct personal interactions with Muslims can neutralize Islamophobia, we asked respondents to indicate the quantity of their previous interactions with Muslims. On a 5-point Likert scale we measured how often they have had prior personal contact (0= *"Never"*, 4= *"Very often"*).

8.3.3 Statistical analyses

Given the cross-sectional nature of the current study, we are limited to non-causal statistical analyses of direct and indirect associations. To test the proposed hypotheses, a structural equation model was constructed in R with the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Age, gender, education and prior contact with Muslims were controlled for. Maximum likelihood, which is a relatively robust estimator concerning the non-normality of the data, was used to estimate the model. However, fit measures and p-values might still be biased due to non-normality. To correct this potential bias, the fit measures were bootstrapped draws using the Bollen-Stine method (Bollen & Stine, 1992). To test the significance of the regression coefficients, 90%, 95% and 99% confidence intervals were bootstrapped as well. Both bootstraps contain 10.000 draws.

8.4 Results

The results of the structural equation model can be found in table 8.1 and figure 8.1. A general overview of the model shows a good fit to the data. (χ^2 360)= 410.4; CFI=0.99, CI[0.97:1.00]; TLI=0.99, CI[0.96:1.00]; RMSEA=0.01,CI[0.00:0.03]). Similarly, all hypothesized paths explain a

substantial proportion of the variance in the two higher-level endogenous variables, i.e. terrorism catastrophizing and islamoprejudice, with $R^2= 0.307$ and $R2=0.316$, respectively.

In reference to H1, we tested whether news media exposure was a significant predictor for terrorism catastrophizing. This hypothesis was indeed confirmed ($\beta= 0.265$, $b= 0.159$, SE$= 0.027$, p<0.000), suggesting that more exposure to terrorism news is associated with increased levels of terrorism catastrophizing. In other words, individuals that are more exposed to news media messages of the terrorist attack tend to report higher levels of state of cognitive hyper vigilance. Also gender, as a covariate, appeared to be a significant predictor for terrorism catastrophizing. More specifically, women were significantly more catastrophizing the terrorist threat than men ($\beta= 0.457$, $b= 0.501$, SE$=00.49$, p < 0.000). Both findings are in line with our expectations and with previous studies on gender differences in responses to terrorism (e.g. de Cock & Kok, 2016).

In reference to H2, we found an opposite association than expected: terrorism news exposure was significantly negatively associated with Islamoprejudice ($\beta= -0.147$, $b=-0.104$ SE$= 0.032$, p < 0.01). In terms of a direct association, more exposure to terrorism news coverage is significantly associated with lower levels of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam beliefs. Indeed, at first sight this seems to be in contradiction to our hypothesis based on the cultivation theory (see Gerbner et al., 2002; Van den Bulck, 2013), suggesting that more exposure to a *'Muslim as a dangerous other'* narrative cultivates a more *'Muslim as a dangerous other'* social reality perception. However, there are potentially three explanations for this. First, we have to look at the broader context in which this study has taken place. The questionnaire was administered among school going youth in Brussels, Antwerp and other Belgian cities in a little more than a year after the Brussels bombings of March 22nd 2016. Hence, for many of the respondents in the present study, these questions about terrorism and media coverage about terrorism might have naturally elicited their memory of the Brussels attacks in particular (cfr.

Criterion	Predictor	b	SE	β	Explained variance
Terrorism catastrophizing	Terrorism news exposure	0.159***	0.027	0.256	
	Gender (1=M, 2=F)	0.501***	0.049	0.457	
	Age	-0.003	0.009	-0.020	
	Education	0.006	0.023	0.017	
	Prior personal contact Muslims	0.019	0.020	0.042	
					$R^2 = .307$
Islamoprejudice	Terrorism catastrophizing	0.675***	0.090	0.593	
	Terrorism news exposure	-0.104**	0.032	-0.147	
	Gender (1=M, 2=F)	-0.482***	0.068	-0.385	
	Age	-0.002	0.010	-0.015	
	Education	-0.090***	0.025	-0.220	
	Prior personal contact Muslims	-0.069**	0.022	-0.132	
					$R^2 = .316$

Note. A significant b-weight indicates the β-weight is also significant. b represents unstandardized regression weights. β indicates the standardized regression weights. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 8.1: Regression results of the structural equation model
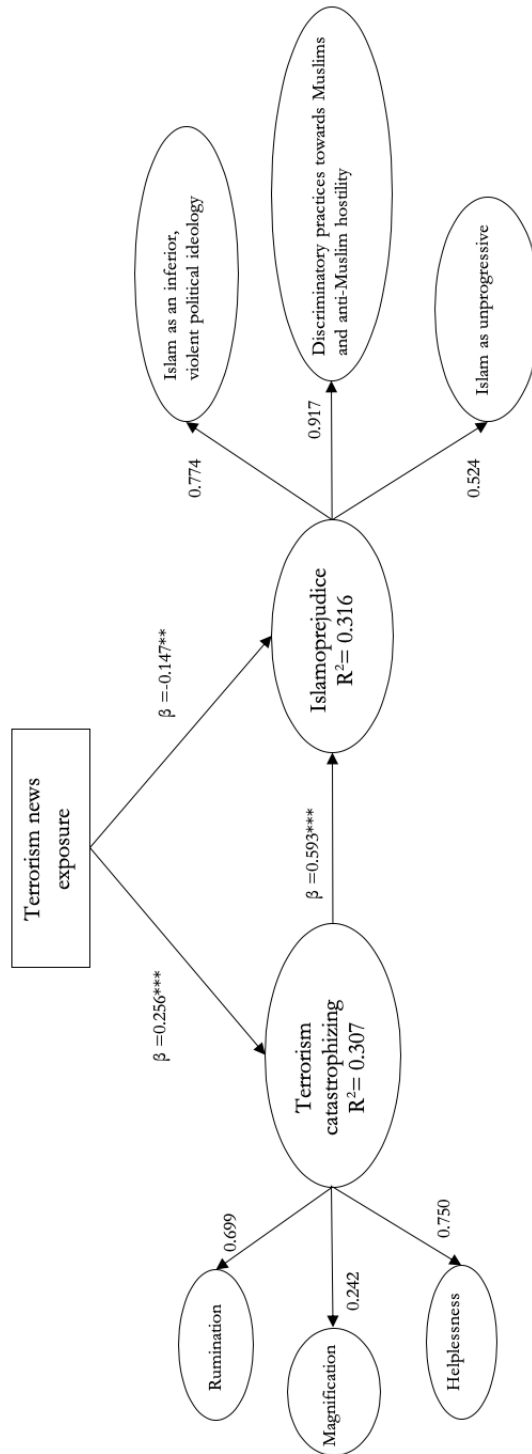
Figure 8.1: Results of the SEM analysis. Controlled for gender, age, education, and prior personal contact with Muslims. ($\chi^2(765)$= 987.5; CFI=0.99, CI[0.98:1.00]; TLI=0.99, CI[0.98:1.00]; RMSEA=0.01,CI[0.00:0.02]).

availability bias, see Kahneman, 2011). As noted in the introduction of this chapter, the vast majority of the media attention of these attacks went straight to the ongoing man hunt of Mohamed Abrini— one of the terrorists on the run who gained world fame as *'the man with the hat'*. Thus, these specific terrorist attacks and their media coverage might have been different in their reporting of the perpetrators than in previous attacks. Instead of scapegoating Muslims and the Muslim community as a whole—which might have been the case with previous terrorist events (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Kundnani, 2014; Poole, 2016)—the Brussels attacks were immediately attributed to a single gangster (or club of gangsters). It is then arguable that respondents in our study might have been primed by terrorism news in which one individual was singled-out and not necessarily all blame was attributed to 'Muslims'. If we take this argument even further, it becomes arguable that more exposure to terrorism news might have functioned as a buffer against a process of scapegoating Muslims. More concretely, individuals who were less exposed to the news—i.e. less exposed to the narrative that it was not a whole Muslim community but rather one single *'man in the hat'*—might have held more negative attitudes toward Muslims in general. Nonetheless, more research is necessary to investigate whether the media coverage of the brussels bombings was indeed different than other attacks.

Another explanation for this finding is the role of gender-differences in responses to terrorism and conflict coverage. Even though we control for gender in our model, an overall gender-effect cannot be ruled out. One should recall that the current sample is somewhat skewed and contains more female than male respondents. Research has pointed out that women tend to react differently to conflict news coverage than men (Höijer, 2004). More specifically, Höijer (2004) found that women experience more compassion after exposure to conflict coverage. It could therefore well be that terrorism news coverage scapegoating Muslims (Poole, 2016: 31; Khiabany & Williamson, 2015) elicits feelings of compassion rather than anti-Muslim beliefs especially for women. Given the overrepresentation

of women in our sample, this effect might not be impossible. Even though this interpretation should be taken with caution, future research is encouraged to differentiate between media effects on anti-Muslim prejudice versus compassion and the potential gendered differences thereby.

