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When Criminology Engages in Terrorism Studies: The Roots of Radicalization in Belgium

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Introduction

The rise of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Islamic State – ISIS) has had physical, ideological and societal repercussions which have affected various areas of the world. It is difficult to measure the genuine impact of this phenomenon on every stakeholder across different societies, given both the specificity and complexity of the subject. Nevertheless, the rise of the so-called Islamic State has highlighted another phenomenon in specifically western societies: "homegrown terrorism", the radicalization of nationals of western countries who commit attacks in their home countries, known collectively as "homegrown terrorists". Since 2015, terrorists have killed more than 300 people and have wounded thousands more in terrorist attacks across the European continent (Klausen, 2017). The phenomenon of "homegrown terrorism" began to emerge following the 2004 train bombings in Madrid (Bhatt & Silber2007). A clear link arises from the fact that most of the attackers were nationals or residents of those countries affected by terrorism. The impact of these attacks is broader than it seems, highlighting social strains that are so deeply rooted in western societies that preventing radicalization has now become the focus of many State governments in western countries. As such, "homegrown terrorism" can be seen as a significant factor in countering terrorism in the West.

The concept of radicalization is often referred to in the context of "homegrown terrorism". As Schmid (2013) contends, radicalization is the process preceding an increased use of political violence. The concept of radicalization is subject to strain debates among scholars and specialists with regards to both its genuine signification and its position within the broader concept of terrorism (Kundnani, 2012; Schmid, 2013; Sedgwick, 2010). Some of the complexities of "homegrown terrorism" include the identification of its roots and the multiple and diverse motivations of its protagonists. An important question remains unanswered concerning Islamic radicalization: Does the prevalence of homegrown Islamic terrorism in Western Europe have more to do with religion and Salafi fundamentalism, or with the social exclusion of Muslims and a generational revolution in response to this exclusion? There is a clear fragmentation in both political and academic debates concerning this question, with certain scholars siding on one or either side of the argument, while others propose a mixture of both being the source (Cottee, 2011; Kepel, 2016; Roy, 2015; Sageman 2005). The academic debate at hand will serve as basis for further analysis of the phenomenon with a focus on Belgium.

Many European countries have indeed been confronted with the phenomenon of citizens or residents becoming radicalized and eventually committing terrorist attacks. Some western nationals have even left their home countries for the purpose of fighting in the war zones in Syria and/or Iraq and are known as "Western Foreign Fighters" (Bakker & de Bont, 2016). Some of these individuals eventually try to return either to resume a 'normal' life far from Islamic extremism or to perpetrate further acts of terrorism. Some others have tried to reach Syria and/or Iraq but have been arrested during the process. This is particularly prevalent in Belgium, the European country with the most foreign fighters per capita, with a contingent of 470 individuals who left as of January 2016 and of 60 individuals who attempted but failed to reach the war zones (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Coolsaet, 2016). In addition, Belgium has been both directly affected by and indirectly involved in terrorism in the recent past, with terrorist attacks in Brussels (Jewish Museum 2014, Zaventem and Malbeek 2016) and the Paris attacks (2015) which were, for the most part, organized on Belgian soil (Kepel, 2017). The Belgian case is therefore notably interesting.

This study identifies patterns of radicalization among young Muslim individuals in Belgium by focusing on radicalization in the region of Brussels between 2012 and 2016. This will be seen in the light of 'Differential Association' theory (Sutherland, 1947) which emanates from criminology. This paper will assess the impact of three broader categories on the process leading to radicalization. The first category, *group dynamics / networking* takes into account factors such as kinship, comradeship and friendship. The second category, *demographical and geographical dynamics*, studies the social and societal strains that may serve as starting point for radicalization. The third category, *skills transfer from criminality to terrorism*, underlines the prevalence and importance of the criminal backgrounds of terrorists. This study will further address the ideological and religious dimension behind Islamic radicalization, and will eventually assess the extent to which the application of 'Differential Association' theory is valid for better understanding the subject at hand. As such the following research question is proposed:

> "*To what extent can the phenomenon of 'Homegrown Terror' and 'Islamic Radicalization' by individual members of the 'French-Belgian Jihadist Network' between 2012 and 2016 be explained by 'Differential Association' theory (Sutherland, 1947)?"*

State of the Art

This section consists in a review of the existing literature of the concept of Islamic radicalization and "homegrown terrorism". The rationale behind the choice of definition of radicalization will also be addressed in this section. In addition, the major features of 'Differential Association' (Sutherland, 1947) theory will be explained. The aim of this chapter is to identify the major trends in the existing literature which will serve as groundwork for further discussion.

There is no universally accepted definition in academia or political discourse for the concept of radicalization (Cottee, 2011). However, the term has largely been used in the media in the context of terrorism and 'homegrown terrorism'. Schmid (2013), contends that the term radicalization is in essence a *context-bound* phenomenon in which global, sociological, political, psychological and ideological drivers all have an equal footing (Schmid, 2013). This plurality facilitates a variety of approaches when dealing with the concept of radicalization. A general tendency in the literature tends to see radicalization as a process leading towards the use of violence. This process implies an escalation in parallel with a radicalization of behaviors (Kundnani, 2012; Schmid, 2013; Sedgwick, 2010). From this point of view, "*radicalization entails a change in perception and a rising animosity towards certain social groups or societal institutions and structures"* (Schmid, 2013).

Neumann (2013) describes radicalization as 'what goes on before the bomb goes off'. This approach and choice of wording does align with the general definition of the concept by the public, however, it neglects to highlight the lack of consensus regarding the definition, as well as the multiple features inherent to a concept as complex as radicalization. This study could have used the definition of radicalization used by the Belgian Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment (CUTA). According to the CUTA, radicalization can be understood as

> *"a process during which a person or a group of persons experiences such influences that this person or this group of people will, at some point, be mentally molded or disposed to commit terrorist acts"* (Plan R – The Action Plan Against Radicalism, 2016).

