

CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN JIHADISM: FRIENDSHIP AND COUNTERCULTURE

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Abstract

This dissertation brings a unique perspective in analyzing the homegrown phenomenon of *Contemporary European Jihadism* as a violent counterculture, involving clusters of young Europeans. The involvement in this phenomenon reflects the rejection of today's globalized world, a level of nihilism and a need for rebellion, disclosed by an adherence to other countercultures before escalating to a *Jihadism*. I indeed argue that we should speak of *Jihadisms*, as various phenomena, rather than *Jihadism*. The absence of a societal project, the family model crisis, the failures of the different integration policies combined with side effects of globalization such as an increased emphasis on *cultural identifications* are all factors initiating this nihilism and will to revolt. What is particularly striking is that this involvement often happens in groups, clusters of friends who have sometimes known each other for years, some other times met a few weeks before deciding to join Daesh to fight in the Levant or conduct a terrorist attack. Daesh offers to a desperate youth a new family, the neo-*jihadis* are “born again” as they adopt a new name. This thesis focuses on the European terrorist networks through the lens of various dynamics that are at stake in order to understand how these individuals are willing to sacrifice themselves for a group, its ideas and ideals. The case study of the Verviers cell, responsible for the Paris attacks in November 2015 and the Brussels attacks in March 2016, demonstrates that most of the terrorists not only knew each other for years, but also grew up together in some *quartiers défavorisés*, and collaborated in petty criminal activities. Other findings show that these individuals previously participated to petty criminal economies and have travelled to Daesh-held territory. These findings support the idea that these attackers experienced a phenomenon of identity fusion.

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Introduction

*Jihadism is the largest violent utopian, anti-Western, and anti-democratic movement in the world*¹

It has been said that on January 7, 2015, France had its 9/11. It has been said again that on November 13, 2015, France had its 9/11. It has been said that on March 22, 2016, Belgium had its 9/11. How many more 9/11s are to come? How many of them have been avoided? These three events resulted in 174 victims and more than 720 wounded. They are related² to one organization that has learned lessons from previous attacks on European soil such as the Madrid and London bombings: Daesh. These attacks marked a shift in European terrorism. A mix of terrorist tactics, including synchronized assaults involving more than one gunman willing to fight to death, hostage-taking and suicide-bombings. In addition, all those attacks were perpetrated by Europeans, most of them having spent time in Daesh-controlled territory. Previously, the only case involving a returnee European foreign fighter attacking Europe was Mehdi Nemmouche, a French citizen who shot four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels on May 24, 2014.³

Islamic terrorism, radical Islam, extreme Islam, militant Islam: many expressions have been and are used, abused and over-abused⁴ to refer to different phenomena, demonstrating the incredible attention accorded to this topic since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, with a

¹ Farhad Khosrokhavar. *Inside Jihadism. Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide* (Paradigm Publishers, 2009), 1.

² Regarding the Charlie Hebdo attacks, Amedy Coulibaly pledged allegiance to Daesh.

³ BBC News. "Brussels Jewish Museum Killings: Suspect 'Admitted Attack.'" *BBC News*. June 1, 2014, accessed May 10, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27654505>.

⁴ Such as the speculative theory of a francophone *Jihadism*. See William McCants, and Christopher Meserole. "The French Connection." *Foreign Affairs*, April 11, 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-24/french-connection>.

particular increase since the events of 9/11 occurred (see **Figure 1**). The recent attacks in Paris and Brussels lead many politicians to identify *Jihadism* as the main threat to security in today's society. However, it remains unclear what *Jihadism* really is, as well as the threat that it supposedly poses. If there is one thing on which journalists, politicians, scholars and other "experts" agree, it is that individuals involved in a *Jihadism* are believed to have something in common, something that others are excluded from. The individuals perceive themselves as *sharing* something. What this something is appears difficult to determine: Religion? Worldviews? Ideology? Social values? Sociopathic or mental illness? Whatever this "shared thing" is, it is strongly attractive – or strongly pushing – to the point that some are willing to die for it.

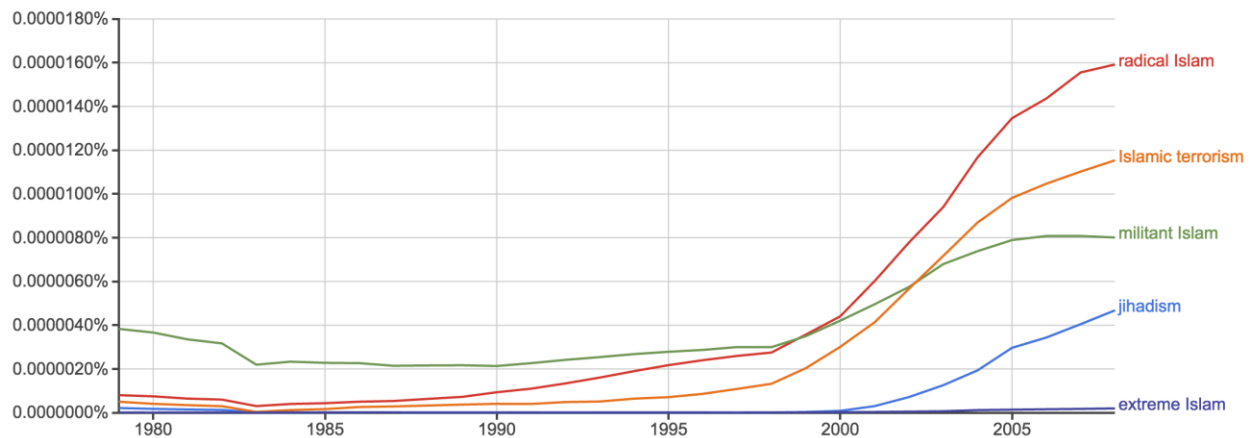


Figure 1: Use of the Words "radical Islam," "Islamic terrorism," "militant Islam," "Jihadism," "extreme Islam," in the English Literature Between 1979 and 2008⁵

This dissertation will investigate the profiles of individuals involved in a *Jihadism*, their clusters, their *milieux* and the interactions between them. Exploratory studies are essential to tackle

⁵Source: Google Books Ngram Viewer.

https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=jihadism%2Cradical+Islam%2Cmilitant+Islam%2CIslamic+terrorism%2Cextreme+Islam&year_start=1979&year_end=2015&corpus=15&smoothing=3&share=&direct_url=t1%3B%2Cjihadism%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Cradical%20Islam%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Cmilitant%20Islam%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2CIslamic%20terrorism%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Cextreme%20Islam%3B%2Cc0%3B.t1%3B%2Cjihadism%3B%2Cc0%3B&hl=en (Data available only up to 2008).

the problems posed by radicalization and terrorism. A better understanding of who the radicalized people are, where they are from, how they radicalized, how they operate and how they were recruited may allow us to overcome the problem and threat they pose to contemporary European societies. This thesis will contribute to a better understanding of the importance of the networks that are behind Paris and Brussels attacks of November 13, 2015 and March 22, 2016 by providing a new perspective on interpreting *contemporary European Jihadism*. Thus, my work is innovative in two ways: first it uses the concept of identity fusion in order to deepen the understanding of the social dynamics that are behind *jihadist* network; secondly it defines *contemporary European Jihadism* as a counterculture, not that much different from a hippie, fascist or a punk counterculture. My point is that most of those young Europeans who join the *jihadi* cause would probably have joined another cause at another point in time – and some actually have. Linking the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels have revealed to be crucially indispensable. In order to fully understand the radicalization process, an interdisciplinary approach is required. Thus, sociological, anthropological, psychological, historical, politico-scientist, and psychiatric approaches are necessary.

To these ends, this study explores the Verviers cell – the network behind the Paris and Brussels attacks – and scrutinizes the profiles of its members. The following research questions will be explored: To what extent does contemporary European *Jihadism* reflect a counterculture? What is the importance of social networks behind the radicalization process in this phenomenon of contemporary European Jihadism? In order to investigate and answer these questions, the following variables will be examined: age, nationality, gender, place of residence, believed to have visited Daesh-held territory, previous criminal activities, previous connections with other members of the cell before “getting radicalized.” Fourteen individuals who carried out the Paris and Brussels

attacks of November 13, 2015 and March 22, 2016 have been identified for this purpose. Of those fourteen individuals, I was able to gather information on twelve attackers through sources of information that are all in the public domain, mostly newspaper articles. The focus on these attacks is justified by the fact that the Verviers cell is the only one on which substantial data could be gathered, as well as on the assumption that France and Belgium are facing the biggest threat regarding Daesh. The challenge will be not to make this study a biographical account. In the previous works, jihadis' biographies appear to be quite diverse and cannot allow for simplistic conclusions. However, it is important to consider biographies as they can tell us about the social, political and historical contexts in which the individuals were raised, as well as bringing some insights about their personal lives.

Chapter one sets up the scene by declaring that Daesh is more than a terrorist organization and that it represents a significant menace to European societies. This threat is growing within these societies and is largely undetectable. Chapter two provides an extensive literature review on the different approaches that have been and are used in order to study *radicalization processes* and *terrorism*. Chapter three focuses on the different important contributions to the study of *Jihadism* in Europe, or rather, as I claim, of *Jihadisms*. Chapter four interprets the phenomenon of *contemporary European Jihadism* as a counterculture resulting from a marginalization. The final chapter explores the Verviers cell, gives the result of my study and applies the different theories exposed throughout this dissertation to the events of Paris and Brussels.

Chapter 1: Daesh and the Threat to Europe

This chapter gives an overview of what Daesh is, which remains a controversy among “experts.” I argue that Daesh is more than a simple terrorist organization, and rather looks like a proto-state. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to evaluating the threat that Daesh poses to Europe. We will see that this threat is not constructed, nor imagined, which is why the topics explored in this thesis are relevant: it is essential to understand the dynamics and strategies that are behind this threat in order to tackle the issue.

1.1 Daesh

It is tempting to compare Daesh to al-Qaeda but Daesh is more a qualitative evolution of the al-Qaeda model. It is more than a terrorist group: the organization has a professionally designed and implemented military strategy that incorporates a surprisingly effective practical model for social governance. Nonetheless, this “state-like organization” could only be sustained in the long-term if it can manage to exploit instability and maintain its significant sources of income, as well as keep its regional adversaries divided. Indeed, Daesh seriously benefits from its financial and structural independence, which is also a crucial weakness that could be exploited by the international community.

▪ **Military Strategy**

Daesh commands more than 30,000 fighters, and it has managed to gain, hold and control a considerable territory in Syria and Iraq.⁶ The group is also able to field an army and confront international military forces. It possesses a number of weapons systems, vehicles and field artillery such as tanks, anti-tank guided missiles, multiple-rocket launchers.⁷ Daesh has implemented policies aimed at professionalizing its members in order to have well-trained fighters.⁸ Lister in “Profiling the Islamic State” divides Daesh military operation into two categories.⁹ First, Daesh acts as a typical terrorist organization by launching mass casualty urban attacks, targeting all non-Sunni Muslims and minority groups with the goal of sparking sectarian conflict, which is a crucial facet of Daesh’s strategy. The second category is a strategic campaign of attribution against military opponent’s capabilities and morale with the goal of acquiring and controlling territory. In addition, Daesh extensively uses intelligence operations in order to prepare its attacks, as well as campaigns of intimidation on government officials accompanied by assassinations.¹⁰

⁶ Audrey Kurth Cronin. "ISIS Is More Than a Terrorist Group." *Foreign Affairs* (2016). Accessed April 10, 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-23/isis-more-terrorist-group>.

⁷ Charles Lister, “Profiling the Islamic State,” *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper*, no. 13 (2014): 17.

⁸ For instance, the organization has many training camps.

⁹ Lister. “Profiling the Islamic State.” 18.

¹⁰ Ibid.

▪ Internal Organization and Policy

Daesh aims to “project a goal of radical political and social change” and as such can be qualified as a “revolutionary actor.”¹¹ For this purpose, the group has established a bureaucratic organization. The self-declared caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,¹² is at the top of the organization, bringing an essential image of Islamic legitimacy with his PhD in Islamic Studies from the Saddam University for Islamic Studies and his history as imam in Samarra.¹³ Al-Baghdadi is assisted by a personal advisor, a deputy for Syria and one for Iraq, as well as a cabinet composed of “ministers.”¹⁴ It is important to note that many of the leaders of Daesh, as well as many of its commanders have military and intelligence experience as former members of Hussein’s army.¹⁵ This is an essential strength in the organization as their professionalism helps it to operate efficiently.