Third, and even more speculatively, considering the cross-sectional nature of our data, it is defensible that the observed relationship might in fact goes in the inversed direction, i.e. respondents that score higher on anti-Muslim prejudice may have a tendency to avoid mainstream media messages in which, according to research Muslims presumably take a prominent role. Following the selective exposure assumption, or patterns of communicative choice (e.g. Slater, 2007), these respondents might then be more inclined to actively seek alternative news sources instead of mainstream media. Ultimately, future studies are needed to address the question of causality in this case by means of a longitudinal research design.

Our third hypothesis (H3), assuming that terrorism catastrophizing is positively associated with Islamoprejudice was confirmed on the basis of the current data. Terrorism catastrophizing was a both a substantial and statistical significant predictor for Islamoprejudice ($\beta=$ 0.593, $b=$ 0.675, SE= 0.090, p<0.000). The more respondents are cognitively preoccupied or hypervigilant vis-à-vis the terrorist threat, the more they hold anti-Muslim and anti-Islam beliefs. Accordingly, this means that terrorism catastrophizing is also a significant mediator in the relationship between terrorism news exposure and Islamoprejudice. More exposure to terrorism news, is associated with higher levels of hypervigilance and in turn with higher levels of Islamoprejudice. Although this association has not received much empirical attention before, our data is in line with the explorations by Sinclair & LoCicero (2007) who showed that terrorism catastrophizing has been found to coincide with avoidance behavior towards people from other cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

Furthermore, all relations in the current study were under control of

socio-demographic covariates and prior personal contact with Muslims. The SEM path analysis showed that Islamoprejudice is significantly associated with nearly all covariates, except with age (β=-0.015, b=-0.002, SE=0.010, p<0.000) . More specifically, men were significantly more Islamoprejudicial than women (β=-0.385, b=0.482, SE=0.068, p<0.000), as was the case for respondents with a lower degree in comparison to respondents with a higher degree (β=-0.220, b=-0.090, SE=0.025, p<0.000). Similarly, confirming the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Christian et al., 2003), respondents who reported to have had more frequent prior personal contact with Muslims held significantly less anti-Muslim and anti-Islam beliefs (β=-0.132, b=-0.069, SE=0.022, p<0.01)

8.5   Discussion

The current study should be contextualized within the notion that terrorist events feed directly into a 'mediatized condition of hyper-security' (Awan et al., 2011). It set out to test whether a *"Muslims as a dangerous other"*-narrative in the media is associated with *"Muslims as a dangerous other"*-beliefs amongst those who are exposed to the media. Despite mounting evidence that suggests that media advance (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017) and inspire anti-Muslim sentiments (von Sikorski et al., 2017), we did not observe a direct positive association between exposure to (Islamist) terrorist news coverage and prejudice towards Muslims. The data in the current study did support a negative association between the two. In terms of a direct association, more exposure to terrorism news coverage is significantly associated with lower levels of Islamoprejudice. As discussed above, there are three potential explanations for this: (1) availability bias and the buffering effect of attributing the blame on a single perpetrator rather than on the Muslim community as a whole (i.e. the omnipresence of the 'man with the hat'-narrative); (2) an over-all gender-effect as a result of an overrepresentation of female respondents; and (3) the cross-sectional nature of the data.

Our data did confirm however, a partly indirect association. Indeed, the

hypothesis that more exposure to national terrorism news can increase terrorism catastrophizing and that terrorism catastrophizing in turn affects Islamoprejudice was confirmed. In fact, of all main variables, terrorism news exposure was the strongest and most robust predictor for catastrophizing the terrorist threat while catastrophizing was by far the strongest predictor for Islamoprejudice. These findings suggest that there is indeed an indirect positive relation between terrorism news exposure and Islamoprejudice through a state of hypervigilance. In fact, the current study is among the first to empirically demonstrate the hypothesis of a mediatized condition of hyper-security. For the respondents in our sample, media exposure evoked more salient and maladaptive schemas of danger or a so-called state of hypervigilance (i.e. terrorism catastrophizing). In turn, the media-induced state of hypervigilance is associated with Islamoprejudice. This association is in line with the findings in the pioneering study by Sinclair and LoCicero's (2007). In their assessment, the people who scored higher on the terrorism catastrophizing scale were also significantly more avoiding contact with people from other ethnic backgrounds—in particular those from Arab descent. Hence, the current data support the notion that there might be link between terrorism catastrophizing and outgroup prejudice. Nevertheless, future research should explore this relation more in depth. Especially longitudinal studies are encouraged in order to investigate the causality of these associations.

Taking all together, our study point in the direction that anti-Muslim and anti-Islam prejudice are indeed the result of the mediatization of a cognitive hypervigilance towards the terrorist threat. This process can be explained from an cognitive and evolutionary psychological perspective. In a situation of perceived threat, the human brain will automatically simplify the world to detect danger, filtering out irrelevant information (Aleman, 2011). A problem in this situation is the fact that these filters are imperfect. For example, the conviction that some members of an outgroup impose a threat to one's existence might increase stereotypical schemata and unjust suspicion towards all members of that outgroup

(cfr. Freeman, Garety, Bebbington, Slater, et al., 2005). As a consequence one may perceive threat in other peoples' actions without sufficient ground to assume that they are suspect. This cognitive process is also called top-down processing (Aleman, Böcker, Hijman, Haan, & Kahn, 2003). It has been suggested that top-down processes can be media-induced and feed into an imperfect reality monitoring. In turn that might generate an experience such as the conviction that one saw a terrorist in a seemingly normal person (cfr. Aleman, 2011). In that sense, individuals have a natural, evolutionary-driven mechanism to monitor 'threat' and terror [1]. Thus, at least partly, human beings are hardwired for terror.

To the best of our knowledge, the results in the present study provide a first empirical support for this assumption in the case of a terrorist threat. More peculiarly, our results are maybe a potential explanation for the overwhelming growth in reports of 'suspicious people' and 'suspicious packages' in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack (Buggenhout, 2015; Regenmortel, 2016). For example, the first days after the Brussels attacks, the Belgian police received over 650 phone calls per day from civilians who claimed to have seen one of the (Muslim) terrorist suspects or who found an 'Arab looking man with a bag' suspicious (Bolle, 2016; Het Parool, 2016). As a result, Muslims in several Western countries have reported to have been increasingly approached and erroneously arrested by police forces despite insufficient evidence (Raedt, 2015). For the sake of illustration, according to a Human Rights Watch report, Belgian federal and local police allegedly engaged in 25 discriminating and violent counter terrorism operations in which Muslims were the center of attention, while *"[o]nly one of the suspects was charged with terrorism offenses but in a case of mistaken identity."* (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

In recent years, authors have observed that anti-Muslim hate speech and hate groups dramatically increased (Corke, Asgeirsson, & Illei, 2016). FBI-statistics have shown an upsurge of 67 percent in hate crimes against Muslims in 2015

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[1] After all, terror is derived from the latin word *terrere*, meaning literally "to frighten" or "to scare" (Weimann, 2008)

(Potok, 2016). These examples illustrate that the a mediatized and media-induced hypervigilance does play a role in contemporary society. The protective role that media could play is of paramount importance. More research is of course needed, but for now it seems safe to claim that attributing the blame on one single individual—instead of scapegoating Islam and Muslims in general (cfr. Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Mertens & De Smaele, 2016)—may have a buffering effect for negative attitudes towards Muslims. The news media can play an important role in setting the frame of such attacks. What directly comes to mind here is the example of the Night club Pulse shooting in Orlando, FL, where the news media immediately attributed the blame to Islam and Islamic-inspired terrorism. However, soon after the attack took place, background reports of the shooter—Omar Mateen—showed that he was most-likely not driven by Islam and operated in isolation without any official ties to a terrorist network (Winter & Ingram, 2016). Whilst this was different for the Brussels attacks—i.e. all perpetrators were part of Brussels-based terrorist network (Van Ostaeyen, 2016)—the media narrative in Brussels set the frame immediately different by (unconsciously) criminalizing only one individual.

Another recommendation for media practitioners would be to be more conscious about their word use. More specifically, a crucial pitfall brought up by terrorism is the use of the word itself. It is now a catch-all buzzword, whose definition varies across countries and communities and times. It is also highly invested politically, besides being loaded with emotions, stereotypes and anguish (Fadil et al., 2019; Seib & Janbek, 2011). Its use oversimplifies a very complex web of causes at play (Awan et al., 2011).Therefore, we argue that it must be used very sparingly and thoroughly, without forgetting the social impacts of labelling facts as terrorist. The media must be extremely rigorous while using such a word or other "coded words", coined by terrorists or by the authorities, like "radicalization", "extremist", "jihadist", "collateral damages", "surgical strikes" or "genocide" (Seib & Janbek, 2011). This vocabulary contributes to the mediatization of a hegemonic understanding, that

gradually blocks any contradiction and critical thoughts. In this respect, the lexical and framing choices the media make can greatly shred or protect social fabric and democracy.

