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# Do actions speak louder than words?

*Dutch media portrayal of the motivations of Dutch Syria travellers*

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*“The major threat we face might as well be one of our own making”*

Rik Coolsaet, 2016

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

As of March 2018, around 300 Dutch natives are believed to have travelled to Syria to allegedly join the violent jihad as a foreign fighter<sup>1</sup>. These Syria travellers and the returnees are defined as one of the highest priority threats in Europe and the Netherlands (NCTV, 2018). Yet, these people were once our neighbours, friends, colleagues but above all fellow Dutch citizens. Now, these people are labelled as Syria travellers, often as foreign fighters and sometimes as terrorists.

The situation in Syria and its attraction to many different individuals, incentivised scholars to research the foreign fighter phenomenon and particularly the Syria travellers more thoroughly. Scholars argue that the motivations of Syria travellers are heterogeneous and so are their roles and actions in Syria (e.g. Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Borum & Fein, 2017; Coolsaet, 2016; Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015; Horgan, 2008). This consensus in the vast growing academic literature is a tremendous insight in the motivations of Syria travellers. Yet it is important to find if this information also reaches the public that does not read all the academic works on foreign fighters. The media is one of the ways people are informed about important phenomena in society (Iyengar, 1990). So how are the Syria travellers portrayed in the media throughout the Syrian conflict? Are their motivations and actions - as presented in academic works - rightfully reflected in the words of the Dutch media?

The foreign fighter phenomenon is not new in European history according to research on terrorism and foreign fighters (Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>; Coolsaet, 2016; Malet, 2010). However, this finding does not necessarily mean that all people travelling to conflict areas are motivated the same way and fulfil the same roles regardless of time and context. Scholars active in the field of terrorism have defined different push- and pull factors that have motivated different people to join a terrorist organisation, become a foreign fighter, join the violent jihad, or travel to a foreign conflict area (see Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>; Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Bakker & Grol, 2015; Coolsaet, 2016; Dawson & Amarasingam, 2017).

The way media portrays complex phenomena, such as terrorism and complex international conflicts, affects the assumptions, reasoning and overall opinion of the public that is exposed to these portrayals (Iyengar, 1990). The interpretations in texts shape stories and are referred

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<sup>1</sup> Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst – AIVD  
<https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/terrorisme/dreiging/uitreizigers-terugkeerders-en-thuisblijvers>

to as frames, which can be viewed as the promotion of a particular way of understanding an issue (Van Gorp, 2005). The Dutch media also uses frames in its articles to portray the motivations of Syria travellers. This thesis will explore if the Dutch news coverage is in agreement with the scholarly findings regarding the heterogeneous motivations of the Syria travellers which are connected to the different stages in the Syrian conflict.

Research into the framing of important social issues such as Syria travellers is pertinent since research on framing has shown that the frames applied by journalists and other advocates will shape the opinions of those exposed to them (Berbers et al., 2016; De Vreese 2012; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Iyengar, 1990). When the public is little familiar with a topic or issue, people take what they read in newspapers and see in the news broadcasts as facts and as the truth (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Iyengar, 1990). Therefore, a correct portrayal of Syria travellers and their heterogeneous motivations in the media is important in order to inform the general public. It is expected that the media generalizes the motivations of Syria travellers to be religiously inclined rather than anything else. An increased emphasis on religious motivations could have implications on the policies regarding Syria travellers and returnees but also on possible security measures that focus on the Dutch Muslim community. Strict and intrusive security measures could harm the social cohesion in The Netherlands by creating suspicion between the non-Muslim and Muslim community and consequentially marginalizing the Dutch Muslim community.

The central research question of this thesis is: *to what extent does the Dutch media take the heterogeneous motivations of the Dutch Syria travellers into account in their news reports from 2011 to 2017?*

To answer the proposed question two Dutch newspapers are analysed to find the dominating salient frame in the Dutch media concerning the motivations of Syria travellers. The objective of this study is to explore which frames were most salient in the Dutch news reports, if they indeed reflect the heterogeneous motivations that are proposed in academic literature and if the salience of these frames changed throughout the Syrian civil war corresponding to the development of this conflict. In order to find an answer to these questions the research in this thesis is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to summarizing the different motivations found in the academic literature to use it as a framework for the second part of the research. This second part refers to the deductive frame analysis of news articles from 2011 to 2017 of two Dutch newspapers.

## **1.2 THE RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

### **1.2.1 Academic relevance**

Literature on terrorism and specifically foreign fighters has focussed on explanations why people are motivated to act in terrorism and conflicts in foreign regions. The motivations of Syria travellers are addressed in several works (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>; Coolsaet, 2016; Weggemans, Bakker & Grol, 2014). The academic relevance of this thesis lies in the aim to broaden the scope of these studies by looking if their findings are reflected in the media and thus presented to the general public. The research in this thesis intends to explore if there is a gap between academic sources and public sources affecting the public understanding of the actions and motivations of Syria travellers.

Research into the media portrayal of conflicts, terrorism, foreign fighters and jihadists has been done before (Berber et al., 2016; De Buitrago, 2014; Evans, 2010; Mishra, 2007; Powell, 2011; Rogan, 2010). Especially a new interest in the role of female foreign fighters and terrorists is noticeable (Brown, 2011; Nacos, 2005). Likewise, this research is interested in the media portrayal of Syria travellers. It will contribute to the body of knowledge on frame analysis of foreign fighters as it will specifically focus on the *motivations* that are portrayed in the media. Additionally, this research is interested to find if the media correctly reflects the motivations of Syria traveller as known in academic works and if this reflection also corresponds to the different periods in the Syrian conflict (2011-2017) that affects different motivations. Especially the temporal element in the analysis of the media portrayal of the motivations of Syria travellers has never been done before.

### **1.2.2 Societal relevance**

The way the media presents societal and political issues in the news influences the perceptions and understandings of the public (Berbers et al., 2016; Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1990; Van Gorp, 2007). The public is particularly susceptible to framing effects when the framed issue is related to security or international conflicts (Iyengar, 1990). The media portrayal of Syria travellers affects how the public, the police, policymakers, prosecutors and politicians perceive these travellers since no one is completely unbiased in their judgement (Iyengar, 1990).

In recent years the foreign fighter threat in Europe revolves mainly around the threat posed by returnees and how this again affects social cohesion within society (Reed, 2016). A nuanced perceptions and a better understanding of the motivations and actions of Syria travellers is necessary to improve social cohesion in The Netherlands and to formulate better

policies regarding Syria travellers and returnees. The media has a crucial role in disseminating the vast academic knowledge on the heterogeneous motivations of Syria travellers to inform the general public and contribute to this nuanced view and better understanding.

### **1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

The structure of the thesis is set up in three sections. The first section includes this first chapter as the overall introduction of the thesis and chapter two that introduces the theoretical framework and the methodological framework used for the research conducted in this thesis.

Section two is dedicated to the actual research in order to answer the proposed research question. The researched is separated in two different chapters. Chapter three will map out the different motivations of people getting involved in terrorism, becoming foreign fighters and travelling to Syria in particular. The results of this literature study will provide the framework for the deductive frame analysis conducted in chapter four. Chapter four will entail a discourse analysis of published articles of two Dutch newspapers in the period of 2011-2017.

The third section of the thesis offers the conclusions and implications of this thesis. Chapter five will synthesize the findings of the literature study and the deductive frame analysis of the Dutch newspaper articles followed by a discussion of the research. This discussion also includes the possible implications this research has on theory, policy and society. Chapter six is the concluding chapter and will offer insights of future research possibilities incentivised by this thesis.

# **CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the theoretical and methodological framework that forms the foundation of this thesis. In the first section the theoretical framework will be discussed by bridging the theoretical argument of the research with the chosen method for this thesis. In order to understand the broader context of the thesis, the difference between reality and perceptions will be discussed within the constructionist paradigm. Also, the connection between media and public perceptions will be made to illustrate the importance of correct news coverage of social phenomena. Then, the preliminary assumption regarding the Dutch perception towards Syria travellers is described by the hand of a conceptual framework (Figure 1). The final part of the theoretical section is devoted to the explanation of several reoccurring concepts throughout this thesis.

The methodological framework will be set out in the second section of this chapter. The method of the research will be discussed in more detail. This section will also describe the operationalisation and data selection process.

## **2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.2.1 The media and public perceptions**

As earlier briefly mentioned, the argument of this thesis is situated in the constructionist paradigm. Constructionists argue that the world around us is socially constructed through interaction (Bryman, 2012; Van Gorp, 2007). People construct their own reality through their experiences and interactions with various sources of information (Papert & Harel, 1991). These different interactions could result in variation in an individual's perceptions of the same reality (Bryman, 2012). The constructionist approach gives an explanation why one's own perception of reality and the 'true reality' – if there ever is such a thing - does not always align.

The media is often used in social scientific research to understand public perceptions in society (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Lecheler & De Vreese, 2012; Matthes, 2007; Nelson et al., 1997; Slothuus, 2008; Van Gorp, 2007). News reports are an example of a source of information that helps construct reality through interaction. For practically all people, political and societal issues are defined primarily through news reports (Iyengar, 1990). The way

media express their news, through so-called *frames*, can therefore have significant influence on people's perceptions and public opinion (De Vreese, 2012; Iyengar, 1990; Van Gorp). The frames that are conveyed by the media guide the way the audience thinks (Berber et al., 2016). It can offer new perspectives on reality but can also confirm the perceptions that already exist in society (Entman, 1993). People are especially susceptible for framing effects when it concerns issues relating to terrorism and security, as most people do not understand the related international conflicts and complex foreign ideology (Iyengar, 1990).

Framing is the way media and other communicating texts exercise power over their audience (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Van Gorp, 2007). The most detailed and widely accepted definition of framing is provided by Entman (1993: 52): "*to frame is selecting some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described*".

It is a strategy of constructing and processing news discourse (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). The widely known experiment of Kahneman and Tversky (1984) shows the power of framing by presenting people the same solutions to the same situations but formulating (or framing) the solutions in two different ways: first they framed the solutions in terms of likely deaths, and then in terms of likely lives saved. This caused people to change their answer even though the solutions were essentially the same only presented in different wording (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). This experiment illustrates how frames with their selection and highlighting of information can determine what people notice and how they interpret information.

The framing effect is not always that obvious as in the experiment of Kahneman and Tversky (1984), the media can easily reinforce a familiar frame but at the same time it is difficult for an audience to interpret or remember an idea that is in disagreement with that familiar frame (Entman, 1993). The strengthening of an existing idea is less noticeable compared to a change of opinion. The controversial frames can unfortunately 'breach the bounds of acceptable discourse' and are unlikely to influence public perceptions or policies (Entman, 1993: 56). A frame that highlights in different ways that a glass as half full will not entice people to argue that the glass is half empty (Entman, 1993).

Undoubtedly, people can recall their own facts; make connections that are not explicitly made in the text or retrieve a causal explanation from memory. In fact, students are encouraged to do this all the time at university. Yet, Kahneman & Tversky (1984), Iyengar (1990), and Entman (1993) suggest that in general people are not so well-informed and cognitively active on social or political issues and that framing therefore will heavily

influence their responses and reactions. Additionally, people are most likely affected if they are only exposed to one specific interpretation and receive little (or no) alternative interpretations (Entman, 1993).

Again, terrorism related issues, such as foreign fighters, are more susceptible to framing effects (Iyengar, 1990). Additionally, the information about Syria travellers is mainly accessible to the public via media reports. It is therefore important to examine if the Dutch media provide different alternatives to the more dominant frames that are already circulating in society to ensure the correct portrayal of the reality why some people travel to Syria. The exclusion of particular interpretations by frames is just as important to outcomes as the inclusion (Entman, 1993). If people are less informed about the alternative motivations of Syria travellers they are bound to uphold the dominant frames that could portray an incorrect or unbalanced picture of the Syria travellers.

### **2.2.2 Theoretical argument**

Since this thesis is situated in the constructionist paradigm it assumes that reality is constructed through interaction, through language. The perceptions towards a particular issue influences people's attitude towards such; it can even influence the policies and measures related to the subject, especially when it is a security issue (Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1990). In this research the issue at hand is the Syria traveller and their motivations in particular.

This thesis argues that the media plays a crucial role in constructing the perceptions towards Syria travellers by the discourse in its news coverage. The media has a great influence on public perceptions and this effect has been researched thoroughly by scholars in fields as sociology, communication, psychology and political science (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Lecheler & De Vreese, 2012; Matthes, 2007; Nelson, Oxley & Clawson, 1997; Slothuus, 2008; Van Gorp, 2007). This influence is the reason why it is important to explore if the presented information about Syria travellers is correct since this would create a better understanding of these individuals among the public.

Scholars have studied the motivations of terrorists, foreign fighters and Syria travellers and argue that many different factors influence the decision of travelling to Syria or another foreign conflict (see Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Bakker & Grol, 2014; Borum & Fein, 2017; Coolsaet, 2016; Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015; Horgan, 2008). Aside from the argument that Syria travellers have heterogeneous motivations, the different stages in the Syrian civil war also influence the motivational factors of the Syria travellers (Bakker & De Bont, 2016).

This thesis expects that there is a discrepancy between what academics conclude and what the media informs the general public. The overall argument of this thesis is that if the media does not reflect the heterogeneous motivations of Syria travellers throughout the Syrian conflict the general public will not be aware of the variation in motivations and will perceive the entire group of Syria travellers as one homogeneous group. It is expected that Dutch newspapers do not correctly reflect the heterogeneous motivations of Syria travellers and will emphasize motivations that are grounded in religion and ideology.

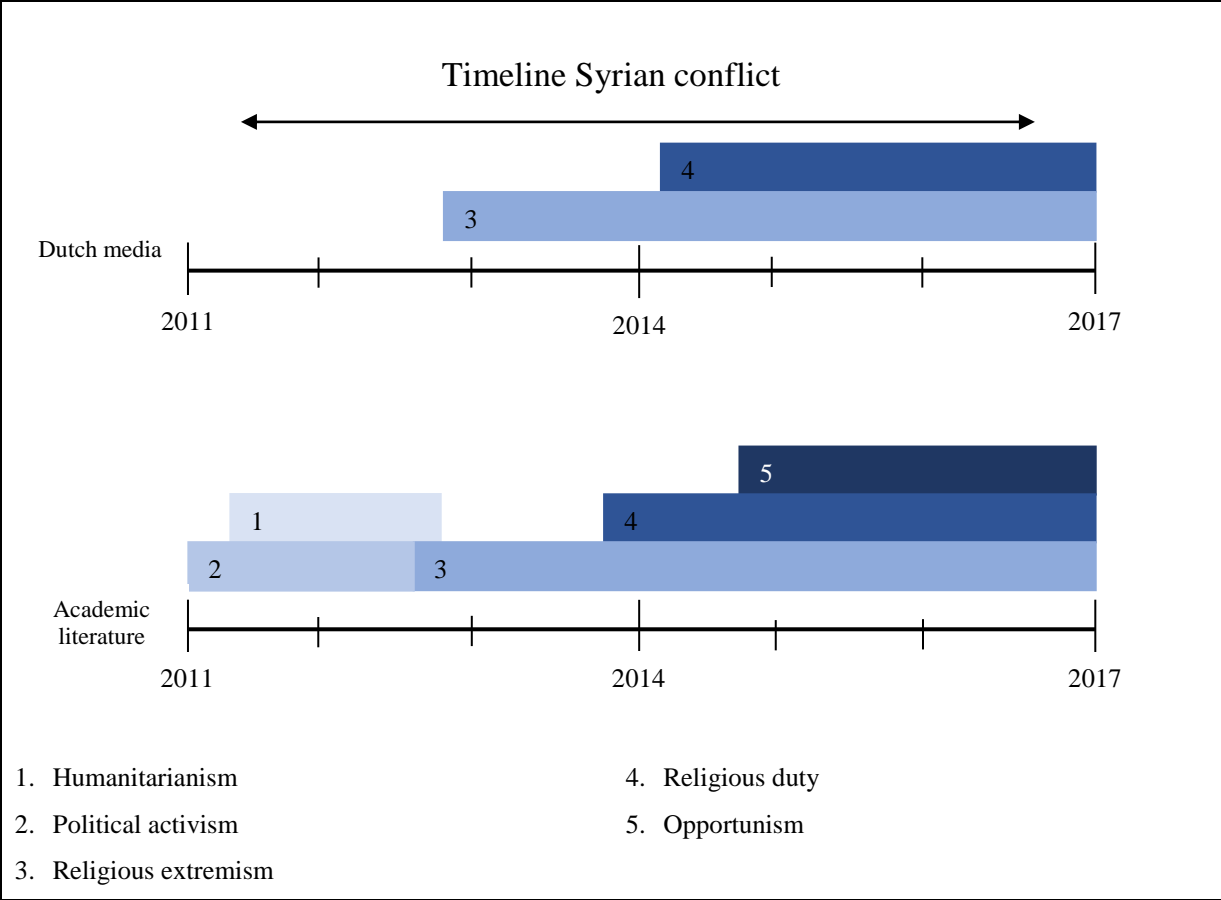


Figure 1 – Conceptual framework

Figure 1 shows a conceptual framework that graphically displays the expectations of this thesis. Academic literature demonstrates that the heterogeneous motivations of Syria travellers are connected to certain periods of the Syrian conflict. The numbers in the figure refer to the different motivations explained later in this thesis. The lower bar shows the argument of the academics, showing the progression of a humanitarian motivation in the early stages of the conflict towards a more personal motivation of Syria travellers when the conflict has matured. The upper bar shows the expectations of the research, arguing that the Dutch media will start reporting on Syria travellers around 2013 and will continue to use frames

emphasizing religion and ideology throughout the Syrian conflict without sufficiently portraying the other motivations of the travellers.