The group is also able to operate as a state-like organization due to its generation of incomes. Daesh is self-sufficient and can thus enjoy independence. The organization funds itself through oil smuggling, a well-established taxation system including customs tax, extortions, kidnap-for-ransom operations, as well as using the Iraqi central bank foreign currency auction systems.¹⁶ Not only do these independent financial capacities allow the group to effectively bypass

¹¹ Stathis Kalyvas. “The Logic of Violence in the Islamic State’s War,” *The Washington Post*, July 7, 2014, accessed April 6, 2016 <http://m.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/07/07/the-logic-of-violence-in-islamic-states-war/>.

¹² BBC. “Profile: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.” *BBC News*. 15 May 2015, accessed 30 March 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27801676>

¹³ William McCants, “The Believer.” *Brookings*. September 1, 2015, accessed March 30, 2016. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2015/thebeliever>.

¹⁴ Ruth Sherlock. “Inside the Leadership of the Islamic State: How the New Caliphate Is Run,” *The Telegraph*, July 9, 2014, accessed April 15, 2016 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/10956280/Inside-the-leadership-of-Islamic-State-how-the-new-caliphate-is-run.html>.

¹⁵ Al-Arabiya News. “Exclusive: Top ISIS Leaders Revealed,” *Al-Arabiya News*, February 13, 2014, accessed April 15, 2016. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/2014/02/13/Exclusive-Top-ISIS-leaders-revealed.html>.

¹⁶ Holly Ellyat. “ISIS ‘making millions’ by gaming forex markets.” *CNBC*. March 3, 2016, accessed March 3, 2016. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/03/is-making-millions-by-gaming-forex-markets.html>.

traditional financial counter-terrorism measures, they also provide a source of social leverage. Daesh is indeed able to induce tribal loyalty through its consequent incomes, in its strategy of buying fuel subsidies and food to gain popular support. This image of success and wealth is an attractive tool in the strategy of recruitment of foreign and local fighters, both through the fact that Daesh pays its fighters and through its social media campaigns.

▪ **Communication Strategy**

Daesh has from its first days understood the crucial importance of media and especially the internet to disseminate its messages. This phenomenon is not new and has been adopted by almost every current militant organization. Still, Daesh's global media campaign is assessed as the most effective ever. The organization uses social media to encourage individual participation in a *Jihadism*, of both men and women from the West, by performing three functions: radicalization, recruitment, and identity formation.¹⁷

Daesh structures its propaganda to have a wide appeal and intentionally creates a dual image: to be both loved and feared. The brutal and violent videos of beheadings, executions and public tortures are used to frighten enemies or provoke them, while being an attractive tool for sympathizers from the West. Daesh has managed to isolate areas under its control from news by declaring journalists as enemy and preventing them from visiting. Thus, as there is no neutral source of information coming from Daesh-held territory, the organization can create an idealistic picture of the self-proclaimed caliphate as a perfect place for living, and attract sympathizers from the rest of the world.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Karagiannis. "Transnational Islamist Networks: Western Fighters in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria," *The International Spectator* 48, no. 4 (2013): 119–34.

▪ Ideological Agenda

Daesh-held territory is considered by its partisans as a part of the restoration of the caliphate. This project can be qualified as “religio-political” and seems to be quite successful so far as the organization manages to sustain governance but also to expand it. The proto-state is *Islamist*,¹⁸ with one *Salafist* interpretation of Islam. Daesh’s main priority is to build the caliphate.¹⁹ Thus, its agenda is clear: fighting locally, instituting and consolidating governance under the *Sharia* law, and expanding its territory. Libya seems to be the key target for extension in a near future.²⁰ The proto-state’s five-step process – *hijra* (migration), *jama’a* (congregate), destabilization of *taghut* (tyrants), *tamkin* (consolidation), and *khilafa* (caliphate)—has now been completed.²¹ Its main challenge is to continue to consolidate and govern the territory it holds without falling victim to its ideology, at the same time resisting local conflicts and international military intervention.

We have seen that Daesh possesses a military strategy, an internal organization similar to a state, a communication strategy and an ideological agenda. It is now crucial to grasp the extent of the threat that Daesh poses to the European states.

¹⁸ Graeme Wood, “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic* 3 (2015).

¹⁹ The International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence. “The Islamic State Model.” *King’s College London* (2015), accessed April 10, 2016. <http://icsr.info/2015/01/icsr-insight-islamic-state-model/>.

²⁰ Alessandra Massi. “Biggest ISIS Threat To Europe Now Comes From Libya, Not Syria And Iraq.” *The International Business Times*. February 21, 2016, accessed on March 30 2016. <http://www.ibtimes.com/biggest-isis-threat-europe-now-comes-libya-not-syria-iraq-2316329>.

²¹ As outlined in the first issue of the Islamic State’s official English-language magazine, *Dabiq*. See “al-Ḥayāt Media Center presents a new issue of the Islamic State’s magazine: ‘Dābiq #1,’” *Jihadology* (blog), July 5, 2014, accessed 8 April 8, 2016. <http://jihadology.net/2014/07/05/al-hayat-media-center-presents-a-new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-magazine-dabiq-1/>.

1.2 The Homegrown Threat to Europe

My research leads me to determine that the main threat Daesh is posing to Europe is homegrown. In light of the recent events in Paris and Brussels, the threat posed by returned foreign fighters to Europe, who had acquired military training and battlefield experience, seems to be the major one. The second important threat is the one of Daesh-inspired or ordered attacks. Would-be foreign fighters who, having failed – or rather having been prevented – to join Daesh-controlled territory, may also carry out attacks in their home countries. A third, yet less severe, threat is the impact of homegrown terrorism on social cohesion within Europe.

▪ **Homegrown Terrorists and Foreign Fighters Returnees as the Main Threat**

The November 13, 2015 attacks in Paris and the March 22, 2016 attacks in Brussels have demonstrated that the threat posed by Daesh in Europe has a dimension never seen before: not only can the Islamist group order lone wolf, wolf packs or low-tech group attacks, but it also has cells²² of European foreign fighters returnees within the EU Member States, capable of organizing long-prepared attacks causing mass casualties. These attacks have revealed that Daesh uses a combat doctrine inspired from *Auftragstaktik*²³ – a 19th Century German combat tactic – to carry out *jihād* in Europe. This tactic calls for leaders to give subordinates a goal and a time frame in

²² Le Monde. “Attentats de Bruxelles : les multiples visages de la filière franco-belge.” *Le Monde.fr*. Accessed March 29, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/visuel/2016/03/29/attentats-les-multiples-visages-de-la-filiere-franco-belge_4891890_4355770.html.

²³ RT International. “ISIS Using 19th Century German Combat Tactic ‘Auftragstaktik’ to Commit Terror Attacks.” *RT International*. Accessed April 1, 2016. <https://www.rt.com/news/338063-isis-german-combat-auftragstaktik/>.

which to accomplish it freely. Abdelhamid Abaaoud,²⁴ a 28-year-old Belgian killed by French commandos in a raid in Saint-Denis on November 18, 2015, seems to have been the subordinate in charge of organizing attacks in Western Europe either with its Verviers cell²⁵ or by ordering lone wolf attacks (e.g.: Villejuif, Jewish museum in Brussels, Thalys train).²⁶ Daesh's operatives in Europe are well-trained as they return from training camps and battlefields, able to organize complex and sophisticated plots involving a high level of planning, preparation and commitment, providing a large group of terrorists, which marks a new trend in Europe. One advantage of using returnees as operatives is their ability to leverage support and facilitation, as well as obtaining weapons thanks to their networks.²⁷

▪ Daesh-Conducted and Inspired Attacks

According to *Dar al-Islam*, the French online magazine edited by Daesh, the group has deployed its resources to generate three types of terrorist attacks in Europe, from large-scale plots ordered by the leaders to “isolated actions of self-radicalized people, who have absolutely no direct contact with ISIS, and yet who will consciously act in its name.”²⁸ This demonstrates that Daesh adopts a similar strategy to al-Qaeda after 9/11: in order to avoid becoming obsolete by only working on consequent-size plots that take years to mount, the organization chose to also carry out

²⁴ Van Vlierden, Guy. “Profile: Paris Attack Ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud.” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. December 15, 2015, accessed January 5, 2016. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/profile-paris-attack-ringleader-abdelhamid-abaaoud>.

²⁵ Le Monde. “Attentats de Bruxelles : les multiples visages de la filière franco-belge.”

²⁶ Julien Crepin, “Attentats de Paris: Abaaoud, Le Lien Entre Toutes Les Affaires (INFOGRAPHIE),” accessed May 21, 2016, <http://www.dhnet.be/actu/belgique/attentats-de-paris-abaaoud-le-lien-entre-toutes-les-affaires-infographie-564a1acd3570bccfaf15c875>.

²⁷ Van Vlierden. “Profile: Paris Attack Ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud.”

²⁸ Rukmini Callimachi. “How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe’s Gaze.” *The New York Times*, March 29, 2016, accessed March 29, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/29/world/europe/isis-attacks-paris-brussels.html>.

multiple small and medium-size operations and using propaganda to inspire self-directed attacks by sympathizers. Indeed, in a speech in September 2014, Al-Adnani, Daesh's spokesman called on Muslims everywhere to kill Europeans, "especially the spiteful and filthy French."²⁹ These lone-wolf inspired attacks are essential to Daesh propaganda but also as a strategy to organize bigger plots under the radar of the authorities, by letting them focus on stopping small-size plots with no or very few links to Daesh as this was the case for the Paris attacks last November.³⁰

▪ Targeting, Resources and Tactics

Daesh uses varied tactics such as multiple coordinated and synchronized attacks, combined with suicide bombings. The Paris attacks was a long dynamic terrorist operation, which enhanced its impact. Abaaoud's revealed plans of attacking a shopping mall and a police station at La Défense a few days later, as well as transportation and Jewish schools³¹ demonstrate that several waves were planned in order to install a climate of insecurity. The Thalys foiled attack, the November 13 and March 22 attacks were all intended to inflict indiscriminate mass casualties. This marks a shift in Daesh's strategy as the group previously targeted specific and symbolic victims such as religious authorities, police, and military personnel. What we do not know because of this *Auftragstaktik* is whether it was Abaaoud's or one of its leaders' decision.

Daesh operatives, or at least some of them, master the production of bombs containing TATP (triacetone triperoxide) and this white explosive powder became the signature in its

²⁹ The Muslim Issue. "ISIS Urges Muslims to 'kill Disbelievers' Anywhere in the World." *The Muslim Issue*, September 22, 2014, accessed April 16, 2016. <https://themuslimissue.wordpress.com/2014/09/22/isis-urges-muslims-to-kill-disbelievers-anywhere-in-the-world/>.

³⁰ Crepin. "Attentats de Paris: Abaaoud, le lien entre toutes les affaires."

³¹ Jean-Charles Brissard. "The Paris Attacks and the Evolving Islamic State Threat to France" *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*. Accessed April 16, 2016. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-paris-attacks-and-the-evolving-islamic-state-threat-to-france>.

European operations. The substance has been found in Daesh-led plots in 2014, 2015 and in the belts and suitcases of the Paris and Brussels bombers.³² The main ingredients for making such bombs can be found in common household goods like nail polish, and is the reason why they are popular. However, TATP is not easy to make and requires some training, that Daesh can potentially provide either in its territory or online. Regarding the funding, it seems that *jihadis* returnees are simply handed cash when they are sent back to Europe to carry out attacks.³³ This provides a relative discretion allowing funds to travel under the radar and involving very few individuals.

▪ **Future Threat**

It would be wrong to assume that the Verviers terrorist cell has been totally dismantled. According to the woman who led the police to Abaaoud, 90 other *jihadis* would have (re)entered France thanks to Abaaoud's network. They remain the principal potential threat to France and other EU Member States, especially as they could act in revenge of the arrest of Abdeslam and Abrini.³⁴ Similar scenarios to the Paris and Brussels attacks (major terrorist operations with equipped and trained fighters)³⁵ could be happening. Daesh inspired violence also poses a threat to the security of EU Member States. An adequate example is Amedy Coulibaly, who, after pledging allegiance to Daesh in a video killed a policewoman and four other people he took hostage following the Charlie Hebdo attacks.³⁶ Many alleged plots linked to or inspired by Daesh have

³² Callimachi. "How ISIS Built the Machinery of Terror Under Europe's Gaze."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Chris Johnston. "Mohamed Abrini Admits to Being 'Man in the Hat' at Brussels Airport." *The Guardian*, April 9, 2016, accessed April 9, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/09/paris-attacks-suspect-mohamed-abrini-charged-with-terrorist-murders>.