Although this definition addresses many factors specific to the concept of radicalization and has a binding link with terrorism and terrorist acts, the use of a governmental definition of the

concept is problematic as it does entail the omission of many academic definitions of radicalization. For the sake of academic consistency, this study will use a more academically fitted definition of radicalization such as the one used by the Canadian non-profit Center for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV). According to the CPRLV, radicalization is:

> *"a process whereby people adopt extremist belief systems—including the willingness to use, encourage or facilitate violence—with the aim of promoting an ideology, political project or cause as a means of social transformation*" (CPRLV, 2015).

The term 'Foreign Fighter' will also be used throughout this study. Again, there is no universally accepted definition for Foreign Fighter. This paper will use the definition for 'Foreign Terrorist Fighter' used by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that states that Foreign Terrorist Fighters are

> *"individuals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict" (UNSC, 2014).*

'Differential Association' theory was postulated by Edwin Sutherland in 1947, and has been a prevailing theory of criminology since its introduction. Sutherland originally looked into the causes of crime following a multiple factor approach, considering mental deficiency, broken homes, minority status, age, class, and inadequate socialization, to mention just a few factors. He subsequently concluded that this approach by itself did not provide a scientific understanding of crime (Matsueda, 2001) and further explained that none of these factors had explanatory power for the purpose of explaining crime dynamics. He therefore judged that scientific criminology should go beyond a listing of correlates of crime and should seek for a scientific generalization of criminal behavior (Burke & Jackson & Tittle, 1986; Matsueda, 2001). His findings came along with the introduction of three concepts; normative conflict, the individual-level and the group dynamic/level (Sutherland, 1947). These three concepts contribute to the overall theory of 'Differential Association'.

According to Sutherland's findings, the concept of normative conflict serves as basis for conflict in modern era societies, explaining that the industrial revolution gave rise to disparities and increasing social conflicts. Such societies become fragmented and fall into conflict over basic values and appropriate behaviors. In other words, normative conflict refers to conflict between the appropriateness of the law and the law being the universal set of rules binding on every member of a given society. Some groups therefore see the law as a set of rules to be followed under any circumstances and some groups see the law as a set of rules to be violated under certain circumstances (Matsueda, 2001). In this way, crime itself is a source of normative conflict.

According to 'Differential Association' theory, at the individual level, criminal behavior is learned via the process of communication and interaction with intimate groups (Sutherland, 1947). Crime is hence learned through the receiving of basic skills and techniques coming along with the spread of definitions favorable to crime. The definitions favorable to crime serve as grounds to organize and eventually justify a criminal line of conduct. Following this recognition, the individual-level concept of 'Differential Association' theory states that an individual will engage in criminal endeavors if the following three conditions are met:

1). the individual has learned the skills and techniques for committing crime,
2). the individual has been exposed to an excess of definitions favorable to crime and;
3). the individual has the objective opportunity to carry out the crime (Matsueda, 2001).

This process is structured by the wider social organization in which the individual is embedded. At the group-level, and according to 'Differential Association' theory, the rate of crime amongst different groups in society is determined by the extent to which that group is organized in favor of crime (Matsueda, 2001). The theory therefore argues that as a result of more longer, more frequent and more intense associations within a group promoting definitions in favor of crime, individuals are more likely to wish to engage in criminal activities via this group's collective influence (Burke & Jackson & Tittle, 1986). In their book *'Le Chaudron Français'* (2017), Marc Leplongeon and Jean-Michel Décugis – two French investigative reporters - thoroughly analyzed the phenomenon of radicalization in the context of group dynamics by analyzing the specific case of the French village of Lunel. The municipality of Lunel has faced more than 20 cases of residents traveling to the war zones in Syria and/or Iraq, and many more having been associated with terrorist cells, marking a significant percentage given its relatively small

population of 26.000 inhabitants (Seelow, 2015).Similarily, Christophe Lamfalussy and Jean-Pierre Martin also studied groups dynamics in relation to Islamic radicalization by focusing on the case of the Brussels' municipality of Molenbeek in their book '*Molenbeek sur Djihad*' (2017). Both of these exhaustive studies have concluded that the vast majority of radicalized individuals originating from either Lunel or Molenbeek have been members of a particular group of young individuals and were exposed to definitions favorable to radicalism and criminality in the past.

First postulated by Tamara Makarenko (2004) and later developed by Rajan Basra, Claudia Brunner & Peter R. Neuman (2016), the notion of "*crime-terror continuum"* illustrates the fact that a group can easily slide up from organized crime to terrorism depending on the environment in which this group operates (Malarenko, 2004). In their study "*Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures"* (2016), Basra, Brunner and Neuman postulated that the so-called Islamic State has found the majority of its recruits in European 'ghettos', in prisons and among those who have previously engaged in criminal acts (Basra, Brunner & Neuman, 2016). Furthermore, they noted that criminal and terrorist groups tend to recruit from a single pool of people with radical predispositions, pertaining to similar demographics and often from the same places (Basra, Brunner & Neuman, 2016). The Belgian municipalities of *Molenbeek, Schaerbeek* and *Laeken* known locally as the '*croissant pauvre'* (the crescent of poverty*)* is indeed a good example of the merging of criminal and terrorist milieus leading to Islamic radicalization. Basna, Nrunner and Neuman suggest that jihadism satisfies the same type of thrill-seeking behaviors as does crime, including violence, adrenaline and eventually a strong sense of rebellion against the establishment. The jump from criminality to terrorism may therefore be smaller than it appears, especially when taking into account the fact that taking part in the jihad promoted by the so-called Islamic State does not require particular religious knowledge or learning (Basra, Brunner & Neuman, 2016).