If this expectation is correct, the Dutch common perception towards Syria travellers and the possible returnees will have implications for Dutch society and political policies. If the Islamist religion is strongly associated with Syria travellers who are perceived as dangerous terrorist-involved extremists, there is a great possibility that it will lead to strong exclusionist attitudes and discriminating policies towards the Muslim community in The Netherlands.

### **2.3 THEORETICAL CONCEPTS**

**Foreign fighters:** “Non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts”, this does not include state actors fighting other state actors (Malet, 2013: 9).

**Jihadi-Salafism:** Salafism is an ideological orientation that ‘seeks to rid the Islam of the outside influences’ and is considered an orthodox conception of the Islam (Neumann, 2006: 82). Jihadists aim to advance their ideological goals through violence (Neumann, 2006). Combining these two concepts makes for a sub-branch of Salafism that believes that illegitimate ‘infidel regimes that do not rule through Sharia’ should be overthrown (Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>: 2).

**Motivations:** Both the push- and pull-factors of the Syria travellers that have contributed to the decision to leave their country of residence to travel to Syria.

**Syria travellers:** People travelling from Western countries, such as the Netherlands, to Syria motivated by different reasons but related to the consequences of the Syrian conflict.

**Terrorism:** The ‘intentional use of or threat to use violence against civilians or against civilian targets’ in order to attain certain (political) aims (Parker & Sitter, 2016: 199).

**The (Dutch) media:** The news media in the Netherlands in general. However, for the feasibility of this research the newspaper articles of two Dutch newspapers are used for analysis.

### **2.4 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

This thesis explores how the Dutch media frames Syria travellers and their motivations in particular. The Dutch media is analysed through newspaper articles to find if they reflect the different motivations that are presented in academic work on foreign fighters and Syria travellers. In order to do this the language used in the news articles will be thoroughly examined. In other words, this thesis aims to analyse the dominating discourse in the Dutch media on the motivations of Syria travellers. I therefore see it as appropriate to use an approach of discourse analysis as research method.

### **2.4.1 Discourse analysis**

A qualitative research method is most fitting for the objective set out in this thesis. This thesis aims to explore how Dutch media reports portray Syria travellers and their motivations to their audience. The analysis of media can be done either quantitatively or qualitatively. Yet due to the specific focus on the discourse and frames presented in Dutch media on Syria travellers compared to the knowledge presented in scholarly works a qualitative analysis of language is recommended.

Discourse analysis recognizes that language is constructive; it gives meaning and creates a frame in how we understand issues in everyday life (Bryman, 2012). Discourse analysis researches how meaning is created and what realities or truths we choose to accept. It is the 'close study of language in use' (Dunn & Neumann, 2016: 4). This study of language shows how and why things appear as they do and how specific actions influenced by the understanding of things become possible (Dunn & Neumann, 2016: 4).

A discourse includes the practices where meaning is created (Dunn & Neumann, 2016). The society we live in creates and gives meaning to the things we experience and is through discourse that we do so. These discourses are present in communications and texts and can be found in for instance public communications, political speeches and news texts. Discourses are not set but are open and always changing because they will have competition of other discourses (Dunn & Neumann, 2016), as will be the case in this thesis. Language can be seen as the building blocks for discourse. In the context of discourse analysis, language constitutes a set of signs that is part of a system that creates 'subjects, objects, and the world' (Dunn & Neumann, 2016: 2). Discourses attempt to capture these meanings that construct the truth about 'our world' (Dunn & Neumann, 2016: 2).

Potential disadvantages of the discourse analysis include the risk of research bias and the difficulty of interpretation. A common critique on the use of discourse analysis is that the discourse is dependent on the perception and insistence of the analyst (Bryman 2012, 539). Challenges with this method can be eliminated by introducing more researchers to analyse and interpret the language that constitute the discourse. Unfortunately, the capacity of this research will not suffice to such division of labour. The researcher must thus acknowledge the possible flaws but be attentive to an objective look.

## 2.4.2 Frame analysis

Although *framing* has already been discussed in section 2.2.1, this section will shortly discuss the methodological aspects of *frame analysis*. Frame analysis is an approach of discourse analysis but can almost be discussed as a field in and of itself. As already discussed, framing explains how meaning is constructed through the power of a communicating text (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). This is done by selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality to promote a particular interpretation of an issue (Entman, 1993). It is therefore considered to be a suitable method for this research as it stems from the theory that sense-making by the public is done through the media discourse they are exposed to (Van Gorp, 2007). The research in this thesis will explore the different frames used in Dutch news to portray Syria travellers and their motivations in particular.

Frame analysis can explain how texts can influence the understanding of their readers by the particular presentation of information (De Vreese, 2012; Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1984). This process is exactly what this research aims to detect in the Dutch news reports on Syria travellers and their motives. Frames have four functions: they *define the problem*, provide *causal interpretation*, make *moral evaluation*, and suggest *treatments or remedies* (Entman, 1993: 52). In this case the frames used in Dutch newspapers will then define the problem – Westerners travelling to Syria; diagnose the causes – identify the motivation of these people travelling to Syria; make moral judgements – evaluate these motivations and their causal effects; and suggest remedies – offer and justify measures to avoid people travelling to Syria (and possibly returning). A single sentence may provide more than one of these four framing functions but it is also possible that many sentences in a text will provide none (Entman, 1993).

Thus, the process of framing will make specific bits of information about an issue more salient (De Vreese, 2012; Entman, 1993, Van Gorp, 2007). The increased salience will make that piece of information more significant so that the audience will notice, perceive and discern meaning from it and therefore more likely to be used when forming an opinion (Entman, 1993; Lecheler & De Vreese, 2012; Van Gorp, 2007). Salience of elements in text is increased by placement, repetitions or by associating cultural familiar symbols to the elements.

Another often used method for analysing texts, in this case news reports, is content analysis. However, content analysis treats all negative or positive terms as equally salient and influential in a text (Entman, 1993). This thesis studies what elements are most salient in the news reports and will relate the salient parts of the text to the frames found in the literature on

the motivations of foreign fighters. When applying only content analysis the risk is that the data will misrepresent the parts of the message that most readers will pick up and will memorize (Entman, 1993).

## 2.5 OPERATIONALISATION

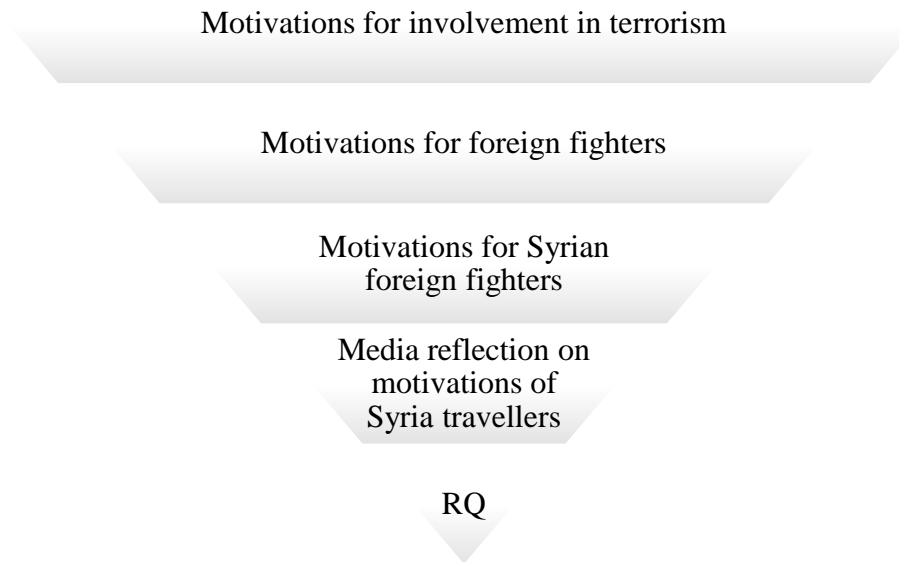


Figure 2 - The funnel

The research conducted in this thesis has two sections. The funnel in Figure 2 displays the course of the research. Chapter three will be devoted to a literature research into the scholarly efforts to map out the different motivations for getting involved in terrorism, for becoming a foreign fighter, and the motivations of Syria travellers in particular. It comprises the first three steps in the funnel. The last part of the literature study will analyse the different motivations that are known today and how these motivations have developed throughout the Syrian conflict. The literature study will be considered the inductive frame analysis. Although it is not a frame analysis of news articles, the literature review will inductively retrieve the relevant frames from the academic articles to apply them in the second section of the research.

The second section of the research will be conducted in chapter four with the deductive frame analysis of the Dutch media. The frame analysis will make use of the identified motivations in the literature research in chapter three, as the frames will reflect these different motivations.

The analysis of the newspaper texts will be based on the idea of media packages described by Gamson and Modigliani (1989). These packages - Van Gorp (2007) renamed the media it into 'frame package' - will help identify the frame presented in the text in a more structured way (Van Gorp, 2007).

A frame package is essentially the central organizing structure of the logical framing devices and reasoning devices that will promote the interpretation of an issue (Berbers et al., 2016; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Van Gorp, 2007). Framing devices suggest how one should think about the issue and reasoning devices justify what should be done about the issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Framing devices can be ‘metaphors, exemplars (such as historical cases), catchphrases, depictions and even visual images’ (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989: 3-4). Reasoning devices refer to the cause, the consequences and the associated moral values (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). These different devices can be brought together in a ‘frame matrix’ that represents the frames and the noticeable characterizing devices (Van Gorp, 2007). Table 1 shows the outline of the frame matrix used as structural guidance in this thesis. The analysis of the Dutch media is conducted in chapter four and will determine what frames are most salient in general, if the salience of frames change throughout the years of the Syrian conflict, and if there are noticeable differences between newspapers.

Frame	Reasoning devices					Framing devices	
	Definition	Cause	Consequence	Moral value	Possible solution	Archetypes/ Myths	Catchphrases/ lexical choices
F <sup>1</sup>							
F <sup>2</sup>							
F <sup>n</sup>							

Table 1 – Example of frame matrix

Chapter five will bring together both the literature research and frame analysis of the Dutch newspapers discussing if the media reflect the heterogeneous motivations of Syria travellers throughout the Syrian conflict. In this chapter the assumptions of the results of the frame analysis (discussed in section 2.2.2) are explored and determined if they are correct or if they need revision.

## 2.6 DATA SELECTION

The Netherlands is chosen as the research case for this thesis. The Dutch government has brought on several public threat assessment documents that clearly identify the foreign (terrorist) fighter threat as one of the most salient issues in counter-terrorism and security policy (Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>b</sup>; NCTV, 2014; NCTV, 2018). In the recent years more attention is attributed to the foreign fighter phenomenon due to the increasing numbers of Dutch citizens travelling to Syria and Iraq and the returning foreign fighters to the

Netherlands (AIVD, 2017; Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Bakker & Grol, 2015; NCTV, 2014). Also, the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism is stationed in The Hague and has brought forth a great part of the literature on the heterogeneous motivations of terrorists, foreign fighters and Dutch Syria travellers.

Picking the Netherlands as a case also brings practical benefits as the research will not be hindered by difficulty in text interpretation due to language barriers

### **2.6.1 Selection of newspapers**

The units of analysis are newspaper articles in Dutch newspapers. News media analysis has the substantive advantage that it reflects the social mainstream (Wodak & Kryzanowski, 2008). Further, studying newspapers has several advantages: they are accessible, they are open sources, there is no need to transcribe before conducting any analysis and the texts will not change when being observed.

This thesis makes assumptions about the Dutch media in general. For that reason the research cannot only analyse the discourse of one newspaper. The best way to generalize the findings of the research on ‘Dutch media’ a variety of newspapers should be analysed. However, this research is restricted in time and resources and will therefore have to make concessions in the number of newspapers. Considering that different newspapers address different audiences an ‘quality’ and a ‘popular’ newspaper should be included in the analysis (Berbers et al., 2016). The regular audience of a newspaper will influence the way journalists frame a specific issue (Berbers et al., 2016). As mentioned earlier, promoting a frame that is strongly deviant from the commonly accepted idea will lead to discarding this frame as unrealistic or implausible (Entman, 1993; De Vreese, 2012).

Different newspapers will have different reputations and audiences that will therefore put forward different discourses and articles. Therefore a ‘quality’ and a ‘popular’ newspaper with a high circulation rate was selected for the deductive frame analysis, namely: NRC Handelsblad and De Telegraaf. The NRC Handelsblad would represent the quality paper and De Telegraaf would represent the popular newspaper (Boukes & Vliegthart, 2017). Using these two newspapers will give a better overview of the Dutch media in general by capturing two newspapers that have a large diverse Dutch audience. Also, using these two can help find possible variation in the frames between a popular and an quality newspaper (Boukes & Vliegthart, 2017).

## 2.6.2 Data collection

Newspaper articles published in 2011 to 2017 are collected for the research. This timeframe comprises the timeline of the Syrian conflict helps to find if the developments of the Syria conflict affects the frames used in the Dutch media as they should correspond to different waves of motivations of Syria travellers. To confine the research to the analysis of entire years, the last year is 2017 since 2018 cannot be included in a full year analysis.

In line with different studies that use frame analysis the article sample was aimed to comprise circa a hundred articles (Brown, 2011; Dirikx & Gelders, 2010; Nacos, 2005). For structural purposes and to create a continuous flow in the analysed articles, six articles per year for both newspapers are selected. The article selection is based on a keyword search in the LexisNexis database that would determine the most relevant article for every two months<sup>2</sup>. In theory this would make for a total sample of 84 articles; 42 articles of NRC Handelsblad and 42 articles of De Telegraaf. This sample is theoretical as it will depend on the existing number of news articles on this topic. It is for instance possible that before 2013 little concrete articles are devoted to the Syria travellers or the foreign fighter phenomenon because they were not a popular or problematized issue in The Netherlands yet.

## 2.7 LIMITATIONS

Despite careful considerations in the research design, some limitations must be notified before continuing to the following section of this thesis.