³⁵ Brian Michael Jenkins. "The Dynamics of the Conflicts in Syria and Iraq and the Threat Posed by Homegrown Terrorist and Returning Western Fighters." Rand Office of External Affairs. (2015).

³⁶ Julian Borger. "Paris Gunman Amedy Coulibaly Declared Allegiance to Isis." *The Guardian*, January 12, 2015, accessed, April 10, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/11/paris-gunman-amedy-coulibaly-allegiance-isis>.

increasingly been broken up, particularly in France and Belgium. Scenarios such as individual or small group attacks involving untrained shooters with single digit victims can be expected. In the case of being largely weakened, Daesh could change its strategy and imitate Al-Qaeda by asking women to carry out suicide attacks. Interestingly enough, because women are considered less suspicious in carrying out attacks, they could thus instill an alarming and unsecure climate.

This chapter has outlined that the principal threat posed by Daesh in Europe is homegrown. Young Europeans join Daesh by hundreds every week, while dozens are sent back to their homes with missions.³⁷ It is thus essential to understand what dynamics are behind this radicalization of a youth.

³⁷ Bibi Van Ginkel et al. "The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union. Profiles, Threats & Policies." *International Center for Counter-Terrorism* – The Hague (2016).

Chapter 2: The State of the Debate

Chapter two provides an extensive literature review on the different approaches that have been and are used in order to study *radicalization processes* and *terrorism*, paying a particular attention to giving definition of many terms that have become common but are often misused or abusively used. The last part of the chapter offers a categorization of the different levels of analysis.

2.1 Concepts and Approaches

First, I would like to mention here that I follow the constructivist position that defines knowledge as always socially and historically constructed. Similarly, “meaning” and “truth” are temporary products of continuous struggles over what counts as legitimate knowledge. This is particularly important to stress here considering the themes of this thesis. There are multiple historical and current meanings to the term *Jihadism*. *Jihadi*, *Mujahid*, *Mujahideen*, which are classical Islamic concepts and Arabic words that simply mean those who perform the *Jihad*. However, in today’s era, this classical definition does not capture the specificities of phenomena that have evolved. Therefore, I use the term *contemporary European Jihadism* in order to clarify this thesis. The same can be said about the concept *Salafi*, which is problematic and often inaccurately used, exceedingly broad and vague as it refers to those who imitate the companions of the Prophet, the “first generation of Muslims.” *Jihad*, according to Wehr,³⁸ comes from the verb *jahada* – “to strive” or “to endeavor” – and covers a variety of actions aiming to become a better

³⁸ Hans Wehr and J Milton Cowan, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: (Arab.-Engl.)* (Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1979).

person and excel in life that are part of the *Greater Jihad*, but also to defend Islam by violent means, which is the *Lesser Jihad*. Thus, in opposition to the common contemporary assumption, violence is not an integral part of the *Jihad*.

In this thesis, the focus is on the *Lesser Jihad* and the contemporary European individuals who engage with it as the central aspect of their lives. I use the concept of *contemporary European Jihadism* in order to describe a phenomenon. I believe and argue that this is a phenomenon within others. The *ism*-suffix connotes that this is an interpretation of *Jihad*. *Contemporary European* is used in order to mark the difference with previous and other current different forms of performance and interpretation of the *Jihad*. *Jihadi* is broadly used as a noun to speak of an individual who is (or rather perceives him or herself as) performing Jihadism; while the term *Jihadist* is an adjective. Regarding the term *terrorism*, it is essential to note that there is not a commonly accepted definition. The limited aim of this thesis will not allow me to enter in this debate that could be the focus of future research. For the purpose of this thesis, Wilner's and Dubouloz's definition is used. Terrorism is then understood as the "use of indiscriminate violence against non-combatants by non-state actors with the purpose of generating fear in order to signal and advance particular socio-political objectives."³⁹ This definition implies that terrorism is meant "to intimidate a larger audience beyond those directly targeted with violence."⁴⁰ The authors add that "Non-state terrorist organization act independently from states and lack sovereign territorial control."⁴¹ Finally, "homegrown terrorism is autonomously organized by radicalized Westerners with little direct

³⁹ Alex S Wilner and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz, "Homegrown Terrorism and Transformative Learning: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Radicalization," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 22, no. 1 (2010): 33.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

assistance from transnational networks, is usually organized within the home or host country, and targets fellow nationals.”⁴²

The term “Islamic State” will be avoided as this organization has not been internationally recognized as a State and I therefore agree with those who do not wish to grant it any degree of legitimacy by this label. I refer to the group as Daesh⁴³ and use terms such as “Daesh-held territory.” Similarly, the concepts *radical* and *radicalization* suffer from vague definitions while they are broadly used in an inconsistent manner by the media and academia. Often used as alternatives to the concepts of terrorism and terrorists, the terms are also sometimes conceptualized in something that is supposed to precede terrorism: *radicalization process*, which is the case in this dissertation. The term radical refers to roots – of plants, words or numbers. The term extended and has been used to describe analyses that go to foundations, first principles or what is essential, particularly in the philosophical and religious arguments.⁴⁴ Calhoun explains that the term was later used to describe political positions that sought systematic or thoroughgoing change.⁴⁵ For the purpose of this thesis, *radicalization processes* are understood as in today’s understanding, which means as an escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action at the individual and group levels in specific contexts.⁴⁶ The classical social science definition of *violence* refers to “behaviour designed to inflict physical injury on people or damage to property,”⁴⁷

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Daesh” is a term used as a way of challenging the legitimacy of the organization due to the negative connotations of the word. See: Faisal Irshaid. “Isis, Isil, IS or Daesh? One Group, Many Names.” *BBC News*, December 2, 2015 Accessed April 5, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27994277>.

⁴⁴ Craig Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements* (University of Chicago Press, 2012): 12.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 13.

⁴⁶ Bouhana & Wikström define radicalization as ‘the developmental process by which a person comes to see an act of terrorism as an action alternative and comes to choose to carry it out’. Noémie Bouhana and P-OW Wikstrom. “Al Qai’da-Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory,” RDS Occasional Paper 97. London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate: 4.

⁴⁷ Hugh Davis Graham et al., “Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives,” 1969.

or "any observable interaction in the course of which persons or objects are seized or physically damaged in spite of resistance."⁴⁸ Political violence then is the use of physical force in order to affect or resist political, social, and/or cultural change. While far from easy to operationalize, political violence is generally understood as behavior that violates the prevailing definition of legitimate political action.

Radicalization has become a central concern in terrorism studies, particularly following the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London attacks, and is often related to "homegrown terrorism,"⁴⁹ involving European citizens in terrorist attacks within their country. Research has provided insights to the phenomenon of Salafism, often characterized as an "accultural religion" and an alleged return to the "pre-culturalized" sources of religion,⁵⁰ which is seen as a basis for radical global identities opposed to the different societies but also as Islam of previous generations.⁵¹ The many and diverse causes described in the literature reflect the fact that radicalization is a very complex process, which is not easily modelled and put into a single model. Much literature in the field now suggests that radicalization does not unfold in a linear manner. It has been proven difficult to find robust causes and mechanisms of radicalization but some achievements have been made. In particular, there has been a gradual shift from simplistic linear models of radicalization towards more nuanced pathway models which help us to get a better understanding of radicalization processes.⁵²

⁴⁸ Charles Tilly. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1978: 176.

⁴⁹ Alex P Schmid, "Radicalisation, de-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *ICCT Research Paper* 97 (2013).

⁵⁰ Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam* (Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁵¹ Werner Schiffauer, "From Exile to Diaspora: The Development of Transnational Islam in Europe," *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence*, 2007: 68–95, in A. Al-Azmeh and E. Fokas (eds.) *Islam in Europe: Diversity, Identity and Influence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Lene Kühle and Lasse Lindekilde, *Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus* (The Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation & Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, 2010).

⁵² Lorenzo Bosi and Donatella Della Porta, "Micro-Mobilization into Armed Groups: Ideological, Instrumental and Solidaristic Paths," *Qualitative Sociology* 35, no. 4 (2012): 361–83. John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (Routledge, 2009).

There is a continuing and fundamental debate about the appropriate levels of analysis regarding terrorism and the radicalization process, especially as both are studied in numerous fields and through numerous approaches, as Khosrokhavar puts it:

Some stress psychological factors, cultural determinants, international crisis, the media's role, and the Internet as well as the breakdown of social bonds as causes of Jihadist terrorism. There are, as well, those who explain Jihadism through the crisis of the state (weak or failed states) combined with some of the above factors. Some sociologists explain Jihadism as a social movement or a campaign. From this perspective, Jihadists frame social demands as opportunities for violent action, networking among themselves, forging collective identities, building up cells and informal organizations, making specific claims against the state and other institutions, and encouraging their members to accept sacrifices and other costs even though in most cases the success is not guaranteed by the action. For some researchers, accounting for terrorism in terms of global conditions (political, economic, cultural, or demographic) is inadequate. Terrorist activity may rise or decline with otherwise constant global conditions; the important factor is the intent and purpose of small groups and their representation of reality. These scholars insist on organizational dynamics, and many focus on the statistical data available on Jihadists and their terrorist cells to learn their generic characteristics.⁵³

The complexity of studying terrorism exposed in this quote requires some categorization. Three categories could be drawn in order to classify the different explanations of the causes of terrorism that have been given in many fields such as psychology, criminology, political science, sociology and history:

- Structural explanations. Such explanations use poverty, relative deprivation, repression and exclusion from the political process as factors.⁵⁴

⁵³ Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism. Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide*: 8.

⁵⁴ See Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Routledge, 2015). Jeffrey Ian Ross, "Structural Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism: Towards a Causal Model," *Journal of Peace Research* 30, no. 3 (1993): 317–29.

- Rational choice explanations. Groups and organization make cost-benefit analyses and can then decide to adopt terrorism as a method.⁵⁵
- Psychological explanations.⁵⁶ Many arguments are advanced in the psychological field, from individual's grievances to mental illness.

Regarding radicalization processes, different trends also emerged. As it will be explained *en détail* later, Sageman in his book *Understanding Terror Networks*⁵⁷ concluded that Al-Qaeda is not an organization but rather a social network. He added that social bonds played an essential role in the decision of individuals to join the *jihadist* cause. Other scholars such as Roy, Kepel and Khosrokhavar explained terrorism as a result of humiliation, exclusion and loss of *identity* due to migration and globalization that leads to "hybrid identity."⁵⁸ Khosrokhavar also created the notion of "humiliation by proxy"⁵⁹ in order to demonstrate that individuals living in different parts of the world could identify with each other and that the humiliation of the latter becomes felt as the own humiliation of the firsts and thus would motivate violence. A number of findings are considered important in explaining radicalization. These findings can be organized to three levels of analysis:

⁵⁵ See Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (Random House, 2005). Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, Columbia University Press 2005.; Martha Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 1 (1991): 69–87.

⁵⁶ See Jerrold M Post, "Terrorist Psycho-Logic: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Psychological Forces," *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, 1990, 25–40. Jerrold M Post, Keven G Ruby, and Eric D Shaw, "The Radical Group in Context: 1. An Integrated Framework for the Analysis of Group Risk for Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 25, no. 2 (2002): 73–100. Jerrold M Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to Al-Qaeda* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Bruce Hoffman, "The Mind of the Terrorist: Perspectives from Social Psychology," *Psychiatric Annals* 29, no. 6 (1999): 337–40. Jeffrey Ian Ross, "A Model of the Psychological Causes of Oppositional Political Terrorism," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1996): 129–141.

⁵⁷ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁵⁸ See Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Harvard University Press, 2004). Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs* (Pluto Press, 2005). Khosrokhavar, *Inside Jihadism. Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide*; Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam. The Search for a New Ummah* (Columbia, 2004).

⁵⁹ Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs*. Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs*.

individual (psychology, cognition; micro-level), group and group formation (meso-level) or societal (structure; macro-level).

