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The Analysis of Attractions that Influence Young Western Europeans to Join
Jihad in Syria and Iraq

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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC CATEGORY

I declare that in the attached work I have respected all the rules of academic honesty.

This written work is the result of my personal work, it is based on my research and relies on the literature.

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Abstract

A more radical, if not, a newer form of an extremist organisation burst on the international scene: the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, IS, ISIL, Daesh). This extremist organisation proclaimed the establishment of their own state: 'the Caliphate'. ISIS has shown to be very successful at attracting significant numbers of young Western European recruits (both men and women) to their territories within Syria and Iraq. Five Western European countries were analysed: Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The first part of the thesis has three key elements of the growing trends of foreign recruits between 2011-2017, changes in radical behaviour and creating new identities.

The focus was on that these Western Europeans had no ties to the Middle East, not of the Muslim faith and were not speakers of Arabic. Recruits are often characterised as young, aimless and lacking a sense of identity and belonging. The second part of the thesis was to prove and show that there is more than greed and grievance that influence attractions. The attractions that were analysed were: community building, money, religion, social media and thrill-seeking.

There is no single solvable solution to fixing the problem of these foreign fighters partaking in this phenomenon. But looking at it from wider perspectives instead of solely greed and grievance may provide more understanding to the problem.

Keywords: Islamic State, Radicalisation, Jihad, Western Europe, Foreign, Fighter, Syria, Iraq

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Introduction

A foreign fighter is a noncitizen who has become involved in conflict states during civil conflicts. This phenomenon of foreign fighters is somewhat a new phenomenon. Foreign fighters began towards the end of the 20th century where individuals or small groups joined and associated themselves with violent jihad in countries such as Afghanistan, Chechnya and Somalia. When it comes to conflicted areas of the world, like Syria and Iraq it has become a 'normalisation' to have certain groups emerge, one specific group: the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (also referred to IS, ISIS, ISIL and Daesh).

In recent years, many European countries have been struggling to grapple with the harsh reality that their own citizens who have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State. The larger Western European countries (France, Germany and the United Kingdom) have produced the highest number of these jihadist foreign fighters. But smaller Western European countries (Belgium and the Netherlands) have produced many of their own citizens compared to the size of their populations.

Young adults have shown their keen interest to take part. Within the last seven years the European Union (EU) has expressed strong concerns about the enormous number of their own citizens joining the jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. Peter Neumann stated that "foreign fighters from Europe have gone to Syria and Iraq to join Daesh. They come from Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, London and Paris."¹ Similarly, Taj Hashmi confirmed that from Western Europe the major contributors have been from Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.² The rise of these foreign fighters has spread not only from a local or regional jihad but has now unfolded into a global jihad.

First and foremost, there needs to be an understanding of what jihad is. Jihad is not just 'holy war' as many would believe it to be, in fact, according to Radoslaw Fiedler "Islamic jihad is not always aggression. Greater jihad is an inner struggle for purification of the soul."³ However, in today's radicalisation of jihad it is used to describe and often referred to as holy war. With previous interviews conducted in 2008 (before the rise of the Islamic State) with

¹ Peter Neumann (23/04/2015). *Conflicts Create Extremists*. Professor Peter Neumann. London addressing the UN Security Council today. YouTube: Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udSM9CB1uuU> [Accessed 26th December 2017].

² Taj Hashmi (2014). *Global Jihad and America The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. p. 150.

³ Radoslaw Fiedler (2002). *Suicide Terrorism in the Strategy of Hamas and al-Qaeda*. Poznań: Institute of Political Science and Journalism. Adam Mickiewicz University. p. 93-94.

young foreign Western jihadists, it was apparent that the lure of jihad had more attractions rather than only greed and grievance. Most of the world associate jihad to be violent and those who join to be somewhat mentally unstable. James Jones suggests “it was the simple lure of a spiritual renewal for the soul and mind along with new morals and meaning of life.”⁴ Although these interviews were conducted before the rise of the Islamic State, it appears that some of these other attractions still hold.

There needs to be an understanding as to how the Islamic State came to be. After the fall of Al-Qaeda and towards the end of 2010 one young Tunisian boy’s self-immolation was not widely covered by the media but it is what led to the ripple effects of what was to become known as the ‘Arab Spring’ or ‘Arab Awakening’ which erupted in the Spring of 2011. The Arab Spring challenged main stream Islamist models for political change as the Syrian and Iraqi citizens were being oppressed by the brutality of the political restrictions that they were trapped in. This quickly backfired as you cannot introduce rapid changes and expect everyone to be on board with it, changes take years to apply.

Citizens in the Middle East were becoming victims in level upon levels of exclusion and restriction which created a distorted vision for the true belief of the Islamic State or the Caliphate (the reign of a true chief Muslim ruler). This led to the beginning and the shocking uprising for the creation of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq and so began the battle to overthrow corrupt politicians and leaders, such as Bashar al-Assad.

During this uprising the Islamic State saw the opportunity from the withdrawal of the United State troops in Iraq to gain territory and throughout 2013 had seized control of territory in Syria. However, what was not expected and if not more disturbing, was the growing number of Western Europeans (who had no ties to the Middle East or Islam) that began to proclaim themselves as jihadists and set off to join the battle and support the causes and ideologies of the Islamic State.

The ideal candidates of these foreign fighters are predominately male and their ages range from late teens to mid-20s. Female jihadists are on average younger than their male counterparts, among these female jihadists are several underage jihadi brides who would join their (future) husbands in Syria or Iraq.⁵ The mind of a youth is easier for radicalisation to take

⁴ James Jones (2008). *Blood That Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 50.

⁵ Masooda Bano (2012). *The Rational Believer: Choices and Decisions in the Madrasas of Pakistan*. Ithaca: Cornell University. p. 191.

place as the process of radicalisation is much shorter than someone who is older. In theory, youthful minds are easier to corrupt and control as a lot of people will live what they have learned. As adults our brains do not fully mature until our mid-20s. The purpose of using youths is to ensure these foreign fighters are easily swayed into the ideology of jihad and can be in prime condition for fitness, trained well for the causes that the Islamic State carry out and groomed to become brides and mothers. Access to foreign fighter networks in Western Europe from Syria and Iraq make it that much easier to create, plan and support the actions for the Islamic State.

Although ideal candidates are male, women have secured influential roles within the Caliphate despite the atrocious treatment that the Islamic State has demonstrated towards women. According to Amanda N. Spencer women have strict responsibilities that the Islamic State value, “being a devout wife to ISIL soldiers, birthing the next generation of jihad and advancing ISIL’s global reach.”⁶ Women contribute greatly to ISIS’ strength and their capability to threaten communities on a local, regional and international scales.

Women in the Quran are viewed as the ‘keepers of family ethics’. Their responsibility becomes to nurture and teach the coming generations. Women recruits were an unused resource as it became apparent that the use of female terrorists produced startling and if not more international media attention.⁷ There was a somewhat disturbing fascination from roles that women held within the Islamic State.

Because of this, the majority of the foreign media outlets dramatically increased their own coverage. A new attraction for potential recruits (both male and female) came to attention for the ideological cause as women were being shown. The Islamic State began to quickly catch on to the very important tool they had just created by allowing women to join and the media became more at their disposal to fuel their propaganda and obtain more and more recruits.

The aim of this thesis is to determine the attractions that influence these Western European foreign fighters. The first part of the thesis will include the literature review of growing trends in Western European fighters joining jihad in Syria and Iraq from 2011-2017, changes in behaviour of radical youths and creating new identities.

⁶ Amanda N. Spencer (2016) The Hidden Face of Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State. *Strategic Security*. 9(3). pp. 74-80.

⁷ Rahat Raja. (2014). Western Women and Islam: Embracing and Negotiating Muslim Identity. *Policy Perspectives*. 11(1). pp. 3-31.

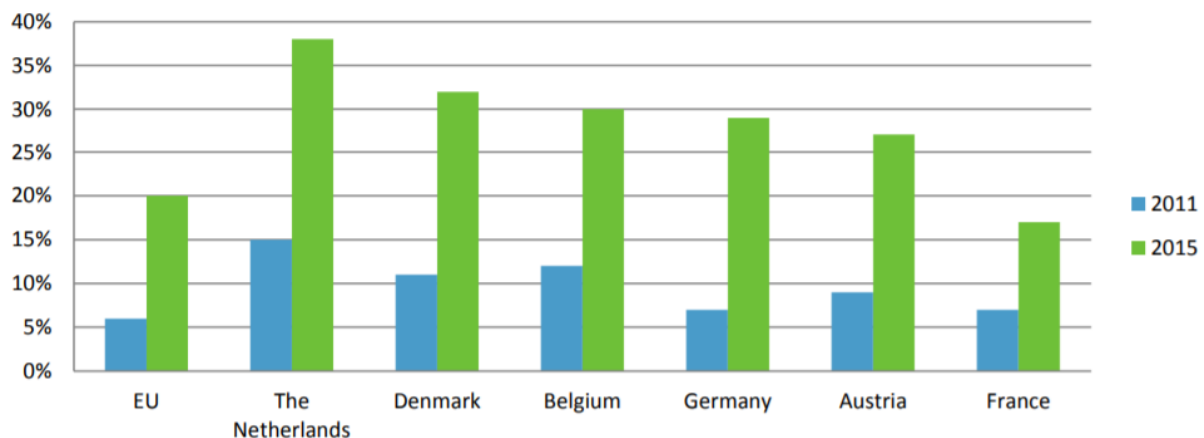
The second part of the thesis will be an analysis of literature highlighting the five main attractions: community building considering cities of Western European countries and how they are connecting with Syria and Iraq via mosques, their own peers and scholars. Money by considering poverty-stricken areas and those who can be easily swayed by money. Religion considering those who are converting to Islam. Social media by analysis of all aspects of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Telegram and the world wide web itself. Thrill-seeking with the promises of rewards, honour, a risk factor and the desire to join in combat.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Growing Trends in Western Europeans Joining Jihad in Syria and Iraq from 2011-2017

A jihadist network is a fluid and dynamic structure containing several interrelated radicals who are linked both individually and via collective groups.⁸ There is a common interest for the pursuit of the jihadism goals and/or terrorism. Those who have come to be within such networks are defined as ‘members’. Members of such groups are those who contribute actively and fully comprehend the realisation of the goal outreach which the network forms its foundation and operates in.

Graph 1. Growing Trends of European Countries Joining Jihad⁹



Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn’s study have shown in their above graph that an undeniable trend in Western Europeans increasing between the years 2011 and 2015. This was an alarming increase in such a short amount of time. Although the graph shows the rising numbers from 2011 through to 2015, there needs to be a closer examination into the years in between, to have a better sense of just how many Western Europeans who left for jihad in Syria and Iraq.

The end of 2012 showed that the Islamic State was not going to back down and saw several Western European citizens making the move joining the jihadi movements in Syria and

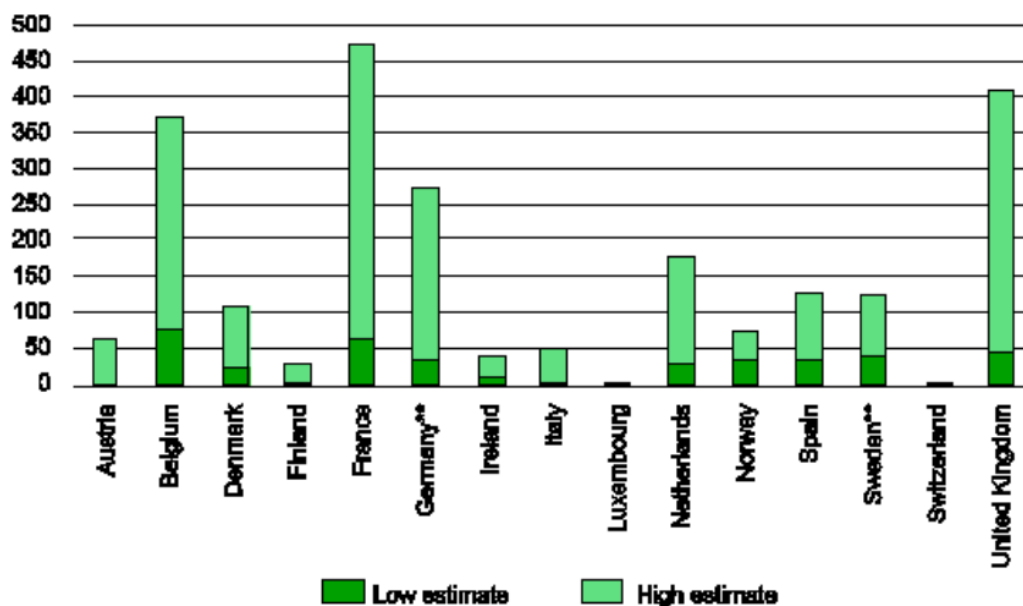
⁸ S.J. van Hulst (2006) *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands. Current trends in the Islamist terrorist threat*. Amsterdam: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. p. 14.

⁹ Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn (2015). *Jihadist Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in Western Europe: A Low-Probability, High-Impact Threat*. The Hague, South Holland: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. p. 12.

Iraq. These movements made headlines in the news and had devastating impacts on those watching as families had begun to recognise their own relatives within the battle fields.¹⁰ This has led to the Western European nations having to face the harsh reality that their own citizens are beginning to pose threats towards their own countries and within the European Union itself.

Between the years of 2011 and 2013 eighteen percent of the foreign fighters that travelled to Syria and Iraq were Western Europeans. In an online video statement from Peter Neumann from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) on their YouTube channel, he stated that the biggest contributing countries are “France (400), the United Kingdom (370), Belgium (300), Germany (240) and the Netherlands (150).”¹¹ What is an interesting factor here is that the surge of these Western European foreign fighters of today is a far greater amount than the number of foreign fighters or ‘mujahedeen’ (holy warriors) that had travelled to Afghanistan in the 1990s to fight against the Soviets. By the end of 2013 it was undeniable that the movement of foreign fighters joining the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq had become quite a historic one.

Graph 2. Countries with Low/High Estimates of Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq¹²



¹⁰ Kate Connolly (06/05/2016). The Guardian: There was nobody to help me stop my son joining Isis. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/02/joining-isis-foreign-jihadis-syria-deradicalisation> [Accessed 26th December 2017].

¹¹ Peter Neumann (17/12/2013). *ICSR Insight: Up to 11,000 foreign fighters in Syria; steep rise among Western Europeans*. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. Retrieved from: <http://icsr.info/2013/12/icsr-insight-11000-foreign-fighters-syria-steep-rise-among-western-europeans/> [Accessed 26th December 2017].

¹² The Parliament of The United Kingdom: House of Commons (2014). *Foreign Fighters*. Retrieved from: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmhaff/231/23105.htm> [Accessed 5th January 2018].

The Parliament of the United Kingdom had reported in 2014 in the above shown graph of the European countries having the highest estimate (or countries more prone to produce) of foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. This graph differs from the previous shown graph as this graph shows the specific low/high estimates of the Western European countries in 2014: Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom who were being recruited to the Islamic State. These countries have higher estimates than any other Western European nation. By this stage there was no mistaking or denying that Western Europe had a very real dilemma with their high contributing factor of their own citizens flocking towards the Islamic State.