One limitation is more of a possible theoretical implications that needs to be considered when analysing the findings of the frame analysis. Scholars that use frame analysis in their studies warn about the media routines that could also impact the prominence of a frame within an article (Berbers et al., 2016; De Vreese, 2012; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Media routines such as the ‘balance norm’ requires that competing opinions are equally presented in the news, journalists achieve this by quoting advocates with clashing perspectives in their article (Berbers et al., 2016). However, journalists can also have esteemed relationships with organisations, political actors and other frame advocates and are therefore less likely to challenge them (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Meaning, the balancing norm is not always applied in news articles. Also, journalists are not always aware of the ideological components

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<sup>2</sup> Keyword entry in the power search tool of LexisNexis: “polderjihad” OR "polderjihadist" OR "jihadist" OR "jihad" OR "jihadisten" OR "Nederlandse moslim" OR "Nederlandse strijders" OR "Nederlandse strijder" OR "Jihadreis" OR "Nederlandse jihadi" OR "Jihadreiziger" OR "Jihadtourisme" OR "Nederlandse jihadisten" OR "Syrieganger" OR "Syriegangers" OR "Syrie reiziger" OR "Syrie reizigers" OR "Nederlandse radicale" OR "Radicalisatie" OR "Radicale" OR "Polderterrorist" AND "Syrie" OR "Syrisch" OR "Syrische".

in their writing, as they are ‘frame-blind’ (Berbers et al., 2016). Still, when interpreting the findings of the frame analysis, especially when different frames are used in one article, the balancing norm must be considered.

Other limitations that must be addressed relate to the chosen method. Frame analysis rests on the interpretation of texts, therefore this method affects the internal validity and replicability of this research. The internal validity and replicability is affected by the method of frame analysis since it revolves around the individual interpretation of the analyst. The frame matrix is an attempt to improve the overall internal validity and replicability of the deductive frame analysis as it would guide the analysis of the different articles. However, the entire research process is executed by one person. Having different researchers separately execute the data selection, the different rounds of analysis, and the interpretation of the results, could have enhanced the internal validity. Unfortunately the timeframe and the resources of this research did not permit such solution to be implemented.

A serious limitation regarding external validity is caused by the small sample of articles that are analysed in this research. This relatively small sample of news articles compared to the total published news articles on the subject of Syria travellers limits the scope, making it difficult to generalise the results. Therefore the results of this study can only be acknowledged as an explorative study that could incite others to study a larger sample whenever interesting findings in this small sample calls for more elaborate research.

Much consideration went in to the eventual decision on the number of articles in the research sample. Different studies using frame analysis were consulted in order to find an appropriate sample size to study the Dutch media portrayal of Syria travellers’ motivations (such as: Berbers et al., 2016; Brown, 2011; Dirikx & Gelders, 2010; Nacos, 2005). With these different studies in mind and with regard to the limited research time and the labour intensity of frame analysis, the choice was made to analyse one article per every two months for two selected Dutch newspapers. Since this research also aims to find possible trends in seven years of news coverage a continuous distribution of the analysed articles is necessary, and therefore an article every two months is selected.

# **CHAPTER III: MOTIVATIONS OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS**

## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter entails the first part of the research set out in this thesis. The academic literature will offer insights on the heterogeneous motivations that should be reflected in the Dutch news coverage on Syria travellers. This section is considered as the inductive part of the research as it will provide the basis for the analytical framework for the deductive frame analysis of Dutch news articles introduced in chapter four.

The literature study will start out quite broadly but becomes narrower with every subtitle. First, the more general motivations for the involvement in terrorism will be examined. Then, the motivations for becoming a foreign fighter will be discussed. Finally, the different motivations for travelling to Syria will be reviewed. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the different motivations proposed in the academic literature categorized into five groups. These five groups will form the basis of the frame matrix that will be used for the deductive frame analysis of the Dutch newspaper articles.

## **3.2 MOTIVATIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN TERRORISM**

The events of September 11, 2001 is one of the most associated event with terrorism nowadays (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006). However, terrorism started many years ago. After the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, David Rapoport wrote one of the most influential articles in terrorism studies on the history of modern terrorism (Parker & Sitter, 2016; Sedgwick, 2004). He explains that this history is comprised of four waves which are ‘cycles of activity’ in a certain period incentivising ‘an international trend’ (Rapoport, 2002: 47).

The first wave was the Anarchist wave and started in the 1880s in Russia (Rapoport, 2002). Then in the 1920s, the Anticolonial wave started and also lasted about forty years (Rapoport, 2002). The third wave, the New Left wave, followed and stopped existing before the 21st century. And finally, in 1979 the world was introduced to the wave we still experience today, the Religious wave (Rapoport, 2002). Considering the pattern of the previous waves, Rapoport (2002) argues that the religious wave of terrorism should wane around 2025, making place for a new wave.

The different names of the waves suggest their different driving energy of these terrorist activities (Rapoport, 2002). These names reflect the dominant features of terrorism in that time, but it is not the only present feature. So although the distinction can be made between

these four different periods of terrorism, the name does not necessarily reflect the differences between individuals or organisations within these waves.

Rapoport's Wave Theory is the primary conceptual framework taught in many academic courses on terrorism (Parker & Sitter, 2016; Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004). Yet, Parker and Sitter (2016) criticised the framework and posed that the waves are actually strains of terrorism that never really disappear. They suggest that the tactical choices of terrorists play an important role in the evolution of terrorism and that for each strain an individual can be identified as the advocate to advance a particular political cause (Parker & Sitter, 2016). The four strains they identify in history are: 'Nationalism', 'Socialism', 'Religious Extremism' and 'Social Exclusion' (Parker & Sitter, 2016: 199).

Essentially both theories highlight a categorization of different characteristics, objectives and motives that lead to the occurrence of terrorist activity. Both are therefore interesting to consider when questioning why some people become involved in terrorism, and why.

### **3.2.1 Who are they?**

One of the major challenges is answering the question who, why and how someone becomes involved in terrorism (Horgan, 2008). Over the years scholars have attempted to find an answer by using different psychological models, studying organizational structures and discussing the root causes of terrorism (Bloom, 2005; Horgan, 2008; Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006; Piazza, 2006; Taylor & Horgan, 2006) Thankfully, becoming involved in terrorism is still more the exception than the rule but this also causes a certain justification to consider terrorists as special human being (Horgan, 2008; Taylor & Horgan, 2006). Different studies in the realm of terrorism have tried to map out a distinct profile for terrorists (Atran, 2003; Marvasti, 2008; Post, Sprinzak & Denny, 2003; Victoroff, 2005).

Evidence unfortunately shows that terrorist profiles are unlikely to appear on a meaningful level and that there is no systematic difference in personality that distinguishes terrorists from non-terrorists (Horgan, 2007; Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006). Nevertheless, the search for these profiles continues because whenever a terrorist attack happens people are forced to think about the behaviour of the people behind the attack (Horgan, 2008). Often people's first response is to pathologize the behaviour of a terrorist (Horgan, 2008; Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006). Also, many people are exposed to the same generating root causes of terrorist involvement, many therefore wonder why not more people eventually become involved in terrorism (Horgan, 2008). Again, implying that people becoming involved in terrorism are special in some sense.

Different aspects play crucial role in becoming involved into terrorism and will be different for every individual (Lee, 2011). The assumption of a terrorist profile risks missing several other important features rather than characteristics (Duyvesteyn & Peeters , 2015; Horgan, 2008). Not every individual is attracted to the same push or pull factor, and the different roles within a terrorist organisation attract different types to their cause (Horgan, 2008).

Counterterrorism efforts still frequently rely on profiles (Horgan, 2008). A middle-aged, white mother of two young children will not be considered a possible suicide bomber. The reasons is because this particular profile is not yet encountered in that specific context. The assumptions we hold about terrorists feed into the way we think about terrorists (Horgan, 2008). But essentially we cannot possibly predict with certain accuracy who will become involved in terrorism or identify how ‘terrorists’ look like, or not look like for that matter. However, it is useful to identify potential factors for involvement in terrorism in the form of the different internal or external motivations.

### **3.2.2 Motivations**

In the early stages of terrorism studies the dominant theory existed that terrorists were irrational beings and often pathologic (Abrahms, 2008; Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006). Yet, psychiatric studies have determined that terrorist are not irrational; in fact, the psychiatric profiles of terrorists are virtually unanimously normal (Richardson, 2006; Silke, 1998).

Around the 1980s the dominant paradigm thus moved from an irrational notion to a rational notion of terrorists and become known as the ‘strategic model’ (Abrahms, 2008). Scholars that support this model explain that the causes for terrorism lie in the environment and the conditions it puts forth (Crenshaw, 1981). The apparent lack of opportunity for political participation is such a condition that can create a motivation for terrorist activity (Crenshaw, 1981). Known terrorist groups such as the French Anarchists, the IRA, RAF, and ETA, were used as an example of this strategic model (Crenshaw, 1981). The model rests on three key assumptions, namely: terrorists are motivated by relatively stable political preferences; terrorists weigh the expected political pay-offs of their available options; and terrorism is adopted as a last resort when the expected political return is higher than any other alternative option (Abrahms, 2008). Terrorism is in this model defined in an instrumental sense where it is the “intentional use of or threat to use violence against civilians or against civilian targets, in order to attain political aims” (Parker & Sitter, 2016).

Although the instrumentalist approach to terrorism is still dominant in terrorism studies, Abrahms (2008) tested the core assumptions by studying various terrorist organisations and found seven flaws in the model. His research argues that terrorists do not use violence as a last resort or even consider using nonviolent alternative methods and they are politically unstable and will not disband their organization when they cannot reach their political goals (Abrahms, 2008). The alternative explanation Abrahms (2008: 94) proposes is that people become involved in terrorism to ‘develop strong affective ties with other members’ emphasizing the great importance of the social benefits that come by joining a terrorist organisation.

This argument is in line with a possible explanation posed by Horgan (2008) who suggests that kinship and a social network experiencing similar difficult issues are crucial in becoming involved in terrorism, especially if these social ties run through terrorist networks. He discusses that the social benefits and the sense of reward that a certain movement represents is an important factor, particularly in Islamic related terrorism (Horgan, 2008).

Other factors related to the emotional state of an individual also play an important role in becoming involved in terrorism (Horgan, 2008; Lee, 2011). Emotional vulnerability and feelings of frustration and alimentation make people more susceptible to the social benefits of a terrorist network (Horgan, 2008). This vulnerability is enhanced by a dissatisfaction with their current life and their low social status (Lee, 2011).

In a way terrorism is still perceived as an instrumental solution to achieve their goal, namely to defeat an offensive enemy that is believed to ‘humiliate’ its victims (Horgan, 2008: 85). Identification with these victims contributes in making the final decision to join a terrorist group because people need to believe that violence is not immoral (Horgan, 2008).

Interesting is that different studies show that terrorists are often relatively well-off and well educated in comparison to their population (Berrebi, 2004; Krueger & Maleckova, 2003; Lee, 2011; Russel & Miller 1983). Yet, people involved in terrorism and violent activity do appear to have a lower social status than their equally well-off fellow citizens who are not involved in violent activity (Lee, 2011). This low social status supports the idea that terrorists are partially motivated by their relative economic and social opportunity gains, rather than solely or primarily by ideology or grievances’ (Lee, 2011: 204).

### **3.3 MOTIVATIONS OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS IN GENERAL**

The foreign fighter phenomenon has become increasingly popular in terrorism studies (Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>). Foreign fighters are defined here as ‘noncitizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflicts’ (Malet, 2015: 9). The high number of Europeans leaving their country to join the violent jihad in Syria has incentivised this interest (Borum & Fein, 2017). Academics from different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and history have taken interest in explaining this phenomenon and how they can account for the attraction of these foreign conflicts (Borum & Fein, 2017; Pécout, 2009). In the more recent years questions arose such as who are these foreign fighters (Weggemans et al., 2014), what motivates them (Borum & Fein, 2017; Malet, 2015), what threat do they pose (Reed, 2017), and how did this phenomenon develop over time (Coolsaet, 2016; Malet, 2010; Mendelsohn, 2011)?

One of the main conclusions that can be made from this fast-growing body of literature is that the ‘foreign fighter’ phenomenon is nothing new in Europe (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>; Coolsaet, 2016; Malet, 2015; Mendelsohn, 2011). However, the impact and new concerns that accompany the contemporary foreign fighter phenomenon is new (Bures, 2018). Before the specific case of the current foreign fighter wave to Syria and Iraq will be discussed, this section will give a broader context of the different historical cases of Europeans leaving to foreign conflicts and their different motivations.

#### **3.3.1 Who are they?**

Throughout time, many Europeans have travelled to a foreign conflict (Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>). Comparable to the different waves in terrorism, these Europeans were attracted to different aspects of various organisations and struggles.

The European foreign fighter phenomenon appeared as early as the 1850s and 1860s with the Roman Question (Harrison, 2007; Pécout, 2009; Sarlin, 2009). Europeans were mobilized to fight against the Italian Unificationists alongside troops supporting King Francis II or Pope Pius IX (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Harrison, 2007; Sarlin, 2009). Archives from that time admit that the cause of fighting for the plight of King Francis II attracted ‘the most cunning industrialists, the most eccentric dreamers, and the most dangerous madmen’ (Sarlin, 2009: 481). Others who travelled to Italy were devout Catholics and joined the pontifical Zouaves who fought for the temporal sovereignty of the ‘Holy See’ (Harrison, 2007: 274).

Some decades later Europeans and Americans joined the International Brigades to fight in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Coolsaet, 2016; Malet, 2010). Some fought against the fascist regime of General Franco, but others also fought alongside the Nationalists supporting Franco (Malet, 2010). People who travelled to Spain on their own account were usually young, middle-class and educated men (Baxell, 2014). This was before the formation of the International Brigades since their assistance and heavy recruitment efforts changed the profile to younger men of the working class (Baxell, 2014).

The Second World War also knew foreign fighters who joined the Waffen-SS or travelled to the Russian front (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Coolsaet, 2016). After the Second World War the foreign fighter phenomenon subsides and only few travelled to conflicts in other countries (Bakker & De Bont, 2016).

Although these different historical examples show that the foreign fighters are not a novelty, the phenomenon of jihadi foreign fighters that is more known today is relatively new (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Coolsaet, 2016; Medelsohn, 2011). The foreign fighters identifying their struggle as the ‘jihad’ originates from around the 1980s when people travelled to Afghanistan to fight off the Soviet troops (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; De Roy van Zuijdewijn & Bakker, 2014). After the turn of the century similar mobilizations appeared for conflicts in Iraq, Bosnia, and Somalia (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; De Roy van Zuijdewijn & Bakker, 2014; Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015; Neumann, 2006). Since the increased salience of the foreign fighters active in Syria and Iraq, the foreigners fighting in these earlier conflicts have been studied more as well. Neumann’s (2006) work on European jihadists for instance argues that there are no clear characteristics connecting the different groups of European jihadists over time. Yet, many Europeans in different jihadist networks have experienced ‘tensions in their personal lives’ or faced some kind of ‘identity crisis’ which they resolved by embracing the ideology of Salafi jihadism (Neumann, 2006: 73). Additionally, scholars have been invested in researching the positive relation between a criminal background and the vulnerability to the recruitment of jihadist groups (Basra, Neumann & Brunner, 2016; Piazza, 2006).

### **3.3.2 Motivations**

There is not one simple answer to ‘why people fight’ (Borum & Fein, 2017; Laqueur, 1977). Just as there is not one single pathway of becoming a foreign fighter or a static profile of the foreign fighter (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). Someone’s ideology, need for adventure, political grievances and socioeconomic situation appear to important factors in the choice of

becoming a foreign fighter (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). Some people cross borders to fight and retain a community with whom they share not necessarily nationality but an identity (Borum & Fein, 2017: 250). Others are motivated to fight for a cause of a belief such as a religion or a global ideology (Borum & Fein, 2017); Duyvesteyn & Peeters, 2015). Many others are attracted more by the opportunity to battle against their perceived enemy (Borum & Fein, 2017; Horgan, 2008; Neumann, 2006).