2.2 A Proposed Categorization of the Levels of Analysis

▪ **Individual Vulnerability**

It is a common and repeated claim in the field that there is no such thing as a clear profile of the typical radical. Nonetheless, many studies point towards some types of individual vulnerability as key risk factors (socio-psychological factors). According to Hogg, Wiktorowicz, Bouhana and Wikström, people who have radicalized show signs of self-uncertainty, *identity-seeking* personalities, challenging situations or complex world views and non-recognition of others' perspectives.⁶⁰ Individuals with these characteristics are prone to seek out answers within radical milieus when faced with particular life events or social, political and cultural grievances. This propensity is found to increase if the individual has social ties to such milieus through friends or family (social selection), a disposition for certain milieus through, for example, religious upbringing (self-selection) or if radical milieus are present in the immediate surroundings.⁶¹ The concept of “cognitive openings” has been used to refer to a situation in which an individual, for various reasons, is experiencing decreased attachment to formerly held beliefs.⁶² Many studies

⁶⁰ Fiona Grant and Michael A Hogg, “Self-Uncertainty, Social Identity Prominence and Group Identification,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 48, no. 2 (2012): 538–42. Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005). Bouhana and Wikström, *Al Qai'da-Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory*.

⁶¹ Sageman. *Understanding Terror Networks*.

⁶² Mitchell D Silber, Arvin Bhatt, and Senior Intelligence Analysts, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (Police Department New York, 2007).

suggest that radical groups deliberately recruit among such vulnerable⁶³ or aggressive individuals. Radical Islamism may resonate with “cognitively open” individuals as it provides black-and-white answers to complicated questions.⁶⁴

▪ Exposure to Radicalizing Settings

When terrorism is studied within a radicalization perspective, it is often argued that for radicalization to happen the individual demand for radical answers needs to be met by a relevant supply.⁶⁵ In other words, the individual must be exposed to radicalizing settings through recruitment outreach, self-selection or social-selection. This exposure might be talking to radicalizing agents or reading radical material. The Internet, because of its flexible, transnational and relatively uncontrolled nature, is considered as a particularly suitable environment to facilitate radicalization processes in today’s societies.⁶⁶ Several studies of exposure to radicalizing settings stress the fact that opportunities for such exposure are consciously and deliberately created by radical groups by providing, for example, study circles and language training.⁶⁷ In this purpose, some “front organizations” are created in order to facilitate recruitment. Della Porta demonstrates that constructing “resonance” between individual grievances and experiences and the ideological

⁶³ Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. Jon A Olsen, *Roads to Militant Radicalization: Interviews with Five Former Perpetrators of Politically Motivated Organized Violence* (DIIS Reports/Danish Institute for International Studies, 2009).

⁶⁴ Bouhana and Wikström. *Al Qai'da-Influenced Radicalisation: A Rapid Evidence Assessment Guided by Situational Action Theory*.

⁶⁵ Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011): 37.

⁶⁶ Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (US Institute of Peace Press, 2006). Magdalena Wojcieszak, “‘Carrying Online Participation Offline’—mobilization by Radical Online Groups and Politically Dissimilar Offline Ties,” *Journal of Communication* 59, no. 3 (2009): 564–86.

⁶⁷ Wiktorowicz. *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*. ‘Roads to Militant Radicalisation—Interviews with Five Former Perpetrators of Politically Motivated Organized Violence.’

outlook and goals of the group is essential in this recruitment process.⁶⁸ This mission is realized by radicalizing agents who frame the different activities. Hogg adds that, in terms of individuals seeking for certainty, – as it will be explored later in this dissertation – radicalizing settings have specific characteristics that render them superior to many other milieus in terms of reducing individual self-uncertainty.⁶⁹ Radical groups often offer intense interaction, comradeship, and clear boundaries between in-group/out-group. Radical ideologies are dispersed through socialization and cultivation, providing clear answers to difficult questions and prescribing subsequent actions.

▪ **Emergence of Radicalizing Settings**

Less attention has been accorded to the emergence of radicalizing settings and the mechanisms that sustain them over time, such as the role played by state actions in the field of counter-terrorism (drone killings, torture for instance). Stefan Malthaner and Peter Waldmann suggest that the concept of “radical milieus” is better suited to grasp the links between violent groups and their social constituencies.⁷⁰ A violence-endorsing setting cannot emerge and sustain without a broader moral context supportive of it. Moral support of sympathizers and followers is crucial to the sustainability of campaigns and thus violent groups need to engage in resonance building with these sympathizers. Some studies have demonstrated the importance of the limited availability of legitimate and non-violent forms of political participation as factors in the emergence of radicalizing settings by exploring the sociopolitical context of emerging violent groups. For instance, Della Porta has, using a social movement theory perspective, shown how the

⁶⁸ Donatella Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁶⁹ Hogg, “Self-Uncertainty, Social Identity and the Solace of Extremism.”

⁷⁰ Stefan Malthaner, *Mobilizing the Faithful: Militant Islamist Groups and Their Constituencies*, vol. 4 (Campus Verlag, 2011).

formation of the Italian Red Brigades and the German Red Army Faction in the 1970s and 1980s was linked to closing “political opportunity structures” such as increased repression of normal political activism.⁷¹ The same has been demonstrated in religious fundamentalist, ethnonationalist and extreme right-wing milieus.⁷² The emergence of radicalizing settings has been connected to state repression and some studies have highlighted how this might “backfire.”⁷³ Once again, the Internet seems to be an important background factor in explaining the emergence of radicalizing settings nowadays attributed to factors such as ease of access, high speed and anonymity.

⁷¹ Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State. A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Lasse Lindekilde. ‘A Typology of Backfire Mechanisms: How Soft and Hard Forms of State Repression Can Have Perverse Effects in the Field of Counterterrorism’ Chares Demetriou, *Dynamics of Political Violence: A Process-Oriented Perspective on Radicalization and the Escalation of Political Conflict* (Routledge, 2016): 51-71.

Chapter 3: Jihadisms

This chapter focuses on the different important contributions to the study of *Jihadism* in Europe, or rather, as I propose, of *Jihadisms*. These different studies are essential in order to understand several phenomena and eventually detect any common pattern. However, they pose some serious lacuna. In a last part, I will offer a potential way to resolve these lacunas.

3.1 Understanding Terror Networks

In *Understanding Terror Networks*, Sageman challenges theoretical and popular notions of the idea that terrorists are driven by poverty; that they are pathological or mentally deficient; or that they are brainwashed by ideological indoctrination. Sageman based his analysis on a set of 172 biographies of global Salafi *jihadis* who have been involved in terrorist activities around the globe in the 1990s and 2000s. This book is impressive as the author created one of the most extensive samples of jihadi terrorists available from open sources, i.e, court transcripts, government documents, press and scholarly articles, and Internet sources. In order to find common features in the involvement of individuals in jihadi terrorism, Sageman uses a set of seventeen variables that he divides into three general categories: “social background,” “psychological make-up” and “circumstances of joining the *jihad*.” While specific data of the seventeen variables for the 172 *jihadi* terrorists is missing from the research, he did include a list of the 172 names, with their alias and date and place of birth. **Figure 1** shows Sageman’s general categories and their respective variables.

<p>“Social Background”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Geographical origins ▪ Socioeconomic status ▪ Education ▪ Faith as youth ▪ Occupation ▪ Family Status <p>“Psychological make-up”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental illness • Terrorist personality 	<p>“Circumstances of joining the jihad”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Place of recruitment • Faith • Employment • Relative deprivation • Friendship • Kinship • Discipleship • Worship
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Figure 2. Variables used by Marc Sageman in *Understanding Terror Networks*

The variables are all related to one or more research questions that are often connected to the “conventional wisdom” and assumptions about terrorism. For instance, “socioeconomic status” checks whether the individuals are upper, middle or lower class and the assumption that poverty fuels terrorism. The “family status” variable checks the marital status and the fact of having or not children, as well as tests the stereotypes that terrorists are single men who do not have responsibilities. The last category, “circumstances of joining the jihad” investigates those circumstances “that may indicate a situation of rising expectations that have not been met and that may support the relative deprivation thesis.”⁷⁴

Sageman’s key findings can be summarized as follows:

- 75 percent of the individuals came from upper or middle class;
- Over 60 percent had some college education;
- Of 137, only seventeen percent had an Islamic religious primary and secondary education (the rest attended secular schools and favored technical faculties such as computer science or engineering);

⁷⁴ Edwin Bakker, “Jihadi Terrorists in Europe,” *The Hague: Cliengendael*, 2006.

- About 50 percent of his sample grew up as religious children;
- The average age at which the individuals joined the jihad was 26;
- 75 percent were professionals or semi-professionals;
- 75 percent were married and the majority had children;
- One percent showed evidence of mental disorder (which is below the worldwide base rate);
- 70 percent of the terrorists joined the jihad while living in a different country from where they were raised;
- About 66 percent joined the jihad collectively with their friends or had a long-time childhood friend already jihadist;
- Another 20 percent had close relatives already in jihad;

In other words, Sageman rejected many of the stereotypes established in the conventional wisdom. He showed that many of the social explanations are not only inadequate, but also mostly wrong in explaining radicalization and terrorism. In his sample, terrorists are not poor, fanatically religious and uneducated. Instead, they are generally young middle-class men, educated in caring and religious families. He also concluded that the majority of them were married and had children. As mentioned above, the individuals in the sample did not display any psychiatric pathology. No pattern of emotional trauma in their past or evidence of pathological hatred or paranoia were observed.⁷⁵ He also concluded that these terrorists did not suffer from long-term relative deprivation or from pathological prejudice.⁷⁶ Sageman clearly claims that there is no common profile of the global Salafi network. His argument is that there are as many profiles as there are clusters of jihadists and of profiles. He categorizes four clusters: the central core of Al-Qaeda,

⁷⁵ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 97.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Maghreb Arabs, Core Arabs, and Southeast Asians. While there exist many differences between these four clusters, Sageman argues that there are some common patterns: “Just before joining the *jihad*, the prospective mujahedin were socially and spiritually alienated and probably in some form of distress.”⁷⁷ Rejecting the ideas of brainwashing and recruitment in the radicalization process, Sageman defines a three-prong process: social affiliation with the *jihad* accomplished through friendship, kinship and discipleship; acceptance of the global Salafi *jihad* ideology by a progressive intensification of beliefs; and formal acceptance to the *jihad* through the encounter of a link to the global Salafi network. It is important to note that the author argues that without this last step, potential *jihadi* groups may try to participate in the *jihad* but without know-how or resources.⁷⁸ He concludes that social bonds are the crucial elements in this process:

These bonds facilitate the process of joining the *jihad* through mutual emotional and social support, development of a common identity, and encouragement to adopt a new faith. [...] They are more important and relevant to the transformation of potential candidates into global *mujahedin* than postulated external factors, such as a common hatred for an outside group. ... As in all intimate relationships, this glue, in-group love, is found inside the group. It may be more accurate to blame global Salafi terrorist activity on in- group love than out-group hate.⁷⁹

These conclusions appear to lack depth and precision. First, his concept of *common identity* should have been described as we do not clearly understand if he deals with the self-perception of specific individuals, group *identification*, or group identity. Likewise, his concept of “in-group love” requires a deeper investigation. His sample shows that friendship bonds between terrorists often pre-existed joining the *jihadi* cause. Moreover, the study also reveals that most of them joined in small clusters of friends where kinship also played a role. Discipleship is unique to the Southeast

⁷⁷ Ibid, 98.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 120.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 135.

Asian group. He also argues that several specific mosques served many functions in the transformation of young alienated Muslims into global Salafi *jihadis*, adding that many friendship groups are formed around the mosques, where “each new group became a “bunch of guys,” transforming its members into potential mujahedin, actively seeking to join the global *jihad*.”⁸⁰ Sageman’s main argument is that the critical and specific element to joining the *jihad* is the accessibility of a link to the organization of the global jihad. Potential *jihadis* cannot be radicalized further without someone able to make arrangements with the Al-Qaeda leadership. The individuals in Sageman’s sample had the consent of the organization’s leadership.

3.2 Leaderless Jihad

Sageman published another book in 2008, *Leaderless Jihad*, in which he updated and expanded his empirical canvas, gathering data on 500 individuals of the global Salafi *jihad*. Based on this new sample, he differentiated three distinct waves. The first wave of *jihadis* fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. They were highly educated and from upper and middle-class backgrounds, often in their 30s. The following wave was composed mostly of elite expatriates from the Middle East who went to attend universities in the West. Sageman claims that their radicalization was a result of their separation from family and friends, which led them to develop hard feeling because of their marginalization. According to the author, they were motivated by the suffering of Muslims in Chechnya, the Philippines, Bosnia and Kashmir, as well as inspired by the alleged heroics of the first wave. This second wave joined Al-Qaeda training

⁸⁰ Ibid, 115.

camps in Afghanistan in the 1990s. In general, they also had a middle class background and were in their 30s. Both of these waves were directly related to the leadership of Al-Qaeda.