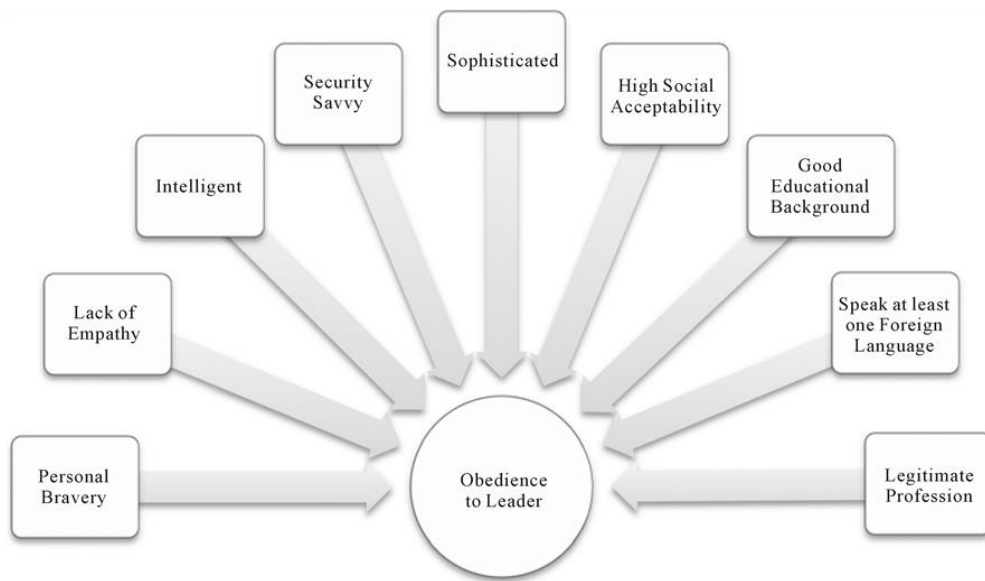
During late 2014, the Islamic State had provided careful and strategic instructions for their foreign fighter recruits to follow. These instructions were to make the foreign fighters appear as if they were simply going to enjoy a holiday in Turkey. They had to make sure they had purchased return tickets along with accommodation, as this would allow foreign recruits to remain under the radar by the EU security and not raise a cause for concern within their own countries.¹³ When they had arrived, smugglers were waiting to provide transport into Syria.

From past terrorist groups there were a certain set of requirements of what you had to be and/or have. This is not exactly the main case with the Islamic State as David Sterman reported that “the Islamic State is a lot less selective than a lot of other groups before it.”¹⁴ This meant that although you come from Western Europe and are not an Arabic speaker. You may not even be a great fighter, you will still be welcomed. The Islamic State have many other roles to fill other than just fighting.

¹³ Ömer Behram Özdemir and Tuncay Kardaş (2014). *The Making of European Foreign Fighters*. Istanbul: SETA. p. 15-17.

¹⁴ David Sterman (04/02/2015) Time: *Don't Dismiss Poverty's Role in Terrorism Yet*. Retrieved from: <http://time.com/3694305/poverty-terrorism/> [Accessed 5th January 2018].

Figure 1. Characteristics of Recruits¹⁵



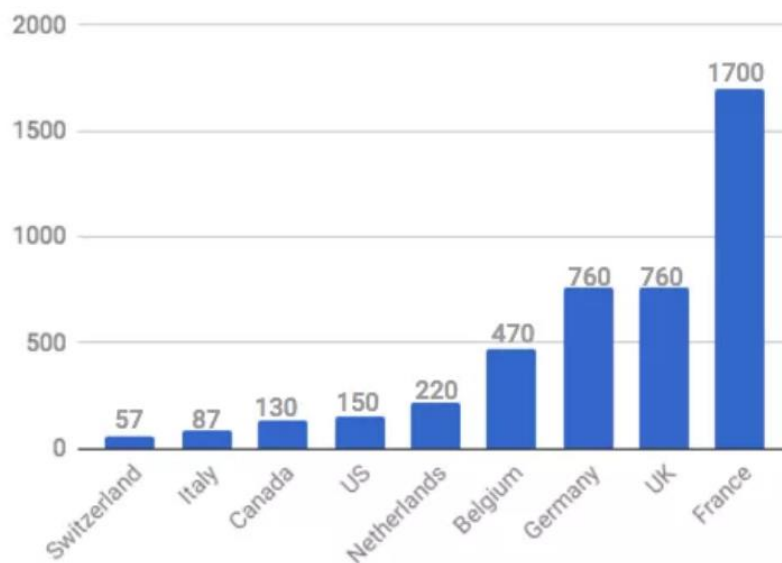
Ishmael D. Norman describes the characteristics that make good recruits in the above figure. Provided the key factor is to have obedience to a leader, which is what really matters. Other characteristics are bonuses and the Islamic State has other roles behind the scenes of their battle operations that they can use foreign recruits for. Terrorism is something that has no respecter of gender. Terrorism is, if not one of the few “social endeavours” where women and men share the equal burden of duty for action.

The highest peak of Western European foreign fighters joining was between the years of 2013 and 2014. This was due to the very accessible routes to cross over the Turkish-Syrian border. Through 2015 Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor both state that “France had the highest number of foreign fighters (1,700) along with Germany (760), the United Kingdom (760), Belgium (470) and the Netherlands (220).”¹⁶ To show these numbers in a statistical view the below graph from Nathaniel Kennedy confirms the numbers that had been collected during 2015.

¹⁵ Ishmael D. Norman, (2016). *The Jihadist Complex. Advances in Applied Sociology*. 6(2). pp. 36-47.

¹⁶ Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor (2016). Nber Working Paper Series: *What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?* Massachusetts: National Bureau of Economic Research p 1-4.

Graph 3. Foreign Fighters per country during 2015¹⁷



From the years between 2011 and 2015 it was clear that the Britons, French and Germans contribute to the highest amount of the foreign fighters who were residing within the Syrian and Iraqi ISIS groups from European countries. Belgium and the Netherlands are the highest contributors in proportion to their populations. France had contributed to be the greatest source for foreign fighters who had left to fight alongside the Islamic State and over 900 of German and UK citizens had added to such large amounts of the foreign fighters heading off to Syria and Iraq.

Within the following year, during 2016, Arnd Wiegmann reported that the numbers had remained the same “overall number of radicalised French citizens involved in jihadist activities is 2000. With 800 Germans, 780 Brits and 516 Belgians.”¹⁸ What is interesting in this report is that during the one-year period, although through the years of 2011-2015 there is a great increase of flow of foreign fighters whereas from 2016 it had remained almost the same from the previous year. This however still very much showed that the European Union were struggling in stopping their own citizens by identifying them and halting their travels to the Middle East. These large numbers of the Islamic State fighters identified casted a dark shadow

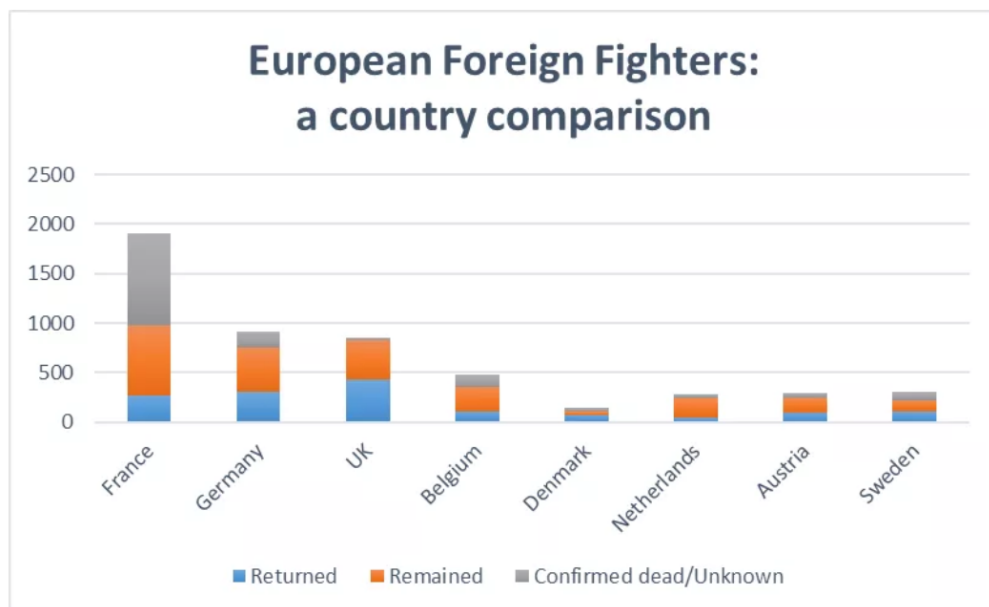
¹⁷ Nathaniel Kennedy (17/09/2017) Foreign Research Policy Institute. *The Maple Leaf Mujahideen: Rise of The Canadian Jihadi Movement – Analysis*. Retrieved from: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/03092017-the-maple-leaf-mujahideen-rise-of-the-canadian-jihadi-movement-analysis/> [Accessed on 5th January 2018].

¹⁸ Arnd Wiegmann (1/04/2016). RT News: *Most European ISIS Fighters Come from France Germany UK – Study*. Retrieved from <https://www.rt.com/news/338080-europe-isis-foreign-fighters/> [Accessed on 5th January 2018].

over Western Europe, where ISIS continued to recruit and train foreign fighters in record numbers.

The beginning of 2017 showed Western Europe was one of the most vulnerable areas in the European continent for a foreign fighter fallout. Between the years of 2011 and 2016 at least 5,000-7,000 Europeans went to fight in Iraq and Syria. During September 2017 Jennifer Carfarella and Jason Zhou reported “ISIL still has as many as 2,500 European foreign fighters in its ranks and around 1,500 have returned.”¹⁹ The Islamic States European foreign fighter population within Iraq and Syria continues to provide the Caliphate with links to jihadist and criminal networks that are alive and well in Europe. The below graph provided by Zsófia Baumann’s concurs with the numbers of returned foreign fighters from the larger Western European countries: France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the smaller countries: Belgium and the Netherlands during 2016-2017.

Graph 4. Returned Foreign Fighters²⁰



The foreign fighters who have returned was now another cause for concern within the European Union as these returnees helped provide the Islamic State with the means to conduct

¹⁹ Jennifer Carfarella and Jason Zhou (2017). *ISIS’s Expanding Campaign in Europe*. Washington: Institute for the Study of War. p. 2-6.

²⁰ Zsófia Baumann (16/11/2017). *The Foreign Analystist: The “Blowback Effect” - Why Do Foreign Fighters Return?* Retrieved from: <https://theforeignanalyst.com/the-blowback-effect-why-do-foreign-fighters-return/> [Accessed 5th January 2018].

terrorist attacks with logistical and various other support operations.²¹ Although the previous coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria have indeed eliminated ISIS' many external operatives but have not yet succeeded in making the Islamic State cease to exist and have only caused the returned foreign fighters to be that much more motivated to help the Islamic State from their home countries.

As it showed during of 2016-2017, the Islamic State had been pushed out of their held territories within Syria and Iraq, however, this does not yet bring cause for a celebration just yet. From these pushbacks the Islamic State continues to use 'safe havens' in other Arabic countries such as Libya²² for their bases from which to support attacks in the European Union. This only demonstrated how removing ISIS from their held territories is still very much insufficient to prevent them from conducting their attacks. The anti-ISIS coalition strikes that took place are still very unlikely to dismantle the global ISIS networks that are still very much active. These safe havens still ensure that the Islamic State can still coordinate and support attacks in Western Europe. This continues to show that the European Union still have a lack of their strict border controls. This has been demonstrated from the past terror attacks that were committed in Belgium, France and the United Kingdom.

The idea that these foreign fighters are only from Arab countries or second or third generation Muslims is not the case. It has become an idealistic adventure with more and more Western Europeans joining jihad and this has influenced the growing trends of others wishing to join. The idea of jihad has become so appealing and attractive that there is no denying the rapid flow of foreign fighters has been rising and/or returning since 2011 and right through to the end 2017. There seems to be no end despite the European Union's best efforts trying to stem the flow of their own citizens travelling to Syria and Iraq. Syria has many entry points and Western European security services recognise that they often do not know who has gone to fight. Training camps and resources which the Islamic state provides gives recruits a sense of mission, focus and from this ensures the development of 'esprit de corps' to take hold.

²¹ Dr Amandine Scherrer (2018). *The return of foreign fighters to EU soil*. Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service. p. 5.

²² United States Department of State (2017). *Country Reports on Terrorism 2016*. Washington: Bureau of Counter Terrorism. p. 206.

1.1.2 Changes in Behaviour of Radical Youths

Radicalisation is when someone has become more radical or extreme in their political and/or religious beliefs. This has been shown with the foreign fighter phenomenon where young Western Europeans have deserted their 'old lives' and strongly voiced their support for the Islamic States causes. Leaving behind the unruly ways of Western society and changing their beliefs for a true Caliphate also that Islam and the Sharia law is the only religion to follow. Throughout the recent years, the psychology of behaviour has changed and in doing so, has become much more radical among young Western Europeans.

According to Steven Pinker "a legitimate topic for psychology is overt behaviour and how it is controlled by the present and past environments."²³ It is difficult to prevent those wishing to join the Islamic State, especially if an 'inspirational' figure succeeds in attracting enough motivated wannabe jihadists. For terror attacks carried out in the past with what is known as 'soft targets' (public transport systems).²⁴ The past attacks in major European cities have taught people, that through these soft targets, are an easy way to ensure multiple victims in simultaneous acts of terror attacks with home-made explosives. Through these actions of violence has had an influence into encouraging others to become radicalised.

There is not just one 'sign or behaviour' which may indicate that an individual may be becoming radicalised. There are a few different types of these indicators, Robin Simcox suggests a few of them:

- Suddenly becoming more political/religious.
- Changing one's appearance.
- Supporting violent actions.
- Visiting extremist websites and having sympathy towards extremist groups.²⁵

To delve deeper into radicalisation, ideology is a big contributing factor to radicalisation. Because of the attacks that have taken place in Madrid, London and the murder

²³ Steven Pinker (2002). *The Blank Slate: The modern Denial of Human Nature*. New York: Penguin Books. p. 10.

²⁴ Susanne Martin and Leonard Weinberg (2017). *The Role of Terrorism in Twenty-First-Century Warfare*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 14.

²⁵ Robin Simcox (17/02/2017). Combatting Terrorism Center: *The Islamic State's Western Teenage Plotters*. Retrieved from: <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-islamic-states-western-teenage-plotters/> [Accessed 1st April 2018].

of Theo van Gogh, it has been known (for some time) that there is a ‘European jihad’.²⁶ This phenomenon is characterised by the emergence of local self-governing jihadist networks who familiarise themselves with such extremist ideologies through the internet and local ideologists, after which is adapted into a European context. Which has been revealed over the last few years with the rise of young radical Western European youths joining the Islamic State as they started renouncing their own countries and religions.

Thomas M. Pick, Anne Speckhard and Beatrice Jacuch state that “behaviours are more focused in local, national and global regions that we operate in.”²⁷ So, what is happening in local areas on national levels will flood over into a full-blown global scale. This suggests that certain ‘role-models’ of already radicalised individuals and/or groups have already shown a strong influence on those who are on their way to becoming radicalised. Idealising can influence ideology on one’s self. This can lead to those seeking information or who have very ‘vulnerable minds’ in the sense they are easily swayed by other’s actions and words. This could mean that someone they once knew or who still know are seen in the media and so in turn start to think that this individual is some sort of a “hero” and wish to aspire to be like that individual. From this point the process of radicalisation has been triggered and has begun to grow.