8.5.1 Limitations and directions for future research

Even though the data and analyses of the present study corroborate the theoretical assumptions, it is necessary to provide some nuances to the interpretation of the current results. First, it seems essentially important to contextualize our sample. The present study drew a large sample from the non-clinical population in Belgium, exactly one year after the Brussels bombings of March 22nd 2016, which took place at the national airport and on the public transport system in the capital. As has been argued by several authors, even though collective fear responses to terrorism might decrease soon after a terrorist attack, people tend to remain much longer cognitive pre-occupied with the terrorist threat and in a state of hypervigilance (Sinclair & LoCicero, 2007). Not much is known about the duration of this terrorism catastrophizing, but it might well be that the sampled respondents in the current study were still in a state of hypervigilance. Nonetheless, we strongly doubt that this might have biased our results into a specific direction. More concretely, it seems safe to claim that if our respondents were already strongly catastrophizing the terrorist threat, the tested associations would be much less substantial and significant due to a potential ceiling effect. Future research should investigate how salient terrorism catastrophizing might be and whether a state of hypervigilance to the terrorist threat endures over months, years or even beyond.

Second, as stated above, all associations in this study were performed on cross-sectional data and are therefore not suitable to confirm any causal relationship. Even though there seems enough theoretical support to assume that the tested associations follow our hypothesized paths, it was beyond the scope of our abilities to provide any empirical evidence for causality. For example, one could perfectly argue that the association between news exposure and terrorism

catastrophizing might be the other way around, i.e. a state of hypervigilance perhaps causes some sort of obsessive media monitoring and information seeking (cfr. Holman et al., 2014). Nevertheless, in order to connect to the dominant theoretical assumptions in the media psychological and mediatization literature, we treat media exposure as a hypothesized predisposition, as a 'molding force' (Hepp, 2013), and not as an outcome or moderator. Having said that, we encourage future research to test the proposed associations over time by means of a longitudinal research design that transcends the limits cross-sectional by testing causal associations between the variables over time.

Third, the used media variable includes both national news sources as well as Facebook. This indicates that in the case of a terrorist attack, Facebook is one of the most important news sources in young adult's lifes. The weakness of this approach is that we only know what type of medium respondents' have used, but it tells us nothing about the messages that they have seen. Moreover, the fact that Facebook was the most used medium for terrorism news raises the question: What is news in the 21st century? Social media channels that suffer from a lack of online content regulation, but also targeted censure, fake news and limitless voices, are now considered news sources in respondents' minds (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). This proliferation blurs the definition of what is actually news, what is trustworthy, and ultimately, what is truth. Indeed, Benkler, Faris, and Roberts (Benkler et al., 2018) stated bluntly that contemporary societies are in an epistemic crisis. At the same time, in the case of a terrorist attack, one should ask oneself How is news made (Starbird, Maddock, Orand, Achterman, & Mason, 2014)? The audiences and potential news producers are hyperconnected with mobile devices and internet tools (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). For example, in the direct aftermath of the 2015 November 13th Paris Attacks, mobile phone videos of the mayhem dominated the news media landscape and social media channels (Bruns & Hanusch, 2017). It is almost impossible to predict what, when and where user-generated content is going to be published, and perhaps even become breaking news. In sum, more research is

needed to understand these processes of mediatization of terrorism and a mediatized state of seeing a terrorist in every foreigner or Muslim.

9 | General Discussion and Reflection

> *"Censorship, in whatever guise, plays into the hands of enemies of democracy. It is also an insult to the intelligence of the general public, and would totally undermine confidence in the veracity of the media if censorship was to be introduced."*
>
> (Wilkinson, 1997, p. 62)

9.1 Ambition

The current dissertation set out under the banner of 'unraveling the mediatized roots and routes of radicalization'. Sounds good, right?! Indeed, that was an often-heard reaction after disclosing the title—being at the same time the ambition of the current dissertation project—to likeminded researchers. But, is it? Is it a good subtitle and likewise scientific ambition? What does it actually mean? Does radicalization have 'roots'? And 'routes'? And if so, can they be mediatized? Also, what does 'unraveling' consist of? Indeed, the idea sounds initially quite logical and 'good', and perhaps even self-explanatory. But, when looking a bit closer at its separate components the opposite seems actually true. This ambition appears to contain in fact four rather difficult and tentative statements.

First of all, and possibly most conspicuously, it presupposes that the very concept of 'radicalization' exists in the first place. For many, the question whether

radicalization exists or not seems odd. After all, we live in an 'age of radicalization (see Fadil et al., forthcoming) in which the word itself has become part and parcel of 'everyday language' (Coolsaet, 2016). And what can possibly cause such horrendous terrorist attacks other than someone's radicalization? However, for a vast group of scholars, the question whether radicalization exists and can be defined in analytic terms is not that unusual. Even though a systematic analysis of the subject is not readily available, it seems safe to claim that the majority of radicalization scholarship has been centered around the question: 'does radicalization actually exist and what is it'? Without going too deep into that debate here (see chapter 2.1.2), it can be stated that the academic field of radicalization can be roughly divided into two poles. One pole suggesting that radicalization is manifested in violent behavior and ultimately in terrorism (cfr. Moghaddam, 2005; Moskalenko & Mccauley, 2011); and the other arguing that radicalization is manifested in beliefs, and not necessarily relates to terrorism (e.g. Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Horgan, 2005). Along similar fold lines, despite being the focal point around which many fields of academia have actively converged, the academic radicalization-debate can be roughly divided in either an individual-psychological or a collective-sociological focus. As a consequence, the concept of 'radicalization' has been plagued by a plethora of conflicting conceptualizations, and until today it remains ill-defined (Della Porta, 2018). Nevertheless, given the fact that radicalization is so firmly rooted in today's academic, public, and political debates, its existence cannot be neglected. Probably the best way to approach it is in Rik Coolsaet's (2016) terms: radicalization is similar to what a fever is to an illness—a symptom to an underlying problem. *"Sometimes, medicine for fever will alleviate suffering, but as long as the triggering illness is not cured, fever will continue to haunt the patient. In both cases – fever and radicalization – an adequate diagnosis is crucial in countering the symptom."* (Coolsaet, 2016, p. 4). As such, the question of how to define and operationalize the concept continuous to be pressing.

Second, there is the assumption that radicalization has some sort of *'roots'*—that it is implanted or grounded in something; that it comes from somewhere. Whilst, at the same time, it is assumed that it follows some *'routes'*—that it is in motion or wanders along paths; that it goes somewhere. In *"Radicalization: Tracing the Trajectory of an "empty signifier" in the Low Lands"*, Fadil and colleagues (forthcoming) have demonstrated that this assumption is indeed warranted, but tricky. They argue that radicalization has indeed 'roots' and 'routes'—in the sense that both its origins and trajectories can be traced—but that they are mainly caught in semantic and social-constructionist debates. See for a broader discussion chapter 2.1. Furthermore, the terms roots and routes are not conceptually pure[1]. Concretely, in the current dissertation, 'roots' and 'routes' have been used in three distinct contexts. In the first context—rather genealogical-wise—they have referred to 'origins' and 'evolutions', respectively. In chapter 2.1.1, for example, we have shown that the origins of the term 'radicalization' can be traced back to the late 18th century and that the concept has meandered ever since. In the second context—rather epistemological-wise—'roots' and 'routes' have referred to 'what' and 'how', respectively. For example, in chapter 2.1.2, we have studied the academic definitions in which radicalization—and the study thereof—is rooted. Whilst at the same time, in chapter 2.1.3, we have reviewed the pathways, or routes, along which an individual or a group is thought to radicalize. In the third context—and rather 'document structure'-wise—they have referred to 'basis' or 'underpinning' and 'progress' or 'advances' and have been employed as a reader's guide. More concretely, the current dissertation is structured in a 'roots'-part in which the current state of the art—the basis—has been dissected, examined, and synthesized; and a 'routes'-part in which an attempt has been made to move this basis forward.

Third, setting out with the purpose to 'unravel the mediatized roots and routes' holds also the preconceived notion that these roots and routes are actually

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[1]Radicalization also lacks conceptual clarity, of course (see above, and chapter 2.1). It is not without reason that Fadil and colleagues (frothcoming) have labeled it an 'empty signifier'.