The extent to which 'Differential Association' theory can apply to the concept of Islamic radicalization will be assessed throughout this study. While this theory is not the only one that informs the debate surrounding the wider phenomenon of the radicalization of Belgian citizens between 2012 and 2016, it does offer an interesting theoretical approach embedding the matter at stake into the academic discipline of criminology. When looking at the three conditions leading to crime as stated by 'Differential Association' theory, it appears that it can be transposed to terrorism studies in order to understand the genesis of the problem of Islamic

radicalization in Belgium. Indeed, the concept of crime has to be seen as 'crime of a terrorist nature'. Following this logic, and according to 'Differential Association' theory, an individual will engage in a crime of a terrorist nature if:

1). the individual has learned the skills and techniques for committing crime (of a terrorist nature),
2). the individual has been exposed to an excess of definitions favorable to crime (of a terrorist nature) and;
3). the individual has the objective opportunity to carry out the crime (of a terrorist nature).

While it is true that this theory has already been used in terrorism studies (Armstrong & Matusitz, 2013), 'Differential Association' theory is yet to be used extensively in the context of the recent radicalization of young individuals on the European soil. The "Bunch of Guys" theory developed by Marc Sageman could also have been applied to this study as it refers to small and self-organized terrorist cells (Cottee, 2011), however, this theory lacks both the social and societal dimensions which are certainly present in the theory developed by Sutherland. On the other hand, the "Strain" theory of criminology would have been valid in the context of this work. This theory states that certain strains increase the likelihood of crime (Agnew, 1992). One of its limitations, however, is that it focuses too much on the individual level, such as monetary status, the loss of a friend or a family member, or stigmatization (Agnew, 1992). A definite asset of 'Differential Association' theory is the taking of many more factors into account, factors that may very well depend on features from the "Strain" theory but that are further embedded into group dynamics and may have an impact on crime rates. 'Social Disorganization' theory, another theory of criminology, emphasizes the spatial concentration and the subsequent stability of rates of criminal behavior. This theory is interesting in many regards as it focuses upon the role of 'neighborhood dynamics' - which can be seen as a form of group dynamic – and the presence of delinquent subcultures within a given neighborhood. In addition, it highlights the impact of social interactions on the overall process leading to criminality (Groves & Sampson 1989). However, 'Differential Association' theory also postulates a 'Differential Social Organization' dimension linked to group rates of crime (Matsueda, 2001) which puts it on a similar perspective footing to 'Social Disorganization' theory. In essence, the choice to use 'Differential Association' theory has been motivated by the fact that it has not been used extensively in the context of terrorism, that it takes many

factors related to crime into account, and that it offers a fresh vision for explaining the phenomenon of "homegrown terrorism" and Islamic radicalization in Belgium. What appears to be the most enticing aspect legitimizing the choice of 'Differential Association' theory when studying terrorism is its multi-level approach for explaining one's decision process to engage in criminal activities. The assumption here is that terrorism is considered as a crime. The Belgian radicalization processes leading to the decision to commit crimes of terrorist nature will be embedded into the criminological framework through the use of 'Differential Association' theory.

The state of the art in relation to the phenomenon of radicalization among Belgian citizens in the recent past is yet relatively non-exhaustive given the contemporariness of the phenomenon. The aim of this research is thus to engage in a detailed analysis of the roots of Islamic radicalization in Belgium while taking this matter in relation with the existing literature. There is indeed a gap in the literature concerning the recent rise of Islamic radicalization across the European continent in general, and in Belgium in particular. The purpose of this study is therefore to address this gap. The existing literature provides with a strong and solid basis for analyzing the wider phenomenon of Islamic radicalization, while an exhaustive study of the 'Belgian case' offers with practical insights for better understanding the major findings emanating from the existing literature. Although, Rik Coolsaet has produced several publications on the topic based on his expertise resulting from his position as Professor at Ghent University and as Senior Associate Fellow at the Egmont-Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels, no exhaustive studies on Belgian radicalization processes have been produced yet. Rik Coolsaet is accompanied in this field by scholars such as Alex Schmid, Edwin Bakker & Roel de Bont, Marc Sageman, Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel to name but a few.

The last two scholars - Gilles Kepel and Olivier Roy - have been in the middle of a public debate recently, a debate that is both interesting and symbolic in many regards. Indeed, these two French political scientists contest the commonly accepted rationale behind the rise of the phenomenon of radicalization among young Europeans in the context of the recent terrorist attacks. On the one hand, Olivier Roy focuses on the push towards extremism as the result of the social exclusion and the discrimination historically experienced by those involved in terrorist acts. One the other hand, Gilles Kepel sees growing Islamist extremism as a result of the efforts exercised by Salafi preachers (Klausen, 2017). This conflict symbolizes the current

state of the academic debate in relation to the roots behind radicalization, while also creating space for further debate.

Roy (2015) asserts that the new generation of extremists was not genuinely interested in religion, and therefore describes this phenomenon as a "*nihilistic and generational uprising*" (Roy, 2015) and as a "*personal uprising"* of young individuals from poor urban communities who see Islamist extremism as a rejection of society. Furthermore, Roy asserts that France is not dealing with the *"radicalization of Islam"* but with the *"Islamization of radicalism"*. They both point out the failure of successive French governments (which can equally apply to the Belgian case) to provide young individuals from poor areas with attractive future life prospects. They further address the group dynamics behind radicalization by stating that social pressure plays an important role in the overall process. Members of a group tend to see themselves as similar to each other and are therefore more inclined to value the same ideas and behaviors no matter how radical these ideas and behaviors may be (Klausen, 2017).

Cottee (2011) contends that members of terrorist organizations in the West represent a "*collective subcultural solution to social strains experienced by the individuals who form or join these groups"*. He further emphasizes on the role of group dynamics by stating that would-be jihadists often seek companionship and solidarity with other like-minded individuals, often in their neighborhoods or in mosques (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Cottee, 2011). There, they usually meet friends or relatives. Their friendship may later intensify and develop into a feeling of brotherhood, united against a common and domestic 'other'. To use Cottee's (2011) terminology, this group may eventually become a 'bunch of guys' (Cottee, 2011) in total conflict with the society at large. Evidently, this phenomenon is marked by a period of radicalization through different interactions and associations with other like-minded individuals. Schmid (2013) conceptualizes the causes of radicalization, explaining that the wider radical milieu can also serve as a formidable incubator for fragile young individuals who have been subject to strained definitions favorable to crime.