Culture, social climate and events pave a way towards the changes of behaviour of radicalisation:

- Culture comes with respect and status.
- Social climate provides stability and fairness.
- Events can create hostility or influence.²⁸

These three factors contribute to changes of behaviour towards radicalisation. The House of Commons in the British Parliament suggest that “certain groups are particularly skilled in targeting other vulnerable groups into influencing their behaviour to become radical.”²⁹

²⁶ S.J. van Hulst (2006) *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands. Current trends in the Islamist terrorist threat*. Amsterdam: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. p. 29.

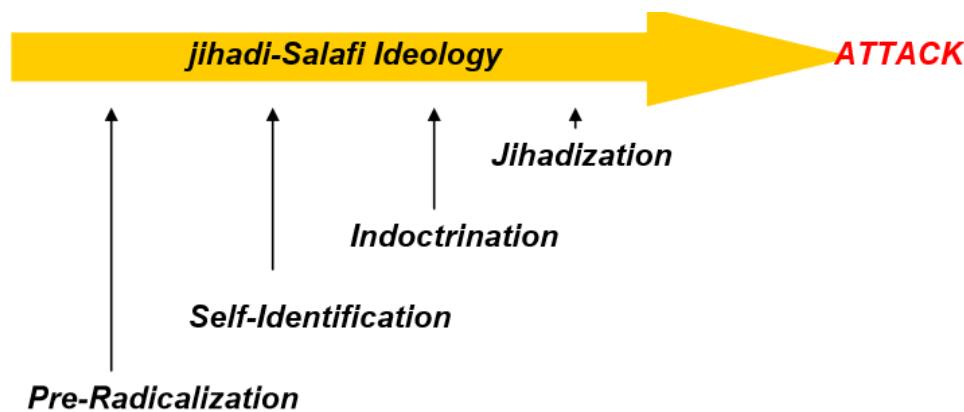
²⁷ Thomas M. Pick, Anne Speckhard and Beatrice Jacuch (2009). *Home-Grown Terrorism: Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalisation Among Groups with an Immigrant Heritage in Europe*. Amsterdam: IOS Press. p. 20.

²⁸ Willem Koomen and Joop Van Der Pligt (2016). *The Psychology of Radicalization and Terrorism*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. p. 90.

²⁹ Great Britain Parliament: House of Commons: Home Affairs Committee (2012). *Roots of Radicalisation*. London: Great Britain Parliament: House of Commons. p. 29.

Terrorism is seen as one of the (if not, the ultimate) goals of the radicalisation process. A homegrown threat where citizens begin to take upon themselves through extremist religious/political ideology that shows hostility towards the West. One very specific ideology is the Jihadi-Salafi ideology. This influences movements, motivates recruitment and utilises those who are respected scholars of Islam to show that their violent actions can be religiously justified. The Jihadi-Salafi interpretation paves a dangerous path towards radicalisation and then into terrorism by those who in the past who have voiced their support of relevance for violence to be a viable and legitimate means to defend Islam. Even if it means attacking one's own government, country and sacrificing your own life to become a martyr.

Figure 2. Jihadi-Salafi Ideology



To further explain and show the process of Jihadi-Salafism, the above figure provided by Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt where they explain the four steps:

- Pre-radicalisation: background of an individual's lifestyle, religion and education.
- Self-identification: Influenced by both internal/external factors. Exploring Salafi Islam.
- Indoctrination: Individuals progressively intensifies his/her beliefs and takes in the Jihadi-Salafi ideology.
- Jihadisation: members of the group accept their individual duty to participate in jihad and self-designate themselves as mujahedeen. This will lead to operational planning for jihad and/or terrorist attacks.³⁰

³⁰ Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt (2007). *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*. New York: New York City Police Department. p. 21-45.

Moving along from ideology, recent analyses revealed citizens of Belgium, France and the United Kingdom³¹ living within certain areas of their home states have become known as local/regional ‘hotbeds’ of extremism.³² These countries all have had a common factor of having previous terror attacks in the past. This has caused their own police forces within these countries to fear to tread within targeted areas and where crime rates flourish. By police not intervening this has given the likes of more radical individuals or groups a golden opportunity to recruit more and more young adults.

These hotbeds are being overlooked in the psychology of rising behaviour into radicalism. Due to lack of authority intervention this leaves those who are most vulnerable to become more susceptible to fall into the hands of already radicalised individuals. Although it is known and noted there are hotbeds of extremism throughout Western Europe, it still has not been thoroughly investigated, thus leaving the problem of rising radicalism to continue to grow.

Eran Halperin and Keren Sharvit both state that “violent changes in radical behaviour do not occur without coercion and mean that certain goals cannot be attainable unless violent action is taken.”³³ Hotbeds will continue to flourish and operate if they are not thoroughly investigated and along with police continuing not to interfere. Those who have not been recognised as a minority ethnic, political or nationality group, can change the behaviour of radicals.

According to Arie W. Kruglanski et al “assessing the identification of terrorism/violence and commitment will shift to a goal of significance.”³⁴ This suggests that a push in the direction for those to embrace radicalisation by justifying the significance of violent actions to be a genuine goal and therefore will change one’s behaviour of how one becomes radicalised. This was evident, especially when the Islamic State came to power during the Arab Spring. Radical youths pursued structural means of their goals through radicalisation.

³¹ Belgium: Molenbeek and Schaerbeek. France: Saint Denis and Lunel. Germany: Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony and Thuringia.

³² Arturo Varvelli (2016). *Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes*. Novi Ligure (AL): Edizioni Epoké. p. 1.

³³ Eran Halperin and Keren Sharvit (2015). *The Social Psychology of Intractable Conflicts: Celebrating the Legacy of Daniel Bar-Tal, Volume 1*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. p. 205.

³⁴ Arie W. Kruglanski, Michele J. Gelfand, Jocelyn J. Bélanger, Anna Sheveland, Malkanthi Hetiarachchi and Rohan Gunaratna (2014). The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism. *Advances in Political Psychology*. 35(1). pp. 74-81.

Radicalisation can be a somewhat choice, in that being that much of an occupational, sane, or social one. This was shown through the 9/11 attacks as it opened the gateway to the first major attacks on the West and sparked the “war on terror” and in turn caused a controversial debate of the role of Western countries, as ‘hotbeds’ of radicalisation. Years later with terror attacks that have happened throughout Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom created ‘homegrown terrorists’. Majority of whom were native citizens of these Western European countries.

Conflicts, frustrations and doubt can boost belligerent reactions far removed from the provoking difficulties. Aggressive Religious Radicalisation (ARR) is a theory which is explained by Ian McGregor, Joseph Hayes and Mike Prentice as conflicting motivations in competing directions that captivate young people. A shift from mainstream to anti-normative willingness to challenge the present circumstances. People are drawn to ARR simply because it feels genuine. Based on past research, specific personalities, threat and other components combined to make ARR feel right.³⁵ Aggression is a that of a reflexive response to frustration and it can tip the scale toward radicalisation. This can lead to escape from strict obedience and begin to self-destruct as warning signs of human’s inability to cope with the frustrating uncertainty about how to make choices in life.

Existential nihilism, like hotbeds of radicalism, has also been over looked. It posits a single human (or even the entire human species) as irrelevant, without a purpose to change in the totality of their existence. Within a systematic association for death to be the key to understanding today’s radicalisation. Jørgen S. Nielsen states “the nihilist dimension is central. What seduces and fascinates is the idea of pure revolt.”³⁶ Violence is not just a means, it is in fact a means to an end. The Islamic State offers young wannabe jihadists a framework which they can achieve their aspirations. Those who offer to die become far more appealing to recruiters. Radicalisation is usually seen as a process through which extremist groups or “hate preachers” groom vulnerable youth for jihadism by manipulating them with extremist ideas.

This was evidently shown when the situation in Belgium had begun to escalate after the shootings that had taken place a few years earlier in Paris. This saw many people arrested as they had been charged with planning for terror attacks to take place in Belgium, France and Germany. Tensions grew as Belgium began to witness one of the biggest terrorism trials against

³⁵ Ian McGregor, Joseph Hayes and Mike Prentice (2015). Motivation for aggressive religious radicalization: goal regulation theory and a personality × threat × affordance hypothesis. *Frontier in Psychology*. 6(10). pp. 185-220.

³⁶ Jørgen S. Nielsen (2012) *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*. Plymouth: Lexington Books. p. 187.

the group who call themselves ‘Sharia4Belgium’³⁷ which is a terror organisation helping to funnel foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. Today, this organisation has become the most vital centre which had transformed Belgium into a hotbed for radical extremism.³⁸

Figure 3. What Drives Violent Radicalisation



In terms of violent radicalisation process, Peter Neumann’s above figure describes what five factors that help to drive violent radicalisation:

- Grievances to prompt questions and seeking.
- Ideas to provide ideological projects.
- Needs that have psychological vulnerability.
- People who have commitment and social obligations.
- Violence for the desire of revenge.³⁹

³⁷ Robert Jan-Bartunek (29/09/2014). Reuters: *Belgium launches its biggest Islamist extremist trial*. Retrieved from: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-belgium-islamists-idUSKCN0HO1IJ20140929> [Accessed 1st April 2018].

³⁸ Sharia4Belgium has proudly claimed responsibility for an underground jihadists network and therefore Belgium being one of the smaller Western European countries had become a greater producer of foreign fighters for ISIS. Sharia4Belgium has continued to inspire other individuals to become more radical and has offered means of travel for foreign fighters seeking ways to get to Syria and Iraq.

³⁹ Peter R. Neumann (2016) *Der Terror ist unter uns: Dschihadismus, Radikalisierung und Terrorismus in Europa*. Berlin: Ullstein. p.20.

All five processes are represented as circular and all flow to ensure that the process of violent radicalisation will take place. As the figure shows there is not only one factor nor is there a specific formula or calculation to be able to predict and fully comprehend why people become radicalised.

Young people can become radicalised when they seek out Mosques that have radical imams. Such radical imams make use of their status and use their ‘influence’ as a religious leader to insert and infuse their radical ways and into young people’s minds. This can bring about a ‘lone-wolf’ psychology, however, A. Richman and Y. Sharan suggest “the lone-wolf psychology is not so lone at all, one may act on their own of other groups that have shown where the so called ‘lone-wolf’ attained his or her idea.”⁴⁰ So a shadowing and/or flattery, is one form where this shows a change in behaviour, as one idea has been taken and used as a base for one’s future ideas.

Prison is a place which puts these youths in contact with already radicalised peers. Prison amplifies many of the factors that fuel the present-day radicalisation through a generational element, being against the system and justification of crime as a form of a valid political protest. Prisons are known for their notoriety being able to create gangs or obtain narcotics easier than being out on the streets and those who have spent longer time in prison will become institutionalised, leaving them to become more likely to be radical and influence others in the same way.

It should not come as a surprise that in prison it is very easy to find like-minded individuals interested in carrying out attacks with operatives who can pass on instructions on everything from how to make a suicide vest to how to credit their violent actions to the Islamic State. Those who have been incarcerated expose many youths to other radicals and become involved in radical political or even militant activity. Chriss W. Street reported that Fabien Clain (a French citizen), who took credit for the Paris Bataclan Theatre attack back in 2015⁴¹ and had masterminded the Brussels Airport bombings in 2016.⁴² He was known to security

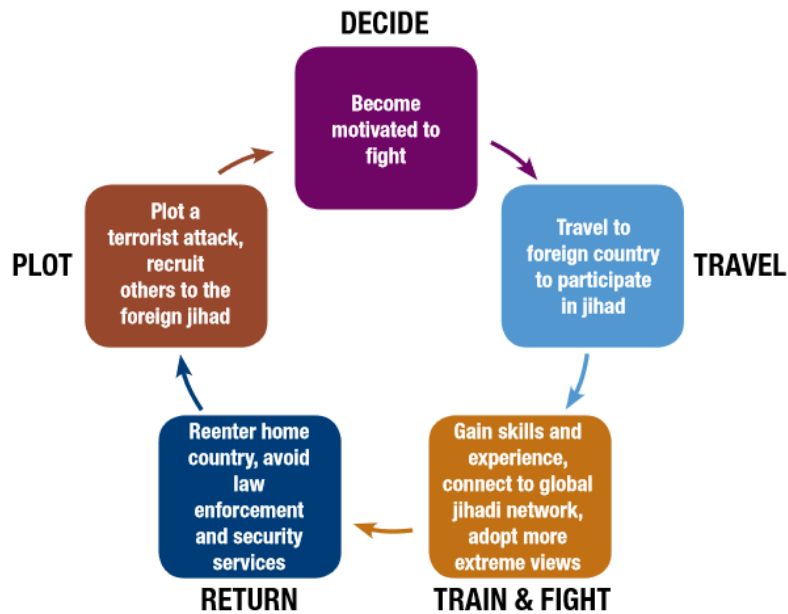
⁴⁰ A. Richman and Y. Sharan (2015). *Lone Actors – An Emerging Security Threat*. Amsterdam: IOS Press. p. 87.

⁴¹ During the evening on November 13th, 2015, gunmen stormed the Bataclan theatre, in the space of three hours had managed to massacre ninety people.

⁴² During the morning of 22nd March 2016, twin blasts had been detonated in the international terminal of Belgium’s main airport, Zaventem. Injuring 340 people, with 32 dead.

services for recruiting inmates to fight in Syria while he was serving a five-year prison term in France.⁴³

Figure 4. Standard Schematic Model of Foreign Fighter Radicalisation⁴⁴



One of the most interesting changes for behaviour of radicalisation must be returnees. Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shaprio’s above figure represents the schematic guide to the transformation of foreign fighters into jihadists. As the figure above suggests that it is a circular process, a cycle of repetition, with today’s recruits becoming tomorrow’s recruiters. There seems to be an accord of radicalisation where it is not only individually but by groups that help explain the complex of today’s young radicals.

Europe faces a ‘least-common-denominator’ effect, due to the lack of border controls which suggests that the whole continent of Europe will only be as strong as its weakest link. Those who are citizens of Western European countries can cross in/out of other countries within the EU and many other countries around the world without the restriction of visas. Just by driving, there are simply only road tolls. The European Union needs to look at what weak links they may have that could help make their security stronger and help to enforce stricter border controls on their home soil.

⁴³ Chriss W. Street (16/07/2016). Breitbait: *French Prisons are ‘Radical Islam’ Terrorist Universities*. Retrieved from: <https://www.breitbart.com/california/2016/07/16/french-prisons-radical-islam-terrorist-universities/> [Accessed 1st April 2018].

⁴⁴ Daniel Byman and Jeremy Shaprio (2014). *Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq*. Washington: Foreign Policy. p. 7.

The seemingly real-life implementation of the Islamist utopia seems to have worked as a fast-track for the radicalisation process, as it appeared to fulfil the Islamist ideals, thus strengthening and reinforcing the desire to actively take part. Although individual radicalisation normally gets noticed by family, friends, or acquaintances at some point, a surprisingly high number of persons had already departed for the Islamic State before their radicalisation was recognised. Naturally, however, the recognition of an ongoing radicalisation would depend on the duration of the individual's radicalisation process.