Chapter 9.1.0

'mediatized'—i.e. that they are not merely mediated or vehiculated by information and communication technologies but that they are actually embedded in, dependent on, and shaped by, 'the media', and vice versa. Something that is mediatized is, according to Hoskins (2014), best understood in terms of being 'wired' [2] or 'hyper-connected' to media, society and culture[3]. How, then, are the roots and routes of radicalization mediatized? In terms of 'mediatized roots', the point has been made that the term 'radicalization' is de facto wired to the pervasive media discourse of early 21st century terrorism and the seemingly unprecedented intangible threat that this terrorism posed to Western societies (see Awan et al., 2011, and chapter 2.1.1). In terms of 'mediatized routes', it is believed that pathways into radicalization are intrinsically interwoven and nearly dependent on mediated communication, whilst at the same time the media ecosystem has equally radicalized in multiple directions and became dependent on fragmented, uniform, dogmatic-thinking audiences (cfr. Benkler et al., 2018; echo chambers, see chapter 2.2-2.4).

Lastly, the mission to 'unravel' something suggests that it has to be entangled in the first place. It carries the connotation that something must be arranged or composed in such a manner that it can be undone or (dis)solved, that it is either woven or twisted, or that it is complex and puzzling[4]. Indeed, radicalization appears to meet all of these criteria. From an Aristotelian ethics perspective, radicalization seems to have been structurally entangled with other related concepts such as extremism, violence, and ultimately terrorism (cfr. Leman (2016), chapter 2.1 and 2.4). Similarly, the term 'radicalization' got itself woven into everyday language as a condition that is nearly exclusively attributed to Muslims and Islam (chapters 2.1 and 5). Lastly, radicalization meets also the criterion of being puzzling and complicated. After all, it has been theorized as a puzzle (see

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[2]Note also the link to the other part of the title '(Hard)Wired for Terror'. For more information see, chapter 2.3.

[3]Mediatization is *"a process of shifting interconnected individual, social, and cultural dependency on media, for maintenance, survival, and growth."* (Hoskins, 2014, p. 662).

[4]In the Oxford English Living Dictionaries 'to unravel' is defined as: (1) "Undo (twisted, knitted, or woven threads)"; (2) "Investigate and solve or explain (something complicated or puzzling)"

chapter 2.1.3). And, it remains an elusive phenomenon that is difficult to define, explain, operationalize, gauge, and measure with (social) scientific techniques and methods (chapter 2.1 and 6).

What conclusion can be expected from a study that has departed from such elusive and floating concepts? Admittedly, a hard-line, clear-cut conclusion is perhaps difficult to draw from the current project—although, this is perhaps inherent to many social scientific research strands. Yet, I would argue that media and communication scholars are uniquely placed to examine the contentious concept of radicalization. Given the interdisciplinary nature of media and communication scholarship, it can take more easily an outsider's perspective and thereby remaining largely agnostic about 'the best' research focus (i.e. individual-psychology or collective-sociology) in which radicalization ought to be studied. In fact, a media and communication scholar is well-placed to consider both focal points before integrating them on a social-communicative level. The present dissertation has attempted to do so. Specifically, it has looked at radicalization and its relationship with the media and terrorism from a bird's eye perspective. In this context, we have suggested a so-called 'flywheel' model, in which mediated communication is seen as the driving force of a cyclic interaction between radicalization and terrorism (and a few other social phenomena) (see chapter 2.4). On the basis of this model we have posited three research propositions as guiding principles: 1) Terrorists' mediated communication is composed for –and feeds into—radicalization; 2) Terrorists' mediated communication is composed for—and feeds into—a state of hyper-security; 3) Terrorists' mediated communication is composed for—and feeds into—intergroup conflict. In what follows, we will reflect upon these propositions by looking at a few core observations that have robustly surfaced during our empirical pursuit of 'unraveling the mediatized roots and routes of radicalization'.

9.2   Reflection

9.2.1   Proposition 1: Terrorists' mediated communication is composed for –and feeds into— radicalization

The first proposition departed from the assumption in the literature that the contents of terrorists' communiques are 'designed' with the purpose to fuel radicalization (e.g. Aly et al., 2017; Klausen et al., 2018; Rudner, 2017). Important remark here is that this proposition does not suggest that radicalization leads to terrorism (cfr. Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Horgan, 2005). It merely assumes that the terrorists' messages are composed and 'framed' in such a way that they may intend to radicalize a potential audience—be it (violent) behavior-wise or (non-violent) cognitive-wise. Similarly, this proposition does not presuppose that the terrorists' messages automatically produce radicalization. It is well-established within the communication and media literature that we cannot automatically assume that the communication messages will be 'decoded'—or produce the effects—as intended by the sender (cfr. Hall, 2001; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Yet, we can study it. For this, both a message-centered (i.e. 'composed for...') as well as an audience-centered (i.e. 'feeds into...') analysis are required. In the current dissertation both have been conducted in pursuance of this proposition. A message-centered analysis has been undertaken in the context of chapter 4 *'Legitimizing the Caliphate and Inhumanity with Moral Disengagement Rhetoric'* (Frissen & d'Haenens, 2017) and chapter 5 *'Legitimizing the Caliphate and Inhumanity with the Qur'ān'* (Frissen et al., 2018). The corresponding audience-study has been conducted in chapter 7 *'The Information seeking – radicalization nexus'* (Frissen, Smets & d'Haenens, 2019).

'Composed for. . . '

Looking at the textual analyses first, a few remarkable findings have come to

surface that deserve some broader reflection.

1) Radicalizing collective action frames are omnipresent in ISIS communiques

First of all, it cannot go unmentioned that collective action frames with the intention to radicalize are omnipresent in ISIS's Dabiq magazine series. We have focused on Dabiq because it is considered to be one of the richest sources for ISIS's body of thought and ideology, especially during their glory days (Gambhir, 2014; Ingram, 2016b; Novenario, 2016). It therefore serves as the fundamental backbone of ISIS's central mission and behavior, i.e. collective action frames and collective action repertoires (cfr. Weiss & Hassan, 2015, p. 176).

In our analysis we came across 4,683 moral disengagement frames and 700 references to the Qur'ān over the course of 14 and 15 issues, respectively. Divided by the corresponding number of total articles (279 and 294, respectively) we can observe an average of about 17 moral disengagement arguments and 2 references to the Qur'ān per article. Especially the vast amount of moral disengagement rhetoric is striking and potentially worrisome. Concretely, an article provides on average 17 arguments to make inhumane behavior more morally acceptable. Because it has been well-established in psychological literature that such rhetoric can be 'contagious', it can potentially be effective for the recruitment and indoctrination for terrorism (Bandura, 2004; Weimann, 2008). It seems safe to claim that these magazines are written with an eye on a moldable audience. The language is generally persuasive and composed in such a way to make their narrative attractive. This is in line with previous research on audiences of online terrorist propaganda that has already made the claim that these media outlets are targeting young vulnerable likeminded radicals (Aly, 2017). However, from a linguistic perspective, the current dissertation came also to an alternative finding. The Dabiq writers tend to have occasionally another audience in mind than vulnerable and potential recruits. In several articles, Dabiq seems to write for the enemy's eyes instead. More specifically, the word use of some articles with terms

such as "our fight", "you" and "we", shows clearly that the authors of the articles are conscious about the potential oppositional background of the reader of the online magazine. Indeed, scholars have argued that Dabiq could also be considered as a form of 'costly signaling' and impression management (see for example Novenario, 2016), for which its actual audience rather consists of political opponents in the West. Hence, this dissertation's analysis suggests that Dabiq is potentially a double-edged sword with the two-fold purpose of targeting and radicalizing potential recruits on the one hand and impressing and intimidating opponents on the other.

2) ISIS's radicalizing collective action frames have gradually become more brutal and hostile

In chapter 4 we have looked at moral disengagement rhetoric as a proxy for radicalizing collective action frames. Besides the finding that these arguments are omnipresent, we have observed a gradual shift from a rather in-group directed and defensive tone to a more out-group oriented and offensive tone. In the first half of the issues, mainly sanitizing language is activated in order to make specific deeds more respectable. For instance, ISIS consequently refers to *"istishhādī operations"*, or martyrdom operations, in order to portray suicide bombings as noble deeds. The use of these kind of labels replaces the idea of fatality with eternal living in paradise.

In the second half of the series, the in-group oriented and defensive language tend to be replaced by opponent-oriented and more offensive language and most notably dehumanization of the opponents. Especially the dehumanization of the local opponents increases—climaxing in issue 13. This is because issue 13 is a thematic issue predominantly concentrating on the deep-rooted Shia-Sunni divide and on the religious foundations that, according to ISIS, suggest that Shia Muslims are 'Rafidah' [rejecters]. Furthermore, the highest number of references to the crusades or crusaders is found in issue four and issue nine. Both of these issues

are strongly criticizing the invasion of Iraq and the military intervention by the United States and the coalition forces.