It is misleading to assume that ideology is the foundation of all conflicts with foreign fighters but it is just as misleading to ignore ideology altogether (Borum & Fein, 2017). Namely, a civil conflict that is framed as a part of a larger struggle over deep identity-based issues, such as an ideology, will attract many more foreign fighters (Borum & Fein, 2017). This is illustrated by the earlier mentioned historical cases of western foreign fighters.

People mobilized for the struggle of the Roman Question were assumed to be motivated primarily by their thirst for adventure, romanticism or they were depicted as psychologically unwell (Sarlin, 2009). However, one of the most important factors was the strong impact of the Italian Unification on conservative Catholic opinion (Pécout, 2009; Sarlin, 2009). The pontifical Zouaves supporting Pope Pius X were motivated by a deep religious inclination as the sovereignty of the papacy was of fundamental importance to Catholics worldwide (Harrison, 2007). People siding with the troops of King Francis II were also heavily involved in an ideological struggle reflecting the powerful European opposition against Nationalists (Sarlin, 2009). The struggle was against the ‘revolutionaries’ who were all deemed the same everywhere and their plans always ‘iniquitous’ (Sarlin, 2009: 482). This statement echoes the earlier mentioned argument of Horgan (2008): that people who become involved in violent activities need a particular enemy.

Others travelled to Italy by the notion of international friendship (Pécout, 2009). The ideological struggle dominated but this functioned only when it was combined with other factors, such as the socioeconomic situation of an individual or the attraction of exotic adventure (Pécout, 2009).

Another example of an ideological struggle that attracted many foreign fighters can be found in the Spanish Civil War. International volunteers were attracted to both sides of the conflict which were opposed in political ideological understandings (Malet, 2010; Baxell, 2014). Considering the terminology used by the opposing fronts: the struggle was fascism versus communism. Both sides used a defensive frame of ‘transnational identity under threat’ that was in need of protection (Malet, 2010: 104). The economic upheavals of the 1930s made class politics very salient throughout the world causing poor people to identify with the

struggles of other poor people. Consequentially, many perceived the struggle in Spain as an extension of their own struggle at home (Malet, 2010).

The process of globalization makes the transnationalisation of identities easier, therefore conflicts that are rooted in identity-based issues attract more foreign fighters (Borum & Fein, 2017). This development is supported by the development in jihadist conflicts that has drawn in many foreign fighters.

The motivations of jihadists foreign fighters are just as diverse as the foreign fighters in other conflicts. Vernaus (2010) reviewed interviews from more than 2000 foreign fighters detained in Guantanamo Bay. He concluded that all these foreign fighters were looking for an understanding of who they are, of what their purpose is, or their role in the world (Vernaus, 2010). They were all seeking for either revenge, status, identity or a thrill (Vernaus, 2010). This need for identity and purpose is also visible in the various conflicts that have led to a transnational-foreign-fighter movement that is also still apparent in Syria today.

The foreign fighters of today find their origin in the First Afghan War attracting thousands of Muslim foreign fighters under the notion of a defensive jihad (De Roy van Zuijdewijn & Bakker, 2014; Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). The support for the anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan shared a sense of purpose and created a transformation of militant Islam (Neumann, 2006). Soon the war in Afghanistan was framed as the fight for ‘an uncorrupted Islamic society’ and influenced the forthcoming conflicts in region (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). When the Soviets were defeated the foreign fighters needed a new sense of purpose and to continue protecting the faithful Muslims from infidels (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015).

The conflict in the Republic of Bosnia Herzegovina with the Muslim-led Bosnian government challenged by ethnic Serbs proved the conflict to continue the purpose (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). The situation of the Bosnian Muslims captured the attention of others elsewhere in the world, particularly in the Middle East (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). The first wave of foreign fighters were hence motivated by a notion of helping the oppressed population or a sense of religious duty (De Roy van Zuijdewijn & Bakker, 2014; Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). The second wave consisted jihadists who fought in Afghanistan and could not return to their former home thus continuing their fight in Bosnia (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015).

The Somalian conflict attracted some foreign fighters as the US-led offensive in Afghanistan made Somalia as possible new Al-Qaeda base (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). However, Somalia was not a welcoming place for foreign fighters who wanted to fight for the global jihad (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). The foreigners who did volunteer for the fight

were mainly members of the Somali Diaspora in the West and were motivated by ‘traditional nationalistic motives’ (De Roy van Zuijdewijn & Bakker, 2014).

The Second Afghan War had different waves of foreign fighter involvement (Stenersen, 2011). From 2001 to 2002, the foreign fighters were involved in an intense armed battle against the U.S. and its allies (Stenersen, 2011). However, due to internal struggles and ideological divisions between the local branches of the Al-Qaeda network, the foreign fighters pulled back to regroup outside of Afghanistan’s borders (Hegghammer, 2006; Stenersen, 2011). In 2005 foreign fighters became increasingly involved in offensive operations and the war in Afghanistan continued with a ‘steady trickle of foreign fighters’ (Duyvesteyn & Peeters, 2015).

Finally the Iraq War sparked a new support for Jihadist-Salafism (Neumann, 2006). Although the motivations of the foreign fighters were generally quite diverse and not all primarily motivated by the ideology of Jihadist-Salafism (Obaid & Cordesman, 2005). Some foreigners were forced to participate in the fight (Obaid & Cordesman, 2005). Some were driven by a moral outrage over suffering friends of families and others were more outraged by their own socioeconomic situation and motivated to combat the world order as they perceive it (Obaid & Cordesman, 2005; Roy, 2005). Some perceived the conflict as a new opportunity and a means to provide for their family (Obaid & Cordesman, 2005). However, generally the frustration with the incapable American-backed government that could not provide security or basic provisions was one of the greatest motivating factor (Borum & Fein, 2017; Obaid & Cordesman, 2005; Hewitt & Kelley-Moore, 2009; Neumann, 2006).

Sociological analysis shows that military occupation by U.S. forces causes a higher rate of jihadism compared to non-occupied countries (Hewitt & Kelley-Moore, 2009). The role of the U.S. as the ‘infidel occupier’ embodied the enemy that threatened the transnational identity of the Muslims. Also increasingly in Europe, the forceful invasion by Western forces of a country at the heart of the Muslim world seemed to confirm the notion that the ‘West is at war with Islam’ (Neumann, 2006: 75). Media images of occupations and mistreatments were spread to highlight the West’s ‘humiliation of Muslims’ and their aim to occupy Muslim land and loot their wealth (Borum & Fein, 2017: 259; Neumann, 2006: 76).

### **3.4 MOTIVATIONS OF SYRIA TRAVELLERS**

After the prodemocratic protests in March 2011 the first ‘foreign fighters’ emerged in Syria (Bakker & De Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>; Bakker, Paulussen & Entenmann, 2013). In the course of 2012, Syria had same percentage of foreign fighters compared to other

the earlier conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Iraq (Bakker et al., 2013). The group that travelled to Syria included individuals that joined the Free Syrian Army, Iranian troops, Hezbollah militias, and jihadist groups such as al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State (Bakker et al., 2013). The number of westerners in Syria grew substantially and fast, making Syria the number one jihadist destination in the world (Bakker et al., 2013).

This number one destination also made for more attention for foreign fighters and Syria travellers in academic research, policies and in society (Borum & Fein, 2017; Fangen & Kolas, 2016). Jihadist foreign fighters regard it as their ‘duty to participate in a jihad of the sword’ (Bakker et al., 2013: 2). However, as already mentioned several times before, not all foreigners travelling to Syria or Iraq were solely motivated to join a jihad of the sword. The Syria traveller phenomenon and their heterogeneous motivations will be addressed in the upcoming paragraphs.

### **3.4.1 Who are they?**

The high number of people travelling to Syria and Iraq compared to the numbers in the historical cases could mean that something is special about the Syrian civil war and the Syria travellers (Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015; Sinkkonen, 2015; Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Unfortunately, there is not one specific profile to the Syrian traveller regarding their motivations, background or characteristics (Van Ginkel, 2016). Bakker and De Bont (2016) did analyse 370 Dutch and Belgian fighters and support some general assumptions regarding characteristics of ‘jihadist foreign fighters’. This research showed that foreign fighters are relatively young with an average age of 23,5 years, that they have a migration background (46% have Moroccan parents), are usually part of the lower classes of society (60%), and circa 70% of the sample is married (Bakker & De Bont, 2016).

The ICCT report on the foreign fighters phenomenon in Europe analysed a larger sample of European foreign fighters and also derived some key characteristics (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). This report indicates that most European foreign fighters are young men between 18 and their mid-to-late twenties (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Some European countries deviated slightly from this average, reporting some underaged foreign fighters, or indicated that more than 50% of their contingent is older than 30 years (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). The number of female foreign fighters varies between 6% to 30% and some countries have notified that this number has grown recently (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Different from the results from Bakker and De Bont (2016), only half of the foreign fighters are married, with one Southern European country reporting a majority of unmarried foreign fighters (Van Ginkel et al., 2016).

The European Member States with the highest absolute number of foreign fighters are: France, Germany, United Kingdom, Belgium, Sweden, Austria and The Netherlands. Relative to capita per million the top seven consists of: Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Denmark, France, Finland and The Netherlands (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Moreover, most of the foreign fighters originate from a large city or peripheral suburbs (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). The ICCT report lists Aarhus, Copenhagen and Odense in Denmark, Gottenburg in Sweden, Brussels or Antwerp in Belgium, and Delft, Zoetermeer, Arnhem and The Hague in The Netherlands as examples (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Many foreign fighters converted to Islam before they departed (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). For two Eastern European countries 100% of their foreign fighters are converts but these countries do have very low contingency (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Generally, in European countries with a higher contingency, between 6% and 23% of the European foreign fighters are converts (Van Ginkel et al., 2016).

Like the historical cases of foreign fighters, the Syria traveller often identifies with a transnational identity that connects him or her to the foreign community and creates the perceived need to support that specific community when they are under threat (Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>; Horgan, 2008; Malet, 2010). The conflict in Syria and Iraq seems to be focussed on the transnational identity of the *Ummah* – the international community of Muslims (Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>; Borum & Fein, 2017; Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). Most of the current foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq are fighting under the banner of Jihadist-Salafism (Bakker & De Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015<sup>a</sup>). But just as the prior conflict in Iraq that attracted foreign fighters, not all of the Syria travellers are motivated by this sub-branch of Salafism.

### **3.4.2 Motivations**

This transnational identity of Jihadist-Salafism makes for a dominant assumption of policymakers, scholars and the media, that foreign fighters join the violent jihad in Syria and Iraq because of they are ideologically motivated (Coolsaet, 2016). Nevertheless, as argued in previous section on foreign fighters, recent research has found that personal motivations such as socio-economic background, social network and feelings of injustice also play a big role in becoming a foreign fighter (Bakker & Grol, 2015; Borum & Fein, 2017; Coolsaet, 2016; Weggemans et al., 2014).

The motivations of Syria travellers are comprised out of both push and pull factors (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Borum & Fein, 2017; Coolsaet, 2016). Recent studies on motivations of Syria travellers have been stressing the importance of the push factors. Some argue that this

'down-plays' the religious and ideological motivations of these travellers (Dawson & Amarasingam, 2017). Yet, another reason for the emphasis on push factors could be because these can be addressed more adequately by policy makers and professionals. The push factors are often dominated by feelings of frustration, injustice and perceived discrimination at home (Bakker & De Bont, 2016).

These feelings of frustration, exclusion and perceived absence of belonging are also present among the Belgian foreign fighters (Coolsaet, 2016; Van Ginkel et al., 2016). The struggle in Syria can provide people with a new purpose in life, a specific role and sometimes a possible outlet for their anger (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). The same can also be implied for the Austrian contingency of which is known that the majority of foreign fighters are second-generation immigrants of Chechen origin (Van Ginkel et al., 2016).

The Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET) points out a wide range of motivations for their departed foreign fighters. PET (2013) explains that some are motivated to help their fellow Muslims in Syria and do humanitarian work. Others want to topple the oppressive Assad regime but for some the establishment of an Islamic State and achieving martyrdom is the primary motivation (PET, 2013). Yet, some Danish Syria travellers search for the excitement and adventure of a violent conflict (PET, 2013).

Syria travellers originating from the UK are also not confined to one homogeneous group regarding motivation (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). It appears that multiple underlying factors play a role in the decision of travelling to Syria but they are often related to a weak social status that make individuals more vulnerable to recruitment efforts (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Maher (2013) observed that the identification with the transnational identity of the Ummah is a key driver as Muslims feel obligated to defend their 'brothers and sisters' in Syria. Also he mentions that some are motivated to topple Assad as he is deemed guilty of committing atrocities against Syrian civilians (Maher, 2013).

One of the largest foreign fighter contingents in Syria is the French contingent (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Their motivations are not easy to gauge but many of them had an existing criminal record (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Also many women and entire families were motivated to settle in the Caliphate (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). This wish to live as a true Muslim in the Caliphate is also present in the German foreign fighter contingent (Van Ginkel et al., 2016). Moreover, many German Syria travellers are motivated to fight for the Islamist cause (Heinke & Raudszus, 2015).

Three categories of push factors can be distinguished in the case of Dutch and Belgian Syria travellers (Bakker and De Bont, 2016). First, some Syria travellers grew frustrated with

their own socioeconomic position or of the position of the group they identify themselves with (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). Second, people have the desire escape the Western (sinful) lifestyle, their responsibilities, and sometimes even debts or a prison sentence (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). Third, some wanted to break away from their mundane and meaningless life and chase the exotic excitement of war (Bakker & De Bont, 2016).

These findings are similar to Coolsaet's (2016) 'fourth wave of foreign fighters'. He argues that the Syria travellers are distinct from their predecessors in earlier conflicts since their motivations are often grounded in personal motives (Coolsaet, 2016). The sudden radicalisation process that is also highlighted in other case-studies is a striking characteristic for this new group of foreign fighters ((Bakker & Grol, 2015; Coolsaet, 2016; Weggemans et al., 2014). Coolsaet (2016) makes a strong case for personal motivations, socio-economical push factors and steers away from the idea that foreign fighters are primarily motivated by religious and ideological ideas. He argues that the push factors are found in the current increase in teenage angst, feelings of pessimism, inequalities in Europe and the strong feeling of estrangement and exclusion in society (Coolsaet, 2016). Peer pressure and romanticizing the future opportunity in Syria has given a great incentive to the young foreign fighters that are part of so called 'no future subculture' (Coolsaet, 2016)

The pull factors contributing to the motivations of Syria travellers are just as important as the push factors and they appear to be related to the different periods of the Syrian Civil War (Bakker & De Bont, 2016).

In the first period of the conflict, when the Syrian civil war broke out after the revolts, people were motivated to help the innocent Syrian population against the oppressive regime of Assad (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). This motivation is reflected in one of the cases in the study of Bakker and Grol (2015) where a Dutch boy is incited to join the fight in Syria because he sees the Syrian population struggling. The international community seemed indifferent to the plight of the Syrian people and some people grew angry and frustrated by this (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Coolsaet, 2016). You could argue that this motivation is more related to helping people and has therefore a humanitarian inclination.

As the war progressed the religious aspects of the conflict emerged, moving to the second pull factor. The rise of jihadist groups created a new motivation that was grounded in ideological and religious ideas (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). This is the most dominantly known motivation by policymakers and the media (Coolsaet, 2016). The rapid ascent of the Islamic State and the combined promise of the Caliphate increased the appeal of the Syrian conflict (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). Almost needless to say this religious motivation was found in

many studies regarding foreign fighters (Bakker & Grol, 2015; Dawson & Amarasingam, 2017; Weggemans et al., 2014). Many people were attracted to the ideology of Jihadist-Salafism as it gave them the sense to 'truly fight for their religion' (Bakker & Grol, 2015: 4). This change in the nature of the conflict also meant that some of the earlier Syrian travellers returned home as they could not identify with the conflict anymore (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Bakker & Grol, 2015).