1.1.3 Creating New Identities

There are benefits of being an exclusive member in a group. Exclusive groups have created mixed feelings of belonging and from this comes new identities. Self-identification can be sought out in mosques where radical imams preach, scholars in universities or in recent times, through the world wide web. When one is exposed to the more radical side of Islam where the West is perceived as an enemy, living in that Western society may cause a tear in one's idea of who one is, which may become difficult and at times can feel unbearable. This creates an integration into a new group and where new identities begin to form. Increasingly, this is shown among terrorist organisations where in the developing world are recruiting youths.

Rex A. Hudson states "young people who are alienated tend to be easier to become thrilled to identify themselves with a group led by a well-known but enigmatic figure."⁴⁵ Those who are uneducated and poor are more of a reason why youths are more of a target and are more ideal for recruitment as they are in transitional phases throughout their lives where they need to belong and have a sense of who one's self is. Those who have higher education and money to support themselves need a bit more persuasion as they have somewhat found a bit more of an identity within themselves.

The changing of youths within their thinking and behaviour where Ralf Dahrendorf states "every society faces a point of subject to process the change of social behaviour and is based on the coercion by others."⁴⁶ It appears that certain changes within society can affect the thinking and the behaviour of those within the change and thus leading to question the old identity of oneself and in turn leads to a new identity. The alienation from one's family and society play a huge factor with young adults as they spend a lot of time being locked away in their rooms online or constantly having their phones attached in their hands. One main factor of youth radicalisation within Europe is the idea that the person is somehow serving a higher cause. Frank Gardner reported one person establishing contact and identifying with a magnetic fighter via Skype from Syria and/or Iraq can be easily persuaded.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Rex A. Hudson (1999). *The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?* Washington D.C: The Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. p. 19-26.

⁴⁶ Ralf Dahrendorf (1959). *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*. California: Sandford University Press. p. 161-162.

⁴⁷ Frank Gardner (8/03/2016) BBC: *Islamic State: What is the attraction for young Europeans?* Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35706764> [Accessed 10th February 2018].

Sympathy, a feeling, which is over looked in playing a part in forming new identities of Western European young adults. Western Europeans have become much more sympathetic and begin to identify to what is happening to the Syrian and Iraqi people and they feel the need to help those who are suffering. The degree of sympathy shown by foreign fighters towards conflicted countries and with extremist groups has somehow been justified into that they see the Islamic State is only trying to get rid of ‘assailants’. Foreign fighters begin to empathise with these groups and in turn have created their own understanding as to what ISIS is and what it is about.

Janene Pieters reported on one Dutch jihadist, Marouane B. who had travelled to Syria during 2014 to join ISIS. His statement as to why he joined was “to help children, women and men who are being terrorised by the tyrant Assad.”⁴⁸ He had sincerely chosen to join the Islamic Sate as he only wanted to “protect a nation” as he saw Bashar al-Assad as a greater threat to the Syrian people as to ISIS who had killed fewer of the Syrian people. Foreign fighters believe it is all for a worthy cause and need to be a part of that cause. Empathy and sympathy are powerful emotions which lead to creating new identities and to understand what others are experiencing and helps to identify with those involved in jihadist networks.

Ressentiment (resentment) contributes to seeking new identities. It showed that it had an impact on Western European youths departing to fight in Syria and Iraq who were desperately seeking their new identities through idealistic causes. The hunger for a new spirituality and a political identity begins to grow. Giray Sadik suggests that “globalised Western Europeans seeking new meanings of life by dictatorial ideology of jihadists which begun to radicalise and plant roots for new identities to grow.”⁴⁹

A fantasy is a great way to seek a new identity. According to Oliver Roy “the Caliphate is this fantasy, with their ideological entity and expanding members.”⁵⁰ This explains why those who identify with such a fantasy agree to identify in a death pact. Suicide bombing is a one of the many goals of the Islamic State and to be a martyr which will allow those to enter jannah (paradise) where in hopes of enlightening a spiritual identity that so many are seeking.

⁴⁸ Janene Pieters (04/07/2017). Netherlands Times: *Dutch Jihadist Joined ISIS to Protect People from Assad Regime: Open Letter*. Retrieved from: <https://nltimes.nl/2017/07/04/dutch-jihadist-joined-isis-protect-people-assyad-regime-open-letter> [Accessed 1st April 2018].

⁴⁹ Giray Sadik (2017). *Europe's Hybrid Threats: What Kinds of Power Does the EU Need in the 21st Century?* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. p. 64-68.

⁵⁰ Oliver Roy (13/042017). *The long read: Who are the new jihadis?* The Guardian. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/apr/13/who-are-the-new-jihadis> [Accessed 10th February 2018].

This spiritual identity also comes with an honour status and becomes very appealing to foreign fighters.

Wolfgang Stroebe et al explain that “social identity is a part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from knowledge of their membership together with value and emotional significance of the membership.”⁵¹ However, such a social identity can fall under threat when a simple categorisation has been made. Thus, creating a tear in the social groups and causing these new identities to be formed.

The Islamic State recruitment in Western Europe has been presented as ‘the righteousness of jihad’.⁵² This can quickly resonate among those whose life in Western Europe lacked meaning and dignity. These youths who have established connections with jihadist fighters can therefore be persuaded to give up his or her life within their countries of origin in as little time of only a few weeks. What draws most wannabe jihadists to Syria and Iraq is not only politics or religion, it is a simpler search for identity, a meaning for belongingness and respect. Islam is a global religion that allows Islamists to create such new identities.

Having an identity can provide a ‘self-closeness’ that allows individuals to interact with others with similar identities. These identities can be constructed by what surrounds us, by what preferences people prefer and relate with. Rik Coolsaet mentions “society, can struggle with chaos and causes breakaway points for individuals who grasp onto whatever is still surrounding them.”⁵³ The perceived benefits of a membership in an extremist group may include such feelings of fitting in and escape into adventure or money.

Foreign fighters want to find something meaningful to fulfil their lives. Foreign fighters of Western Europe were far more likely to be facing some sort of identity crisis or the desire for a personal sense of acknowledgement that they felt the Islamic State would provide. Patrick Tucker and Defense One reported “ISIS sympathisers establish connections with curious and/or socially secluded Western Europeans and manufacture a sense of identity throughout constant online interaction.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Wolfgang Stroebe, Arie W. Kruglanski, Daniel Bar-Tal and Miles Hewstone (1988). *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict: Theory, Research and Applications*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag. p. 50.

⁵² John L. Esposito, Emad El-Din Shahin (2013). *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 485.

⁵³ Rik Coolsaet (2011). *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge: European and American Experiences*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited. p. 264.

⁵⁴ Patrick Tucker and Defense One (09/12/2015). *The Atlantic: Why Join ISIS? How Fighters Respond When You Ask Them*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/why-people-join-isis/419685/> [Accessed 10th February 2018].

Propaganda is the deliberate, systemic attempt to influence perceptions, manipulate thoughts and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the Islamic State. Propaganda activities are to influence some individuals along with public opinions and the perception with the final aim of guiding their behaviour towards the desired outcome. Charlie Moore and Julian Robinson reported that a young German girl, Linda Wenzel, who set off to Iraq to become a jihadi bride. She was convinced by the propaganda she saw and online contact with another woman had swayed her to convert to Islam and join ISIS. Prior to leaving she had attended a radical Salafist mosque in Hamburg where she received a copy of the Quran as it provided her with answers for her life and identity issues.⁵⁵

Laura Passoni, a Belgian woman had just gone through a horrible break up from her previous partner and in turn to help her feel stronger she sought out Islam. Her creation of various social media profiles under fake names where she began to post photos of women in the Islamic State who were supporting the use of burqas and knowledge of weapon use. This attracted the attention of an ISIS recruiter. Jake Cigainero reported she was then shown “romantic” videos about life within the Caliphate. Jihadist men were portrayed as honourable and loyal who promised to take care of her and her young son. Later she married a Tunisian fighter and they set off to Syria.⁵⁶ He convinced her she could become a part of something much bigger than herself and that she could reinvent herself under ISIS.

There is a fascination from the rest of the world where the large number of youths that on the surface seemed to live normal lives until radicalisation took hold, taking a 180 degree turn as the identity of the jihadist beings to form. But how does a person who potentially, (only a few weeks earlier) lived and studied in a Western European country end up in the conflicts in a foreign land? The adoption of group identity as your own has gone to the extreme. S Schwartz, C Dunkel and A Waterman describe the lack of one’s own individual identity where “people begin to cling on to the message of these extremist organisations. Islam is a religion of

⁵⁵ Charlie Moore and Julian Robinson (04/10/2017). Daily Mail: *German girl facing the death penalty for running away to join ISIS in Iraq reveals how she was groomed by a girl online and arranged to marry a jihadist after arguing with her parents*. Retrieved from: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4947820/German-girl-joined-ISIS-reveals-groomed.html> [Accessed 28th April 2018].

⁵⁶ Jake Cigainero (19/12/2016). Pri, *A Belgian woman explains why she joined ISIS, and why she came back*. Retrieved from: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-12-19/belgian-woman-explains-why-she-joined-isis-and-why-she-came-back> [Accessed 10th February 2018].

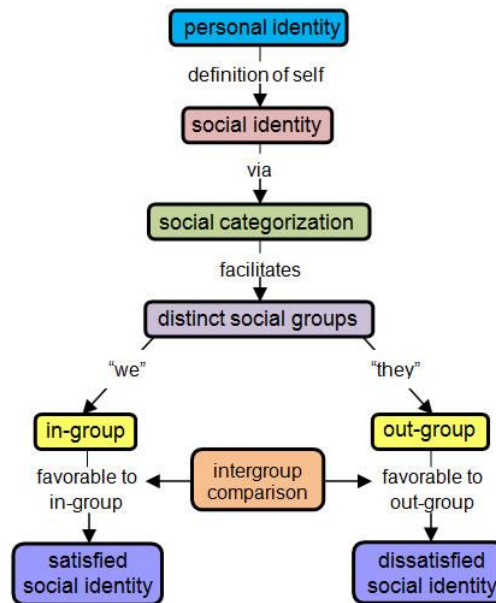
law and has codes of conduct, it attracts people that are hoping for some higher authority to guide their lives.”⁵⁷

Messages from the Islamic State stems from a religious authority and is confirmed by religious texts. The Quran differs to the bible in the sense that it is unchanged, as the bible has and old and new testaments. The Quran has been the same since Islam first began. This provides those a more secure feeling of something that they can relate to. ISIS is very much about the literal interpretation of Hadith (words, actions and silent approval of the prophet Muhammad) and this is appealing to people who are struggling with identity issues.

Women who have decided to leave their families, friends and lives behind to join the extremist group may be attracted to the idea of belonging to something greater than themselves and to the elevated status that they expect to achieve by joining the Islamic State. When women feel they are the “other” in the country where they live, and their religious identity tells them they have a greater duty as a Muslim. Interactions with the Islamic State recruits encourage these feelings because they can manipulate the belonging which may not exist in Western Europe, so in turn, create relationships/feelings of closeness for identities to fit within a group. Some women have deliberately sought out ISIS to challenge both traditional and Western-imposed gender norms, by seeking new identities for themselves.

⁵⁷ S Schwartz, C Dunkel. and A. Waterman. (2009). Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. 32(6). pp. 544.

Figure 5. Theory of Social Identity



The social identity figure above explained by Henri Tajfel helps to understand the process of recognition of identity in a socially defined term:

- 1) A person will remain a member of a group, seek membership of new groups for personal and social identity. Provided these groups share similar positive aspects with that person.
- 2) If such group does not provide pleasing requirements, then said person will leave.
- 3) If leaving a group proves to be challenging, the person will accept the situation as is, and a tear is created leaving to how the groups will change to be more attractive.
- 4) All groups in society live during other groups. The positive aspects of social identity in an 'in-group' will keep individuals together once a threat or rejection happens within the in group then the 'out-group' becomes more appealing.⁵⁸

This helps to support the rejection-identification model (RIM). Social categorisation can have a limited capacity by the human mind to identify with new incoming information. Social categorisation is a perceptive tool to help assemble social environments. Emotional worth of one's social identity varies. Therefore, it has been shown that rejection from social

⁵⁸ Henri Tajfel (1974). Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour. *Social Science Information*. 13(2). pp. 79.

groups adds to higher identification with other social groups. Tamara Kharroub describes RIM as a “model where discrimination (perceived and/or real) against one’s in-group leads to higher identification and greater attachment with that victimised group (as acceptance by the out-group becomes unlikely).”⁵⁹

Antisocial extremes replace fretting uncertainty with decisive commitment that relieves anxiety. When unsupportive people, chaotic social structures, personal values and priorities for resolving uncertainty are not developed, individuals will turn to the dictates of powerful others and groups. Merging with an extremist in-group can thereby become psychologically vital to identity changes of today.

Western European women who travelled to join the Islamic State because of feeling isolated and being physically and/or verbally attacked in their societies where there is a ban for wearing the hijab/niqab. The Islamic State provides these foreign fighters the need of belonging and allows them to join their communities where others can share similar values. In a group, one must not underestimate the unity that is shown and expressed, it is an impressive lure for those wishing to identify and find support along with inner peace within themselves.

Poetry interestingly has established itself as being crucially central to the self-presentation of jihadis, as it lies within the core of their identity. Poetry has not been thought of to create a new identity, however, it represents a most sophisticated cultural aspect of the religion of Islam. Most radical leaders and ideologues, (including Osama bin Laden), have been known to write poems of their own and make a point of reciting the poems, as well as verses by others in social settings and in propaganda communities.

The jihadists poetry highlights origin of tradition, presenting itself as a “genuine” expression of the Muslim identity with true Islamic philosophies. Andrew Anthony reports it is difficult to understand jihadism with all its aims, appeal to outsiders, along with its durability, the culture must be investigated. Such poetry provides a window on to the movement talking to itself, as well as to potential foreign recruits. It is in their poetry that these fighters most clearly articulate the dream life of jihad.⁶⁰ Poetry has often been referred to as art, when people read poems it is an expression of one’s self and thoughts. People can identify with poetry as a

⁵⁹ Tamara Kharroub (22/10/2015). Arab Center Washington DC: Understanding Violent Extremism: The Missing Link. p. 5-6.

⁶⁰ Andrew Anthony (23/07/2017). The Guardian: *The Art of Making a Jihadist*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/23/the-culture-that-makes-a-jihadi-thomas-hegghammer-interview-poetry-militancy> [Accessed 30th March 2018].

way of having something that has been put into words, when they could not find their own. Poetry provides release and understanding.

However, one must take in account that there is not just one reason or a level of how creating new identities begin to take place. It appears there is a sense of a 'you vs me feeling'. Which the Islamic State are very tactful at exploiting. ISIS has made sure to allow themselves to be shown as this collective, righteous in-group that shares the same goals of freedom for the Caliphate whereas Western Europe are out-groups that are corrupt and Islamophobic.