This phenomenon of group affiliation has further been studied and contextualized by Marc Sageman. The fact that jihadist groups offer their members with a strong seductive narrative, Sageman contends, they feel that they can find direction and a reinvigorated sense of purpose in their lives. This narrative appeals to individuals who feel excluded from the society in which they live and offers them an alternative set of values to believe in (Sageman, 2005). In

Sageman's (2005) words, this narrative promotes parallel satisfaction that is more fitted to their current aspirations. Finally, Sageman (2005) also concludes that the feeling of belonging to a terrorist organization has the added benefit of providing its members with a strong collective identity (Sageman, 2005).

Coolsaet (2016) contends that the 'migrant community' in Belgium still faces harsh stigmatization, despite these families having been present on the Belgian soil for three, or sometimes, four generations, that many of them have acquired Belgian nationality, as well as having gone through the Belgian education system (Coolsaet, 2016). For some of the children and grandchildren of migrants that arrived in the 1960's and 1970's, one way of reacting to this stigmatization is to emphasize their religious affiliation (Coolsaet, 2016). This results in specific cases in which some consider themselves primarily as Muslims and secondly as Belgian citizens. This aspect has a considerable federating character, especially when considered in relation to the strong influence of group dynamics.

The major element of discussion that came forth on the basis of this literature review is the strained and continuous debate in countries such as Belgium and France around the possible explanations for 'homegrown terrorism' and jihad. If it is true that religion plays an important role in the radicalization process of any would-be jihadists, one should not underestimate the role of social and societal spheres in explaining 'homegrown terrorism'. Investigators have long noticed that particular towns, neighborhoods or even streets tend to be more subject to unusually high numbers of jihadists (Higgins, 2015). Cities such as Verviers, Molenbeek, Lunel and Vilvoorde have all been greatly affected by 'homegrown terrorism' along with multiple residents departing to fight in war zones in the Middle-East. The appearance and proliferation of these jihadist networks in the latter cities all have something in common: group dynamics and a criminal environment that can both be seen in the light of 'Differential Association' theory. Many of the members of the French-Belgian jihadist network were just a group of school friends living in poor areas where unemployment, discrimination and violence often prevail (Roy, 2015). For a certain portion of psychologically unstable young Muslims, a consequence of growing up in such an environment is the tendency to fall into specific forms of radicalism that, in the case at stake, can be linked to Islam. This discussion will be addressed in-depth throughout this study for the purpose of seeking answers. These answers are necessary in order to understand the phenomenon of 'homegrown terrorism' in its present form and to eventually develop well-grounded methods for addressing it.

The relevance of this study has to be seen at different levels. First, this study is relevant to the framework of its educational program as both terrorism studies and criminology fit into the broader concept of crisis and security management. Secondly, the review of the existing literature on the subject has highlighted the fact that there is a gap in both the application of 'Differential Association' theory to the phenomenon of radicalization among Belgian citizens in the recent past and the overall literature on the subject given its contemporariness. Thirdly, the fact that this phenomenon finds it roots in multiple layers of the society provides this study with a high social relevance.

Methodology/Data Collection

This chapter regards the methodology that this study will adopt. In addition, it enumerates the names and profiles of the twenty jihadists sampled for the purpose of this study. It does also explain how and where the data was gathered and the way in which this data will be processed. It will eventually describe the extent to which these variables are relevant to the general features of 'Differential Association' theory and how they complement it.

This study will follow a holistic case study design using twenty jihadists as units of analysis. The reasoning behind selecting these jihadists specifically was motivated by their relevance in relation to both the type of research design and the choice of theory. The aim is to use 'Differential Association' theory as an analytical framework through the study of these twenty profiles for the purpose of better understanding the phenomenon of radicalization in Belgium. This number has to be seen in light of the total number of forty-five individuals who are members of the French-Belgian jihadist network as shown in *Figure 1*. The individuals sampled thus represent a 45% share of the total output of the jihadists members of the French-Belgian jihadist network. While this study is following a qualitative research design, it does also include a coding scheme aimed to both extract and highlight relevant information on the individual's pathways with relation to 'Differential Association' theory. The benefits from engaging in both types of research methods therefore lie in the advantage that the coding scheme offers in sorting out the considerable amount of information needed for the conduct of this qualitative study.

These individuals have been chosen on the basis of media, Think-Tanks and government reports. The fact that they have been directly involved in the perpetration or planning of terrorist attacks recently has made their profiles accessible to the public. The empirical basis for this study is thus a database containing the profiles of twenty jihadists that have been involved in terrorist plots on the European soil. The variations regarding the extent of their involvement will be further addressed in the next section of this paper. While this is not a representative survey of every European jihadist, it does provide sufficient insight and source material for explaining the different dynamics that will further be explained in the next section of this paper. This section contains information on the content of the database, information on how the data was collected and a description of the different classifications that were used in order to extract relevant information about the pathways of these twenty jihadists. This will be followed by a

table containing a simplified overview of every jihadist's pathways and the different categories that were used to study their pathways.

The aim of this study is to identify patterns of radicalization with a focus on criminal backgrounds, group dynamics, demographic and geographical factors. As a result, the database includes only the profiles of individuals who have either been involved in plots, had criminal backgrounds or were residents of Brussels' "croissant pauvre" neighborhoods, Molenbeek, Schaerbeek and Laeken. Moreover, by focusing on twenty individuals, this study offers an in-depth analysis of specific cases, rather than an overarching, broad and generalized set of conclusions. One can argue that this relatively low number of profiles may alter the overall representativeness of this study, and may therefore comprise a limitation of the analysis. This limitation, however, may be contained given the fact that the individuals that have been selected have been, for the vast majority, involved in terrorist plots, have criminal backgrounds and originate from poor neighborhoods in Brussels. This aspect, taking the research question into consideration, gives legitimacy to this study. In an effort to maintain balance and to avoid overrepresentation, all individuals have been selected on the basis of their belonging to the French-Belgian jihadist network, this aspect being the only common denominator binding on all.