When the conflict became a known and popular jihadist battlefield, the fight in Syria became ascribed as a righteous cause, something right to do – now or in the future (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Bakker & Grol, 2015). Some Syria traveller by that time could either be religiously motivated or socially motivated (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). Some travellers were attracted to the idea of living under a Shariah regime and others were searching for an identity, a sense of belonging, or respect (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). One of the cases in the study of Bakker and Grol (2015) can be identified in this category. A native Dutch boy was fascinated by Islam as it gave him a structure and a sense of belonging to a community. After he converted he recalls his peers telling him that fighting in Syria is a righteous cause for Islam as there were Muslims in need (Bakker & Grol, 2015).

Another pull factor is the personal motivation grounded in the idea that Syria poses new opportunities (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Coolsaet, 2016; Weggemans et al., 2014). In the later stages of the conflict it seems that the ideological and religious motivations have waned, making place for more personal motivations as adventure, excitement, and an opportune future (Coolsaet, 2016). Syria can form an escape for troubled people (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Basra et al., 2016; Coolsaet, 2016; Weggemans et al., 2014). Especially Coolsaet (2016) supports this idea; he argues that Syria is seen as an opportunity since ISIS provides decent salary, employment possibilities, housing, power over others and an outlet for frustration. Peer pressure and propaganda of recruiters also play a big role as the situation in Syria is romanticised and travelling to Syria is considered 'hot' (Coolsaet, 2016: 41). Two cases in the study of Bakker and Grol (2015) exemplifies this motivation. A troubled boy who has dropped out of school, deals drugs and has no bright future prospects is eager to leave for Syria. However, he has little 'real knowledge' about Islamic theology and the conflict in Syria in general (Bakker & Grol, 2015: 6). After this boy is prevented from going to Syria he broke with the practices and traditions of the Islam and resumed his life without future prospects in the Netherlands (Bakker & Grol, 2015). Another case is a Dutch girl that was struggling with her Muslim identity searching for a sense of belonging but was not troubled in any other way (Bakker & Grol, 2015). She got in contact with a boy who had travelled to Syria and he

romanticized the idea of the life in Syria, agreeing to arrange her travels to Syria and then marry her (Bakker & Grol, 2015). After she was prevented to travel she reflected that she had made a mistake in wanting to go to Syria for a better future (Bakker & Grol, 2015).

### **3.5 FINDINGS**

Considering the recent literature on the motivations of terrorists, foreign fighters and Syria travellers in particular a distinction can be made between five different ways Syria travellers could perceive Syria relating to their motivations for travelling to Syria. The motivation on which Syria travellers act are categorized in: humanitarianism; political activism; religious extremism; religious duty; and opportunism. The five categories summarized in this section will be the leading analytical framework for the upcoming deductive frame analysis of Dutch newspapers. The five different ‘frames’ are listed below in expected chronological order relating to the timeline of the Syrian conflict. Following the reasoning of Bakker & De Bont (2016) it is expected that in the first period of the conflict humanitarianism is most likely to be the motivation of Syria travellers developing into more religious motivations and finally personal motivations rooted in opportunism and adventurism.

*Humanitarianism:* People perceive Syria as an oppressed state that needs help or even saving. This frame is expected to be salient at the start of the Syrian civil war and it refers to the motivation to help the struggling and suffering innocent people in Syria. People show frustrations due to the paralysis of the international community and its perceived indifference to the plight of the Syrian people. In the early stages of the conflict many people were appalled by the atrocities Assad committed to the Syrian population. Many wanted to do something in order to help the people of Syria, their motivations were thus rooted in a humanitarian commitment.

*Political activism:* People perceive Syria as a radical political cause. This frame is also expected to be salient in the earlier stages of the Syrian Civil War but this frame relates to a more politically inclined motivation rather than humanitarian. People are motivated to travel to Syria in order to topple an oppressive regime and take part in the civil war before the religious and sectarian aspect became dominant in Syria. People who are politically motivated to travel to Syria are expected to return when the pro-democratic demonstrations and efforts turn into a dominantly religious conflict. These people return since they will not be able to identify with the conflict in Syria anymore.

*Religious extremism:* People perceive Syria as the promise of the Caliphate and as the start of an Islamic state. This frame is expected to become increasingly salient around 2013 when

the religious aspects of the conflict in Syria became more apparent. People are attracted to the religious aspects of the civil war and the fast ascent of different jihadist groups. People are increasingly motivated to join IS or other jihadist troops under the banner of Jihadi-Salafism. The promise of the establishment of the Caliphate through violence, the rejection of western values and the wish to eliminate infidel regimes are important aspects in this frame. *Religious duty*: People perceive Syria as a righteous cause. This frame is expected to become increasingly salient over time and most likely around 2014. Around that time not only fighters are attracted to the fight or only religious extremists that reject all values associated with the West but also people who identify themselves as purist believers and true Muslims. In this frame people see travelling to Syria as a duty to help their Muslim brothers in need and support the international Ummah in general. Some people are motivated to leave as they want to live under a Sharia regime and permanently settle in the Caliphate with their family. The motivation of these people is religiously and socially inclined as they search for belonging and social inclusion within a religious context. It usually means the traveller is motivated through its social connections that are acquainted with the life in Syria.

*Opportunism/Adventurism*: People perceive Syria as a new opportunity. This frame is expected to be most salient after 2015 but it is also possible that this frame will be used throughout the entire conflict. The *opportunism* frame relates to personal motives such as a search for excitement and adventure, for prospects of a better future, or for a sense of purpose and belonging in life. Discourses of the ‘jihadi-is-cool attitude’ and ‘being radical is fun’ are included in this category. People who are motivated to escape their former life and responsibilities are also applicable to this opportunism frame. This category also includes people that have fought in different conflicts and are travelling to fight for pleasure, interpreted as a need for adventure and violent excitement.

# **CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF DUTCH NEWSPAPERS**

## **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is devoted to the frame analysis of two newspapers in Dutch society. First the general assumptions and the operationalisation of research will shortly be recapitulated. Then the results from the frame analysis will be presented by the hand of various tables. Finally, in 4.4 the findings of the frame analysis will be further discussed and interpreted.

## **4.2 RECAP RESEARCH METHOD**

A frame matrix is used to guide the frame analysis of the news articles. This frame matrix is based on the notion of ‘media packages’ (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) or ‘frame packages’ (Van Gorp, 2007) which include a structure of framing devices and reasoning devices that will promote the interpretation of a certain topic (Berbers et al., 2016). Using the notion of frame packages will help identify the frame presented in the articles and will help to structurally conduct the analysis (Van Gorp, 2007).

Framing devices are metaphors, depictions and stereotypes that will suggest how one should think about an issue (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Reasoning devices justify what should be done about the issue and refer to causal roots, consequences and moral claims (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). These different devices are brought together in a frame matrix that represent the different frames and the characterizing devices noticeable in the media discourse (Van Gorp, 2007).

The completed frame matrix that is used for this research can be found below in table 2. The objective of the analysis is to explore what frames were used in the articles, which frames were most salient in general, and if the salience of frames changed throughout the years of the Syrian conflict.

Reasoning devices			Framing devices				
Frame	Definition of problem/situation	Cause	Consequences	Possible solutions	Moral values	Archetypes/myths	Catchphrases and lexical choices
Humanitarianism	Idealist choose to help the population in Syria	Disgusted with atrocities committed in Syria and desire to help the population in sight of international political paralysis	The experience will have a formative effect on their personality and will make them who they are	Situation not problematized	Humanitarianism; secularism; idealist commitment, and bravery	Tragic hero	...Shocked by the horrific images of the war and want to take action. ...Motivated by sense of justice ...Sense of inactivity ...Morally inclined to help out suffering people
Political activism	Political inclination to topple oppressive regime and take part in civil war before religious and sectarian aspect became dominant	Holds the Assad regime accountable for the civil war, wants to help with the political struggle for democracy and freedom	The political activists become frustrated with the progression of the conflict and become disconnected to the conflict when religious and sectarian aspects become more dominant	Situation not really problematized	Secularism; political idealism; rational	Political idealist	...Excited by pro-democracy demonstrations ...Want to topple Assad regime ...Unable to identify with struggle when religious aspects come in ...Politically motivated; freedom for all

Table 2 – Frame matrix

Continued on next page

Reasoning devices			Framing devices				
Frame	Definition of problem/situation	Cause	Consequences	Possible solutions	Moral values	Archetypes/myths	Catchphrases and lexical choices
Religious extremism	People join ranks of extremist troops to fight for the radical Islam and for an Islamic State in Syria	Reject values associated with democracy and liberalism (the west) and try to spread their extremist views by joining jihadist groups and to establish the promised Caliphate	Likelihood that an terrorist attack will occur in the Netherlands (or EU) has become substantially greater than before	Restrictive measures against radical organizations and increased surveillance in Muslim communities to stop them from leaving/returning	Rejecting democracy and the west in general in favour of an Islamic state and associated values	Myth of scapegoat; Religious extremist; Terrorist (motivated by religion)	...Syria is the promise of the Caliphate. ...Motivated by the religious aspects of the civil war. ...Eager to fight under ISIS against infidels Labels: jihadi terrorists, radical lunatics, Salafists
Religious sense of duty	Muslims decide to help their brothers and sisters in Syria as part of their religious duty, or want to live as a 'pure/true Muslim' in the Caliphate	People are motivated by the suffering of their brothers and sisters of the international Ummah and perceived disrespect and threat from the west to Islam not feeling at home in EU/NL	The fighters will possibly have the honour of sacrificing themselves for their faith and support the Ummah in the process, as well as get to paradise. Others have possibility to live as a true Muslim supporting the Ummah	Situation presented as the solution to the problem of demise of the Islam due to the west and secularization of the Ummah	Dedication to religion; Purity of faith; Sense of duty to help out brothers and sisters of the Ummah; Marginalized in the west	The martyr; Purist believer; Purist believer	...Travelling to Syria is seen as a duty ...Helping my brothers in need. ...Motivated to live under Sharia law ...Religiously and socially inclined as they search for belonging within religious context

Table 2 – Frame matrix

Continued on next page

Reasoning devices		Framing devices					
Frame	Definition of problem/situation	Cause	Consequences	Possible solutions	Moral values	Archetypes/ myths	Catchphrases and lexical choices
Opportunism (/Adventurism)	People with little prospects and little feeling of purpose try and find better opportunities in Syria. Naïve adventurers choose to go to Syria to fight (with whomever)	People are frustrated with own future prospects and social position and long for better opportunities or adventure and are ignorant for the consequences of their actions. These people know little about Islam	Their romantic views of the civil war and bravery will be shattered as they are confronted with reality	Supportive measures to make people less susceptible to the romanticization of the conflict.	Youthful ignorance; Naivety; Future less; Seeking for opportunities they do not have in NL	Naive youths; Troubled people	... Troubled with own future prospects ...Romanticize the situation in Syria ...Longing for adventure to break with mundane existence in NL Labels: Opportunity seekers; Daredevils; Pop-jihad; Jihad is cool

Table 2 – Frame matrix

The frame matrix presents the five frames that are searched for in the news articles; the *humanitarianism*; *political activism*; *religious extremism*; *religious duty*; and *opportunism* frame. These frames are inductively taken from the literature review of scholarly work on the motivations of foreign fighters and Syria travellers in chapter three.

During the frame analysis other frames became apparent which were not included in the frame matrix on first account. The two other frames, although not necessarily aimed at explaining the motivations of a Syria traveller but more to promote certain reasoning devices, are included in the analysis: the *victim* frame and the *terrorism* frame. Table 3 presents the additions to the frame matrix.

The frame of the victim already shimmered through in the academic literature when discussing the young Syria travellers who were motivated by opportunism and adventurism as they often were not well informed about the real situation in Syria. Yet, the frame of victim regularly coincided with psychiatric problems and is thus often used as an excuse rather than a motivation.

The archetype of ‘the terrorists’ can be related to the religious extremism frame when it refers to terrorist activity motivated by religious aspects and the rejection of western values. However, in some cases the frame of terrorism is used without elaborating on the motivations, characteristics or situation, other than that Syria travellers are a danger to national security. Encountering this frame does not determine whether the Syria traveller was motivated by humanitarian inclinations, opportunism or religious aspects. This frame is included in the analysis since it portrays a certain picture of the Syria traveller, namely that they supposedly all travel to Syria to fight and are dangerous upon their return.

Reasoning devices		Framing devices					
Frame	Definition of problem/situation	Cause	Consequences	Possible solutions	Moral values	Archetypes/myths	Catchphrases and lexical choices
<b>Victim</b>	Young people are manipulated to go Syria by religious extremists, some to fight, some to marry a jihadist, some to 'help'	Youngsters are susceptible to brainwashing techniques of the recruiters because of their troubled background	The young are exploited when arriving in Syria and not allowed to leave	Supportive measures to make youngsters less susceptible to the extremist rhetoric and better support for troubled youths	Abused and manipulated. Easy prey.	The victim	... he was forced to fight ... he tried to escape ...the recruiter poisoned my child with extremist ideas
<b>Terrorism</b>	People who have travelled are dangerous irrespective of their motivations to travel	People who have resided in Syria are traumatized, battle-hardened and have received military training	Returning Syria travellers are dangerous to national security as they could execute a terrorist attack	Restrictive measures regarding returnees	Battle-hardened; Violent; Dangerous to everyone	The terrorist	Terrorist

Table 3 – Frame matrix with the two additional frames Victim and Terrorism

In the frame analysis every paragraph in the article is studied to find if it puts forward a particular frame. In the first round of analysis the paragraphs are studied for the present framing devices (the lexical choices, stereo- and archetypes) that set the frame. The second round comprises of more interpretative reading to find the reasoning devices within the paragraphs. The third round of analysis is matching the right frame from the frame matrix to the paragraph.

To find relevant results it must be determined which frame is the most salient frame in the article. This salient frame is the most predominantly used frame in the article and is increased by placement, repetitions or association with cultural symbols (De Vreese, 2012; Entman, 1993, Van Gorp, 2007). Counting the number of times a certain frame is used in an article will help find the most noticeable, or salient, frame in the entire article. Treating every mentioning of the frame as equally salient will give a distorted view of what frame is noticed by the audience and will risk misinterpreting the results (Entman, 1993).

#### *Data collection*

As explained in the methodological section of this thesis two Dutch newspapers are selected for the deductive frame analysis: *NRC Handelsblad* and *De Telegraaf*. Newspaper articles published in 2011 to 2017 were collected to find if the developments of the Syrian conflict affects the frames used in the Dutch media.

To cover an entire year, one article for every two months, per year, per newspaper was analysed. This would make for 42 articles per newspaper and 84 articles in total. As already anticipated in the research design it proved to be difficult to find relevant article before 2013 in the two newspapers as the ‘Syria traveller’ was not a popular or problematized issue in The Netherlands. This is the reason why for 2011 no relevant articles were found and for 2012 only a total of five relevant articles were found. Therefore a total of 65 articles were studied in the frame analysis.

The article selection was done in a structural and repeatable manner. The article selection is based on a keyword search in the LexisNexis database, picking the ‘most relevant’ results for every two months. For every search the three most relevant articles were picked as some of the first articles would contain a lot of keywords but would not be relevant to the topic of Dutch Syria travellers. In that case, the second most relevant, and in some cases the third most relevant article, would be used for the frame analysis.

### 4.3 FINDINGS

The peaks of news coverage about Syria travellers, jihadists and other related news can be viewed in Figure 3 below. The figure shows a clear peak in news coverage around 2014 and in lesser terms in 2015. The period before 2013 show little reporting on the issue as the magnitude of the Syria travellers issue was not fully in scope. Figure 3 shows that for 2011 and 2012 there were still some results that came up with the power search in LexisNexis yet this is mainly due to keywords such as ‘Syrië’, ‘Syrisch’, ‘Syrische’ and ‘Jihadist’.