The third wave differs from its predecessors as it consists mostly of the post-Iraqi invasion and would-be terrorists who were angered by this American intervention, and by the foreign policy of Western states in general. This is in my view an inadequate, superficial and incomplete explanation. I will expose later in this dissertation that many more factors are at stake. They are not linked up with Al-Qaeda Central as the organization went underground following the 9/11 events. Thus, they formed from bottom-up fluid informal networks that were self-financed and self-trained. They joined the *jihad* through kinship and friendship bonds and used the Internet to connect to the global context and create a virtual environment offering a kind of unity and purpose.⁸¹ In Europe, these individuals were often migrants' children from lower to middle classes with a limited religious background.⁸² According to Sageman, these European "wannabe *jihadis*" were younger than the previous generations, with an average age of 20, and less well educated.⁸³ However, the Dutch scholar Edwin Bakker's study resulted in a higher average of 27.7. Sageman argues that they are more "Westernized" as most of them have been born and raised in the West.⁸⁴ He qualifies this wave of "home-grown" terrorists,⁸⁵ and declares that this third wave is primarily a European phenomenon.

⁸¹ Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011): 48-50.

⁸² *Ibid*, 50.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 58.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 50.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 71, 133-136.

3.3 Jihadi Terrorists in Europe and Global Salafi Jihadis

Sageman's work on the third wave finds a strong echo in Edwin Bakker's work, that followed Sageman's methodological approach. In *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe and Global Salafi Jihadis*,⁸⁶ a study that Sageman agrees with in *Leaderless Jihad*,⁸⁷ Bakker offers a rich empirical account of *jihadi* terrorism in Europe during the September 2001 – October 2006 period. Based on 31 successful and unsuccessful terrorist attacks and thwarted plots and identifying 242 *jihadi* terrorists, Bakker reports the following non-exhaustive list of results:

- Most of the individuals in the sample were “first, second or third generation immigrants,” as Bakker qualifies them. However, speaking of “second- and third- generation” as immigrant makes no sense as no immigration is involved;
- More than a third of the sample was born and raised in Europe. This result proves that Bakker's categorization of “second- and third-generation immigrants” does not make sense.
- Only 8 jihadi terrorists resided in other parts of the world before their involvement in terrorist activities in Europe;
- Of the 72 individuals on whom socioeconomic data could be gathered, 39 were from lower classes;
- 58 individuals had a criminal record before getting involved into the *jihad*;
- The average age of the sample was 27.7;
- 237 were males;

⁸⁶ Bakker, “Jihadi Terrorists in Europe.”

⁸⁷ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 50, Footnote 2.

- 50 were related through kinship.

Based on this study, Bakker concludes like Sageman that there is no such thing as a standard *jihadi* profile, even for the European *jihadis*. However, many share common traits:

Nonetheless, there are a number of, more or less, common traits. A clear majority of them are from Arab countries and have roots especially in North Africa (mainly Algeria and Morocco). Many of these first, second or third generation immigrants also have in common that they come from the lower strata of society. A strikingly high number of persons had a criminal record; at least a quarter of the sample. Finally it should be noted that almost all *jihadi* terrorists in Europe are male, and that many of them relate to each other through kinship or friendship.⁸⁸

3.4 Lacunas

The first serious lacuna in Sageman's and Bakker's work is the neglect of the structural context in which those individuals and the global *Jihadism* evolve in the West. Sageman's work has had an important impact in the field of jihadi terrorism attributable to the clarity and rigor of his study by focusing on the role of social networks and small group dynamics. However, it is essential to connect meso dynamics to those at the macro and micro levels. Sageman only briefly states that *jihadi* terrorism is rooted in a wider structural context of alienation and exclusion, without offering a broader development of that context and the individuals' interactions with it. The second lacuna in his work is the neglect of the "shared thing" of the third jihadi wave: what are the reasons the *jihadis* give for their participation in this *Jihadism*? Getting insights and understanding of the subculture that I believe is *Jihadism* will help understanding the individuals'

⁸⁸ Edwin Bakker, "Jihadi Terrorists in Europe." 78.

motives, as well as their preoccupations, anxieties, desires, and enthusiasms. This is a recurrent lacuna in the terrorism field as scholars usually focus on policy-oriented works aimed at countering terrorism. Analyzing the threat and the scope of jihadi terrorism is crucial, but understanding the current *Jihadism* in Europe as a counterculture will provide a unique perspective. A third problem with Sageman's and Bakker's studies is that they, as many others, tend to view *Jihadism* in Europe as one phenomenon, thus, implying that ideology is at stake in the phenomenon. The differentiation the authors made between different types of *Jihadism* are related to time. This is reflected by the idea of a series of "generations" of *Jihadis*, implying that one generation replaces another. Rather than being a case of "generations" of *Jihadis* replacing each other, I would argue that we are in presence of different phenomena, that there are different *Jihadisms*. The same problem is present with Sageman's geographical classification of networks, categorizing them by regions.

I argue that these lacunas or issues presented by Sageman's and Bakker's studies could be solved with a stronger focus on the in-group connections of the individuals. One relevant approach is the one developed by Swann et al.⁸⁹ with the concept of *identity fusion*.

3.5 Bringing a New Approach: Identity Fusion

*People almost never kill and die just for the Cause, but for each other: for their group, whose cause makes their imagined family of genetic strangers – their brotherhood, fatherland, motherland, homeland.*⁹⁰

Developing on the concept of *identity* alone is crucial in understanding Swann et al.'s

⁸⁹ William B Swann Jr et al., "When Group Membership Gets Personal: A Theory of Identity Fusion.," *Psychological Review* 119, no. 3 (2012).

⁹⁰ Scott Atran, "The Devoted Actor: Unconditional Commitment and Intractable Conflict across Cultures," *Current Anthropology* 57, no. S13 (2016).

identity fusion. As the readers might have noticed by now, this concept is broadly used in the literature, but also in the media and in the political sphere. We can think here of the various debates about a so-called “national identity” or even “Christian identity” in various European states. This broadly used term often suffers from a monist and so-called objective definition, resulting in an essentialization of the term. In my countering view, terms such as *identification* and *self-perception* of an individual should be used instead. However, the term identity will be held in this thesis when referencing to other authors’ works.

Scott Atran explains today’s global terrorism as partly driven by “devoted actors” who adhere to sacred, transcendent values that generate actions dissociated from rationally expected risks and rewards.⁹¹ This theoretical framework has been developed in order to better understand, through social and psychological mechanisms, the willingness of certain people to make extreme sacrifices for a group and a cause. This concept of *devoted actor* integrates two “hitherto independent research programs in cognitive theory, sacred values and ‘*identity fusion*.’”⁹² Atran defines these two concepts:

Sacred values are nonnegotiable preferences whose defense compels actions beyond evident reason, that is, regardless of calculable costs and consequences. *Identity fusion* occurs when personal and group identities collapse into a unique identity to generate a collective sense of invincibility and special destiny.⁹³

Atran claims that *sacred values* and *identity fusion* interact, producing the willingness to make extreme sacrifices for a group, sometimes involving death – in this case the individual

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid. (Emphasis added).

⁹³ Ibid.

sacrifices the totality of her/his self-interests. By doing so, Atran extends on Swann et al.'s argument that *identity fusion* is the mechanism explaining these extreme sacrifices for a group.⁹⁴ This theory of *identity fusion* differs from various social identity theories, which held that individuals have not only personal self-concepts but also social self-concepts.⁹⁵ *Identity fusion* occurs when the *social identity* becomes an essential component of the personal self-concept.⁹⁶ Thus, *identity fusion* and *group identification* are different: *identified* individuals have a feeling of shared essence within the group but it is not essential to their *personal self-concept*. On the contrary *fused* individuals demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice themselves for their groups when a threat arose or the group's privileged values are threatened.⁹⁷ In the *fusion* process, individuals are empowered through social networking and emotional bonding, involving sentiments of invincibility and exceptional destiny. Swann et al. found out in a recent study that *fused* individuals "perceive that group members share core physical attributes and values, they are more likely to project familial ties common in smaller groups onto the extended group."⁹⁸ This demonstrates the willingness of some individuals to fight and die for a larger group, a community. Whitehouse et al.⁹⁹ provide evidence that *identity fusion* may have underpinned the willingness of the Libyan revolutionaries combatants to fight and face death and defeat.

⁹⁴ William B Swann Jr et al., "When Group Membership Gets Personal: A Theory of Identity Fusion," 441. (Emphasis added).

⁹⁵ Harvey Whitehouse and Jonathan A. Lanman, "The Ties That Bind Us," *Current Anthropology* 55, no. 6 (2014): 678.

⁹⁶ William B Swann Jr et al., "When Group Membership Gets Personal: A Theory of Identity Fusion."

⁹⁷ Swann et al. "When group membership gets personal: a theory of identity fusion." Whitehouse and Lanman. "The ties that bind us."

⁹⁸ Atran. "The Devoted Actor."

⁹⁹ Harvey Whitehouse et al., "Brothers in Arms: Libyan Revolutionaries Bond like Family," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 50 (2014): 17783–85.

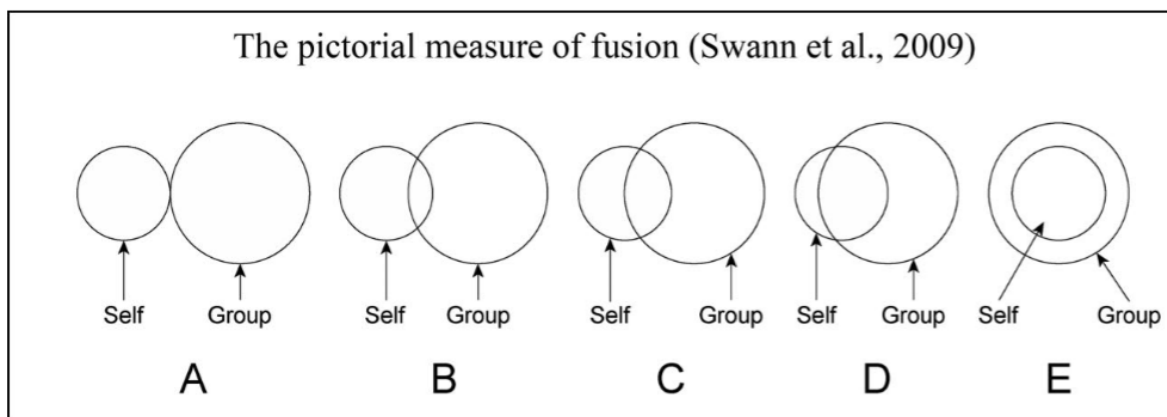


Figure 3. Measures of fusion pictorial¹⁰⁰

Whitehouse states that fighting may reflect the tendency for Libyan revolutionary fighters to express a strong *fusion*. He suggests that life-shaping experiences can take the form of extreme rituals, group-sanctioned or chance life events such as engaging in intense fight.¹⁰¹ His conclusion is that the connections created by the fighters take on familial or even supra-familial qualities. Therefore, these plausible ties binding the individuals of a group may compel them to make extreme sacrifices for this group. To this framework, Atran adds the *sacred values*, arguing that humans are not only willing to kill others or sacrifice themselves to preserve their group, but also in the name of an idea – “the abstract conception they form of themselves.”¹⁰² He defines *sacred values* as “any preferences regarding objects, beliefs, or practices that people treat as both incompatible or nonfungible with profane issues or economic goods, as when land or law becomes holy or hallowed and as inseparable from people’s conception of ‘self’ and ‘who we are.’”¹⁰³

This chapter has exposed the different explanations that have been offered to the phenomena of *Jihadisms* and offered a new approach that is the concept of *identity fusion* in order

¹⁰⁰ Swann et al. "When group membership gets personal: a theory of identity fusion."5.

¹⁰¹ Whitehouse et al., “Brothers in Arms: Libyan Revolutionaries Bond like Family.”

¹⁰² Atran. “The Devoted Actor.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

to better understand the meso-dynamics present behind the *radicalization processes*. The following chapter will look at the *contemporary European Jihadism* through the bigger and smaller picture simultaneously.

Chapter 4: Contemporary European Jihadism: A Counterculture

This chapter interprets the phenomenon of *contemporary European Jihadism* as a counterculture that can somehow be parallel with a punk or fascist counterculture. It first gives a brief overview of essential works on countercultures before describing the current phenomenon as a counterculture.