Many people gravitate toward extremist groups for many of the same reasons people join gangs and cults, their lives are missing something. Those who create such new identities often adopt new names as they feel the new name is far better suited as to how they now identify. This is something which is common, many influential persons of the past have done the same. They adopt a new style, a new faith and a whole new persona. So, this leaves the question, are what motivating others the same as recruits have for a decent life? For those joining the Islamic State is fighting for a utopia and for a place where they're wanted. Maybe, in that sense they're not so different from other young people of today who struggle with identity issues.

2. Attractions for Western Europeans

To understand what really influences the attractions of young foreign Western European jihadists, there needs to be an understanding of what the meaning of attraction is. According to Rhonda Byrne “law of attraction is a law of nature, impersonal and does not see good or bad. Attraction receives your own thoughts and reflects them back into the world.”⁶¹ In other words, you get what you are thinking about. Attraction is also classed as a ‘desire’ or ‘lure’. What appeals to us, will start to appear everywhere. This causes an undeniable pull factor that sucks people in to their attractions.

Advice and support to help with travel is a source of propaganda for jihad. Therefore, presenting idealised notions of jihad, where there are many ways of seeking the means for travelling to the Middle East. Therefore, these young adults feel they have the knowledge of moving to the Middle East for a ‘good cause’ and it seems perfectly normal to help the Islamic State get rid of invaders. Many of these young Western Europeans have never been to Syria or Iraq and so the attraction of visiting another country is very appealing. Along with radicalisation, new identities and with the support of advice groups and the contacts they have made through them via online, within a community or payment they feel they already have someone waiting for them, so they will not be completely alone in a new land.

This thesis was not only to focus on the greed, grievance and violence which is long been associated with the Islamic State, it was to investigate other attractions to maybe better understand why young Western European foreign fighters find the Islamic State that much more attractive. This next chapter of the thesis analyses further the five attractions of community building, money, religion, social media and thrill-seeking.

⁶¹ Rhonda Byrne (2006). *The Secret*. Oregon: Beyond Words Publishing. p. 13.

2.1 Community Building

Young persons want to find something meaningful to complete their lives. These young jihadists are often in transitional stages between jobs, students, searching for new families and companions.⁶² Many of these Western European youths do not have links to the Middle East. The yearning to become a part of a community comes about when you have become an outcast within society with nowhere else to turn to. The loneliness sets in and it is in human nature for the need to connect with other humans. This is where community building to be a part of something which can unite people, standing together for the same cause and creates the connection that gives meaning back into their lives.

Those who seek this can go to mosques, universities and community centres to identify people with the right ‘traits/qualifications’ and then they can integrate themselves in their lives and learn about their backgrounds. The Islamic State has become greatly successful in exploiting a sense of alienation and a failure to belong in communities among many young Western Europeans. Within the Islamic State communities, they need a variety of engineers, doctors and other professions. Along with volunteers and fund raisers. They needed people who could build stations and work with technology.

This brings their community to grow as the Islamic State present themselves as welcoming with open arms, since there can be a role for everybody. You don’t need to become a fighter on the front line as there are many behind the scenes places suited for everyone who joins ISIS. The historical treatment of the foreign fighter phenomenon maintains that recruitment is largely driven by the strong belief that one’s global community is confronting an existential threat from a menacing adversary.⁶³ Western European jihadists participate in these foreign civil conflicts because they see fighting in Muslim lands as legitimate self-defence, not an act of aggression. They are fighting to protect and help a community.

Islamophobia can begin a dangerous circle for community building. As communities become suspect, they withdraw into themselves and become less trustful of law enforcement, which results in providing fewer tips on possible jihadists. In contrast, if a community has good

⁶² Jessica Stern and JM Berger (09/03/2015). The Guardian: *Thugs wanted – bring your own boots: how Isis attracts foreign fighters to its twisted utopia*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/09/how-isis-attracts-foreign-fighters-the-state-of-terror-book> [Accessed 30th March 2018].

⁶³ Sean C. Reynolds and Mohammed M. Hafez (2017). Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq. *Terrorism and Political Violence*. 30(4). pp. 30-50.

relations with their local police and society, there would be fewer grievances to exist for terrorists to exploit and the community is more likely to point out troublemakers in their sights.

Daniel L. Byman describes in the long term the Islamic State has kept the flame of jihad alive all around the globe. The ideas they champion, necessity of a Caliphate, glory of brutality and the evil of Western states that shows with the staggering volume of Western European foreign fighters.⁶⁴ Lone-wolf attacks increase because of this Islamophobia in the West, which was evident right after the attacks throughout Western Europe. The concerns about terrorism spiked and Islamophobia along with it grew.

Rik Coolsaet suggests the self-declared state was not only a warrior nation. It also needed 'normal' people who were not solely hell bent on violence. These normal people were doctor's nurses, officials, engineers, mothers and teachers. The Islamic State went to great lengths to project a new utopia of peace and harmony with simple and straightforward rules, a recovered righteous Caliphate to which Muslims worldwide could migrate and form new communities with others who felt the same way.⁶⁵ In theory, a new hijra (emigration) to all those who felt like 'ajaneb' (strangers/foreigners) within their own countries in Western Europe. Several foreign fighters in the United Kingdom were manipulated by the British leader of 'Sharia4UK',⁶⁶ Anjem Choudary, into a deliberate strategy of acting through confrontational missionary actions, and in turn increasingly becoming more violent-prone waiting for an opportunity. Which turned out to be Syria and Iraq for those said opportunities.

Elham Manea suggests closed off communities is an expression that refers to 'ghettoised' groups, organising themselves along ethnic and/or religious lines. Particularly within Britain, these closed off communities created separate cultural and social entities. They function with different cultural patterns than those prevalent within the rest of the British communities.⁶⁷ The problem has more to do with the fact that in places like Birmingham or Bradford, where more than forty percent of the population are of the Islamic faith. These closed

⁶⁴ Daniel L. Byman (18/01/2018). Brookings: *What happens when ISIS goes underground?* Retrieved from: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2018/01/18/what-happens-when-isis-goes-underground/> [Accessed 30th March 2018].

⁶⁵ Rik Coolsaet (07/11/2017). Clingendael Institute: *Anticipating the Post-ISIS Landscape in Europe*. Retrieved from: <https://spectator.clingendael.org/en/publication/anticipating-post-isis-landscape-europe> [Accessed 30th March 2018].

⁶⁶ Also known as 'Islam4UK', originated in 2010. This group has been described as a terrorist group under the United Kingdom's counter terrorism laws.

⁶⁷ Dr. Elham Manea (24/05/2017). DW: *How 'closed communities' provide a breeding ground for radical Islam* Retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/en/how-closed-communities-provide-a-breeding-ground-for-radical-islam/a-38968522> [Accessed 30th March 2018].

off communities do not allow their own to accept the Western community ways, it's about keeping tradition and not letting in outsiders. Those who share these closed-minded values will seek out closed off communities and join them, as now they have found many people who will welcome them and praise them for rejecting the hedonistic life of the West.

The problem lies within the gathering of these closed off communities with certain religious backgrounds and religious values, that will eventually lead to social problems. In these communities, religious leaders have not exactly set the best example when it comes to tolerances of other religions or culture. In fact, they preach of separation and at times of hatred. They begin to exercise control over the closed off communities. That type of control makes it possible to spread the ideology to disillusioned youths.

The leader of the one of the most popular Dutch parties (ahead of the parliamentary elections which were to be held in early 2017), where Caroline Mortimer reported in which the leader had made a bold statement where he wanted to ban every Islamic symbol, mosque and the Quran throughout the whole of the Netherlands. To support this, later the far-right Party for Freedom (FRPP), led by Geert Wilders, released a similar statement in which he called to “de-Islamify” the Netherlands. Under such statements every mosque, Islamic school and asylum centres were to be shut down. Women were to be forbidden from wearing religious attire in public.⁶⁸

These leaders are well within their rights to do so as under the European Union law, ministers have the power to block anyone entering their country who they deem a threat to their public policies, societies or the European Union as a whole. These statements further increased Islamophobia and more people retreated into these closed off communities, where they were in search for new ones to become a part of.

Bradford Kelley and Ava Morgenstern explain Islamic radicalisation in Europe today is primarily a community creation. When the political rise of Pim Fortuyn (who was a very strong critic of Islam), began, he significantly transformed the public discussion of Muslims in the Netherlands, making the opposition to Islam generally more acceptable. Fortuyn was known for making polarising statements such as, “favour of a cold war with Islam. Islam is an extraordinary threat and hostile religion.” This has still affected the young Dutch people of

⁶⁸ Caroline Mortimer (28/08/2016). The Independent: *The Netherlands' most popular party wants to ban all mosques*. Retrieved from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/netherlands-pvv-leader-geert-wilders-koran-islam-mosque-ban-holland-dutch-pm-favourite-a7214356.html> [Accessed 29th March 2018].

today who were in these situations and they have largely expressed that they felt “churned up” and shunned by their own communities.⁶⁹

For those who have returned or reside within the European Union, the Islamic State have in fact taken an approach by keeping their ‘brothers’ within the EU territories as it proves useful to create attacks or have someone on the ‘inside’. According to Sami Moubayed such a decision was decided by the multiple ISIL advisers in Raqqa. Returnees await instructions when to start whichever operations are waiting to be set in motion.⁷⁰ This creates the community of those who share the same ideas and the same wishes that the Islamic State share. Having the same interests and goals is a way to build strong communities which helps to establish friendships and to have a ‘family’ within these communities.

The development of technology is something which can let the Western world see and imagine themselves within other communities. Through the constant uploaded viral video clips and news. This leads the urge to feel involved or to respond. The communication with fellow sympathisers creates ‘virtual communities’ which has the sense of a belonging. Frazer Egerton explains that website chat forums in non-Arabic languages such as Dutch, English, French and German reflect a desire among the ‘diaspora mujahedeen’ to feel included in a jihadist community.⁷¹ This helps to collectively experience events and suffering on a global scale.

The message is clear, online communities are to provide messages with up to date information to remind those to stand up for Syria and Iraq, to join and support jihad, to inform them of the horrors that are plaguing the Syrian and Iraqi people. During 2015, the Islamic State’s goal in Europe was to provoke overreactions by European governments that would alienate Muslim communities and radicalise them over time.⁷² ISIS designed a campaign to instil violence into European communities to kickstart the low-level attacks against non-Muslim populations in Europe that would further polarise the European communities.

⁶⁹ Bradford Kelley and Ava Morgenstern (2006). *Humanity in Action: The Elephant in the Room: Unexposed Roots of Islamic Radicalism in The Netherlands*. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/185-the-elephant-in-the-room-unexposed-roots-of-islamic-radicalism-in-the-netherlands> [Accessed 29th March 2018].

⁷⁰ Sami Moubayed (2015). *Under the Black Flag: Under the New Frontier of the New Jihad*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. p. 199.

⁷¹ Frazer Egerton (2011). *Jihad in the West: The Rise of Militant Salafism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 93.

⁷² Jim Cullen (2017). *Democratic Empire: The United States Since 1945*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. p. 283.

Syria, along with Iraq are probably the most ‘socially mediated’ conflicts in modern history. The Islamic State has been incredibly successful in circulating the Caliphate narrative. It also managed to present the romantic idea of the Caliphate and the jihadist battlefield. The call to those with certain specific occupations (engineers, teachers, nurses) to join ISIS suggests employment opportunities of a supportive nature to create new communities.⁷³ Furthermore, jihadist parties were in full control of large areas in Syria and Iraq and it has been portrayed that it is possible to take part in jihad while avoiding both combat and deadly enemy battles. This has made joining jihad in Syria and Iraq attractive for an unusually diverse global community of people when compared to the other terrorist situations in the past.

⁷³ Edwin Bakker and Roel de Bont (2016). Belgian and Dutch Jihadist Foreign Fighters (2012–2015): Characteristics, Motivations, and Roles in the War in Syria and Iraq. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*. 27(5). pp. 837-857.

2.2 Money

There needs to be a clear understanding as to just how the Islamic state has been able to support themselves for as long as they have. Those who wish to join are recruited as they have shown a skill set in scamming banks via fraudulent loans. Those who have been recruited can even be employees of these banks and who have been willing to aid the organisation to obtain access to bank accounts and loans. These fraudulent loan applications provide a source of funds for jihadists wanting to travel to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS as it enables them to fund their journey.

Rukmini Callimachi, Katrin Bennhold and Laure Fourquet all report that one man who had managed to “scam an impressive sum of €15,000 from an ING bank located within Belgium.” Once these scams have been completed, they use of cash at ATMs to withdraw their money from the neighbouring countries and from there, they carry the cash with them to the Islamic State.⁷⁴

When the Islamic State had taken hold of their territories within Syria and Iraq they began to loot the heritage areas of the countries. Rachel Shabi reported several of these stolen artefacts have been smuggled by returnees back into Western Europe to be sold. Majority of which end up in London, which is one of the biggest international markets. These stolen artefacts have been deemed as ‘blood antiques’ those who purchase them should be weary as this will help to fund ISIS.⁷⁵

Donations to the terrorist group has been possible by scamming charities from their own family members, supporters and fundraisers. Such donations can take the form of small operators collecting money within their local communities. These types of fundraisers clearly abuse the charity sectors. People may pose for donations towards the homeless or for cancer societies and these draw the attention of others in to want to help support “the organisation.” According to the Financial Action Task Force, once raised, donations are passed to a network of facilitators who help to ensure the money will be sent to ISIS without being detected. They

⁷⁴ Rukmini Callimachi, Katrin Bennhold and Laure Fourquet (30/11/2015) New York Times: *How the Paris Attackers Honed Their Assault Through Trial and Error*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/01/world/europe/how-the-paris-attackers-honed-their-assault-through-trial-and-error.html> [Accessed 20th April 2018].

⁷⁵ Rachel Shabi (03/07/2015). The Guardian: *Looted in Syria and sold in London: the British antiques shops dealing in artefacts smuggled by Isis*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/03/antiquities-looted-by-isis-end-up-in-london-shops> [Accessed 20th April 2018].

do this by making a series of small transfers at shops, small enough to not need identification documents, or by using cash couriers who take the funds across borders.⁷⁶

A big advantage the Islamic State has had over past groups is their access to oil. The group has taken control of existing oil fields within Syria and Iraq and has successfully exported its oil via Turkey. Erika Solomon, Guy Chazan and Sam Jones all reported those who help with oil trades are not soldiers but recruits who were previously engineers, trainers, and managers. ISIS was believed to be making (during 2013-2015) approximately \$50 million US per month with a total of a staggering \$600 million per year through these illegal oil trades.⁷⁷

Because of the control from the territories that the Islamic State held had provided an access to another revenue stream which other groups did not have, which was taxation. Oscar Williams-Grut had reported that ISIS was thought to make around \$700 million US a year from their own residents within their territories. ISIS do charge import taxes, rent for businesses and fines for breaking their laws.⁷⁸

Now to look at the attraction to gain money from joining the Islamic State from poor neighbourhoods within major Western European cities. Saint Denis is a slum neighbourhood located in France where those who reside, are, on average far poorer than the rest of the population. The neighbourhood is not as 'appealing' as where the rest of the French population live. Those who are in these slum neighbourhoods face strong racism and discrimination, particularly with those who are of the Muslim faith. In France, they have been kept at an arm's length, not being of a worthy societal status to associate with those who have better living conditions.