Also in the analysis of the Qur'ānic references in chapter 5 we have noticed a predilection for brutal and hostile Qur'ānic verses (Āyah). Throughout the fifteen issues of Dabiq, only 9,28% of all 6,236 verses in the Qur'ān has been cited. The majority of the cited verses stem from the Medinan period and deal therefore more with warfare and legal/military rulings than is the case with Meccan verses (see chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of this matter). In any case, the data show that more than 90% of the Qur'ān has been dismissed. Worse still, the Dabiq-authors cherry-pick only the most violent sentences from these Āyah. We have called this process 'Āyah mutilation'. A strong and illustrious example can be found in the consequently mutilated version of Āyah of the Sword (at-Tawbah, Q9:5), whereby ISIS cites only the parts of the verse where the command to kill is given: *"Then kill the mushrikin [polytheists] wherever you find them."* Hereby, ISIS not only neglects the premise of waiting until *"the sacred months have passed"*, that precedes this passage in the Qur'ān, they also structurally cut out the part that follows in which leniency and 'goodwill' towards enemies is commanded: *"But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."*

Thus, on the basis of this dissertation's analysis (chapter 5) it seems safe to conclude that the religiously-inspired collective action frames in ISIS communications follow a severely de-contextualized and mutilated application of only a small part of the Qur'ān–a practice that paradoxically violates the strict Salafist tradition in which a literal application of the Qur'ān is requested (cfr. Holbrook, 2010).

3) ISIS's radicalizing collective action frames lean strongly on the 'attribution of blame'-frame (i.e. 'eye for an eye')

In chapter 4 we have seen that real-life developments can cause short-term changes

in ISIS's radicalizing collective action frames. For example, when the coalition ramped up the airstrikes in Syria and Iraq, small peaks in crusader/politically-oriented dehumanization practices and fluctuations in the levels of attributing the blame have been observed.

Concretely, a sudden peak of 'attribution of blame'-frames can be observed in the middle issue, Dabiq 7. This peak is due to the fact that this issue predominantly devotes attention to the ISIS propaganda stunt in which they burned the Jordanian military pilot Moaz al Kasasbeh alive. In this issue ISIS purely justifies this violent action as retribution. Their logic states that because the pilot conducted airstrikes above Syria and Iraq, whereby he inevitably killed many innocent women and children, he deserves to die in the same way. Hereby, the Dabiq authors explicitly refer to the Islamic concept of *qisās*, which is the Islamic equivalent of "an eye for eye". In other words, they justify the killing of Kasasbeh with the idea that his punishment should equal the trauma he caused.

This disengagement rhetoric, however, is not only dominant in the reports of Kasasbeh's killing. More concretely, right before the release of the seventh issue, the shooting at the offices of the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo in Paris had taken place. Even though these attacks were claimed by AQAP (Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula), in Dabiq issue seven, they are blessed and explained. Again here, the inhumanities are legitimized by attributing the blame on the cartoonists themselves. Specifically, these shootings are justified as retaliation for mocking with the Prophet Muhammad. In terms of social movement and collective action, it becomes evident here that the Charlie Hebdo shooting is a chilling example of how moral disengaging/radicalizing collective action frames might have far-reaching real-life consequences.

4) The introduction of a new but vigorous dehumanization frame: 'predatorization' is relevant and necessary

The analysis of the moral disengaging collective action frames in chapter 4 reveals

another important communicative aspect of ISIS moral disengagement rhetoric that has potentially far-reaching implications: the dehumanization of the self—or 'predatorization'.

When conducting the study, we have proposed a more fine-grained moral disengagement framework. More specifically, we have advocated to include a new but essential category in Bandura's (2002) container concept of 'dehumanization'. Rather than stripping the recipients of the inhumane conduct from their human characteristics, dehumanization might also be powerfully applied by attributing superhuman or predatory-like qualities to the perpetrator, e.g. *"The lions of the Islamic State advanced and continued capturing one position after another [...]"*(Dabiq 2, 2014, p. 42). This idea of 'predatorizing' the self, might potentially be a an effective way to commit immoral conduct (Bastian et al., 2013), as well as an appealing recruitment narrative for readers who feel victimized or humiliated in Western (host) societies—cfr. *quest for significance* (Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Kruglanski et al., 2014).

Our data emphasizes the assumption that predatorization is a conspicuous and vigorous concept. A correspondence analysis showed that this specific disengagement rhetoric was both highly offensive and strongly in-group oriented. Apparently, proposing the self as a predator, i.e. lion, is a similar but exceptional form of moral disengagement.

This finding is of crucial importance in the context of so-called "lone wolf terrorism". More specifically, we recommend to be cautious with the use of the concept 'lone wolf' in the public debate, and in particular in the news media. This recommendation is mainly directed to policy-makers, news media and state officials. From a critical linguistic perspective, the metaphor of a 'wolf', which is a predatory animal, might activate specific cognitive schemata and a semantic web of associations that might be appealing to certain group of already vulnerable individuals (see also, Hamm & Spaaij, 2017). In the section 'Prospection' this observation will be addressed more in detail.

5) ISIS's radicalization rhetoric has gradually become more (geo-)political and less religious

The last robust observation is that collective action frames become increasingly geo-political, such as the '*Western occupation of Muslim lands*'-rhetoric. Consequently, this is at the expense of religious arguments. On the basis of logistic regression analyses we have shown that the odds that an article deals with political content increases with about 20% every time a new publication is released. Religiously-inspired contents however significantly declined over time. In terms of terrorists' communications that are composed with the intent to feed into radicalization this observation is particularly compelling. Indeed, it somehow reflects the narrative within the academic literature. Whereas in the early articles an adherence to Islam—or to any doctrine for that matter—was nearly unanimously taken for granted as *the* causal factor (cfr. King & Taylor, 2011), later studies have suggested that radicalization is rather an outcome of socio-political grievances (cfr. Hafez & Mullins, 2015). In this context, the shift in collective action frames in ISIS's communications could perhaps be interpreted as a strategic choice by the Dabiq editors. Tentatively put, as soon as the ISIS media masters realized that religious arguments did not find enough traction to effectively radicalize their audiences, they adapted their propaganda rhetoric and tailored their messages more to the needs and pre-existing beliefs of their audiences. After all, *"throwing messages at millions of unsympathetic listeners is unlikely to be successful"* (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2012, p. 141). However, more research is needed to explore this speculation more in detail. Especially studies addressing the sender-side of the communication spectrum are desirable.

'. . . feeds into radicalization'.

Besides an analysis of the message-aspect within the terrorists' communication processes, this dissertation has also looked at the audience-side. More specifically,

in chapter 7 we challenged the speculations that the abundance of jihadist media online is related to violent radicalization. By means of a large-scale cross-sectional survey study among Belgian school-going youth (n=1872) we brought the puzzle-theory to the test. More specifically we examined to what extent three predictor puzzle pieces, i.e. (1) 'jihadist information seeking'; (2) 'moral disengagement' (proxy for cognitive opening); and (3) youth delinquency; were associated with the outcome puzzle piece 'violent radicalization'

1) Beheadings most sought, but less radicalizing. Magazines less sought, but most radicalizing.

Without any doubt, empirical studies are a dearth in the radicalization literature—especially when it comes to the associations between jihadist media and its relationship with the audience's characteristics. Chapter 7 has attempted to address this. The first notable observation is that of all six jihadist media (i.e. Dabiq, Inspire, ISIS videos, beheading video, fora, and Facebook) beheading videos are sought by a whopping 36.11% of the respondents in our sample. In other words, a good one in three youngsters have actively sought for execution videos of ISIS—and this is probably a conservative estimate if we take social desirability into account. This seems to point in the direction of what Koch (2018) has called '*mainstreaming beheadings*'. Indeed, seeking beheading videos seems to be mainstream in the sense that, of all six media types, it has been found to be the least associated with violent radicalization. For the magazine-genre, i.e. Dabiq (ISIS) and Inspire (al-Qaeda), these findings are in the opposite direction. Whilst the magazine genre was the least popular jihadist material in terms of information seeking, those who did actively seek for it had the highest scores on the violent radicalization scale. Thus, whilst videos of masked men decapitating another human being might be described as the most violent and radical form of any of the jihadist materials, they are, paradoxically, the least predictive for violent radicalization. On the contrary, whilst a magazine might seem boring and static at

first sight, the small group of individuals that actively seeks out for these materials is significantly more violently radical than the majority who does not. In that sense, this observation points in the direction that both materials tend to do what they are composed for: beheadings attract attention within the general public, and magazines radicalize audiences within a 'niche market'.

2) The four radicalizing routes of jihadist information seeking: direct, cognitive, behavioral, cognitive-behavioral

A second compelling observation that we made in chapter 7, is that seeking jihadist information is significantly associated with violent radicalization in four distinct ways. First, the mere act of seeking radicalization predicts higher levels of violent radicalization. Second, youngsters that actively seek out for jihadist materials, score higher on the moral disengagement scale, and in turn, higher on the violent radicalization scale. We have called this the cognitive route—jihadist materials and violent radicalization are related through a cognitive restructuring process of morality. Third, respondents who sought more jihadist materials, showed higher levels of youth delinquency, and in turn, had higher violent radicalization scores. This was labeled the behavioral route—youngsters who seek out jihadist materials, are more likely to be involved in petty criminality, and had in turn higher levels of violent radicalization. The fourth association was called the cognitive-behavioral route whereby youth who sought more jihadist information, were more morally disengaged, and in turn more inclined to be involved in petty crime, and ultimately more violent radicalized. This observation points in the direction that terrorists' communications that are composed to feed into radicalization also tend to do so.