4.1 Psychological Note on Motivation in Social Life

Understanding the motives that pulls or pushes people in life is essential in order to get a better understanding of the radicalization process. Push or pull factors are as diverse as goals, drives, ambitions, devotions, frustrations or needs. In his book *The Psychology of Social Movements*, Cantril argues that motivation can be put into its proper social context only by understanding the development of the ego. He adds that motivation can be placed into its personal context only by “understanding the relation of needs, derived drives, frames of reference, and attitudes to the ego.”¹⁰⁴ Cantril continues by developing on two characteristics of the ego drive as a motive in social life that are maintaining self-regard and the sources of discontent.

¹⁰⁴ Hadley Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movements* (Transaction Publishers, 1941): 45.

For most people, self-regard is achieved through social recognition and status.¹⁰⁵ The author states that in Western societies, status cannot be maintained without efforts such as recognized signs of accomplishment or possession. However, some people seek to achieve self-regard through other ways as they do not identify themselves with current social values.¹⁰⁶ These individuals have a desire to change the criteria of status. Individuals, under the pressure of environment, are continuously motivated towards some activities if they are to be satisfied with themselves.¹⁰⁷ However, sources of discontent may arise. First, Cantril states that “the values in which a person has identified may not be those which his behavior actually reflects.”¹⁰⁸ A disparity can arise between the ego level and the level of achievement, between the level of the aspirations and the performances. A second source of irritation to a person’s ego is caused when the status and values of the individual are not recognized by other people.¹⁰⁹ A third cause of dissatisfaction is due to the fact that it is not always possible to satisfy one’s innate self-perception and at the same time identify with the values one believes are his/her. Finally, another source of discontent is the fact that the society may not give any recognition to certain values that one may cherish.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 46.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 47.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 48.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 50.

4.2 Countercultures and Subcultures

▪ Cohen

Culture is defined by Cohen as “beliefs, values, codes, tastes and prejudices that are traditional in social groups and that are acquired by participation in such group,” whereas a *subculture* is a “culture within a culture,” and consists of “ways of thinking and doing that are in some respects peculiarly its own.”¹¹¹ In *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*, Cohen explores the different ways in which young delinquents react to structural constraints. According to Merton’s concept of *social strain*, the social structure “exerts a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconformist rather than conformist conduct.”¹¹² Cohen states that young people in the United States have become delinquents due to being defined as “failures” by schools partly due to their lower-class status. We can add that by extension, these individuals self-perceive themselves as “failures.” Their humiliation and “status frustration” result in a collective reaction against the middle-class standards, creating the delinquent gang. The gang repudiates the commonly accepted social values and creates its own. For Cohen, the gang is a “collective solution to a structurally imposed problem.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ Albert K. Cohen. *Delinquent Boys; The Culture of the Gang*, (New York: The Free Press 1955): 12.

¹¹² Robert K Merton, “Social Structure and Anomie,” *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 5 (1938): 672.

¹¹³ Cohen. *Delinquent Boys; The Culture of the Gang*: 148.

- **Kaplan, Jeffrey and Lööw**

A cultic milieu exists at all times in all modern societies according to Kaplan et al. It is a minority position in opposition to a mainstream majority that has the power to define “normality”. It is a milieu where seekers meet other seekers. The authors assert:

The cultic milieu can be regarded as the cultural underground of society [...] it includes all deviant belief systems and their associated practices [...] Lastly, the cultic milieu is manifestly united by a common ideology of seekership which both arises from and in turn reinforces the consciousness of deviant status.¹¹⁴

- **Roszak**

Roszak studies the making of a counterculture within youth in America in the 1960s.¹¹⁵ He describes the skepticism that developed towards existing values and the gradual division between a generation of young people and their parents because they had “sold their souls” to General Motors in post-depression America.¹¹⁶ Some individuals of this youth started looking for other role models and for a different quality of life while questioning their contemporary *constructed* culture. This counterculture was marked by a distrust of authority and included violent extremists.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw, *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*. (Rowman Atlamira, 2002):13.

¹¹⁵ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Univ of California Press, 1995).

¹¹⁶ Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen. “The Attractions of Jihadism. An identity approach to three Danish terrorism cases and the gallery of characters around them”. (PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen: Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, 2010): 78.

¹¹⁷ For further reading on subcultures and countercultures, see Ken Gelder, *The Subcultures Reader* (Psychology Press, 2005). Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (Routledge, 2007).

4.3 Contemporary European Jihadism: A Counterculture

Arguably, these notions of *subculture*, *cultic milieu* and *counterculture* are highly similar with *contemporary European Jihadism* as this phenomenon interacts and challenges the European society from where it emerges. Individuals involved in a counterculture define themselves as being counter to the culture of the majority society and its “normality.” More importantly, these individuals and the group they form define themselves as an alternative to the majority society. The group creates new norms and its own normality, thereby constructing their own shared culture including a distinct language – e.g. shared words, shared expressions, shared ways of using words, shared ways of greeting each other etc. – and codes of conduct, etc.¹¹⁸ This is certainly the case with individuals involved in *contemporary European Jihadism*:¹¹⁹ *koffar*, *Dawla*, etc. are consistently used by these European *jihadis*.¹²⁰ Salafism, *Islam de marché*,¹²¹ *Jihadism* and others could all be categorized as countercultures deriving from an *Islamism meta-counterculture*.¹²² For a visual on this dynamic, see **Figure 4**.

¹¹⁸ Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen. “The Attractions of Jihadism. An identity approach to three Danish terrorism cases and the gallery of characters around them.” 78.

¹¹⁹ See Dounia Bouzar. *La vie après Daesh*. (Edition de l’Atelier, 2015) See also Spécial Investigation “Les Soldats d’Allah.” (Canal+ 2016) <http://www.canalplus.fr/c-infos-documentaires/pid3357-special-investigation.html?vid=1387445>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Haennia developed the term *Islam de marché* in order to describe a new “Islamic market” that has been created as a result of a quest for economic success and a focus on personal salvation and self-improvement. See Patrick Haenni. “L’islam de Marché: L’autre Révolution Conservatrice.” *Paris, Seuil*, 2005.

¹²² Hemmingsen, “The Attractions of Jihadism. An identity approach to three Danish terrorism cases and the gallery of characters around them:” 80.

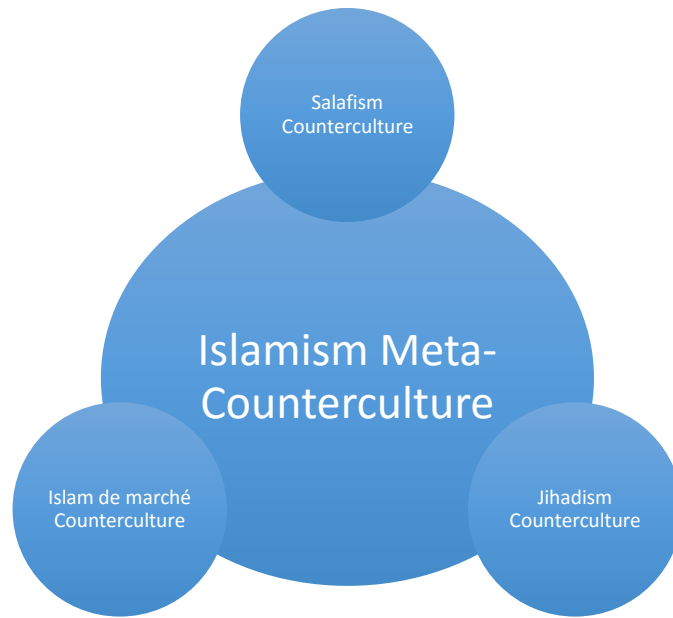


Figure 4. A Meta-Counter culture Including Counter cultures

Figure 4 does not represent an exhaustive list of counter cultures related to the Islamism counter culture. For instance, Roy¹²³ distinguishes between *Neofundamentalism* and *Jihadism* and Khosrokhavar establishes a distinction between *Fundamentalism* and *Hyperfundamentalism*.¹²⁴ These different counter cultures share some common ideas and ideals but they do not offer the same *alternative*, neither the same ways to achieve this *alternative*. Similarly, different positions exist within a counter culture (See **Figure 5**). What is common to these counter culture is their opposition to the dominant cultures in the different societies they emerge from.

¹²³ Roy, *Globalized Islam*.

¹²⁴ Farhad Khosrokhavar. *Inside Jihadism. Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide*.

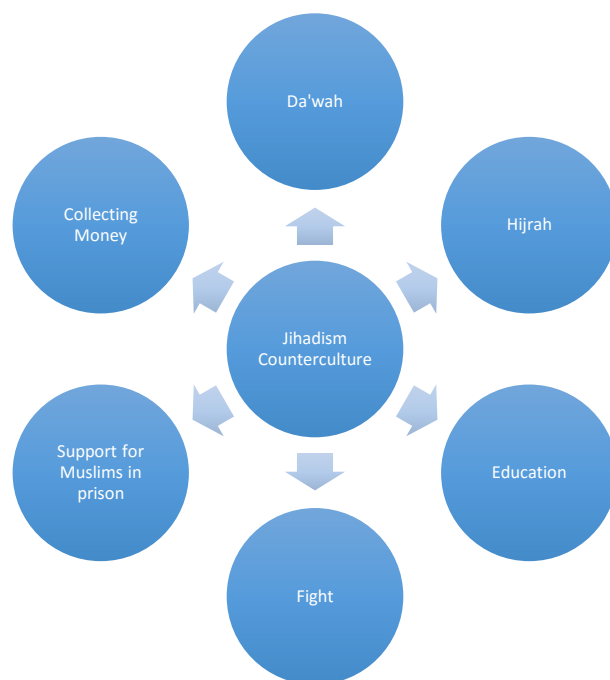


Figure 5. Different Positions Within the Jihadism Counterculture

One issue in Europe today is that Daesh recruiters manage to infiltrate cultic-milieus and spread hateful narratives and not an ideology, as Roy states.¹²⁵ Bashar Al-Assad's crimes against Sunnis and the absence of Western reaction, the oppression of Palestine and of Muslims around the world are repeated over and over. Sayyid¹²⁶ speaks of historical elements that are being linked to the idea of a Caliphate such as the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Local countercultures and cultic-milieus are penetrated by those narratives and thus develop sort of credible *alternatives* that is the Caliphate. Because of these narratives and alternatives, a young man or woman who is in disagreement with the majority society can be attracted by the *contemporary European Jihadism*. What does the European youth reject? What are the attractions to this *contemporary European Jihadism*? Those are questions that clearly cannot be answered fully without in-depth interviews of individuals, access to biographical accounts to investigate their past and history, as well as

¹²⁵ Ibid, 14.

¹²⁶ Salman Sayyid, *Recalling the Caliphate: Decolonisation and World Order* (Hurst, 2014).

environmental factors, etc. However, we can attempt to give some sort of categorization to the purpose of the counterculture.

There are obviously as many motives as individuals that could be given on the reasons for joining a counterculture. Consequently, a counterculture can serve different purposes for different individuals, based on what they are looking for. A counterculture offers a framework which the people who join it need, a framework that can transform their individual motivations and needs into shared ones and allow them to be part of a greater cause. It also provides a network, that can be used by its members to find not only material resources but also intellectual and social. In the case of *contemporary European Jihadism*, individuals can potentially be attracted by *action* (understood as a need for adventure), *social belonging*, and simply *being counter*. Individuals attracted by the prospects of action need to satisfy this crucial need, which can be done by the action of travelling secretly and illegally to Daesh-held territory, fighting or planning an attack. Individuals who are attracted by the prospects of social belonging are satisfied when they find recognition, by creating social bonds such as friendship. Individuals attracted by the prospects of being counter can be simply satisfied by the fact of being against a culture.¹²⁷

The following and final chapter will pay attention to the members of the Verviers cell in order to identify the previous bonds between the attackers and investigate their relations to countercultures.

¹²⁷ Similarly, Khosrokhavar offers “five types of Jihadist personalities:” the *missionary*, the *macho*, the *upholder of justice*, the *adventurer*, and the *existential man*. *Inside Jihadism. Understanding Jihadi Movements Worldwide*: 233-237.