An example of such a case is an article in NRC Handelsblad (2011) with the title “*Niks jihad, Samir ging op vakantie*” (No jihad, Samir went on holiday). This article was selected as it seemed to be related to the topic of the research. However, this article was about the court ruling of Samir S. that allegedly prepared a terrorist attack in Antwerp and was later recruited for the jihad in Chechnya. Another example is an article in De Telegraaf (2012) titled “*Revolutie Syrië gekaapt; Moslimstrijders spelen dictator in de kaart*” (Syrian revolution high-jacked; Muslim fighters help the dictator). Although this article contained many keywords it was actually about the presence of jihadists, not necessarily ‘foreign fighters’, in Syria and how they affect the civil war in Syria in relation to their goal of toppling the Assad regime. These kind of articles are included in the figure below as it still represents the overall news coverage on Syria, jihadists and the Dutch Syria travellers.

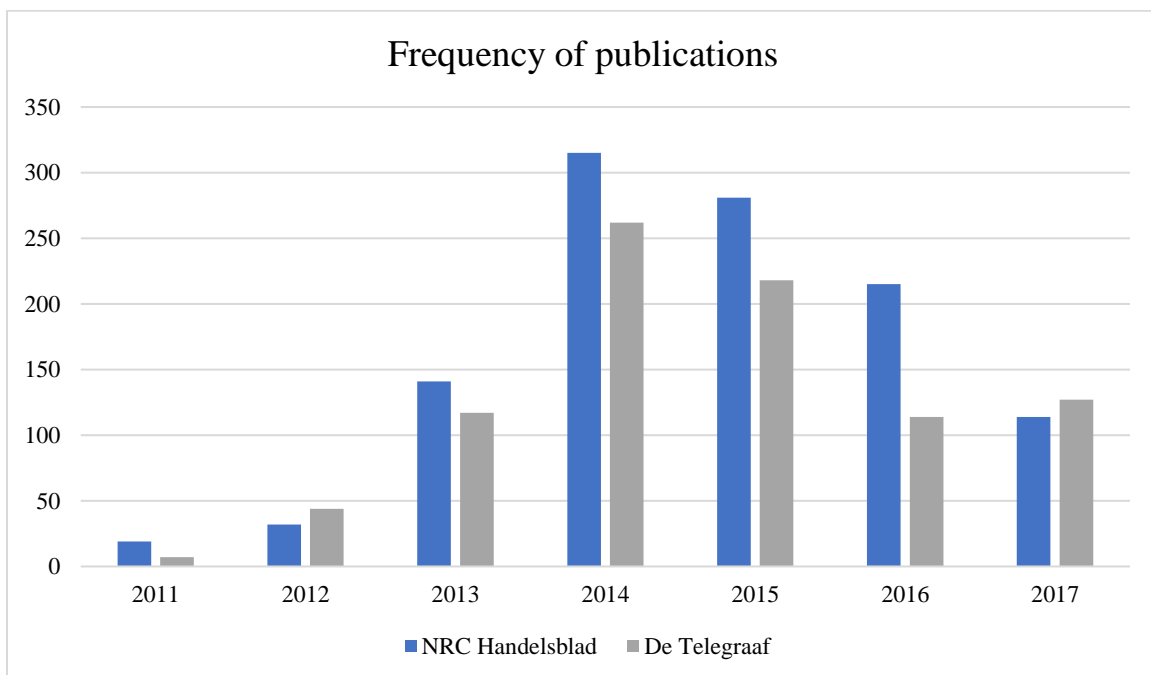


Figure 3 – Frequency of publications over time in NRC Handelsblad and De Telegraaf

Figure 4 shows the most salient frames used in the total article sample of both newspapers. It shows that the *religious extremism* frame is the dominant frame in the Dutch media with 43% salience of the total article sample. Both the *opportunism* frame and the later added *terrorism* frame were the salient frames in 17% of the total article sample.

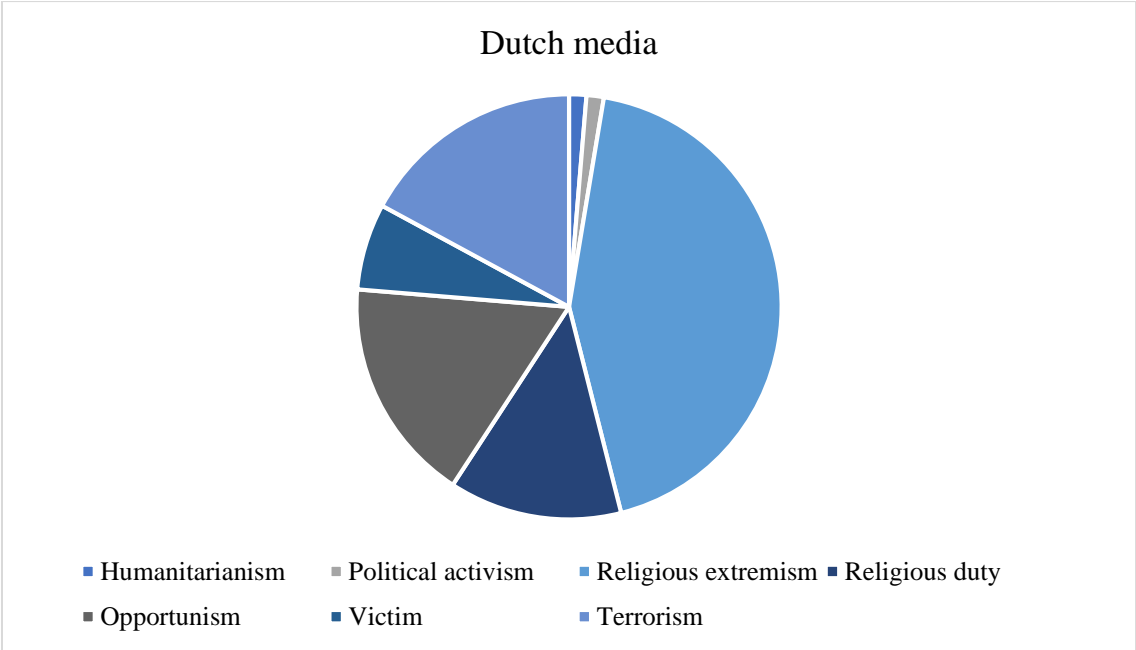


Figure 4 – Salient frames in the Dutch media

Interestingly, the individual newspapers do not have the same share of salient frames in their articles. The results for both newspapers are visualized in Figure 5 with the two pie charts.

The *religious extremism* frame continues to be the predominant salient frame in the article sample of NRC Handelsblad. When reporting about Dutch Syria travellers 51% of the articles put forth the *religious extremism* frame. De Telegraaf also uses *religious extremism* as the salient frame for most of its articles, namely, 37%. Also, 22% of the articles in the sample of De Telegraaf have the *opportunism* or *terrorism* frame as salient frame. From this sample it seems that De Telegraaf puts forth a more balanced view of the different frames compared to NRC Handelsblad.

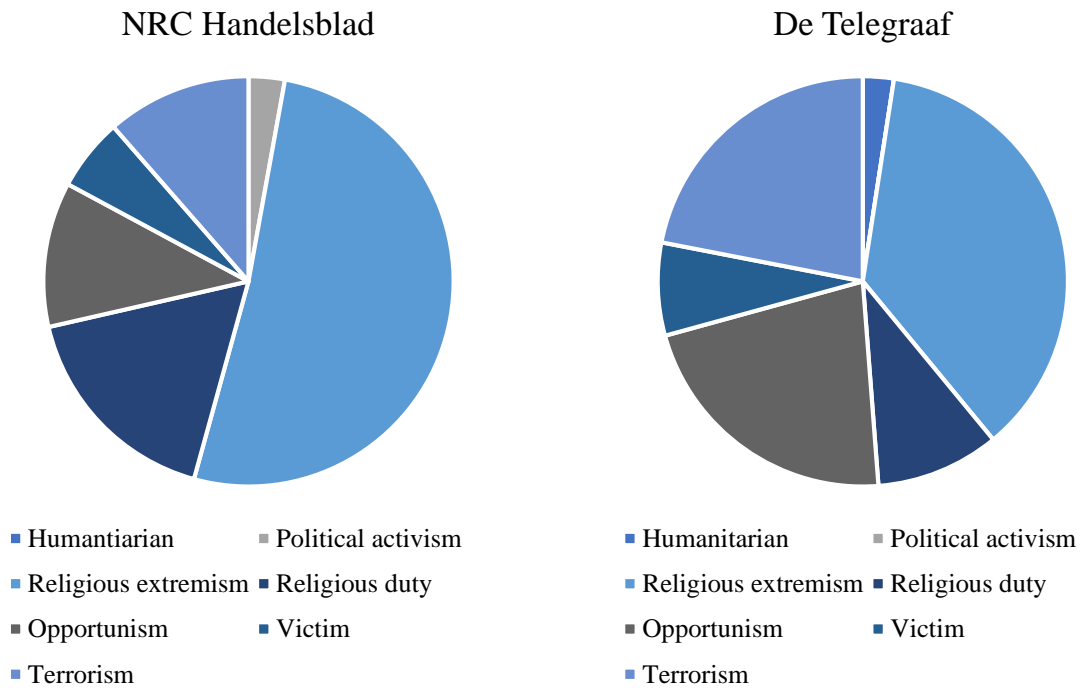


Figure 5 – Most salient frames of NRC Handelsblad and De Telegraaf

This research also aims to explore the development of frames salience over time and if the progression of the civil war in Syria affects the way the Dutch media reports on Dutch Syria travellers and their heterogeneous motivations. Figure 6 gives an overview of the salient frames in the Dutch media and the development of the salience of each frame.

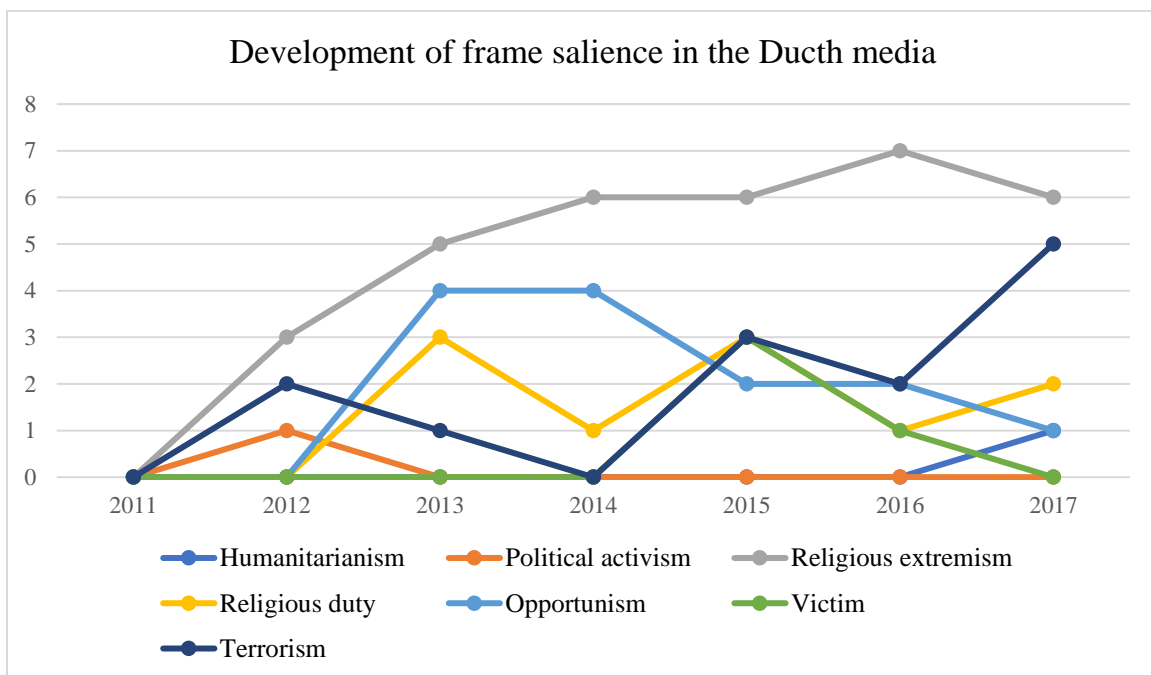


Figure 6 – Development of frame salience - NRC Handelsblad and De Telegraaf combined

Figure 6 shows that the *religious extremism* frame did increase in salience over time and the *terrorism* frame does also show an increasing trend starting around 2015. Interesting is to detect the rise in the *opportunism* frame, which is a lot earlier than expected. Around 2015 there is a peak in the salience of the *victim* frame which then slowly decreases again. The salience of the *religious duty* frame can be characterized as fairly stable but also a lot less salient than anticipated. The salience of the *political activism* frame has a small increase around 2012. A more peculiar finding is the small increase of the *humanitarianism* frame at the end of the timeline, around 2017.

Just as for the overall frame salience, the development of the salient frames per newspaper are dissimilar. Figure 7 shows the development in NRC Handelsblad and Figure 8 shows the results of De Telegraaf.

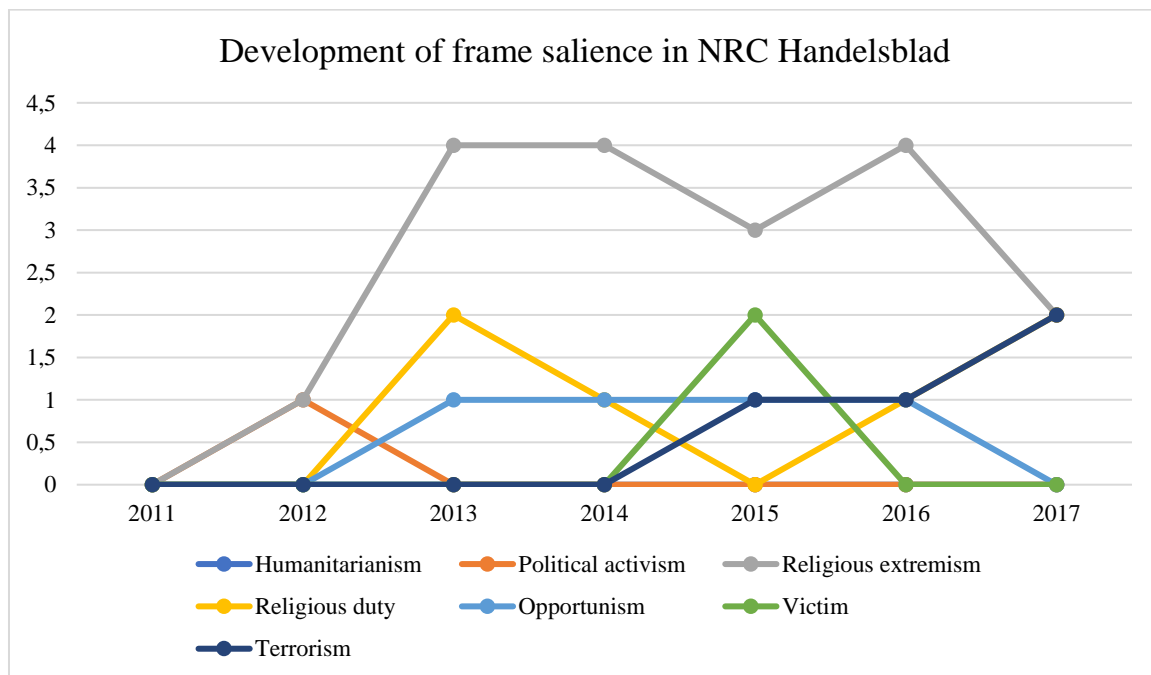


Figure 7 – Development of frame salience in NRC Handelsblad

In NRC Handelsblad the constant salience of the *religious extremism* frame is noticeable, which was already discovered in the pie charts of the salient frames in the NRC Handelsblad. The frame of the *religious duty* peaked around 2013 and then decreased again. Just as presented in Figure 6, the *political activism* frame peaked around 2012. The *opportunity* frame stayed almost constant since 2013 with a medium salience in the news articles of the NRC Handelsblad. The *terrorism* frame increase after 2014 as also seen earlier in figure 6.