This combination of poverty and the desire for acceptance is a classic recipe for gang recruitment. Societal conditions breed populations of youths, dissatisfied with the formation and desperately seeking a community of protection and inclusion. Therefore a 'brotherhood' of one form or another comes along and professes to provide financial stability. Christina Capades reported "they go straight from I'm in the projects, to now, I'm a jihadist. A resident

⁷⁶ The Financial Action Task Force (2018). *Financing of Recruitment for Terrorist Purposes*. Paris: FATF. p. 18-23.

⁷⁷ Erika Solomon, Guy Chazan and Sam Jones (14/10/2015). *Financial Times: Isis Inc: how oil fuels the jihadi terrorists*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ft.com/content/b8234932-719b-11e5-ad6d-f4ed76f0900a> [Accessed 20th April 2018].

⁷⁸ Oscar Williams-Grut (07/12/2015). *Business Insider: Here's Where Terrorists Groups Like ISIS and Al-Qaeda Get Their Money*. Retrieved from: <http://uk.businessinsider.com/how-isis-and-al-qaeda-make-their-money-2015-12> [Accessed 30th July 2017].

of this neighbourhood stated, if you look at the situation, then you will understand.”⁷⁹ In the suburb of Sevran in France, much like Saint Denis has come known by poverty, crime and failed integration. Claire Sergent and Katy Lee both reported “there have been warnings against neighbourhoods that have fallen to such a state, it is likely to be a hotbed of radical Islam.”⁸⁰ A shocking forty percent of young adults who are currently living in the neighbourhood are unemployed. The unemployment rates in France in these slum-like neighbourhood’s breed frustration and desperation.

Brussels’s Molenbeek neighbourhood, which is known to be a centre of producing Belgian jihadism, along with high unemployment, poor education and in general lacking greatly in any government assistance. Terrorism is an effective tactic around the world because it allows small groups of people to spread hysteria with relatively little manpower because it is impossible to prevent entirely, even among police states. David A. Graham reported that “jihadists found a society that was unusually susceptible and exploited it to their desired effect.”⁸¹

Social mappings of Molenbeek, saw many youths who were residents of the Molenbeek neighbourhood, set off for jihad. It had been made very clear that no one had seemed to even know about the various problems that continue to flourish in Molenbeek. When no one cares, therefore it is a prime place for frustration and radicalisation to develop. The culture wars within Western Europe over Islamic symbols has effectively reinforced the Islamic States main message that there is no place for those who support the faith of Islam in Europe.

Residents in the United Kingdom of Birmingham’s communities in Sparkbrook had to acknowledge the link between their city and Islamist extremism, which many attributes to again from poverty and drug abuse that make youths vulnerable to jihadist recruiters who operate strategically just like gangs do. A connection to Birmingham where more than one in five residents has announced that Islam is their sole religion. Birmingham has produced a disproportionate number of convicted Islamist jihadists (some even tied to the bombings that took place in Belgium). Part of Birmingham’s allure is that is a great hiding place to keep a

⁷⁹ Christina Capatides (01/18/16) CBS News: *Expert: It sucks to be a Muslim in France*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-terror-muslim-life-france/> [Accessed 30th July 2017].

⁸⁰ Claire Sergent and Katy Lee (18/04/2016) Politico: *The French town that lost 15 boys to jihad*. Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/french-town-sevran-lost-15-boys-to-jihad-isil-syria-terrorism/> [Accessed 2nd August 2017].

⁸¹ David A. Graham (22/03/2016) The Atlantic: *How Belgium Tried and Failed to Stop Jihadist Attacks*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/03/belgium-attacks-isis/474945/> [Accessed 1st September 2017].

low profile, where no one would really think to even look twice. Birmingham is (on average) poorer than London and provides a more exploitable population for extremists. Katrin Bennhold and Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura reported “when we say terrorism, people tend to think it’s solely about religion, in these circumstances it’s always about money.”⁸²

Thessa Lageman reported “the Schilderswijk neighbourhood, a.k.a the “Sharia Triangle” in the Netherlands.”⁸³ This neighbourhood primarily houses those entangled in poverty, petty crime and drug abuse, as do many poor neighbourhoods in large Dutch cities. The dissatisfaction is common, with the residents who find themselves trapped in these neighbourhoods. The unemployment rates are higher than in the rest of the country. Dutch jihadist foreign fighters showed that many of the jihadists grew up in deprived neighbourhoods, that they had difficulties at school or at work, confrontations with the authorities, and (the perception of) being confronted with all kinds of injustice. Some of the Dutch jihadists showed strong frustrations about their own societal position in the Netherlands or that of their ethnic group.

In Germany parts of Berlin and Hamburg have been as Andrew C. McCarthy reports “burgeoning ghettos, parallel societies and no-go areas.”⁸⁴ The penetration of trained terrorists is a massive problem. The bigger threat however, lies within the communes. These are not merely parallel societies in which the law and of the host countries are commandeered by Islamic law. Even residents who are not jihadists do tend to be jihadist sympathisers. That turns these neighbourhoods into somewhat safe havens for jihadist recruitment, training, fund-raising, and harbouring. They enable the jihadists to plan attacks against the said host country and then can very easily evade the authorities after the attacks.

Being vulnerable is a key factor for money being an attraction to go to jihad. Young jihadists are targeted in these poverty-stricken areas. Those who live in these poverty areas are far more likely to be persuaded with money to join ISIS. Mark Townsend reported “as much

⁸² Katrin Bennhold and Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura (26/03/2017) *The New York Times: Why Do All the Jihadis Come to Birmingham?* Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/26/world/europe/birmingham-britain-islam-jihadis.html> [Accessed 25th April 2018].

⁸³ Thessa Lageman (05/10/2014) *Al Jazeera: Islamic State fears take hold in Netherlands*. Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/09/islamic-state-fears-take-hold-netherlands-201492131426326526.html> [Accessed 25th April 2018].

⁸⁴ Andrew C. McCarthy (22/12/2016) *National Review: German Lesson: Islamist Enclaves Breed Jihadism*. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/12/germany-islamist-enclaves-europe-jihad-terrorism-problem-growing/> [Accessed 25th April 2018].

as \$1,000 US has been offered. Vulnerabilities of young adults who are faced with no work, no education and poverty have a higher risk of going to jihad.”⁸⁵

Desperation of an escape out of poverty is something many of this world know. When people are on the edge of a day-to-day struggle, then someone comes along and offers you money and a means to escape for the promise of a better life, thus leaving money to play a huge factor into attracting the young foreign fighters of today.

After joining ISIS, people are paid in US dollars instead of Syrian lira or Iraqi dinar, this is due to that the US dollar is easier to run and exchange on the black markets where the Islamic State runs their own currency exchanges. In an interview Jeremy Barden spoke with a member of ISIS where he explained the benefits of being in ISIS and what they pay for. He rented a house paid for by ISIS. He was married and the benefits of having a wife, ISIS provided him with an extra \$80 per month, if there are kids you get an extra \$55 per child.⁸⁶ Any members of ISIS who have backgrounds as construction workers or doctors will receive similar compensations. Without being a part of ISIS, some people make next-to-nothing a month, so when these perceived benefits and being offered up to \$800 per month is very much an attractive part of joining the Islamic State.

The Islamic State was once dubbed the richest terrorist organisation in the modern world of today. Through their operations and supporters, they were able to enlist more and more recruits to help keep the flowing revenue. The Islamic State was believed to have made around \$2 billion US in 2014 alone.⁸⁷ Although as of the last two years, due to their loss of territories it has appeared that ISIS revenues have considerably dropped. The loss of their finances has still not helped in stemming the flow of foreign fighters.

These young fighters believe they have a means of an escape or job opportunities and for the price of money, staying alive and in turn they must have a duty to jihad, cannot be that bad compared to the state their lives are already in. The Islamic State approaches these youths and asks them to leave their neighbourhoods and let them be their financial security or enlists

⁸⁵ Mark Townsend (5/02/2017). The Guardian: *Isis paying smugglers' fees in recruitment drive among child refugees*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/05/isis-recruitment-drive-child-refugees> [Accessed 25th April 2018].

⁸⁶ Jeremy Bender (18/11/2015). Business Insider: *An ISIS Defector Explained a Key Reason People Continue Joining the Group*. Retrieved from: <http://www.businessinsider.com/isis-defector-explains-why-people-continue-joining-group-2015-11> [Accessed 27th April 2018].

⁸⁷ History (2017). History: *ISIS*. Retrieved from: <https://www.history.com/topics/isis> [Accessed 27th April 2018].

them to work for them. Money becomes a significant motivator, just as significant as jihad itself.

Among jihadi terrorists within Western Europe most have been, according to Rik Coolsaet “with low skills in education and work. Most had even been unemployed. Causing the effect into why European youths are joining the ranks of ISIL for money.”⁸⁸ These war racketeers certified that food produce and fuel came from places by crossing numerous forefronts with the means of modern equipment along with medical supplies that had been smuggled in from Turkey. This ensured those who joined ISIS would be able to have health care and food provided, they did not need to worry about where their next meals or wait for hours on end for medical assistance. Young adults see their only way out is joining the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq as their only option for a better, more financially secure life.

⁸⁸ Rik Coolsaet (2008). *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited. p. 81.

2.3 Religion

One similar characteristic that most Western European countries have in common is that many radicals are “born-again” Muslims. This can come about from the tiresome ways of living non-religious lifestyles of partying, drinking and participation within crimes. This brings about a sudden moment of clarity and sense to renew their religious beliefs individually or in groups.⁸⁹ Daniel (Ghasem) Akbari states what separates these new jihadists from the rest of the Western world, is that their hearts belong to Islam, as in a link directly to the religion.⁹⁰ It has nothing to do with their country of origin or the predominate religion in their country of origin. The infatuation and admiration for those who preach the Islamic State ideologies are what draws those who have become very susceptible to them, this causes the conversion to Islam and with it, the allegiance to the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq.

During 2005 when a Belgian woman blew herself up in Iraq, had caused a ripple effect that radiated with Al-Qaeda and in the years to come, the Islamic State. As a result, from this ISIS began to look for converts of a blue eyed and blonde hair description as these specific looking Europeans would be far easier at passing under the European Union’s security and elude suspicion.⁹¹ Those who convert while in Europe are somewhat ‘masters of disguise’ in the aspect that they have grown up in these European countries, so they have full comprehension of the European cultures, people and the way things work and function.

European converts to Islam was a popular trend during the 19th century, as of the past recent years the conversion to Islam has become more of a solidarity and support. With new foreign recruits it had been shown with the ISIS propaganda videos on Islam with radical imams who were praising martyrdom. This caused a chain reaction where people began claiming allegiance to the Caliphate out of religious belief and had an impressive reach for a those who wanted a sense of spirituality. Those who truly crave religious immersion have even travelled to Al-Azhar in Egypt where the thousand-year-old seat is situated for obtaining knowledge of the Sharia law and Islamic studies.

⁸⁹ Rukmini Callimachi (03/08/2016) *The Guardian: How a Secretive Branch of ISIS Built a Global Network of Killers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/04/world/middleeast/isis-german-recruit-interview.html> [Accessed 30th March 2018].

⁹⁰ Daniel (Ghasem) Akbari (2013). *New Jihadists & Islam*. Morrisville: Lulu Publishing Services. p. 12

⁹¹ Alison Pargeter (2008). *The New Frontiers of Jihad: Radical Islam in Europe*. New York: I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd. p. 166-168.

The religious ideology of Takfir Wal Hijra (excommunication and emigration) which had taken a strong hold particularly among the young Dutch converts. Takfir Wal Hijra was originally an extremist group that had surfaced in Egypt during the 1960s. Like the Salafi, this group focused on the 'pure' interpretation of Islam. A key difference however was their own mandate, they declared Muslims who failed to convert to this pure form of Islam to be kafir (infidel). By the end of the 1970s the group collapsed. However, their doctrine had already spread throughout the Arab world, North Africa and would later resonate within the Western world.

Within the past few years, through radical preachers and jihadi veterans, the ideology had established a foothold in Europe, especially among young European converts. Takfiri regard jihad as a personal duty for every single person of the Islamic faith. Among local networks in the Netherlands dominated by the Takfir ideology, was that the idea of jihad must take its place in the West where this flourished as it began to increasingly take hold.⁹²

The would-be jihadi terrorists have participated in Quranic studies and have actively debated Islam on many forums on the internet. Edwin Bakker stated that these "converts tried to convert acquaintances, colleagues or changed from liberal mosques to more extremist ones."⁹³ Those who have converted have disconnected themselves from people who worship and agree with the idea of a Western democracy. The only one, as true Muslims who they should worship, and follow is Allah along with making sure that they are upholding the Sharia law.

Amritha Venkatraman states that "Islamic terrorists are able to legitimise their movement of violent jihad which is allowed by the Quran from religious sanctions that justify the use of violence to preserve the will of Allah."⁹⁴ Influenced by these extremists, violent jihadists desire to acquire their religious ideals inside a geopolitical surrounding using maximum force. According to the Quran, a violent jihadi can relinquish his or her violent struggle only when he or she dies, or the religious objectives are completed.

⁹² S.J. van Hulst (2006) *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands. Current trends in the Islamist terrorist threat*. Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Amsterdam. p. 32.

⁹³ Edwin Bakker (2006) *Jihadi terrorists in Europe their characteristics and the circumstances in which they joined the jihad: an exploratory study*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations: Clingendael. p. 41.

⁹⁴ Dr. Amritha Venkatraman (2007) *Religious Basis for Islamic Terrorism: The Quran and its Interpretations. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. 30 (3). pp. 1-26.

From this perspective, the religious basis for Islamic terrorism still threatens to persist. One in six Europeans joining the Islamic State are converts to Islam. Particularly in France, their ratio of converts among those joining ISIS is much higher than the rest of Western Europe. The Counter Terrorism Projects organisation reported in their findings from some Western European converts who had all converted to Islam before the age of 25, some of whom had adopted and taken on new names for themselves. Below are five Western European converts:

- Jejoen Bontinck (Belgium). Migrated to Syria to join the ISIS in 2013. He converted to Islam in 2011 when he was in his late teens. Not long after his conversion he was invited to the headquarters of the Islamist group ‘Sharia4Belgium’. He adopted the name Sayfullah Ahlu Sunna and the nickname Abu Assya.
- Jérémie Louis-Sidney (France). In 2012, his DNA was found at the scene of a grenade explosion that targeted a market near the capital city. He had converted the year before the attack.
- Christian Emde (Germany). Arrested by German officials in 2012. He entered the UK with radical propaganda on his computer and later he migrated to Iraq to join ISIS and became a senior commander in Mosul. In 2003 he had converted to Islam and adopted the name Abu Malik al-Almani.
- Jason Walters (the Netherlands). Arrested in November 2004 after making plans to assassinate Dutch politicians. He had been a supporter of the Hofstad Network, (Dutch Muslims who were influenced by Al-Qaeda). When police arrested him, he threw a hand grenade and succeeded in wounding a few. He had converted in 2001, taking on the name Jamal.
- Brusthom Ziamani (the United Kingdom). Arrested in 2014 for plotting to decapitate a British soldier. Authorities arrested him on his way to commit the attack, while he was carrying an Islamic flag, knife and hammer. He had converted to Islam months before the attempted attack.⁹⁵

There appears to be some dominant motives behind the decision to convert to Islam. The search for a group that will provide the wannabe converts with meaning and guidance by cohesion to Sharia law. Milena Uhlmann reported “safe places where converts can freely express his/her criticism of Western society and share a sense of alienation from the dominant

⁹⁵ Counter Extremist Projects (27/03/2017). *Extremist Converts: Part I U.S & Canadian Extremist Converts. Part II European & Australian Extremist Converts*. Retrieved from: <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremist-converts> [Accessed 4th April 2018] p. 33-38.

culture helps the individual to be open with his/her views.”⁹⁶ During 2016, the number of foreign fighters from Western Europe who were converting to Islam showed they were converting because they had idolised Muslim terrorists who committed acts of terror or wanting a sense of spirituality which they believed Islam could provide just that.