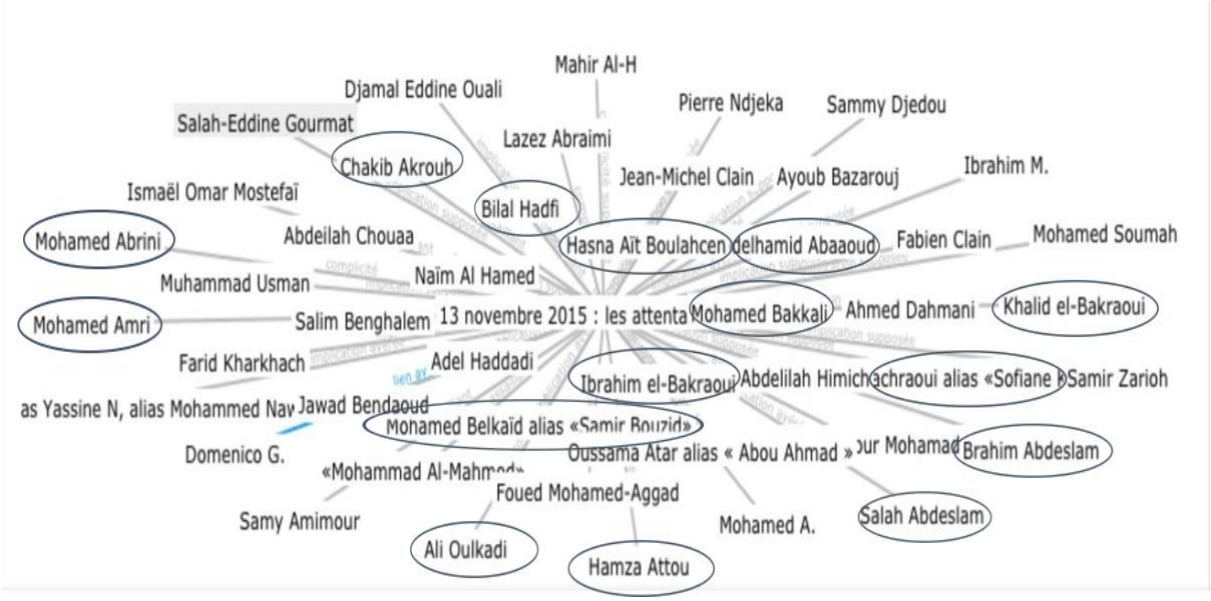
All data was gathered from open sources, mostly from newspapers and Think-Tank reports. The French newspaper *Le Parisien* developed a helpful and well-documented tool for identifying past links and connections between all the members of the French-Belgian jihadist cell that is responsible for the plotting and perpetration of multiple terrorist attacks both planned or successfully carried out. In addition to this, the Counter Extremism Project database contains the detailed profiles and pathways of many jihadists included in the sample. Only a relatively small amount of specific data regarding certain individuals is unknown and is therefore missing from the database. This does not compromise the overall output of the empirical study given the very small amount of data that is missing. These limitations are based on a lack of information on both criminal and religious backgrounds for three of the individuals sampled as this type of information is often unknown, incomplete, classified or difficult to research. In addition, the fact this information has been reported by the media consists in a de-facto limitation. Indeed, this information may be the reflection of journalist-biases, where the most "tabloid-worthy" information receives the most media attention while other - potentially more

important - information is left unmentioned. To prevent such cases from distorting the overall picture, every information was cross-checked with a least one other source.

The twenty individuals that have been selected for the purpose of this study are as follows: (1) Khalid Zerkani; (2) Najim Laachraoui; (3) Salah Abdeslam; (4) Brahim Abdeslam; (5) Mohamed Abrini; (6) Chakib Akrouh; (7) Khalid el-Bakraoui; (8) Ibrahim el-Bakraoui; (9) Abdelhamid Abaaoud; (10) Ayoub al-Khazzani; (11) Bilal Hadfi; (12) Reda Kriket; (13) Hasna Aït Boulahcen; (14) Khalid Ben Larbi; (15) Soufiane Amghar; (16) Hamza Attou; (17) Mohamed Amri; (18) Ali Oulkadi; (19) Mohamed Belkaïd, and (20) Mohamed Bakkali.

The majority of these individuals are male (19 male vs. 1 female) and have been involved in terrorist activities with different degrees of implication. The degrees of implication range from rudimentary logistic support to suicide bombers. The common denominator of these individuals is their belonging to the French-Belgian jihadist network that was uncovered during the aftermath of the recent Paris attacks (November 13, 2015).

Figure 1: *The "French-Belgian" jihadist network. This jihadist network has been unveiled in the aftermath of the Paris attacks (November, 2015). This connection map has been initiated by the French newspaper Le Parisien.*