Chapter 5: The Verviers Cell

*Constituée par des copains de quartiers, à Molenbeek, à Schaerbeek et en Syrie, il y a plus d'un an, autour d'Abdelhamid Abaaoud, [la cellule de Verviers] a été découverte par les Belges à l'occasion d'un spectaculaire coup de filet à Verviers, le 15 janvier 2015.*¹²⁸

5.1 Methodology and Results

I collected information on the fourteen individuals *directly* involved in the Paris and Brussels attacks of November 13, 2015 and March 22, 2016. Access to profiles and relations of the accomplices that helped with the organization of these terrorist attacks and the hiding of fugitives, for example, are restricted by the limitations of this research. However, of the fourteen attackers, I was able to gather information on twelve.¹²⁹ My hypothesis is that these young Europeans were juvenile marginalized delinquents tied by different bonds before joining Daesh – this step being the result of an escalation from petty criminal activities. Thus, I use the following variables: age, nationality, gender, place of residence, believed to have visited Daesh-held territory, previous criminal activities – such as bank robberies and drug dealing, previous connections with other members of the cell before “getting radicalized.”

Collecting data on the Verviers cell and its members presented some problems as I could only rely on biographies and profiles exposed in the press due to recent events and limited access to information. I did not have access to any governmental sources, which would have aided in

¹²⁸ Soren Seelow, and Jean-Pierre Stroobants. “Verviers, Paris, Bruxelles: l’empreinte du groupe Abaaoud.” *Le Monde.fr*. March 24, 2016, accessed May 17, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/03/24/attentats-de-bruxelles-deux-suspects-activement-recherches_4888940_3214.html.

¹²⁹ Two suicide bombers who attacked the stadium have not been identified.

developing my hypothesis further. Despite many attempts, obtaining interviews with city council officials or social workers from different places, such as Molenbeek, proved to be unsuccessful. However, considering the current atmosphere in France and Belgium following the recent attacks, these limitations were not surprising. City councilors' responses were influenced by unwanted continued stigmatization and attention to the city. Thus, I had to slightly change my initial project and rely on sources of information that are all in the public domain. I selected these sources by the common credibility that is accorded to them, such as *Le Monde* and the *New York Times*, which investigation work is quite impressive. Since my sources rely on journalistic accounts, more data was available on certain attackers, such as the leader Abaaoud and the ex-fugitive Abdeslam, than other members of the cell. In ensuring the credibility of my sources, crosschecking with other online newspapers deemed useful. Finally, given the limitations of this thesis, namely time and length, this case study will be an illustrative example, which is why I will not draw general conclusions on this sample of twelve individuals.

		N°	Name	Age	Nationality	Gender	Place of Residence	Believed to have visited Daesh-held territory	Committed previous crimes	Known connection to other attackers before <i>Jihadism</i>
Paris Attackers	Chief Planner	1	Abdelhamid Abaaoud	28	Belgian	M	Molenbeek (Belgium)	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Stadium Attackers	2	Salah Abdeslam	26	French	M	Molenbeek	Yes	Yes	Yes
		3	Name Unknown		Declared Iraqi by Daesh	M				
		4	Name Unknown		Declared Iraqi by Daesh	M				
		5	Bilal Hadfi	20	French	M	Neder-over-Heembeek (Belgium)	Yes		
	Bataclan Attackers	6	Ismaël Omar Mostefaï	29	French	M	Courcouronnes (France)	Yes	Yes	Yes
		7	Samy Amimour	28	French	M	Drancy (France)	Yes	Yes	
		8	Foued Mohamed-Aggad	23	French	M	Wissembourg (France)	Yes		*
	Restaurant Attackers	9	Ibrahim Abdeslam	31	French	M	Molenbeek (Belgium)	Yes	Yes	Yes
		10	Chakib Akrouh	25	Belgian and Moroccan	M	Molenbeek (Belgium)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Paris Planners and Brussels Attackers	Airport Attackers	11	Najim Laachraoui	24	Belgian	M	Schaerbeek (Belgium)	Yes		Yes
		12	Mohamed Abrini	31	Belgian	M	Molenbeek (Belgium)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brussels Attackers	Metro Attacker	13	Khalid el-Bakraoui	27	Belgian	M	Laeken (Belgium)	Tried to**	Yes	Yes
	Airport Attacker	14	Ibrahim el-Bakraoui	24	Belgian	M	Laeken (Belgium)	Yes	Yes	Yes

Sources: Le Monde, Libération, The New York Times, BBC News, BFM News, France 3, France 24, The Guardian

*Travelled with a group of friends from La Meinau (France) unrelated to these attackers

** Was deported by Turkish authorities after trying to reach Daesh-held territory

Figure 6. Paris and Brussels Attackers' Profiles

The results of my research are the following:

- Nine individuals out of twelve on whom data could be gathered had previous connection to another member of the cell;
- Ten attackers committed previous crimes before being involved in contemporary European *Jihadism*;
- Eleven *jihadis* are believed to have visited Daesh-controlled territory. The last one, Khalid el-Bakraoui, was stopped by Turkish authorities trying to cross the border and deported back to Europe in 2015;

- Five individuals' place of residence was Molenbeek (Brussels, Belgium), two others lived in Laeken (Brussels, Belgium), one was from Neder-over-Heembeek (Brussels, Belgium), one from Schaerbeek (Brussels, Belgium), one from Courcouronnes (Essonne, France), one from Drancy (Seine-Saint-Denis, France), and one from Wissembourg (Bas-Rhin, France).
- All the attackers were males;
- Five were Belgian, six French, and one Belgian-Moroccan.
- Age ranged from 20-31 years old;
- Four individuals had family ties (el-Bakraoui brothers and Abdeslam brothers).¹³⁰

What do these results show? First, this investigation seems to confirm my hypothesis that social bonds and small clusters of friends are important in the radicalization process. It also demonstrates that going through delinquency and petty criminal activities seems to be an ineluctable step in this radicalization process, showing a potential escalation from delinquency to *Jihadism*. It also demonstrates that eleven of those twelve individuals arise from neighborhoods that may be qualified as relatively poor, with high unemployment rates and part of a phenomenon of socio-economic and geo-social segmentation, but far from being “slums” or “no-go zones” as it has been shouted out by many media. These results can potentially reflect evidence that individuals joining the contemporary European *Jihadism*, which appears to be a homegrown phenomenon, perceive themselves as not having a stake in the society they live in

¹³⁰ Number of cases of terrorists-brothers around the world could be cited as example. This interesting note would be worth exploring. A potential short explanation that can be given here is that brothers are *fused individuals*, have *real* family ties and share the same experiences while growing up. For more information on the topic, see: Madeleine Kruhly “The Outsize Role of Brothers in Terrorist Plots.” *The New York Times*, accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/03/23/world/brothers-terrorism.html>. Jim Callimachi, Yardley Rukmini, and Scott Shane. “As Siblings Again Unite to Unleash Terror, Experts Ask What Drives Them.” *The New York Times*, accessed March 23, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/24/world/europe/as-siblings-again-unite-to-unleash-terror-experts-ask-what-drives-them.html>.

and thus express sentiments of revolt and rebellion revealed by their willingness to enter a subculture.

5.2 Uncovering the Links Between the Attackers

▪ A Bunch of Friends

*Ils sont si proches, à vrai dire, que le père de Salah Abdeslam confie à un voisin, au moment où Abaaoud s'envole en Syrie : "Je me demande ce que va devenir le mien."*¹³¹

What appears evident when looking at the different profiles of those attackers is the ties that bind them. First, in my sample, eight people lived in Brussels, from whom 5 lived in the same neighborhood, with only a street or two separating them from each other.¹³² If we include the acknowledged accomplices, at least fourteen of the individuals linked to both attacks lived in Brussels.¹³³ For instance, Ibrahim and Salah Abdeslam, who are brothers, lived near Abdelhamid Abaaoud in Molenbeek.¹³⁴ Additionally, Chakib Akrouh was best friends with Mr. Abaaoud. They were recruited through the same cell,¹³⁵ grew up in Molenbeek and were friends with the Abdeslam brothers. Ibrahim Abdeslam and Abaaoud were arrested together after they tried to break into a parking garage and were sent to the same Brussels prison in 2010.¹³⁶ Mohamed Abrini, a key

¹³¹ Florence Aubenat. "Attentats de Paris : la bande de Molenbeek." *Le Monde.fr*. May 4, 2016, accessed May 20, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/05/04/attentats-de-paris-la-bande-de-molenbeek_4913192_3214.html.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The New York Times. "Unraveling the Connections Among the Paris Attackers." *The New York Times*, November 15, 2015, accessed May 20, 2016.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Daily Intelligencer. "What We Know About Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the ISIS Leader Killed in a Police Raid." *Daily Intelligencer*, November 20, 2015, accessed May 20, 2016. <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/11/what-we-know-about-abdelhamid-abaaoud.html>.

connection between the Paris group and Brussels group also grew up in this neighborhood and had close ties with the other previously mentioned.¹³⁷ The same applies to Najim Laachraoui, another *maillon essentiel*, who was a friend of Salah Abdeslam.¹³⁸ In addition, there are two other brothers, Ibrahim and Khalid el-Bakraoui, who also grew up in Brussels, in the neighborhood of Laeken, next to Molenbeek. It is interesting to note that Amedy Coulibaly, who was involved in the Charlie Hebdo attacks, as well as Mehdi Nemmouche, who killed four people at a Brussels museum in 2014, are believed to have bought weapons in Molenbeek.¹³⁹ Ayoub el Khazzani, a Moroccan who tried to attack passengers on a high-speed train between Brussels and Paris in August, is thought to have lived there.¹⁴⁰ It is believed that Mr. Abaaoud has been orchestrating these previous attacks,¹⁴¹ potentially as a strategic move to mislead the authorities.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Jean-Pierre Stroobants, and Madjid Zerrouky “Najim Laachraoui, maillon essentiel des attentats de Paris et Bruxelles.” *Le Monde.fr*. April 23, 2016, accessed May 20, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/04/23/najim-laachraoui-maillon-essentiel-des-attentats_4907439_3224.html.

¹³⁹ Financial Times. “Jihadis and the Belgian Connection — Timeline.” *Financial Times*, Accessed March 20, 2016. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/22d656bc-f008-11e5-aff5-19b4e253664a.html#slide0>. The New York Times. “Unraveling the Connections Among the Paris Attackers.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Edouard De Mareschal. “Qui est Abdelhamid Abaaoud, commanditaire présumé des attentats.” *Le Figaro*. November 17, 2015, accessed May 20, 2016. <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2015/11/17/01003-20151117ARTFIG00178-qui-est-abdelhamid-abaaoud-terroriste-belge-et-commanditaire-presume-des-attaques-de-paris.php>.

▪ **Travelling to Daesh-held Territory: Fusing the Bonds?**

Those bonds tying the different individuals of the Verviers cell come to confirm that contemporary European *jihadis* are, similarly to Sageman's third generation of *jihadis*, joining Daesh as clusters of friends. However, as described previously, it is pretty unlikely that people are willing to sacrifice themselves for a group when they only go through a process of group identification, which seems to be the case here. This is where the variable "believed to have visited Daesh held-territory" reveals its importance: I believe that there is a condition of a *before* and an *after* going to Daesh-controlled territory. Swann et al. state that a process of "fusion-friendly ideologies" can result in an identity fusion, but that it can emerge from "transient contextual origins."¹⁴² In this case, sharing bonding experiences with others in a group context may encourage the belief that the other group members perceive the world in the same way. This perception can produce profound feelings of connection, giving rise to fusion.¹⁴³ Harvey Whitehouse claims that a shared dysphoric experience engenders a sense of sharing highly personal experiences and family ties, resulting in the development of a visceral unity, or *identity fusion* within a group.¹⁴⁴ Only when this process of *identity fusion* has occurred are individuals ready to sacrifice their lives for the group's cause or for a group member, such as Mohamed Belkaid – who died while trying to protect Salah Abdeslam from being arrested.¹⁴⁵ What can be this shared dysphoric experience?

¹⁴² Swann et al. "When Group Membership Gets Personal: A Theory of Identity Fusion:" 9

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Personal notes collected from a conference entitled *Ritual, Community, Conflict* given by Harvey Whitehouse at the Central European University on May 19, 2016, as part of the Center for Religious Studies PhD Doctoral seminar RELI 6000 - Religious Enthusiasm: Psychology, Politics and History.

¹⁴⁵ Seelow, Soren. "Mohamed Belkaid, mort en protégeant la fuite d'Abdeslam, et logisticien présumé des attentats de Paris." *Le Monde.fr*. March 13, 2016, accessed May 20, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2016/03/19/mohamed-belkaid-mort-en-protecteant-la-fuite-d-abdeslam-et-logisticien-des-attentats-de-paris_4886074_4809495.html.