9.2.2 Proposition 2: Terrorists' mediated communication is composed for—and feeds into—a state of hyper-security

Within the context of the second research proposition we have again conducted a message- and an audience analysis. However, we did this from two separate terrorists' communication processes. First, we have looked at the message-side in the context of propaganda-by-the-word. More specifically, we have explored all Dabiq issues (in chapter 4 and 5) in terms of collective action frames that might have been composed with the intention to feed into a state of hyper-security (Awan, et al. 2011). Second, we studied the audience-side in the context of propaganda-by-the-deed. Concretely, chapter 8 *'The 'Terror in the News' – 'Terror in the Mind'-Nexus'* investigated to what extent exposure to news media coverage of a terrorist event is associated with a state of cognitive hyper-vigilance, i.e. catastrophizing the terrorist threat.

'Composed for. . . '

Admittedly, collective action frames particularly composed to feed a state of hyper-vigilance have been the least observed in the current dissertation. After all, chapter 4 and 5 focused predominantly on frames that are composed for radicalization. Nevertheless, one finding needs to be briefly discussed here.

Concretely, in the light of this research proposition it is interesting to repeat here the introductory quote of chapter 4:*"Every Muslim should get out of his house, find a crusader, and kill him. It is important that the killing becomes attributed to patrons of the Islamic State who have obeyed its leadership. This can easily be done with anonymity. Otherwise, crusader media makes [sic] such attacks appear to be random killings."* (Dabiq 4, 2014, p. 44, "Reflections on the Final Crusade"). Besides the plethora of moral disengagement rhetoric in this passage, another argument catches immediately the eye: the sentence *"Otherwise, crusader media*

makes [sic] such attacks appear to be random killings." This leaves less to the imagination: ISIS is hungry for attention. In fact, they are surprisingly open about their desire to cause widespread fear and their awareness of media dependency for that. As noted by Nacos (2016), terrorists have a few media-centered goals, and 'public attention and intimidation' is one of them. It can be argued that such quotes as presented here are indeed composed for public attention and intimidation. In that sense, ISIS seems definitely in search for a mediatized state of hyper-security (cfr. Awan, et al. 2011). Even though we have occasionally encountered such statements in our analysis of Dabiq, it seems too sporadic to assume that these ISIS communications—and specifically their 'propaganda by the word'-communications—are really composed to feed into a state of hyper-security. Nonetheless, we encourage future studies to quantify this more in detail.

'...feeds into a state of hyper-security'.

The idea that terrorists' mediated communication is composed to drive society into a condition of hyper-security is perhaps better understood in the context of 'propaganda by the deed'. In chapter 8, we have tested this concretely. We have studied to what extent an event of terrorism—which *is* communicative in its very nature, i.e. 'propaganda by the deed' (Archetti, 2013)—affects a state of hyper-vigilance in function of an individual's exposure to news media coverage of the terrorist event. This was done on the basis of a cross-sectional questionnaire study in a sample of young adults in Belgium (n=747). Specifically, we tested the thesis whether terrorism news exposure was related to a state of cognitive hypervigilance, i.e. a mental pre-occupation with a terrorist threat (terrorism catastrophizing).

In the data of chapter 8, we have indeed observed that individual news media exposure to a terrorist threat feeds directly into an individual's state of cognitive hypervigilance. More concretely, for the respondents in our sample, media exposure evoked more salient and maladaptive schemas of danger and insecurity as

a direct result from exposure to terrorism news coverage. In other words, it seems safe to assume that a terrorist event indeed feeds into a state of hyper-security and that the news media drive this process.

9.2.3 Proposition 3: Terrorists' mediated communication is composed for—and feeds into—intergroup conflict

The last research proposition that we put forward concentrates on another crucial stage in the flywheel model of radicalization: intergroup dynamics/conflict. Within the radicalization literature, group-level factors have been the main locus of concern in recent years (Post, 2015). In their seminal work, McCauley and Moskalenko (2008, 2011) explain radicalization in terms of intergroup conflict and dynamics. A particular important concept here is 'out-group hostility'.

As was the case for proposition 1 and 2, we again studied the message-side, i.e. 'composed for', and the audience side 'feeds into'...of the terrorists' communication process. In line with the second proposition we studied the message-side in a 'propaganda by the word' context, and the audience-side in a 'propaganda by the deed' context. Specifically, we looked at what ISIS defines as the out-group as well as how they refer to their opponents. As will become clear below, ISIS has mastered the practices of dehumanization as no other. Similarly, we studied the extent of out-group dynamics in society in the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

'Composed for...'

I dare to argue that one of the most central observations in this dissertation is the predilection towards dehumanization rhetoric in ISIS communications. We understand with dehumanization here the derogatory names for local opponents, dehumanizing labels for the West, and references to the crusades (Bandura, 1999; cfr. Weimann, 2008).

Of all eight possible disengagement tools, 67.85% (of the total) in Dabiq is devoted to dehumanizing practices only. In line with what we had expected, the most central dehumanizing tools are directed towards local opponents. These are for example *Tawaghit* (referring to the corrupt regimes or false rulers), *Kufr* [disbelievers] and *al-Salul* (derogatory name for the Saudi royal family).

A vast group of scholars have noted the importance of dehumanization of the out-group as pivotal within a radicalization process (Borum, 2004; Della Porta & Diani, 2006; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Saucier et al., 2009). Thus, if we wish to prevent radicalization, a meaningful antidote might be empathy and humanization. In the section 'Prospection' later on this chapter, this observation will be addressed more in detail.

'. . .feeds into a state of hyper-security'.

There is no shortage in the literature arguing that the very existence of the label of 'radicalization'—and the near-exclusive use of it for Muslims and Islam—has fueled intergroup conflict, cfr. Muslims as the 'ideal enemy' etc. (Coolsaet, 2016; Fadil et al., 2019 (forthcoming); Huntington, 1996; Kundnani, 2014). In the pursuance of the third and final proposition, we have tested this notion within the context of 'propaganda by the deed'. More specifically, in chapter 8 we set out with the aim to investigate whether the 'Muslim as a dangerous other'-narrative in the news media is associated with the 'Muslim as a dangerous other'-schema or anti-Muslim sentiments in young adults' minds. Despite mounting evidence that suggests that media advance (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017) and inspire anti-Muslim sentiments (von Sikorski et al., 2017), we have not been able to observe a direct positive association between exposure to (Islamist) terrorist news coverage and prejudice towards Muslims. In fact, a negative association was found.

The most plausible explanation for this observation is that the context in which the questionnaire was administered might have biased some of the results. More specifically, the questionnaire was administered among school-going youth in

Brussels, Antwerp and other Belgian cities in a little more than a year after the Brussels bombings of March 22nd 2016. It can be speculated that these events have biased respondents' memories. Noteworthy about these attacks is that the vast majority of the media attention went straight to the ongoing manhunt of Mohamed Abrini— one of the terrorists on the run (who gained world fame as 'the man with the hat'). Hence, the media attributed the blame immediately to one concrete person. Hence, instead of scapegoating Muslims and the Muslim community as a whole—which might have been the case with previous terrorist events (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Kundnani, 2014; Poole, 2016)—the Brussels attacks were immediately attributed to a single gangster (or club of gangsters). If we take this argument even further, it becomes arguable that more exposure to terrorism news might have functioned as a buffer against a process of scapegoating Muslims. More concretely, individuals who were less exposed to the news—i.e. less exposed to the narrative that it was not a whole Muslim community but rather one single 'man with the hat'—might have held more negative attitudes toward Muslims in general. However, more research is needed to assess whether the news media narrative was indeed exceptional.

9.3 Introspection (limitations)

There are some notable limitations to the current dissertation. However, as they have been already extensively discussed in the respective chapters, we do not wish to reproduce them all here. Hence, we will only highlight a few crucial limitations.

First of all, we have limited our scope in this dissertation to Salafi-jihadist-inspired terrorism and radicalization. Even more narrowly, we have looked only at one group of Salafi-Jihadist terrorism, that most notably has been considered the most brutal and less representative of the Salafi-Jihadist brand (Bunzel, 2015; Maher, 2016). Narrower still, chapter 5 in this dissertation has focused on only Qur'ānic references in ISIS's propaganda magazine. This means that a part of this dissertation has been looking at a phenomenon purely through a Qur'ānic-lens. We

do acknowledge that this has limitations. In fact we are well aware of the fact that written and oral traditions within Islam are much broader than the Qur'an only (Ayatullah Kamal Al-hajj Sayyid Imani, 1991a; Fachrodin, 2015; Messick, 1993; Schoeler, 2006). Just as that we are well aware of the fact that Salafi-jihadism is more than ISIS, and that terrorism is more than Salafi-Jihadism.