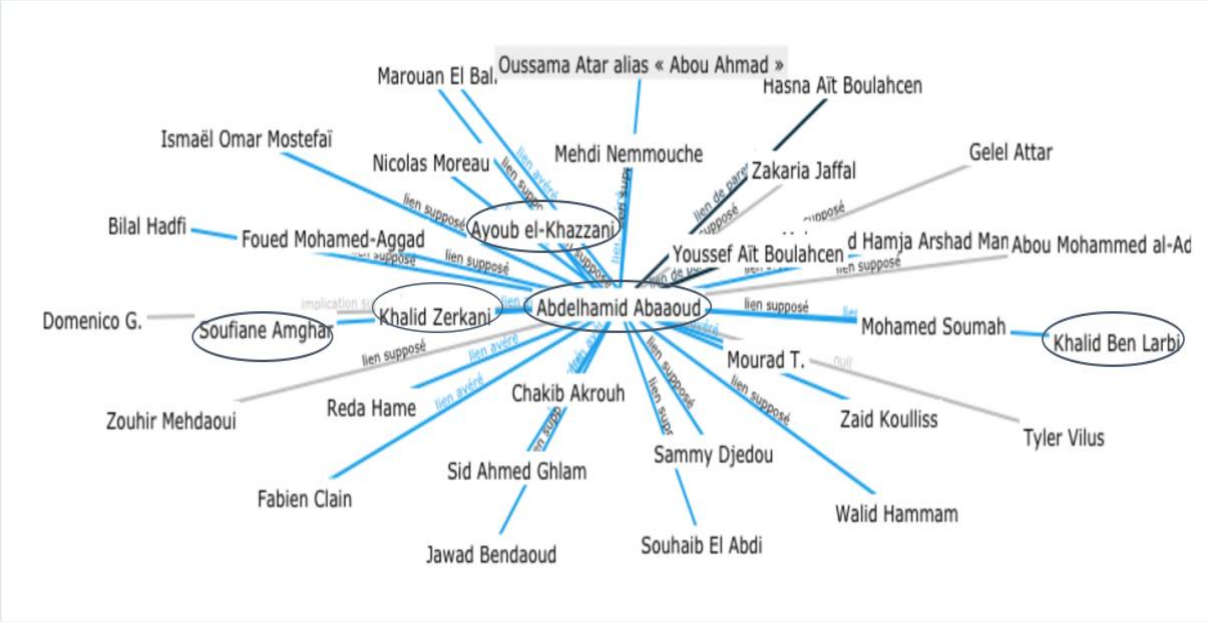


Source: https://atelier.leparisien.fr/galaxie-djihadiste/profil.php?id=E15

There are forty-five individuals named in *Figure 1*, the majority of which had a direct role in the planning and/or execution of both the Paris (November 2015) and Brussels attacks (March

2016). This 'connection map' has the advantage of being an excellent tool for identifying the members of this particular jihadist network, however, it does not provide the nature nor the frequency of the connections between its members. In addition, some of the individuals present in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2* were not 'key elements' of the network as they were not directly involved in the execution of terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, the sheer fact that their names have been cited in this network means that their collaboration in the planning of these attacks has been considered sufficiently important. Inclusion in diagrams such as those in *Figure 1* and *Figure 2* does not automatically connote a direct connection with every individual present in the jihadist network. For example, Ali Oulkadi only had direct connections with Hamza Attou, Brahim Abdeslam and Salah Abeslam. In contrast, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a central figure of the network, not only had direct connections with almost all the members of the French-Belgian jihadist network, but also had extra personal connections with four other individuals, who will be studied in the context of this paper, namely Ayoub el-Khazzani, Soufiane Amghar, Khalid Zerkani and Khalid Ben Larbi (*Figure 2)* as part of his own jihadist network.

Figure 2: *The "Abaaoud Network", comprised of members of the "French-Belgian" jihadist network, as well as other individuals who have been entertaining direct connections with Abdelhamid Abaaoud. This connection map has been initiated by the French newspaper Le Parisien.*



Source: https://atelier.leparisien.fr/galaxie-djihadiste/profil.php?id=P029

When studying the French-Belgian jihadist network, the presence of a great number of relatives, friends, brothers, cousins who are originating from the same deprived urban areas of Brussels is a significant factor to consider. Most have known each other for many years and have been involved in other types of radical or criminal behaviors in the past (Roy, 2015). This is a first indication of group dynamic patterns linked to Islamic radicalization and will be further analyzed in the next section of this paper.

From a practical point of view, the coding process is articulated around ten different variables which are aimed to capture the broader aspects of an individual's pathway to Islamic radicalization. The rationale behind this particular choice of variables is related to the major features of 'Differential Association' theory. These variables fall under four broader categories that will serve as basis for discussion in the 'discussion/analysis' section. For instance, the variables 'friendship/comradeship with member(s) of the network' and 'kinship with member(s) of the network' are aimed to highlight the effect of group dynamics in the process leading to radicalization. Furthermore, the variable 'residents of the "*croissant pauvre"* (Molenbeek, Schaerbeek, Laeken)' regards the socio-economic backgrounds of the individuals sampled and refers to the wider radical milieu in which these individuals have been evolving. The findings emanating from this coding-approach will then be used to identify potential patterns of radicalization. The ten variables are outlined and further explained below.

1. Nationality: The majority (65%) of the jihadists sampled are Belgian citizens. The others are either French or Algerian. Some have dual nationality.
2. Involvement in terrorist plots: The goal of this variable is to determine whether a given individual has been involved in the plotting of a terrorist attack. This category is broad and requires some forms of implication, ranging from logistical support to direct involvement in the attacks. For example, Khalid Zerkani is known to be an important recruiter and predicator but he has never been convicted of participation in a terrorist attack. In addition, Hamza Attou has been implicated as Salah Abdeslam's driver after the Paris attacks (November 2015), but has since been vindicated by a court of justice. All the other individuals have been involved in the planning or the perpetration of terrorist attacks on European soil.
3. Foreign Fighter/Attempted: This variable has to be seen in the light of the aforementioned definition of 'Foreign Terrorist Fighter' used by the UNSC. Half of the

individuals present in the database are considered to be Foreign Fighters while two of them have tried but eventually failed to join the battlefronts in Syria and/or Iraq. Brahim Abdeslam is considered as a Foreign Fighter even though the nature of his stay in Syria back in 2015 is not entirely known. However, he appeared in a video that has been posted by the so-called Islamic State where he can be seen carrying a weapon in his hands. In addition, the sub-variable 'attempted' accounts for the failed departure to the war zones, in this case Salah Abdeslam and Ibrahim el-Bakraoui.