Whitehouse, in his article “Brothers in Arms: Libyan Revolutionaries Bond Like Family,”¹⁴⁶ offers the potential explanation that fighting may foster *fusion* within a group. Thus, the fact that eleven individuals out of twelve are believed to have been fighting in the Levant, while the last one tried to, could have been this factor initiating the *identity fusion* of the group members, deepening their friendship bonds to the point of giving them family-like – or even “suprafamilial” – qualities, and creating an *extended fusion* with other *jihadis*. Moreover, the “culture of martyrdom” can be considered as reinforcing these bonds. Even the sole factor of taking part of a secret and illegal adventure to join Daesh-held territory could be a factor of *fusion*. Indeed, it is also possible that life-shaping experiences or life events create such *fusion*. In this case a *shared trauma* by individuals can result in *identity fusion* within a group. This is where I find Whitehouse’s work facing a limit: could this shared trauma be constructed? Do individuals need to experience it or could they only perceive it as a trauma? What if many young Europeans shared this idea of “no future,” of having no stake in the society?

Regarding the individuals who did not grow up in Brussels, the concept of *extended fusion* can potentially be applied: fused people – which can be their case given the fact that they spent time in Daesh-held territory – perceive that other group members share the same core values, and thus they are likely to project familial ties common in their small cluster onto an extended group. In our case, Mohamed-Aggad,¹⁴⁷ Amimour and Hadfi could have *fused* with their own cluster of friends back in the Levant before extending this fusion to the “Daesh community” or other *jihadis*.

¹⁴⁶ Whitehouse, “Brothers in Arms: Libyan Revolutionaries Bond Like Family.”

¹⁴⁷ This hypothesis has proven to be true. See Seelow, Soren. “Je suis venu pour tomber en martyr.” Le Monde.fr. May 28, 2016, accessed May 28, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2016/05/28/je-suis-venu-pour-tomber-en-martyr_4928167_1653578.html. ---. “Sept apprentis djihadistes, dont le frère d’un kamikaze du Bataclan, devant la justice.” Le Monde.fr. May 28, 2016, accessed May 28, 2016. http://www.lemonde.fr/attaques-a-paris/article/2016/05/28/itineraires-en-ordre-disperse-de-dix-apprentis-djihadistes_4928177_4809495.html.

▪ From Marginalization to Contemporary European Jihadism

*Ici, “on montait dans la délinquance, avant de monter dans l’islam », dit quelqu’un. « La religion était la conséquence, pas la cause. ”*¹⁴⁸

Determining what attracts or pushes an individual to join a skinhead gang, a feminist movement, a punk group or Daesh is obviously a hard task. “Social deprivation” is the broad and vague term used by Sageman and Bakker in their studies while Simon Cottee speaks of “social strains.” In my view, contemporary European *Jihadism* is a generational nihilist revolt, a rebellion that takes the shape of a counterculture.¹⁴⁹ In the case of the Verviers cell, this perceived nihilism and rebellion can be slightly measured by the petty criminal activities in which at least nine individuals have taken part before getting involved with *Jihadism*. First, as noted above, all of the attackers come from *quartiers défavorisés* – with the exception of Foued Mohamed-Aggad, who however joined Daesh-held territory with a group of friends from one of those disadvantaged areas. It is now well known that those neighborhoods such as the *banlieues parisiennes* are part of a socio-economical and geo-social segmentation phenomenon that have engendered a nihilistic youth turning to petty criminal economies such as drug dealing or robberies. This is the case of the el-Bakraoui brothers, who had violent criminal records such as bank robberies, car-jackings, kidnappings and opening fire onto a police officer.¹⁵⁰ Both of them served time in jail. This clearly shows that these individuals were *en marge* of the society and that they had a violent behavior long

¹⁴⁸ Aubenas, “Attentats de Paris: la bande de Molenbeek.”

¹⁴⁹ For instance, a 20 years old French Jihadi declared that he was into the Satanist counterculture before joining the *Jihadism* one. See Spécial Investigation “Les Soldats d’Allah.” Similarly, a former German rapper famously joined Daesh. See Christine Hauser. “Deso Dogg, Ex-Rapper Who Joined ISIS, Is Killed by U.S. Airstrike.” *The New York Times*, October 30, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/31/world/europe/deso-dogg-denis-cuspert-ex-rapper-who-joined-isis-is-killed-by-us-airstrike.html>.

¹⁵⁰ The New York Times. “Ibrahim and Khalid El-Bakraoui: From Bank Robbers to Brussels Bombers.” *The New York Times*, March 24, 2016, accessed May 20, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/25/world/europe/expanding-portraits-of-brussels-bombers-ibrahim-and-khalid-el-bakraoui.html>.

before being radicalized, demonstrating a *radicalization of violent individuals* rather than a *violent radicalization*. Similarly, Abdelhamid Abaaoud was engaged in a spiral of petty gangsterism and criminality. Like a significant number of youngsters living in “inner-city” areas like Molenbeek, Abaaoud fell in with a loosely organized gang of violent local youths, whose members’ names would now be familiar to the readers of this thesis such as the Abdeslam brothers.¹⁵¹ They too served their time in jail. Once they got out, the brothers opened a bar in Molenbeek, apparently selling more drugs than alcohol.¹⁵²

Prisons seem to have been the place where those individuals radicalized,¹⁵³ which is in sharp contrast with the third generation described by Sageman claiming that radicalization occurred within mosques. Radicalization in prison as an acknowledged phenomenon has started to gain recognition of a number of scholars,¹⁵⁴ and countries, such as Denmark and France, have launched experiments to counter the phenomenon. Let us note here that, once again, friendship bonds might have been reinforced through the shared prison experience, as for instance Salah Abdeslam and Mr. Abaaoud served their time together in the same jail.

¹⁵¹ Van Vlieden, Guy. “Profile: Paris Attack Ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud.”

¹⁵² Aubenas, “Attentats de Paris: la bande de Molenbeek.”

¹⁵³ Van Vlieden, Guy. “Profile: Paris Attack Ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud.”

¹⁵⁴ See Mohamed Ajouaou and Ton Bernts, “Imams and Inmates: Is Islamic Prison Chaplaincy in the Netherlands a Case of Religious Adaptation or of Contextualization?,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 1 (2015): 51–65. See also Ian M Cuthbertson, “Prisons and the Education of Terrorists,” *World Policy Journal* 21, no. 3 (2004): 15–22. Farhad Khosrokhavar, “Radicalization in Prison: The French Case,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, no. 2 (2013): 284–306. Farhad Khosrokhavar, “The Constrained Role of the Muslim Chaplain in French Prisons,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 1 (2015): 67–82.

Reflections and Conclusions

*Il ne s'agit pas de la radicalisation de l'islam, mais de l'islamisation de la radicalité.*¹⁵⁵

As demonstrated previously, local kinship and friendship networks are a crucial element playing in the decision to join the contemporary European *Jihadism*, a homegrown phenomenon. As Oliver Roy explain in *Globalised Islam*,¹⁵⁶ individuals joining a *Jihadism* find a way to re-establish a sense of belonging. What seems to be different with Sageman's third generation is that individuals are still bond to each other, but now to an even larger extent and with connection to petty criminality economies. The fact that many have a criminal record should be stressed. These individuals may perceive Daesh as a sort of "super-gang." It would be interesting to explore the patterns of engagement, age range, propensity for violence, and – as briefly started above – the feeling of having no stake in society of gang members in order to detect any similarity with contemporary European *Jihadis*. Why individuals join Daesh rather than a street gang is a topic that needs to be researched, such as what is being rejected by the European youth that leads it to join a counterculture. One door that can be open as a potential explanation that I believe is worth exploring is related to the theory of *double polarization*.

Jonathan Friedman¹⁵⁷ developed the concept of *double polarization*: social polarization paired with cultural polarization. I believe that this is what happens to contemporary European

¹⁵⁵ Cécile Daumas. "Olivier Roy et Gilles Kepel, Querelle Française Sur Le Jihadisme." *Libération.fr*, April 14, 2016, accessed May 20, 2016. http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/04/14/olivier-roy-et-gilles-kepel-querelle-francaise-sur-le-jihadisme_1446226.

¹⁵⁶ Roy, *Globalised Islam*.

¹⁵⁷ Jonathan Friedman. *Globalization, the State, and Violence*. (AltaMira Press, 2004).

jihadis as they got into unemployment, stagnation, petty criminal economies and then join Daesh-held territory. In a situation of double polarization, civic nationalism can turn into *ethnonationalism*: individuals who no longer feel protected by the nation-state are claiming to want the nation “back.” Post-fordist, post-imperial capitalism produces double polarization, which is a mechanism that creates particular outcomes over time. Friedman makes clear that the mechanism of double polarization does not operate in the world as a whole, neither in the same form or same degree. Thus, it is not a covering law.

The hypothesis that I want to state here is that the neo-liberalist doctrine is beneficial for some (the new post-modern cosmopolitan and capitalist elite) while marginalizes many (workers, ethnic and religious minorities), which corresponds to a double polarization. Moreover, the emergence and spread of a cosmopolitanism backlash as there is an increased emphasis on *culturalism identifications* and particularities, creating feelings of exclusion and absence of belonging. These hypotheses could potentially be developed in further and future research. In my view, religion is not the key departure point of the radicalization process. *Jihadism* is a *phénomène de mode*. Many testimonies from Daesh returnees and biographical accounts of *jihadist* terrorists have made clear that most of these individuals had very little knowledge of religion. They claim the right to interpret the Qu’ran for themselves as they see it, instead of studying it for years, as Islamic scholars have been doing for centuries. I once again tend to agree with Roy who argues that this is not the radicalization of Islam, but the “Islamisation of radicalism.”¹⁵⁸ I believe that this radicalism is rather relevant of a generational revolt in a neoliberal globalized world perceived as a “no future” world. We can think here of different movements happening across Europe, such as the rise of populism, but also the *15-M movement* in Spain or *Nuit Debout* in France.

¹⁵⁸ Daumas. “Olivier Roy et Gilles Kepel, Querelle Française Sur Le Jihadisme.”.

One of the specificities that might distinguish people joining Daesh and those joining *Nuit Debout* can be the social, economic, geographical and political marginalization of French-born Muslims. But this structural argument should be tempered: Why do so many converts join Daesh? Why do many boys and girls from the French countryside, far from living in *quartiers défavorisés*, such as Foued Mohamed-Aggad, leave their homes and families to go to a conflict-zone, expecting their death to come? Those questions are the focus of many research centers and governments at the moment and finding answers will not be easy, particularly as interviewing these young individuals and doing fieldwork is highly complicated. Tackling this problem will not be an easy task. What dreams are offered by current government policies offering no more than little material comfort?

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that *contemporary European Jihadism* is a homegrown phenomenon acting as a counterculture that features clusters of friends characterized by their involvement in petty criminal economies. This involvement, in my view, reflects the rejection of today's world, a level of nihilism and a need for rebellion. Not only today's European *jihadis* want to revolt, they want to do it *violently*. This is where Daesh offers something that interests them more than other countercultures. Many of these young individuals are attracted by the violent propaganda set up by the organization. Daesh also offers a concrete location, not far from Europe and is easily accessible. It also offers a new self-perception to narcissistic individuals¹⁵⁹ by giving them material incentives such as houses and cars, but also by fulfilling their need to see themselves as strong men, soldiers and martyrs. This particularity also reaches women. Indeed, in Daesh's propaganda, men are often represented as courageous and tough fighters, while women are represented as modest, honorable wives and mothers. Based on a social media survey carried

¹⁵⁹ Abaaoud has repeatedly posted videos of himself shooting guns, posing in front of 4x4 and dead bodies on his Facebook page. Similarly, many European *jihadis* brag about their life in Daesh-held territory.

out by Melanie Smith, the idea of getting married to a heroic jihadist fighter who is willing to become a martyr is an appealing one.¹⁶⁰ All in all, I think that the rise of Daesh is arguably the most influential and politically novel countercultural force in our neoliberal globalized world. *Contemporary European Jihadism* is not some sort of *fundamentalism* or the resurgence of *traditional cultures* but rather the collapse of *modern cultures* and societies. This is the dark side of globalization. Young Europeans are looking for their place in society, are seeking personal significance and glory. Especially for young men, mortal combat with a band of brothers, a new family offered by Daesh members, in order to serve a great cause appears to be the ultimate adventure and a road to a heroic recognition by their peers while placing themselves above the rest of the people, who “*mènent une vie de kuffar.*”

¹⁶⁰ Homa, Khaleeli. “The British Women Married to Jihad.” *The Guardian*, September 6, 2014, accessed May 20, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/06/british-women-married-to-jihad-isis-syria>.

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