One interview conducted in early 2017 with one young Belgian man who was previously an altar boy in his local Catholic church, had converted to Islam and had travelled to Syria and fought for the Islamic State. Clarissa Ward reported “he idolised Osama bin Laden as a hero and honours the 9/11 attacks. He chose ISIS because they were the most committed to the Sharia law and they are clear in what they’re trying to accomplish.”⁹⁷ Everything is for the sake of fighting for Allah and ensuring that the Sharia law is upheld.

Religion as the attractive alternative for building a better future. It performs even better if the potential recruit’s non-religious leaders are corrupt, incapable and if Western cultures have been portrayed as prejudiced against Muslim values. This only adds to the attractiveness of the extreme Islamic State’s interpretation of Islam, which is loud and proud of their rejecting Western hedonism, materialism and goals of establishing a true Caliphate. The urge for converting was partly being driven by ‘exclusion from the Western society’, particularly in countries with burqa and hijab bans, such as France and the Netherlands.

Those who were excluded felt they could not express their religion how they wished. There are many articles which can be found online where they are specifically aimed at women with instructions urging them to be proud supporters of their fellow sisters and not demoralisers. Lizzie Dearden reported those who are “devout wives, supporting their husbands and allowing her children to wage jihad against the enemies of Allah, for this she will receive a part of her spouse’s deed.”⁹⁸

The Islamic State presents a distorted interpretation of Islam to Western European youths to motivate them to establish a ‘utopian world’ that may also involve adventurous trips to the Islamic State. Through their sophisticated propaganda that sways young people, they

⁹⁶ Milena Uhlmann (01/06/2008). Middle East Forum: *European Converts to Terrorism*. Retrieved from: <https://www.meforum.org/articles/2008/european-converts-to-terrorism> [Accessed 4th April 2018].

⁹⁷ Clarissa Ward (31/03/2017) CNN ISIS the Face Behind the Mask: *From Altar Boy to ISIS Fighter*. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2017/03/europe/isis-behind-the-mask/> [Accessed 4th April 2018].

⁹⁸ Lizzie Dearden (05/08/2017). The Independent: *How Isis Attracts Women and Girls from Europe with False Offer of 'Empowerment'* Retrieved from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-jihadi-brides-islamic-state-women-girls-europe-british-radicalisation-recruitment-report-a7878681.html> [Accessed 4th April 2018].

would take part in an important time of human history. ISIS tactically use powerful religious ideology to induce recruits to accept a life that in more ways than one, will include martyrdom.

It has been shown with “born-again Muslims” who rediscover their faith are also at risk of being drawn into extremism, as are prisoners and people with existing grievances who could seek redemption through jihad. Among the Islamic State fighters who converted to Islam in the United Kingdom was Harry Sarfo, a former Royal Mail postman who is now in a German prison after fleeing the group’s territories in Syria. Lizzie Dearden reported that he was raised in a Catholic family, he found the religion of Islam appealing through speeches he heard during lunch breaks at a college in London.⁹⁹ He then converted to Islam and met a recruiter while in prison where he became infatuated by jihad. Its appeal will outlast its demise, and while it will be hard to assess the specific threat posed by foreign fighters and returnees, they will present constant challenges to many of the Western European countries for years to come.

But quite interestingly, from the point of view of the Islamic State, a lack of knowledge on Islam is seen as an advantage as it also means that Western European converts will not challenge the distortions of Islam that are preached to justify the brutal actions of the organisation and its absolutist style of government.¹⁰⁰ When it comes to Western recruits, it seems to be enough if a person is willing to obey and has some skill that is of advantage to the extremist organisation.

⁹⁹ Lizzie Dearden (19/07/2017). The Independent: *Former London postman charged with murdering Syrian captives in Isis mass execution*. Retrieved from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/harry-sarfo-isis-germany-syria-london-postman-charged-murder-mass-execution-palmyra-video-massacre-a7849831.html> [Accessed 4th April 2018].

¹⁰⁰ Richard Barret (02/06/2014). The Soufan Group: *Foreign Fighters in Syria*. Retrieved from: <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf> [Accessed 4th April 2018].

2.4 Social Media

Social media is, if not, the biggest attractions as there are many platforms in today's world of ever growing technology. Everyone has access to some form of a social media platform. Charlie Winter reported "social media is an effective weapon that, if leveraged correctly, has a 'far-reaching' power that can exceed the mightiest bombs."¹⁰¹ The sheer combination of emotions with the addition of ideological appeals that can be delivered in the privacy of your own home, right at your fingertips. This keeps young jihadists active and interested. Arturo Varvelli stated, "the further development of the web and YouTube has fuelled means of communication and attraction."¹⁰²

Social media has always been a platform for those who are shy to ask in person for information, want to remain anonymous or want to reach out too many people in one single post. There are many dark corners of the world wide web and it is far too easy to be sucked in and head towards a path where young foreign fighters are on their way to becoming young jihadists. According to Philip Hefner "if the Arab Spring has taught us anything, it is the extraordinary power social media has in organising and motivating people in great gatherings."¹⁰³ Propaganda forums are still very much active online. YouTube, which has shown their guidelines make it very accessible to upload propaganda and had still contained numerous videos of ideologists who were members of Al-Qaeda. These videos remained accessible on YouTube until end of last year.

By using social media, the Islamic State can spread their propaganda with ease to a far broader audience and create the foundation for radicalisation among Western European citizens. Recruitment which occurs on the web takes place very quickly through social media platforms. What is a distinguishing trait of the Islamic State, being that they have embraced technology in a way that few terrorist organisations before it had. They have realised that in today's world most people are connected to one form of social media or another and so instead of seeing this as an obstacle, ISIS sees this as an advantage.

¹⁰¹ Charlie Winter (13/02/2017). ICSR: *Media Jihad: The Islamic State's Doctrine for Information Warfare*. International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence. Retrieved From: <http://icsr.info/2017/02/icsr-report-media-jihad-islamic-states-doctrine-information-warfare/> [Accessed 27th April 2018].

¹⁰² Arturo Varvelli (2016). *Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes*. Novi Ligure (AL): Edizioni Epoké, 2016. p. 45.

¹⁰³ Philip Hefner (2012). Editorials. *Theology*. 51(3). pp. 182.

This technological foundation has provided a larger pool of candidates that seem more appealing to young people and its message has been driven deep into the roots of Western European societies in a way that would have been impossible just a few years ago. Jihadists are breaking down the barriers to joining their organisation, there is a focus on “franchising” jihad instead of “owning” it. They're playing a numbers game that is making security at home far more difficult than it ever was in the past.

Today it is much more common for young people to contact Islamic State recruiters directly. In the past, recruiters had to seriously put in the effort to find appropriate recruits. Now wannabe jihadists come right to ISIS at only one click away. Many have already self-radicalised thanks to the online propaganda that is available at the click of a button. A typical recruitment usually starts over the major social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. This starts with a friend request to one of the jihadist propagandists, whose accounts are run by those who are constantly promoting the Islamic State causes.

Seeing the attracting propaganda, this is when the wannabe jihadist will approach one of the numerous accounts via a direct message and ask how to get involved. The leader of such accounts will respond with some questions asking why this individual is reaching out and what their religious background is. Later a more detailed survey of who the person is, what other social media accounts the person has, their opinions on politics and their knowledge about Islam. Should these wannabe jihadists be selected then it is a must that Skype is required to engage in video calls.¹⁰⁴ This is essential as it eliminates the risk of imposters and gives the Islamic State more leverage over the potential recruit as now they can have him or her fully identified.

Once the video calls have been established a new process of ‘doxing’ comes into play. Jeff Bardin explains “the recruits will ‘dox’ them, which forms a dossier that contains all their information of their backgrounds, social media, families etc.”¹⁰⁵ This is a final stage of how all this information is used by the Islamic State to determine whether the wannabe jihadist is legitimate in their claims to join and just how useful he or she would be to their organisation.

The Islamic States online propaganda is set in its aim to solely convince potential recruits that their loyalty belongs not to their country of origin but only to the Caliphate. Their

¹⁰⁴ Carsten Bockstette (2008). *Jihadist Terrorist Use of Strategic Communication Management Techniques*. Garmisch-Partenkirchen: European Centre for Security Studies. p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ Jeff Bardin (22/05/2015) Business Insider: *What it's like to be recruited by ISIS online*. Retrieved from: <http://www.businessinsider.com/what-its-like-to-be-recruited-by-isis-2015-5> [Accessed 27th April 2018].

propaganda online has demonstrated that should you support Western governments and their policies in any way is 'haram' (forbidden). Their messages are clear in stating that the Western life is a lie and a waste of time. It is only for the kafiri. Foundations of Islamic media is a great tool used to branch out within the minds of the youth to partake in the global jihad of today. Social media is proving to be not only a problem to stop Western Europeans joining but a prime key into understand the jihadists struggle against the West.

With foreign fighters the Islamic State has again seen a great advantage in catering their content to hit the right people. Important ISIS messages are released simultaneously in English, French and German (the most common languages spoken throughout Western Europe). A highly strategic play as ISIS leaders in charge of their online media know from the famous quote of Nelson Mandela, "if you speak to a man in a language he understands, it will go to his head. If you speak to a man in his native language it will go to his heart."¹⁰⁶ By the release of their messages in different languages will of course attract potential recruits more as they see they do not need to know Arabic to join the Islamic State, this ensures that they still feel welcomed and not as an outsider.

In 2014 the Islamic State in Iraq made use of 'Multimedia Messaging Service' (MMS) before launching its successful, "surprise" aggressive video footage against Mosul, providing photo/video evidence of the disturbing executions and abductions of members and sending them to the Iraqi army officers as a very strategic scare tactic. Then began the launch of the hashtag on Twitter, '#AllEyesOnISIS'.¹⁰⁷ The combination of our worlds digital era of cameras, wireless computers, better developed software and social media has been greatly exploited by the Islamic State and its sympathisers both within and outside their territories. The Islamic State has choreographed violence in the areas under their control, to meet the demands of their targeted audiences. ISIS has exploited the capabilities of ever growing and changing media technology to deliver their content at top speed via social media.

Jihadist millennials, (the new generation of tech knowhow youths) are starting to exploit the full potential of advancing media. Telegram, a free messaging application has been extremely popular with these jihadist millennials and is one of their main uses for their propaganda and has in turn helped to claim responsibility for promoting messages within their

¹⁰⁶ Victor Ginsburgh and Shiomio Weber (2011). *How Many Languages Do We Need?: The Economics of Linguistic Diversity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p. 201.

¹⁰⁷ The hashtag AllEyesOnISIS began during 2014. It had attracted global supporters who had posted and uploaded images and shout-outs to Twitter in the form of handwritten messages praising ISIS from all over the world.

operations. Following the Paris attacks in November 2015, Telegram had managed to shut down ISIS related accounts, but was not entirely successful in shutting all the accounts down.

The chat facilities are heavily encrypted, and one appealing feature for ISIS is that Telegram has a function where messages can be set to 'self-destruct'. Encryption apps allow these jihadists to securely upload footage of their attacks.¹⁰⁸ Social media applications such as Facebook has a live mode and Twitter has an application called periscope which allows users to broadcast live videos. All of this is for a 'real time' effect. To show people what is happening right at that specific moment. Those who may see these videos may be enjoying in their lives and suddenly a wave of anger or sadness will strike and causes sympathy to be urged to help the Islamic State.

In the months following the March 2016 Brussels attacks, sympathisers in France and Germany commenced a series of attacks and attempted attacks using what they had branded as Islamic State operations via social media. Which has been very effective at keeping the Islamic State in the media headlines and keeping tensions high in Western Europe. Jason Burke suggests that in this era of Islamic State terror, social media and encryption are making a rise of individual terrorism, a reality. There has been a steady rise in the number of lone-actor operations over the last decade.¹⁰⁹ Lone actors now have a much greater access to create and broadcast ISIS propaganda than they did a decade ago, while extremist groups can contact and interact with potential recruits with much greater ease.

Women living in Western Europe are among the least likely people to be suspected of Islamist extremism, which makes them highly desirable for recruitment. As far as the history of war, crime and attacks go, women are not often seen as posing any threats and may even be able to travel more freely than men without alerting suspicion. Interestingly, some Islamic State campaigns to recruit females were carried out primarily by Western European women who left their home countries, joined ISIS and relocated to Syria or Iraq. Such campaigns consist of propaganda, instruction on how women can communicate with members and ways how they can make their journey to Syria or Iraq.

¹⁰⁸ A. Niglia, A. Al Sabaileh and A. Hammad (2017). *Countering Terrorism, Preventing Radicalization and Protecting Cultural Heritage*. Amsterdam: IOS Press. p. 76-78.

¹⁰⁹ Jason Burke (November/December 2016). Combating Terrorism Center at West Point. *The Age of Selfie Jihad: How Evolving Media Technology is Changing Terrorism*. p. 19-21.

Islamic State women recruiters created multiple social media accounts, summoning women to come to the Caliphate. Travel instructions can easily be found online showing exactly which areas and where to cross borders along with what to pack for their new lives in. Photos online which depict young women carrying weapons surrounded by ammunition accompanied by supportive tweets from other women who have joined ISIS paint a somewhat equality description of a positive image where they have been embraced in the land of the Islamic State.

2.5 Thrill-Seeking

Sensation-seeking (also referred to as excitement-seeking) is the tendency to pursue sensory pleasure for excitement. Sensation seekers are easily bored without high levels of stimulation. They love risks and seek thrills. Which is where the Islamic State has promoted such “excitement”. Being a ‘hero’ or a ‘thrill-seeker’ can be risky and is a massive attraction among today’s young adults who go to jihad. According to Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen “the motivation by a desire to engage actively in combat”.¹¹⁰ Thus, leaving these young adults to have such desires to search for access and ways to enter within the combats that ISIS has waged.

If one looks from a standing point where it is seen, they are part of a minority where they have found that Muslims are not being appreciated and have interpreted that experience as something, such as fear. If those who are simply walking down the street and are being looked at with fear and loath this experience can be interpreted as being an important individual whom others fear and would never dare challenge. If these same feelings are shared by others and they can come to an agreement on this fear, then this becomes fundamentally empowering.

Promises are made to those who wish to join in the combat. Young men are more ideal for combat and are more willing to join if they are promised rewards for their services in the Islamic State. ISIS is, in a sense, a gang and being part of a gang is empowering. This thrill acts as an attraction. Young males want to be like the jihadists and young women want to be with them. It has in turn, become a trend setter of some sort.