4. Extremist Religious Background: This variable covers individuals brought up in an extremist Islamic family or environment. This variable was hard to assess with just the use of open sources. Nevertheless, the information available to the public through the interviews with relatives and via publically accessible information regarding the individual's backgrounds makes it possible to assess their potential exposure to extremist Islamic influence over the course of their youths. This variable is missing for three individuals namely Khalid Ben Larbi, Soufiane Amghar and Ali Oulkadi because of the lack of information available in the press concerning their pasts. This variable is linked to the third condition - *the individual has the objective opportunity to carry out the crime* - of 'Differential Association' theory.
5. Criminal Backgound: This variable is based on whether or not these individuals were known to law enforcement and to the police for acts ranging from petty crimes and drug trafficking to large-scale organized crime or involvement in terrorist activities. As this study focuses on the pathways and personal backgrounds of these individuals, this category does not include their indictments for their potential involvement in the recent terrorist plots/attacks but only their past criminal behaviors. This variable is missing for one individual namely Ali Oulkadi. This variable is linked to the first condition - *the individual has learned the skills and techniques for committing crime* – of 'Differential Association' theory.
6. Time in prison: This variable does not take into account the duration of the sentence but only the fact of whether or not an individual has been incarcerated. This variable is missing for one individual namely Ali Oulkadi. This variable is linked to the second condition - *the individual has been exposed to an excess of definitions favorable to crime*, of 'Differential Association' theory.
7. Kinship with member(s) of the network.
8. Friendship/comradeship with member(s) of the network: This variable may seem subjective but it is based on information concerning the existing connections between

the members of this network. The nature of these connections may vary from old school friends or neighborhood playmates to criminal associates. Again, this variable is linked to the third condition - *the individual has the objective opportunity to carry out the crime* - of 'Differential Association' theory.

9. Residents of the "*croissant pauvre"* (Molenbeek, Schaerbeek, Laeken): while it is true that all the individuals mentioned in this study have links with other individuals originating from the '*croissant pauvre'*, not all of them were residents of any of these neighborhoods at the time of their offences. Again, this variable is linked to the second condition - *the individual has been exposed to an excess of definitions favorable to crime*, of 'Differential Association' theory.
10. Year of Birth

While no uniform profile emerges from the sample used in the database, it is however possible to identify patterns. Out of twenty individuals, the only female was Hasna Aït Boulahcen, cousin of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who died during a police raid on November 18, 2015 in Saint-Denis (France). All the individuals are considered as jihadists in the sense that they have been linked with the planning and/or the perpetration of terrorist acts. The youngest individual (Bilal Hadfi) was born in 1995, and the eldest (Mohamed Belkaïd) was born in 1981. The average age (at the time of the attacks between 2015 and 2016) is 27. Of the twenty individuals, only two had not been previously charged for their involvement in a terrorist activity. Ten of them are considered to be Foreign Fighters, with two more having tried but failed to reach the war zones abroad.

Their exposure to extremist religious discourse in the past is relatively low with only three individuals meeting the requirements of this category. The 'criminal background' and the 'time in prison' categories are not automatically interconnected, since five individuals with criminal backgrounds did not spend time in jail, and five more having no criminal background at all. No variable concerning potential radicalization in prison has been employed in this study, however, the potential links between jail time and Islamic radicalization will be further addressed later on. All members of this network had connections with each other. Fifteen members were residents of the '*croissant pauvre'* at the time of the attacks between 2015 and 2016.

Discussion/Analysis

This chapter represents the main body of this study. It consists of four major elements of discussion that may have an explanatory nature for the roots of radicalization among young individuals in Brussels in the recent past. The first factor that will be taken into consideration when analyzing the reasons behind radicalization is the effect of group dynamic and the subsequent impact of jihadist networks. In relation with this point, the importance of both family and friendship ties on the radicalization process of the twenty jihadists sampled will be further assessed. The second factor that will be analyzed regards the effect of demographical and geographical dynamics on the radicalization process of the jihadists sampled. The aim is to evaluate the extent to which "difficult urban areas" - with high unemployment rates among young individuals and large proportion of low-income population with a foreign background – are breeding grounds for Islamic radicalism. The third factor regards the extent to which criminal background can feed into terrorism. The last point takes the form of a discussion on the ideological rationale behind 'homegrown terrorism' and the role of Islam on the radicalization processes of the individuals sampled.

Every category will be seen in the light of 'Differential Association' theory. From an analytical point of view, 'Differential Association' theory may provide additional insights on the process leading to radicalization and eventually to the perpetration of crimes, which in this case, are crimes of a terrorist nature. As a reminder, the individual-level concept of 'Differential Association' theory states that an individual will engage in criminal endeavors if the following three conditions are met;

1). the individual has learned the skills and techniques for committing crime,
2). the individual has been exposed to an excess of definitions favorable to crime; and
3). the individual has the objective opportunity to carry out the crime (Matsueda, 2001).

This model has to be transposed for the needs of this study in order to verify the extent to which this theory is valid for explaining the radicalization of many young European Muslims. The main assumption is thus that an individual, in this case a would-be jihadist, is more likely to engage in jihad if all the aforementioned three conditions are met, keeping in mind that the term 'crime' as to be seen as 'crime of a terrorist nature'.

Group dynamics - Networking

As shown by *Figure 1* and *Figure 2*, many protagonists of the French-Belgian jihadist network knew each other and were part of a broader community of young Muslims that had been building connections for a long time. The nature of these connections varies and depends highly on factors such geographical proximity, membership to sport clubs, attending the same Mosque, kinship and friendship. For instance, Brahim Abdeslam, who died after detonating his suicide vest in Paris on November 13 2015, was Salah Abdeslam's brother. In addition, Ibrahim and Khalid el-Bakraoui, who are both dead as the result of terrorist attacks, were also brothers while Hasna Aït Boulahcen and Abdelhamid Abaaoud were cousins and died together after a police raid in Saint-Denis in the aftermath of the Paris attacks. This phenomenon has been frequently witnessed in most of the recent terrorist attacks in the west (Jarvie, 2016). Furthermore, a great number of jihadists' family members have traveled to Syria in order to follow their relatives (Coolsaet, 2016). Moreover, other forms of family ties may appear through friendship and comradeship, and are therefore central features on the path to radicalization (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Coolsaet, 2016; Sageman, 2005). The impact of these ties on the radicalization process will be analyzed and eventually assessed on the basis of the pathways of selected individuals present in the chosen sample.