The *victim* frame peaked around 2015 but was not salient in other years. The *humanitarianism* frame was not salient in the article sample of NRC Handelsblad.

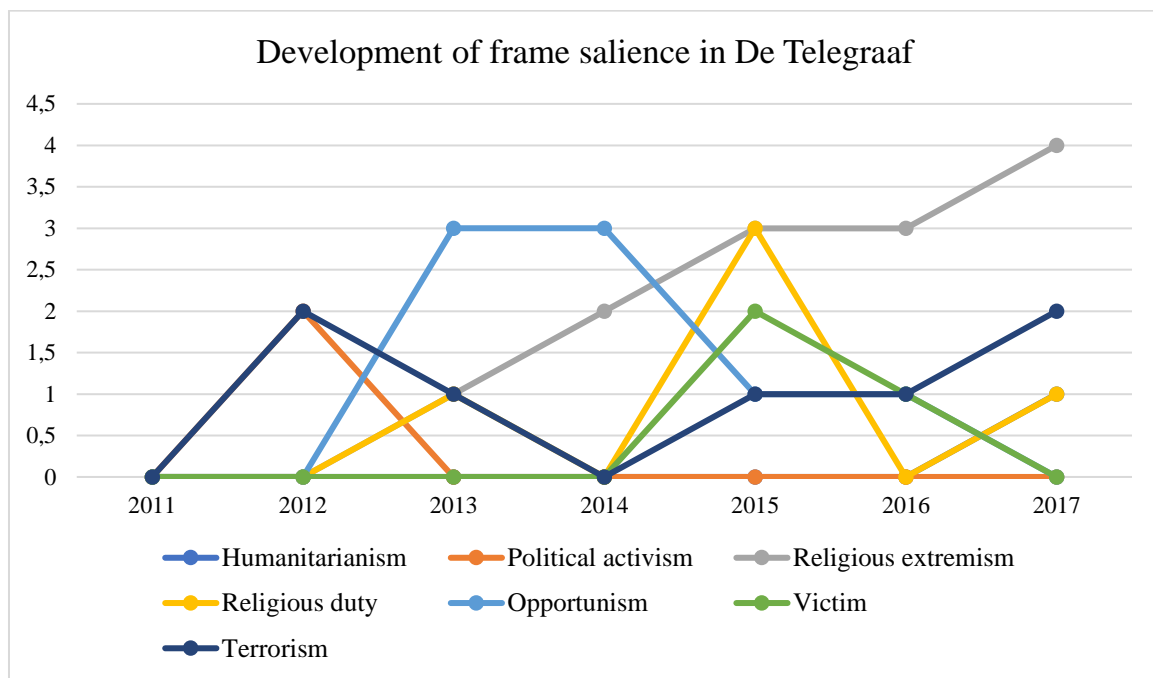


Figure 8 – Development of frame salience in De Telegraaf

The articles of De Telegraaf show a clear increase of the use of the *religious extremism* frame since 2012. Around 2013 and 2014 the *opportunism* frame has a high salience in articles of De Telegraaf. The *religious duty* frame peaked around 2015 and the *political activism* frame shows a clear peak around 2012. However, strange is that in 2017 there is a minor increase in salience for the *humanitarianism* frame in 2017 which was also apparent in Figure 6. In Figure 8 this increase is blocked by the same increase of the *religious duty* frame from 2016 to 2017. Just as in NRC Handelsblad the *victim* frame was most salient around 2015 in De Telegraaf. Lastly, the *terrorism* frame in De Telegraaf increased in salience after 2014 just as it did for NRC Handelsblad. However, this frame also peaked earlier in 2012 before decreasing again in salience.

## **4.4 INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.4.1 General differences**

The prominent difference between the two newspapers is the style of NRC Handelsblad and De Telegraaf. The overall style differences between the newspapers was one of the reasons why they were picked for the research so it was already anticipated.

The units of analysis in the frame analysis were the paragraphs in the articles and whereas some paragraphs do not include any frame, most of them do. The articles in NRC Handelsblad were often longer – usually around 1500 words – where articles in De Telegraaf are generally quite short – usually around 500 words. NRC Handelsblad also uses more background information in their articles and many different frames in one story. De Telegraaf uses different frames in one article although less variation compared to NRC Handelsblad since the language and structure of De Telegraaf articles is more direct. The different frames used in the longer articles of NRC Handelsblad could be accounted for by the previously mentioned ‘balance norm’ that requires journalists to present competing opinions equally in the news by quoting advocates with clashing perspectives in their article (Berbers et al., 2016). However, often these competing narratives were not as equally presented as the salient frame.

The style in reporting and language also affects the framing analysis. De Telegraaf, for instance, uses many stereo- and archetypes and framing devices such as strong language. NRC uses less strong language and more nuanced framing devices but more reasoning devices. This difference became already clear in the process of data selection as it was more difficult to select relevant articles for NRC Handelsblad since many of them focused on policies regarding Syria travellers or counterterrorism using a lot reasoning devices instead of telling the story of the Syria traveller.

### **4.4.2 News coverage**

As mentioned before news articles of 2011 and 2012 that did show up in the results of the databased with the keyword search did not reveal any relevant information about Dutch Syria travellers, Dutch jihadists or their motivations. This relevance is important to note, was due to the fact that the phenomenon of Syria travellers was not yet known or in any case not problematized.

The first known case of a Dutch Syria traveller was reported around 2013. Others went before him but people were not aware of the situation or their intentions. As seen in the results, the salience and awareness of the issue grew substantially after 2013.

The Syria travellers, jihadism and foreign fighters were most popular around 2014 and, to a lesser extent, 2015. Coverage reached its peak in 2014 which is logical considering that a lot more Dutch citizens had decided to travel to Syria.

After 2014/2015 the ‘popularity’ of the issue subsided a little. Many of the articles after 2015 were not necessarily anymore about the Syria travellers but more focussed on the returnees and how to manage the possible threat they posed for national security. These articles still included pieces with information about the motivations of their journey to Syria.

#### **4.4.3 Salient frames in the total article sample**

The finding that 43% of the total sample have the *religious extremism* frame as most salient frame is in line with the expectations. Considering the elevated jihadist activity in Syria it is not unusual that the *religious extremism* frame takes centre stage. The *religious duty* frame, on the other hand, is a lot less salient in the sample than was anticipated. Possible explanation can be that the *religious extremism* and *religious duty* frame are different but only with a slight nuance and often the religious extremism is more dominant.

Two other frames scored high on salience within the sample, namely *opportunism* (17%) and *terrorism* (17%). The *opportunism* frame is used when people are motivated by the romanticisation of the situation and life in Syria since their own future prospects or opportunity look less appealing, this frame is also used when youngsters are excited to embark on an adventure by fighting in Syria. The *opportunism* frame is one that is prescribed to young people with troubled backgrounds and with a criminal past. The *terrorism* frame appears to be used often in the sample when discussing Syria travellers but most commonly when discussing the possible threat emanating from returnees. The salience can possibly be accounted for the increased news coverage on policies regarding returnees in the recent years.

A lot less salient is the *victim* frame with 7% and the *humanitarianism*, and *political activism* frames with only 1% of salience in the articles. The *victim* frame was used many times within the articles but often as a nuance to counter the stronger frames. The *victim* frame was frequently paired with the *opportunism* frame and when discussing women and girls travelling to Syria.

The reason why the *humanitarian* and *political activism* frame is not that salient could be because no relevant 2011 and little 2012 articles were analysed. If these articles were in the sample it could be that this frame was more prominent in the overall sample. However, this is all speculation and the fact that there were no relevant stories on Syria travellers with *humanitarian* and *political activism* motivations could be because this situation was not

problematized. The *humanitarian* frame did appear in some of the articles and they were usually advocated by their family, their lawyers or themselves when awaiting trial.

#### **4.4.4 Salient frames in the two individual samples**

The differences between the two newspapers in terms of salient frames were interesting and different than expected.

NRC Handelsblad put a lot more emphasis on the religious frames, namely 51% of its articles had *religious extremism* as most salient frame and 17% of its articles had *religious duty* as most salient frame. Likewise, the most dominant salient frame in De Telegraaf was the *religious extremism* frame but ‘only’ for 37% of its articles and only 10% of its articles had *religious duty* as most salient frame. This finding was relatively unexpected, since the opposite was assumed.

Another contrast can be found in the salience of the *opportunism* frame. In the sample of NRC Handelsblad, 11% of the articles had *opportunism* as most salient frame compared to 22% of the articles in sample of De Telegraaf. The low number of NRC Handelsblad articles with a salient *opportunism* frame was not hypothesized. The NRC Handelsblad also uses a lot of interviews with experts for their articles and did mention the adventurism of the young generation travelling to Syria in their articles. An example of a NRC Handelsblad article that gave a very balanced view of the different motivations of Syria travellers is ‘*Vrees de dag waarop de Syriëgangers terugkeren*’ (Fear the day on which Syria travellers return) (Ramadan, 2016). This article used the *religious extremism*, *religious duty*, *opportunism*, and the *victim* frame but the *opportunism* frame was most salient when discussing the different motivations of Syria travellers.

De Telegraaf frequently underlined the bleak future many of the Syria travellers had in The Netherlands and also that many of them were bored with their mundane Dutch lives. An article from 2013 was even titled “*Zit in elke jongen een jihadist?*” (Is there a jihadist in every boy?) arguing that a lot of teenagers do not know what to do with their need for action and violence, picturing Syria as a wonderful adventure.

#### **4.4.5 Development of frame salience**

Another objective of this research is to explore if the different frames used in Dutch media reflect the different waves in the Syrian civil war. In Figure 6 the results were sorted into years aiming to find a trend in the salient frames over time. Figure 7 and Figure 8 show that the trends presented in Figure 6 can sometimes be accounted for by the heavy salience of a particular frame in one of the two newspapers .

The salience of the *political activism* frame only has a small increase around 2012. This increase is accounted for by the rise in salience in both NRC Handelsblad articles and De Telegraaf articles. The small increase in salience around 2012 is logical considering the timeline in the Syrian Civil War as most people were expected to be motivated by a political inclination to support the Syrian population in their struggle against the oppressive Assad regime.

A more peculiar finding is the small increase of the *humanitarian* frame at the end of the timeline, thus around 2017. When searching for an explanation in the data you can find the article of 2017 '*Jihadi's ontlopen straffen*' (Jihadis avoid punishments) that mentions the *humanitarian* frame when referring to people travelling to Syria around 2012 wanting to work in hospitals to aid the suffering Syrian population. With that knowledge it does fit the timeline of the Syrian conflict as it was assumed that Syria travellers in 2012 were motivated with a humanitarian commitment to relieve the suffering of people.

The salience of the *religious extremism* frame was already high at the start of the media coverage on Syria travellers. As known the religious aspect did increase around 2013 and this is also where the *religious extremism* frame began to increase slightly over the years. Expected was that the *religious extremism* frame would be and indeed stay highly salient within the Dutch media over time. In the article sample of NRC Handelsblad the *religious extremism* has been the most salient frame since 2012. Yet, its salience decreased after 2016 ending on the same level of salience with the *terrorism* and *religious duty* frames (the latter is blocked by the increase of *terrorism*). For De Telegraaf the salience of *religious extremism* development is characterized as a more steady increase over time, peaking in 2017.

An interesting contrast can be detected between the salience of *religious duty* in the two newspapers. In 2015 the salience of this frame dropped in the sample of NRC Handelsblad and but increased in the sample of De Telegraaf. However, as interesting this finding may be it is in need of some nuance. When looking more closely to the different frames used in the articles in 2015, the frames *religious duty*, *victim* and *religious extremism* were almost equally salient amongst the article sample of De Telegraaf. Possibly the balancing norm can account for these equally salient frames in the article. In the NRC Handelsblad sample, most articles did use the *religious duty* frame but the *victim* frame was slightly more salient in most cases. Implying that people who travelled to Syria to live as a true Muslim were also victims in their former lives in The Netherlands, possibly by their vulnerability to recruitment in or feeling marginalized in Dutch society.

Interesting is the high salience of the *opportunism* frame in 2013 and 2014 as it was expected to be more salient around 2015. The sample of NRC Handelsblad showed a stable medium level of salience for the *opportunism* frame throughout time. The high salience for the frame around 2013 and 2014 in Figure 6 can be accounted for in the sample of De Telegraaf. News articles around 2013 and 2014 in general focussed a lot on the characteristics of the Syria travellers and highlighted the fact that many of them were searching for a purpose in life. Especially the articles in De Telegraaf focused primarily on the need for adventure of teenagers in puberty and the story of a remorseful Dutch teenager who was collected from Syria by his mother. An example of an article with a salient *opportunism* frame in De Telegraaf is: ‘*COWBOYS IN SYRIË; Nederlandse moslimsstrijders rekenen op heldenrol in Heilige Oorlog maar komen bedrogen uit*’. The rise in salience came earlier than anticipated since it was assumed that this frame would be highly salient around 2015-2016. Yet, it indicates that the newspapers, especially De Telegraaf, were already aware of different motivations of Syria travellers which do not only revolve around religious aspects.

Around 2015 there is a minor increase in the salience of the *victim* frame that after that point decreases again. When looking into the articles for 2015 they generally used the *victim* frame to tell the story of young girls and women who left for Syria with a romanticized perception of the situation there and of young boys who suffered from some kind of psychiatric disorder. The article ‘*Zuster, jullie zijn nodig in kalifaat*’ (Kamerman & Stoter Boscolo, 2015) in NRC Handelsblad describes the lives of Dutch girls and women who travelled to Syria and are confronted with a reality they did not expect.

The *terrorism* frame increased in 2014 to a peak in 2017. This increase is apparent in both article samples, accounting for the rise in Figure 6. The development of this frame after 2014 seems to be the same for both article samples. The increase in salience can be explained by the focus of the later articles on the possibility of a terrorist attack by returnees, framing all prior Syria travellers as potential terrorists with extensive combat training and battle experience.

Yet, interesting is that for the article sample of De Telegraaf also showed an increase of salience around 2012. When searching for these articles in the sample you can find that they highlighted the trend that many Dutch youngsters travelled to ‘jihad areas’ and joined jihadist groups in Syria, speculating about the future threat for Europe or The Netherlands posed by jihadist returnees who are trained in terrorist activities.

# CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to answer the central research question this chapter will discuss the findings of both sections of the research: the literature review and the deductive frame analysis.

The first part of this chapter will combine the findings of chapter three and chapter four and discuss these in further detail. First, it will be discussed if the sample of the articles in Dutch newspapers reflect the heterogeneous motivations of the Syria travellers. Second, it will be determined if the temporal aspect of the academic findings is reflected in the analysed sample of newspapers.

The second part of this chapter will elaborate on the possible implications the findings could have on political policy and Dutch society.

## 5.2 SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE RESEARCH AND FRAME ANALYSIS

Preceding to the conducted research a few expectations were drawn up to eventually answer the research question posed in this thesis. The overarching research question that is in need of answering is *to what extent does the Dutch media take the heterogeneous motivations of the Dutch Syria travellers into account in their news reports from 2011 to 2017?* This part of chapter five will be dedicated to review the different expectations in this thesis.

*Expectation 1: The Dutch media does not reflect the heterogeneous motivations of Syria travellers throughout the Syrian conflict.*

The literature review on Syria travellers and foreign fighters provided the different frames that were sought after in the article sample of the Dutch media. The results of the frame analysis gave insights in the different frames, and thus motivations, which were used in the news articles on Dutch citizens travelling to Syria. Figure 4 presents the different percentages of the salient frames in the overall article sample and shows that the Dutch media does reflect the heterogeneous motivations of Syria travellers throughout the Syrian conflict. Although De Telegraaf showed a more even distribution of various frames, in general there is more variation in the salient frames than initially expected.