Yet, it is noteworthy that it was never our intention to produce research findings that could be applicable and representative to all types of radicalization and terrorism—if that is possible at all. We do, however, consider that the current findings can be a meaningful source for studies that concentrate on contexts other than ISIS or Salafi-Jihadism. After all, it was the rationale behind the development of the ten-piece radicalization puzzle (chapter 2.1.3) to come up with a model that could be used for a broader range of radicalizations that are not per se religiously-inspired, nor violent.

Second, our audience-based studies are constrained to correlational findings due to the cross-sectional nature of our data. That means that the associations that have been presented in all chapters in this dissertation should be interpreted as correlational and not as causal. Similarly, based on these data, we cannot say anything of the direction of the presented associations. All arrows that have been drawn in the models in chapter 7 and 8 should be interpreted as hypothesized directions. It is perfectly arguable, however, that the associations may very well go in the opposite direction. Yet, our analysis should be situated within a theoretical research strand assuming that exposure to media contents has socializing and cultivating effects on the consumers (e.g. Van den Bulck, 2013) or at least on some of them (e.g. Slater, 2007).

As noted by Hegghammer (2017), the deeper a scholar gets involved in a particular research topic—especially those topics that tend to be under-researched—the bigger the risk that he/she overestimates the significance of it. It is true—after studying the subject of this dissertation for nearly four years, it has become very

tempting to believe that nothing but media and communication matters in the case of radicalization. Worse still, studying mediatization for so long would almost lead one to believe that nothing but media matters in the very existence of contemporary human beings. Clearly, I want to avoid these traps. Hence, it needs to be stressed that mediated communication is only one element of a much bigger picture of radicalization and terrorism—there is much more to it. The fact that most scholarly attention so far has concentrated on the psychological and sociological aspects instead of on empirical media studies, is probably because these aspects simply do matter more fundamentally in our understanding of radicalization and terrorism, than mediated communication.

Yet, it would be another trap to declare that the media ecology and mediated communication are only marginally relevant to our understanding of radicalization. They do matter; they do to a great extent, in fact. Most notably substantiated by the findings in the current dissertation. Thus, putting aside one facet of the radicalization puzzle risks to overestimate the significance of another and vice versa. Hence, in order to achieve a better understanding of radicalization and subsequently also terrorism, all crucial puzzle pieces have to be (1) empirically examined and (2) better situated in a broader perspective. The current dissertation has given an initial impetus for this.

A broad approach is particularly true when it comes to research that could be beneficial to counter-radicalization efforts. Those initiatives that focus on only one aspect may not be entirely effective. They may even be counter-productive for some individuals. Worse still, counter-radicalization measures focusing solely on curtailing (the influence of) the media bear the risk to endanger or even damage the fundamental fabric and structures of democratic societies and governance. Therefore, in the next section a few modest, scientific-based, empirically-driven recommendations are made for prevention initiatives—be it for de-radicalization, countering violent extremism (CVE), or counter-terrorism.

9.4   Prospection (a few recommendations)

In reference to our flywheel model, we have seen that it is through the driving forces of the media that the flywheel builds up kinetic energy and keeps in motion. Some counter-terrorism measures have been criticized for being 'kinetic'—for 'adding fuel to the fire' instead of trying to slow the movement down. Most notable example of this is the so-called 'war on terror' (Ahmad, 2018). Therefore, the current dissertation proposes to come up with non-kinetic responses. That means prevention measures that intend to slow the flywheel down. For this, a delicate balance needs to be found between acknowledging the urgency and threat these phenomena pose for democratic societies, and avoiding to (further) damage any fundamental democratic rights and freedom of expression (Bertelsen, 2015).

First, on the basis of our 'collective action frames'/message analysis, we suggest that prevention initiatives should in the first place invest in publication guidelines for news media outlets on how to deal with information and framing in the context of a terrorist events. It is of essential importance to stress here that this has nothing to do with censorship or curtailing freedom of press. Instead, it would empower the press to play their role of 'watchdog' (cfr. Cottle, 2006) in the best possible and inclusive way—without endangering one group specifically in society. Indeed, such guidelines would have everything to do with responsible reporting and journalistic deontology, especially given the epistemic crisis in media and politics that threatens many Western democracies (Benkler et al., 2018).

Furthermore, if it is possible to develop guidelines that are respected in the context of suicide reporting (Till, Arendt, Scherr, & Niederkrotenthaler, 2018), then why not for terrorism? Unquestionably, it will be precarious to find the right balance. For example, on the basis of our analysis from chapter 8 we would recommend that news media single-out a perpetrator, in favor of preventing scapegoating Muslims and the Muslim community as a whole. However, it has also been argued that this can be dangerous in terms of social contagion and copy-cat terrorism (Nacos, 2016).

As we have seen in chapter 2.3, excessive media coverage of terrorist attacks can make the perpetrators excellent candidates for a celebrity status. Which, in turn, might inspire more of such acts, cfr. Omar Mateen (Winter & Ingram, 2016).

On a similar note, the current dissertation has shown that ISIS often transcends personal moral responsibility by attributing predatory-like characteristics to its actors. A reoccurring form of this *predatorization* of the self was found throughout most issues of Dabiq, where soldiers of the Islamic State were portrayed as a 'pack of mighty lions'. In this context, it seems advisable to be cautious with the propagation of the concept 'lone wolf terrorism'. This recommendation could perfectly be included in the guidelines for news media outlets and journalists. From a critical linguistic perspective, the metaphor of a wolf, which is a predatory animal, might activate specific cognitive schemata and a semantic web of associations that might be appealing to certain groups of already vulnerable individuals. This might specifically be the case with individuals who are gripped by the *predatorization narratives* of devouring lions in ISIS's propaganda (e.g. quest for significance). In this sense, we have to be watchful that specific language elements and frames (Berbers et al., 2015) in (counter-)terrorism discourses and in mainstream media do not provoke what they wish to prevent. Thus, a well-balanced and nuanced set of guidelines seems to be recommendable.

Second, and more tentatively, a focus on religious counter-narratives may be ineffective and fruitless. In the current dissertation, one of the most robust findings is that religion plays only a marginal role. In fact, we came to this observation in three independent phases of the dissertation. In chapter 4 we recorded a significant decline in religiously-inspired contents in Dabiq in favor of politically-tinged messages. In chapter 5 we found that less than 10% of the seminal book of Islam, the Qur'ān, is in fact applicable to the ISIS discourse. And in chapter 7, we discovered that jihadist information seeking and its diverse relationships with violent radicalization was independent of youth's religion. In fact, religion was either not significant or negatively associated with the outcome. One's level of moral disengagement

and prior petty crime were statistically and substantially more meaningful. This is perfectly in line with recent recognition in the literature that religion is only sideways relevant for radicalization, but that it is rather out-group hostility and prior criminal involvement that drive someone in a radicalization process (Basra et al., 2016; Gartenstein-Ross & Blackman, 2019). Furthermore, in our recent study we found that radicalization is also associated with higher levels of discrimination due to language and political views, but not religion/faith (Frounfelker et al., 2019).

Accordingly, just as how ISIS has shifted its rhetoric from religion to (geo)-politics during its glory days, it seem advisable that prevention measures should change their locus of concern from the development of religious counter-narratives to addressing socio-political grievances for radicalization, such as crime-involvement, discrimination, and intergroup dynamics.

Ultimately, more research is needed to know which prevention measures work and which do not. Perhaps, the best recommendation that this dissertation can give for now is that future research should investigate the mediatized roots and routes of *de*radicalization. I think I leave that to someone else.

After all, what this thesis has shown is that *"we all possess the raw material required to commit horrible acts* –i.e. hardwired. *We just need the right or wrong combination of events* –i.e. 'wired' *to make the raw material combustible."*. Indeed, we are *(hard)wired* for terror.