Young men seek out information for the rewards of joining jihad and the benefits for their families. This entices the young men more into the thrill of jihad and having the title of a jihadist. Young radicals are sincere believers as they wholeheartedly believe they will enter jannah. They join the Islamic State to restore the Caliphate. Masooda Bano explains “if martyrdom is seen as the highest religious calling and knowledge about Sharia law creates desire to carry out certain operations with greater frequency.”¹¹¹ These jihadi fighters are provided with the sense they are not the same as their jihadi brothers before them, they are new and improved, they have a lot less fear and a greater hunger for the desire to fight for what is theirs.

¹¹⁰ Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen (2010). *The Attractions of Jihadism: An Identity Approach to Three Danish Terrorism Cases and the Gallery of Characters around Them*. University of Copenhagen Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies. p. 104.

¹¹¹ Masooda Bano (2012). *The Rational Believer: Choices and Decisions in the Madrasas of Pakistan*. Ithaca: Cornell University. p. 191.

Young radicalised men with the notion of being somehow sent on a highly important mission such as blowing oneself up at an Iraqi or Syrian checkpoint or public transport stations in Western Europe is morbidly exciting and the way to be known for your ‘sacrifice’ after death as a martyr. Those who are willing to do this will create the illusion of being selected for a somewhat elite role with a higher purpose. This was very apparent during 2012 when the Syrian civil war was raging as you can kill ISIS members, but you cannot kill the ISIS ideology.

That is a thrill that the cause of the Islamic State will live on, even after if members have been killed or have chosen to commit suicidal bombings. One of the quotes that ISIS is notorious for using, “we love death as you love life.” Being killed is the victory. You fight a people who can never be defeated. They either gain victory or are killed, it is all the same to them. Islamic State fighters are not only willing to die in a blaze of a religious high, they have embraced it, believing that they will be granted their divine right to enter jannah.

Sheer excitement is a very dangerous emotion. Those who join the Islamic State have the exciting idea to leave a ‘legacy’ behind. This comes with being honoured as a martyr. The trick to keep the excitement is to keep the youth preoccupied so that there is no room for boredom to enter and to allow the excitement to continue as this will brainwash youths to be even more willing to join ISIS and in turn these young adults will spread their own excitement to others. Those who have failed at other things in their lives seek jihad as an option as it gives them the chance of being able to achieve extraordinary things that will have a ripple effect around the globe which will be talked about and researched on for years to come.

While in the war zone where brutal combat hardens the fighters by acclimatising them under immense pressure and in turn, creates the bond of devotion to their fellow ‘brother-in-arms’. Through that, these foreign fighters obtain instant and useful skills. Those who have not been killed return to their countries of origin and have this sense of “street cred” which enables them with the necessary skills to recruit and radicalise others. Sympathisers showed an admiration for returnees from Iraq and Syria, giving them the prestige to convince others to join them for the Islamic State.

From its arrival in the late 1980s, jihadism has created a very intriguing and dangerous path. To this day it is still very hard to comprehend its successive outreach. The Islamic State is, for now, the last jihadi outreach. They have re-invented and re-energised jihadism thanks to its unique selling proposition among contemporary jihadi groups and the goal to have a true Caliphate. This allowed ISIS to outbid Al-Qaeda and to attract thousands of foreign fighters

with widely different motivations and from many various locations around the world. Through its control over their large territories, ISIS was able to offer them a collection of ‘wonderful’ opportunities with the promise of instant satisfaction for anyone seeking to join their organisation, either physically or virtually.

To members of street gangs, this so-called collection offered status, brotherhood, thrill, adventure, respect, and an outlet for their anger to an extent they could only dream of on the streets of their home countries. The Islamic State offered foreign youths a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to join a “superior gang” that included heroism and martyrdom if they so desired. It provided them with power over others, hope of revenge and even a license for viciousness in the name of the Caliphate.

But the pull of the Islamic State extended beyond those searching for a fight. It offered a new life to those in search of belonging and meaning in life, such as adolescents and mid 20-year olds. ISIS hinted at a new beginning, empowerment, pride, future, prospects, fellowship and a feeling of finally being accepted the way they wanted to be. The Islamic State at times has presented its organisation to be that of a romantic one. Where they see themselves as these new historical heroes or ‘knights in shining armour.’ In doing so they have offered material wealth which included a salary, homes with beautiful gardens and if those who wished, a jihadi bride who would be devout to their jihadi husbands.

For the young adults that had left Belgium, and/or the Netherlands had been granted an opportunity to break with their criminal and corrupted Western lifestyles by recruiters from the Islamic State. This meant that they could escape possible prison sentences or even their debts. In other words, this gave the risk and excitement of evading authority and possible boredom to pursue the excitement of the rapid ascent of the ISIS and the establishment of the Caliphate along with the impression of unstoppable expansion had impressively boosted the appeal to join the organisation.

The promises of guns and women. According to Robert Spencer, sex is one of the most primitive assertion of one’s significance, with men, this is shown a lot more. It is the chance to assert yourself and have your genes and name carry on. The power of being dominate.¹¹² To ensure this dominate feeling, sex slaves may have even been promised to those who join ISIS. These sex slaves were portrayed as not completely haram, because they can be bought, the

¹¹² Robert Spencer (2015). *The Complete Infidel’s Guide to ISIS*. Washington: Regnery publishing. p. 50.

buyers “owned them”. To join the Islamic State as “the baddest gang in town”, men have a predominate need to feel ‘masculine’ so by the means of joining the Islamic State, they have procured just that. The adventure, bloodlust and sex that comes with ISIS is a way to ensure the thrill of having such dominate power.

During 2014, some of the Islamic States newly established soldiers were widely welcomed in Mosul, unlike the cruel Iraqi army. These ISIS fighters seemed much “politer”. They began by making sure that public buildings were being guarded, to prevent looting and demolished the concrete barricades that surrounded Mosul. This is where new banners that were proclaiming the new regime of being long-lasting and that it will expand. Once their authority had been recognised, ISIS could now begin their focus toward creating a civic administration.

All existing government structures that had been destroyed, had now been replaced with diwans (ministries) where there were different roles to fill and control. The idea was to portray to people that ISIS was fair and that they cared about the people. These diwans were broken down into:

- Medical.
- Schooling.
- Service industries.
- Investment.
- War and security.
- Agriculture.

All these diwans was headed by an emir (ruler), some of them were in fact foreigners. Although the Islamic state is a terrorist state, it was also a somewhat “modern state,” Ghaith Abdul-Ahad reported “they dressed and talked like they were living in the early days of Islam, however, administratively, they ran the state efficiently.”¹¹³

Before the beginning of the loss of the Islamic State’s territories during 2016 and 2017, they had expanded quite a fair amount of ‘wilayat’ (provinces) this was a rather impressive attribute to the attraction of thrill-seeking, to take something that essentially did not belong to you and have complete control over it. It was in hopes of expanding the Caliphate even further.

¹¹³ Ghaith Abdul-Ahad (29/10/2018). The Guardian: *The bureaucracy of evil: how Islamic State ran a city*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/jan/29/bureaucracy-evil-isis-run-city-mosul> [Accessed 5th June 2018].

The desire to have a land that you could truly call your own, the desire to do unto what has been done to you is a very scary attraction which some of these foreign fighters felt joyous at the site of ISIS committing their atrocities.

The Islamic States portrayal of their battles is described as the “ultimate battle” in which only the faithful are triumphant. It is this kind of glorification of terror which enticed the youth to be a part of. Should you fight in the battles for ISIS, it is worth more than fighting in a hundred battles with less of an eschatological aura.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Charles Cameron (01/09/2014). Center for Strategic Information: *Filiu on ISIS: “excitement at the approach of the end of time”*. Retrieved from: <https://csc.asu.edu/2014/09/01/filiu-on-isis-excitement-at-the-approach-of-the-end-of-time/> [Accessed 5th June 2018].

3. Discussions

As it has been shown within the literature review of this thesis, that there are three factors with help to show and understand the foreign fighter phenomenon, particularly with young Western Europeans that have had no ties to Islam or the Middle East. It is evident that during the beginning of the Arab Spring, along with the rise of the Islamic State that between the years of 2011-2017 there have been an inflow of these foreign fighters and from the inflow into Syria and Iraq there has been another inflow of returnees back into Western Europe.

Community building showed that it is quite easy to find like-minded individuals and gather alongside the extremist views that they all share of rejecting the hedonistic Western lifestyle. What is more interesting is that these communities were not formed in Syria or Iraq they were formed in Western Europe and have been known about for quite some time. So those still within their home countries did not even need to travel to the Islamic States territories, they could learn and understand their ideologies right within their home countries.

Identity is such a thing where everyone in their lives has struggled with at some point, it's a struggle to know who you are, what you stand for and where you can fit into this world. Something which the Islamic State was able to provide the vulnerable youth struggling with such identity issues. They were able to shape, create and promote a "romantic" version of jihadism, thus creating a tear in social identity of in-groups leaving individuals to perceive threats and leave to join an out-group. We all choose paths to travel down in search of who we are, some fall to a much darker side and hence the foreign fighters feeling fulfilled within themselves to identify with charismatic ISIS fighters and the suffering of the Syrian and Iraqi people from tyrants.

Money for today's generation is a rather interesting attracting factor as past generations had it somewhat easier being able to own houses and not having to obtain a degree to sustain themselves. Poverty neighbourhoods in Western European countries which have been overlooked or have had next to no help from government officials have lead the youth to become fed up and when the Islamic State comes along providing proof of their money and promising to pay for these people to join them, it is seen as a means of escape, a means of survival. Poverty brings frustration which many of this generation know. ISIS has had an impressive run as the wealthiest extremist group of today.

Religion is another struggle to where most people have longed to find something which can provide an inner peace or a spirituality. Some young converts had converted due to having friends who were Muslim, or they had been lost at a point of their lives and had found Islam to help guide them. Those who converted for extremism found the lure of it very appealing and that the extremist views of jihadism attracting for a sense of power.

Social media, the biggest attraction in the sense of how fast the technology of today's world has grown into, the means of committing acts of terror at the click of a button from the privacy of your own home, is very appealing. With today's youth the Islamic State has seen and understood the power of social media and has used and manipulated it to their desire. Showing propaganda of the suffering of the Syrian and Iraqi people has played the empathy and sympathy cards. Using one post in multiple languages to reach thousands of people at once has shown a disturbing amount of support from Western Europeans for ISIS.

The Islamic State has changed and manipulated their way into becoming what they are. They have achieved things no other terrorist groups before it could. They have had the advantage of being at the peak of technology and changing their requirements for other recruits. Despite setbacks, ISIS and their foreign fighters need to be closer examined along with a wider look into other attractions.

The research is ever changing to understand how radicalisation has changed over the years, what was seen with the Islamic State is they had changed the game for radicalisation of those wishing to join them. Past extremist groups had certain requirements for recruits whereas ISIS had no limitation in respect of gender, skill, language, religion or education levels. In other words, there was a role for everyone to be a part of. It appeared that this helped with radicalisation of youths whereas they found they could freely join without speaking Arabic or being Muslim. It was a sense of welcoming.

Thrill-seeking, if all else is put aside, the sheer thrill of being a jihadist with the promises of glory, being a martyr and having your name live on after death is a very appealing attraction. It has been overlooked as an attraction to youth. Adrenaline junkies live for thrills, live for the risks of danger where they could possibly die. Death is a fascination and something which has not been guaranteed with a date, time or year. Fighting for glory and power and believing that it is justified is a guaranteed attraction to mainly young men who want to feel more powerful, more dangerous and feared.

Within the empirical part of the research it had shown that there are more attractions as to why Western Europeans were pledging allegiance to the Islamic State. Mainly foreign fighters were solely based on greed and grievance which many have believed to be the main attractions to joining extremist groups in the past and even today. However, as shown, they are not the sole influences of attractions.

Conclusion

This master thesis analysed the attractions that had influenced young Western Europeans joining an extremist organisation. It also presented a qualitative analysis of the growing trends between the years 2011-2017, the changes in radical behaviour and creating new identities and to shed light on the influence of five attractions: community building, money, religion, social media and thrill-seeking.

More specifically the thesis attempted to answer the following research question:

What are the attractions that influence young Western Europeans to join Jihad in Syria and Iraq?

The study proved, in the literature review that there are three key elements that contributed to these foreign Western European fighters joining ISIS. These elements are growing trends from 2011-2017, changes in radicalisation behaviour and creating new identities. The study also showed that ISIS had no preference in who was recruited, they did not need to be just men, speakers of Arabic or fighters. Women held influential roles in the Islamic State as keepers of the family and non-fighters were able to help with operations behind the battle fields. Western Europeans proved to be a great use as they were able to go undetected within the European Union and did not raise suspicions. Something which ISIS saw as a great advantage for their foreign recruits.

The Islamic States peak of foreign fighters was between 2011-2015. Between the years of 2016-2017 saw a slight decrease but instead saw many of these foreign fighters return to their home countries. Although they have returned, many authorities are still unsure of the exact total and who these foreign fighters even are. The larger countries analysed that had produced the most foreign fighters was France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The two smaller countries that had produced a significant number of foreign fighters in proportion to their populations were Belgium and the Netherlands.

Tackling the foreign fighter phenomenon of today is not an easy task. Just as the European Union and the rest of the world has seen. By targeting Islamic symbols can only escalate the ongoing problem. Social media does make it harder to identify recruits, but it is very important to identify the places and countries where recruitment is likely to take place. To begin to try and take out the radical element would require a great amount of patience and from the whole communities, as well as the government.

It is difficult to say which attraction plays the key factor as mostly all will eventually blur into one and make it rather difficult to indicate one key attraction or behaviour. But this master thesis did show that it is not always based on just greed and grievance. It may be helpful to talk with those who have returned to be able to get a greater understanding to the foreign fighter phenomenon, each will have a different view on their experiences and beliefs. Particularly with social media, it is accessible almost everywhere and is a continuous glorification of jihad. This keeps inspiring and attracting new members and plays right into the hands of the Islamic State. This is crucial where those who need to filter out these glorifications in hopes of slowing down the foreign fighters.

Within societies and cultures, it is important that more of an understanding towards people who are struggling to find their place in this world, particularly with identity issues. More understanding and help provided may help to calm the youth to know that the darker path to travel down is not the way to find peace. More acceptance and assistance with those struggling to hold onto steady jobs, have an education will ensure youths can have more options and patience. Once the stigma of Islamophobia has been eliminated. All this will cause the Islamic State to become less appealing and ISIS will lose their attraction to these foreign fighters.

What is needed is a more precise study on ways to counter the foreign fighter youths of Western Europeans. We start to better understand the motivations behind the trend as the situation has been ongoing for some time. It needs a deeper look at not just stereotypical subjects where foreign fighters are immigrants of second or third generation Muslims or who are Arabic speakers. Western Europeans are also prone to radicalisation and joining extremist groups. There needs to be more available data on native Europeans to be able to understand and tackle the problem in a more efficient way. But there is a smaller amount of data on native Europeans than on immigrants.

Despite the territorial losses of the recent years, the Islamic State continues to be a force that threatens international security. Western European recruits travelling to ISIS' held territories show no signs of slowing down. The world has only begun to witness the introduction of the Islamic State and the extremist organisation is likely to offer interesting studies of research in the future if more information becomes available and the world learns more about the organisation along with the foreign fighter phenomena.

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