Also, generally speaking the articles in the entire sample used more than one frame meaning that the newspapers do present different portrayals of Syria travellers in their articles. As mentioned in the research design the use of different frames or counter-narratives in an article could be explained by the ‘balancing norm’ some journalists are bound to.

However, the variation in salience can still account for a diverse portrayal of the motivations of Syria travellers in the Dutch newspapers of NRC Handelsblad and De Telegraaf.

*Expectation 2: The Dutch media generalizes the motivations of Syria travellers to be religious and ideological.*

Although there was variation in the salience of the different frames, the religious inspired motivations dominated the sample. In the entire sample, 56% of the articles have the *religious extremism* frame (43%) or the *religious duty* frame (13%) as most salient frame.

Still, the expectation was that the other frames such as *opportunism* (17%), which is a broadly supported motivation in academic works, would be little represented in news reports on Syria travellers. Anticipated was to find a result similar to the individual NRC Handelsblad sample. In this sample 68% of the articles used *religious extremism* or *religious duty* as most salient frame.

*Expectation 3: The Dutch media will show little change in frame salience over time even though the different periods in the Syrian conflict attracts differently motivated Syria travellers.*

Finding concrete evidence for this expectation has proven to be more difficult than anticipated. This can be illustrated by the finding of an article in 2017 (De Telegraaf) with *humanitarianism* as most salient frame. This article actually referred to the earlier stages of the civil war in Syria, meaning that this article acknowledged the different motivations related to the different periods in the conflict.

Nevertheless, in the figure 6, 7, and 8 an attempt is made to plot trends of the frames over time. According to these figures the salience of the *political activism* frame did change over time and corresponded to the right point in the timeline of the Syrian conflict. The *political activism* frame suggests that people travelled to Syria with a political inclination to topple the oppressive Assad-regime and take part in the civil war *before* religious aspects became dominant. Although the peak in salience was not as high as expected, its peak does reflect the time where the conflict was not yet dominated by religious factors.

The *religious duty* frame went back and forth but was not particularly related to a time in the Syrian conflict. Expected was that this frame would gain more salience starting around 2013 and slowly decrease around 2016. This assumption is based on the notion that around 2013 the religious aspects would become increasingly important attracting people who want

to fight for their faith but also attracting people who want to live as a true Muslim, supporting the international Ummah by settling in the Caliphate and live under Shariah law.

The *opportunism* frame was assumed to be more salient around 2015-2017 with the increase of Dutch teenagers leaving for Syria to satisfy their need for adventure. Yet the frame analysis shows that this frame was most salient in 2013 and 2014 and decreasing after 2014. This finding could also support for the theory of scholars, arguing that this generation of 'jihadists' are and always were dominantly motivated by their personal grievances and problems (Coolsaet, 2016).

The *religious extremism* frame dominated the reporting on Dutch Syria travellers and showed an increase in salience starting from 2013. The expectation was that the Dutch media would generalize all Syria travellers to be ideologically or religiously motivated. Therefore the dominance of the *religious extremism* frame is in line with this expectation. However, relating to the periods in the Syrian conflict it was thought that the dominance of this frame would subside in time in favour of the *religious duty* frame and the *opportunism* frame. Yet, considering the heated situation in Syria with the high influence of jihadist groups in is not remarkable that the religious aspects continued to be salient in the Dutch media.

Moreover, the *terrorism* frame increased with time. This frame was included in the frame analysis when the salience of this frame became apparent, this is also why no real predictions were made for this frame. The increase over time is most likely due to the fact that articles over time, especially after 2015, focused more on the policies regarding returnees and the shadow of terrorist attacks in Europe by returnees or supporters of IS. These articles also argue, with reference to experts (AIVD, 2017), that the returnees after 2015 are more dangerous than the ones that had returned before. The salient frame in these articles portrayed every Syria traveller as a potential risk for more terrorist attacks in The Netherlands as they all would have received military training in Syria, are battle-hardened by their experiences and are less hesitant to use violence.

It can be argued that the timing of this increase in salience for the *terrorism* frame is in line with the conflict in Syria. Yet, this frame is a dangerous one since it overgeneralizes every Dutch citizen that travelled to Syria as a dangerous threat by portraying them as terrorists.

*Expectation 4: An quality newspaper will show more variation in frames on the motivations of Syria travellers than a popular newspaper.*

The basis of this expectation was that a quality newspaper would make more references to academic findings, possibly incorporate more interviews with experts and include more

background information. The articles of NRC Handelsblad do present a lot of different frames in the text. One reason for this is the length of an average NRC Handelsblad article balancing different frames in different paragraphs. Thus, the within the NRC Handelsblad articles there is a lot of variation compared to the shorter and more direct articles of De Telegraaf.

However, when you compare the frame salience of the two newspapers De Telegraaf seems to show a more balanced variation of the different frames. NRC Handelsblad seems to emphasize the religious aspects of the motivations of Dutch Syria travellers. This is one of the most interesting findings in the research as the exact opposite was expected. This means that this article sample can confute this expectation.

### **5.3 IMPLICATIONS**

Aside from the theoretical implications the findings of the frame analysis have on the prior expectations, the findings of this exploratory research could also have implications for overall political policies and Dutch society. The central theory on which this thesis is based suggests that the media steers public opinion and public opinion is known to influence politics and intergroups relations in society. This section will elaborate on these possible implications.

#### **5.3.1 Policy implications**

Media coverage of a certain phenomenon or issue shapes how the public perceives such an issue (Berbers et al., 2016; Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1990; Van Gorp, 2007). The media portrayal of Syria travellers affects how the public, the police, policymakers, prosecutors and politicians perceive these travellers since no one is completely unbiased in their judgement (Iyengar, 1990). The salience of a certain frame in the media could therefore impact the policy regarding Syria travellers or returnees. The question here is, what implications do the findings of the deductive frame analysis have for public policy regarding Syria travellers?

The results of the frame analysis show that the *religious extremism* frame dominates in the Dutch media. Articles with this salient frame usually revealed reasoning devices that suggested a solution to the ‘Syria traveller problem’. These solutions were usually in the form of restrictive measures against extremist organisations to defer people from travelling to Syria, and also to increase the surveillance on the Muslim community in The Netherlands to search for potential Syria travellers or unregistered returnees.

The focus on religious extremism in the media could influence policy as this frame only highlights the religious aspects in the motives of Syria travellers (Fangen & Kolas, 2016). Policy regarding Syria travellers and returnees could then also solely be focus on the religious

convictions of the Syria traveller without acknowledging the possibility that some people are otherwise motivated or have fulfilled different roles in Syria.

Yet, important is to nuance this influence a little since a lot of stricter legal measures against returnees are invoked because there is proof that the current returnees are more dangerous compared to returnees of previous years due to traumatic experiences they are exposed to (AIVD, 2017). Also in many news articles the legal trials sentencing Syria travellers and alleged jihadists are highlighted and argue that they are often used to set example. In another news article a judge responsible for these trials tells the reporter that he does not allow himself to be influenced by what he sees or reads in the media.

Aside from stricter legal measures, the portrayal of Syria travellers in the media could also have implications for overall security measures. People tend to support intrusive and discriminating security measures when they feel threatened (Verkuyten, 2013). Stricter security measures as racial profiling, intrusive neighbourhood prevention programmes, increased surveillance of communities and greater awareness of radicalisation can be related to the salient frames used in the media, creating a greater public support for such measures. However, harsh and intrusive security measures could backfire and amplify emotions that cause for more support of extremist ideas (Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006).

The salience of the *opportunism* frame in some of the articles created a focus on the radicalisation processes and the vulnerability of young Dutch citizens. The accompanied reasoning devices included policies to create a counter-narrative, psychological guidance and counselling for youngsters and increased deradicalization efforts that focussed more on the grievances of teenagers instead of their religious convictions. Meaning, an article with *opportunism* as most salient frame has contrasting reasoning devices with articles with *religious extremism* as most salient frame. Unfortunately, the sample still shows a dominance for the *religious extremism* frame keeping the focus on religion and ideological motivations.

### **5.3.2 Societal implications**

The findings of the frame analysis put forth two salient frames that can have a negative effect on Dutch society. The *religious extremism* frame and the *terrorism* frame portray Syria travellers in a particular way which could affect how people perceive the overall Muslim community in The Netherlands.

The *religious extremism* frame puts a strong emphasis on the religious aspects of the situation in Syria. Considering the situation in Syria this is not unusual, nevertheless, this has implications for the social cohesion of the Dutch society. The reasoning devices related to the

*religious extremism* frame contain severe stereotyping, generalizing an entire community, and intrusive security measures such as increased surveillance of the Dutch Muslim community. Negative attitudes between the different groups in society creates a weak social cohesion (Verkuyten, 2013). Research has shown that when people feel threatened they will legitimize their discriminatory behaviour against minorities, such as the Dutch Muslim community (Perreira, Vala & Costa-Lopes, 2010; Valasco Gonzalez, Verkuyten, Weesie & Poppe, 2008). If a particular group is perceived as threatening then it is acceptable to reject associated group members in society (Verkuyten, 2013). Threats can take different forms but usually in society they will pose a danger of a deviant ‘other’ who does not align with what ‘we’ believe in and the way in which ‘we’ live our lives (Verkuyten, 2013). Media reports portraying Syria travellers as religious extremists or as terrorists can work up threatening versions of the Islam and can help justify negative and exclusionary attitudes towards the Muslim minority in The Netherlands. An article in the sample already suggested that feelings of suspicion towards orthodox Muslims and also within the Muslim community were high, people felt marginalized by the negative stigmatization of Muslims (Kamerma & Kouwenhoven, September 2015). It is important to acknowledge that such tensions in society can foster radicalisation (Neumann, 2006; Reed, 2017).

Especially the *terrorism* frame reinforces a sense of suspicion and fear within society. When people accept the frame that most returnees are dangerous people that aim to execute terrorist attacks in The Netherlands a negative line of reasoning could follow (Fangen & Kolas, 2016). This reasoning would start out with the assumption that all Syria travellers are Muslim. The frame portrays all Syria travellers as (potential) terrorists, therefore Muslims are terrorists. Most individuals will, hopefully, not blindly follow this line of reasoning and usually the cognitive processes in one’s mind are not this simple. However, constant reading about the possible threat certain orthodox Muslims or young frustrated Muslim pose could create an unconscious animosity towards people who can fit that profile. It is therefore important that people are aware of the difference between the various motivations for travelling to Syria, of the different roles that some people have acquired and that Muslims who want to travel or did travel to Syria are still the exception rather than the rule.

# CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

## 6.1 OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The Dutch media does reflect the heterogeneous motivations of Syria travellers throughout the Syrian conflict to some extent. Generally speaking the news articles of NRC Handelsblad and De Telegraaf used more than one frame when discussing the Dutch Syria travellers

The seven different frames, five of which were taken from the academic literature and two which were later included, were all salient in at least one of the articles in the total sample. Although there is variation in the frame salience and thus awareness of the different motivations of Syria travellers, in general the religious inspired frames (especially *religious extremism*) still dominate in the total article sample. This domination was more or less expected. Nonetheless, the consideration of other frames in the newspapers was more than anticipated.

The sample of De Telegraaf showed a more varied distribution of the salient frames compared to the sample of NRC Handelsblad. This contradicted the initial expectation that De Telegraaf would have less variation in frame salience in favour of the religious frames. Contradictorily, the sample of NRC Handelsblad put more emphasis on the religious aspects of the motivations of Dutch Syria travellers. This could possibly be the most interesting finding of the research as it the exact opposite was expected.

The sample of analysed articles showed that the Dutch media did change their salient frames over time, to some extent. For instance, the *political activism* frame was most salient in 2012 when it is argued that most people were motivated by political inclinations. Clearly the frame of *religious extremism* dominated throughout the year with an increase in salience starting from 2013. Referring back to the academic sources, the *opportunism* frame peaked earlier than expected. Yet, its salience remained present over time reflecting the academic argument that this generation is often motivated by personal grievances and adventurism.

Important to note is the increasing salience of the *terrorism* frame starting around 2015. Most likely this increase is by the perceived threat emanating from returnees emphasized by the recent terrorist attacks in Europe and the idea that more travellers will be returning due to the collapse of the Islamic State (AIVD, 2017; Duyvensteyn & Peeters, 2015). This frame depicts all Syria travellers as potential terrorists as it is argued that they all had military training and battlefield experience in Syria.

A nuanced picture of Syria travellers in the media ensures a better understanding of these people and the possible threat they pose for national security. Reasoning logics created by the

*religious extremism* and *terrorism* frames could enforce support for restrictive and intrusive measures against particular Dutch communities. The *opportunism* frame calls for better awareness of the radicalisation processes of Dutch youth and better support for troubled and vulnerable people. Unfortunately the persistent dominance of the religious frames can cause for a tunnel-vision on religious convictions and miss other related factors that motivate people to leave for Syria.

Related to this is the societal impact the media framing of Syria travellers can have in The Netherlands. Increased surveillance of the Muslim community as a security policy can make Dutch Muslims feel marginalized and threatened by their surrounding environment. A possible social gap between the non-Muslim and Muslim community could appear and worsen over time. If such effects are not mitigated it would possibly create a sense of frustration with their current social position which will negatively impact social cohesion. It is important to acknowledge that such tensions in society can foster radicalisation (Reed, 2017). The threat of people turning to extremist ideologies to find purpose and a sense of belonging is then something society itself has facilitated.

## **6.2 FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research is explorative in nature and aims to confirm an assumption of the researcher. It is clear that the assumption was in need of some nuance when researching the different news articles of the Dutch media. Some interesting results were found but it must be acknowledged that this research used a small number of articles for the frame analysis due to time restrictions. Solving the limitations of this research could determine if the encountered difference between the salient frames in the two newspapers are correct or due to the selected article sample.

Future research thus could focus on improving the internal and external validity of this research. To improve the external validity of this research a larger sample of articles should be analysed and possibly another Dutch newspaper that addresses another part of the Dutch population ensuring a more comprehensive research of framing in the Dutch media. A very popular news platform that was not included in this sample, and could be useful for future research, are online news platforms. News websites such as NOS.nl and NU.nl are often used by people that do not have a subscription to a physical newspaper or their associated online services.

Internal validity can be improved by adjusting some elements of the operationalisation of this research. As mentioned before, the internal validity would be greatly enhanced if different

analysts would be responsible for executing the frame analysis of the texts, making the researcher only responsible for the creation of the frame matrix and the interpretation of the frame analysis. This would mitigate the possibility of bias by the researcher and make the outcomes of the frame analysis more reliable.

Aside from improving this research, future research could use these explorative results as the basis of further research or even a new line of research. One could elaborate on this research and examine if the frame advocates – the people who use the frames in the articles such as a parent, neighbour, politician, or journalists (see Berbers et al., 2016) – change over time putting more emphasis on the societal discourse on Syria travellers.

An interesting new line of research would be to conduct a microlevel research into the attitudes of Dutch citizens towards Syria travellers and their knowledge of their heterogeneous motivations in order to find if the media framing of this issue truly has the impact assumed in this thesis. The salience of the frames in this thesis is based on their dominance in the articles but maybe some frames or frame advocates are intrinsically more salient to Dutch natives than others, despite their dominance in the texts.

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## **APPENDICES**

The appendices of this thesis are send separately in the format of excel sheets.  
These documents include:

- Two documents with analysis worksheets: Each newspaper has its own excel document in which an overview of all the selected news articles is given, followed by the executed deductive frame analysis with one article per new worksheet.
- One document including an overview of the results of the deductive frame analysis and the list of news articles used in the analysis.