10 | Bibliography

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A | Sympathy for Violent Radicalization Scale used in Quebec Study (8 items)

"Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous en accord ou en désaccord avec les gens qui commettent les actions suivantes":

1. Complètement en désaccord
2. En désaccord dans une certaine mesure
3. Un peu en désaccord
4. Ni en accord ni en désaccord
5. Un peu en accord
6. En accord dans une certaine mesure
7. Complètement en accord
8. Ne sais pas
9. Refuse/préfère ne pas répondre

Participent à des manifestations non-violentes	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Commettent des délits mineurs lors de manifestations politiques (e.g. dommages à la propriété)	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Ont recours à la violence lors de manifestations politiques	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Font l'organisation de groupes radicaux violents	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Ont recours à la violence pour protéger leur famille	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Le recours à la violence par des groupes organisés pour protéger les gens de leur propre groupe	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Ont recours à la violence pour se battre contre l'injustice de la police	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Ont recours à la violence pour se battre contre l'injustice du gouvernement	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Utilisent des armes/bombes pour se battre contre les injustices	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

B | Sympathy for Violent Radicalization Scale used in Belgium Study (12 items)

"In welke mate keur je volgende vormen van gedrag goed of af?":

1. Totale afkeuring
2. Afkeuring
3. Neutraal
4. Goedkeuring
5. Totale goedkeuring

Deelnemen aan vreedzaam politiek protest.	1 2 3 4 5
De wet overtreden uit politiek protest (vb. vandalisme)	1 2 3 4 5
Geweld gebruiken bij politiek protest	1 2 3 4 5
Dreigen een terroristische aanslag te plegen	1 2 3 4 5
Radicale gewelddadige groeperingen vormen	1 2 3 4 5
Een terroristische aanslag uitvoeren	1 2 3 4 5
Gebruik van wapens of bommen om onrechtvaardigheid te bestrijden	1 2 3 4 5
Gebruik van zelfmoordbommen om onrecht te bestrijden	1 2 3 4 5
Geweld gebruiken om je familie te beschermen	1 2 3 4 5
Gebruik van geweld door georganiseerde groeperingen om hun mensen te beschermen	1 2 3 4 5
Geweld gebruiken tegen onrechtvaardigheid door de politie	1 2 3 4 5
Geweld gebruiken tegen onrechtvaardigheid door de regering	1 2 3 4 5

C | Radical Intention Scale used in Quebec study

"Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous en accord ou en désaccord avec les gens qui commettent les actions suivantes":

Je continuerais à soutenir une organisation qui se bat pour les droits politiques et légaux de mon groupe, même si parfois cette organisation enfreint la loi.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Je continuerais à soutenir une organisation qui se bat pour les droits politiques et légaux de mon groupe même si parfois l'organisation a recours à la violence.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Je participerais à une manifestation publique contre l'oppression de mon groupe même si je pensais que la manifestation pourrait devenir violente.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
J'attaquerais la police ou les forces de l'ordre si je les voyais battre des membres de mon groupe.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

D | Radical Intention Scale used in Belgium study

"In welke mate keur je volgende vormen van gedrag goed of af?":

1. Totale afkeuring
2. Afkeuring
3. Neutraal
4. Goedkeuring
5. Totale goedkeuring

Het steunen van een organisatie die de rechten van mijn groep/cultuur verdedigt, zelfs al overtreedt die organisatie nu en dan de wet	1 2 3 4 5
Het steunen van een organisatie die de rechten van mijn groep / cultuur verdedigt, zelfs als die organisatie daarvoor geweld gebruikt	1 2 3 4 5
Deelnemen aan gewelddadig protest omdat mijn groep / cultuur onderdrukt wordt.	1 2 3 4 5
Politie of veiligheidsdiensten aanvallen als ze geweld gebruiken tegen leden van mijn groep / cultuur.	1 2 3 4 5

E | Doctoraten in de Sociale wetenschappen en doctoraten in de Sociale en Culturele Antropologie

I. Reeks van doctoraten in de sociale wetenschappen [1]

1. CLAEYS, U., *De sociale mobiliteit van de universitair afgestudeerden te Leuven. Het universitair onderwijs als mobiliteitskanaal*, 1971, 2 delen 398 blz.

2. VANHESTE, G., *Literatuur en revolutie*, 1971, 2 delen, 500 blz.

3. DELANGHE, L., *Differentiële sterfte in België. Een sociaal-demografische analyse*, 1971, 3 delen, 773 blz.

4. BEGHIN, P., *Geleide verandering in een Afrikaanse samenleving. De Bushi in de koloniale periode*, 1971, 316 blz.

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8. GHOOS, A., *Sociologisch onderzoek naar de gevolgen van industrialisering in een rekonversiegebied*, 1972, 256 blz. + bijlagen.

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15. MARTENS, A., *25 jaar wegwerparbeiders. Het Belgisch immigratiebeleid na 1945*, 1973, 319 blz.

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18. BUNDERVOET, J., *Het doorstromingsprobleem in de hedendaagse vakbeweging. Kritische literatuurstudie en verkennend onderzoek in de Belgische vakbonden*, 1973, 420 blz. + bijlagen.

19. GEVERS, P., *Ondernemingsraden, randverschijnselen in de Belgische industriële democratiseringsbeweging. Een sociologische studie*, 1973, 314 blz.

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25. LEMMEN, M.H.W., *Rationaliteit bij Max Weber. Een godsdienstsociologische studie*, 1975, 2 delen, 354 blz.

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36. COLSON, F., *Sociale indicatoren van enkele aspecten van bevolkingsgroei.* 1977, 341 blz. + bijlagen.

37. BAECK, A., *Het professionaliseringsproces van de Nederlandse huisarts.* 1978, 721 blz. + bibliografie.

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58. PEETERS, R., *Ziekte en gezondheid bij Marokkaanse immigranten.* 1983, 349 blz.

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61. LOOSVELDT, G., *De effecten van een interviewtraining op de kwaliteit van gegevens bekomen via het survey-interview.* 1985, 311 blz. + bijlagen.

62. FOETS, M., *Ziekte en gezondheidsgedrag : de ontwikkeling van de sociologische theorievorming en van het sociologisch onderzoek.* 1985, 339 blz.

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64. DE GROOFF, D., *De elektronische krant. Een onderzoek naar de mogelijkheden van nieuwsverspreiding via elektronische tekstmedia en naar de mogelijke gevolgen daarvan voor de krant als bedrijf en als massamedium.* 1986, 568 blz.

65. VERMEULEN, D., *De maatschappelijke beheersingsprocessen inzake de sociaal-culturele sector in Vlaanderen. Een sociologische studie van de "verzuiling", de professionalisering en het overheidsbeleid.* 1983, 447 blz.

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68. HELLEMANS, G., *Verzuiling. Een historische en vergelijkende analyse.* 1989, 302 blz.

II. Nieuwe Reeks van doctoraten in de Sociale Wetenschappen EN IN DE SOCIALE EN CULTURELE ANTROPOLOGIE

1. LIU BOLONG, *Western Europe - China. A comparative analysis of the foreign policies of the European Community, Great Britain and Belgium towards China (1970-1986).* Leuven, Departement Politieke Wetenschappen, 1988, 335 blz.

2. EERDEKENS, J., *Chronische ziekte en rolverandering. Een sociologisch onderzoek bij M.S.-patiënten.* Leuven, Acco, 1989, 164 blz. + bijlagen.

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Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Terrorisme *is* communicatie. Het bestaat uit een zorgvuldig georkestreerde boodschap die moet worden overgebracht aan een publiek dat veel groter is dan diegenen die betrokken zijn bij het incident. Om een effectieve communicatie te waarborgen, moeten terroristen tactisch gebruik maken van de massamedia. Zodoende moet terrorisme worden afgestemd op de zogenoemde 'logica van het media-ecosysteem'. Meer specifiek, terrorisme is feite onderworpen aan 'de vormingskrachten van de media'; terrorisme is *gemediatiseerd*. Indien we terrorisme echt willen begrijpen–en misschien wel willen voorkomen–zullen we eerst de communicatieve architectuur die hieraan ten grondslag ligt moeten ontrafelen en begrijpen. Dit proefschrift ging uit van de ambitie om dit te doen.

(Hard) Wired for Terror is verdeeld in twee delen. In het eerste deel (de *'Roots'*) bieden we een historische, semantische analyse van de concepten van radicalisme, extremisme en terrorisme, en hoe ze met elkaar verbonden zijn. Verder wordt een uitgebreid overzicht gepresenteerd van de stand van zaken waarin het huidige onderzoek naar radicalisering en terrorisme is geworteld. We stellen inzichten uit individueel-psychologisch onderzoek en collectieve-sociologische studies aan de kaak, maar brengen beide persepectieven samen in een sociaal-communicatieve dimensie. Op basis van een theoretische versmelting van *Social Movement Theory*, *Mediatization* en *socio-epidemiologie*, stellen we een nieuw cyclisch model voor dat toepasbaar is op terrorisme en radicalisering.

In het tweede deel (de *'Routes'*) presenteren we de resultaten van vijf originele empirische onderzoeken. Zowel boodschap- als publieksanalyses werden uitgevoerd. Op basis van een gedetailleerde inhoudsanalyse onthullen we de morele psychologische en theologische onderbouwing van het wereldbeeld van ISIS. Bovendien gebruiken we enquêtegegevens over Belgische jongvolwassenen om de 'effecten' van verschillende Salafi-Jihadistische media aan te tonen (van onthoofdingsvideo's tot terroristische aanslagen). Uiteindelijk stelt het proefschrift een paar beleidsaanbevelingen voor om radicalisering en terrorisme te voorkomen.