Kinship dynamics

There are a great number of examples where radicalization has taken place among family members generally, particularly among brothers. Indeed, many recent terrorist plots have been organized by brothers lately: Chérif and Saïd Kouachi (Charlie Hebdo, 2015), Djokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev (Boston Marathon, 2013) and Jean-Michel and Fabien Clain, who claimed the responsibility for the Paris attacks on behalf of the so-called Islamic State. As a matter of fact, six out of the twenty jihadists present in our sample have family ties, some of which being brothers: Salah and Brahim Abdeslam; Ibrahim and Khalid el-Bakraoui, while two others were cousins: Abdelhamid Abaaoud and Hasna Aït Boulahcen. Furthermore, Abdelhamid Abaaoud was also known for having convinced his smaller brother, Younes Abaaoud, to join him while he was in Syria (Kepel, 2017). At only 13 years old, Younes Abaaoud is presumed by the French Ministry of Defense to be dead. Furthermore, within the selected sample, Mohamed Abrini's smaller brother, Souleymane Abrini, died in Syria while their cousin, H. Abrini, was arrested in Greece while on her way to Syria (Belgian Ministry of Justice). In light of these few

examples, one cannot underestimate the role and impact of family ties on the individuals' proclivity to radicalization and subsequently their decision to take part in jihad.

Terrorism, and the radicalization process leading to it, is indeed a highly social phenomenon in the sense that it entails as many peer discussions as any other form of activism. As Coolsaet (2016) describes, radicalization has to be seen and understood as a socialization process in which group dynamics may be even more important than ideology itself. This is reflected by the fact that among the twenty individuals studied here, six have direct family ties while all others had known each other for a significant period of time before the planning of the terrorist attacks. In this sense, the participation in a jihadist movement may be the result of previous interactions among like-minded next of kin or friends. The fact that sibling ties are common among terrorists invites a more detailed study of the relationship between kinship and radicalization. In order to do so, this paper will briefly focus on cases extracted from our sample, namely, the cases of the Abdeslam brothers and of the Abaaoud cousins.

Salah Abdeslam, born in 1989, and his deceased brother Brahim Abdeslam, grew up in Molenbeek. Salah and Brahim were both friends of Abdelhamid Abaaoud. The brothers were involved in the management of a bar named "Les Buéguines", located in the hearth of Molenbeek. Former clients described the bar as a central hub to drink alcohol and to buy and smoke hashish (AFP, 2015). At the same time, they were showing videos of propaganda of the so-called Islamic State. Both brothers were known to be "bon-vivants", chasing girls, drinking alcohol and smoking hashish. In addition, Brahim was known to be a small-scale drug dealer, selling mostly hashish (ibid). Former friends and relatives of the Abdeslam brothers described both brothers suddenly quitting their delinquent lifestyle, selling their bar and eventually trying to travel to Syria but failing. In adddtion, Ibrahim and Salah Abdeslam's third brother, Mohamed, was arrested in the aftermath of the Paris attacks before being freed for his non-implication in the terrorist plots. Their younger brother Mohamed proclaimed to not have foreknowledge of the attacks, highlighting the Abdeslam brothers' capacity to keep something secret, even from their own family.

There are strong reasons to believe that Salah Abdeslam followed the path of his older brother Brahim when the former took the decision to become radicalized, following his older brother who had been to Syria and received training in terrorist tactics (AFP, 2015). Salah was indeed known by the police for being a delinquent, however, he was not monitored by the Belgian

intelligence services for belonging to a terrorist organization nor for being radicalized. Nevertheless, both Salah and Brahim were living in the same environment, worked together in the family business and spent most of their time together. Radicalization is often based on peer-discussions and an individual may indeed develop his/her ideology or social identity through interactions with the closest relatives, usually the brothers, sisters, cousins and childhood friends (Sageman, 2005). Sageman (2005) contends that siblings often trust each other with their lives, making brothers and sisters easy targets for radicalization (Sageman, 2005). In light of this recognition, siblings tend to become involved in terrorism because they share affinity and evolve in similar environments.

Another case, in relation with the potential impact of kinship on radicalization, is that of Hasna Aït Boulahcen, cousin of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who died, along with her cousin, after a police raid in Saint-Denis (France). Aged 26 at the time of her death, Hasna had a difficult childhood where she suffered physical violence and subsequently became a foster child (Kepel, 2017). Hasna and Abdelhamid did not keep in regular contact since they did not live in the same city, however, she was completely aware about her cousin's extremism (ibid). This case is interesting in many regards as it fosters the extent to which an individual would offer his/her help to a family member knowing the potential risk to her life. A few months before her death, Hasna Aït Boulahcen stated publicly via the social media *Facebook* that she wanted to fly to the war zones in Syria and Iraq in order to fight along with her cousin Abdelhamid and the other jihadists fighting there (ibid). Hasna was indeed very proud of her cousin and did not hesitate one second to help him in the aftermath of the Paris attacks (ibid). On November 15, 2015 Hasna received a call originating from Belgium asking her whether she could help her cousin by finding him a place to stay in or around Paris (AFP, 2015). That night, Hasna made several phone calls for the purpose of finding a suitable place for her cousin to hide (ibid). The next morning, Hasna Aït Boulahcen, together with Chakib Akrouh and Abdelhamid Abaaoud, moved into an apartment located in the Parisian suburb of Saint-Denis. On November 18 2015, the two cousins, along with Chakib Akrouh, were killed by the police after a seven-hour long raid (ibid).

As someone who enjoyed a typically western lifestyle, taking part in activities such as attending parties and drinking alcohol which are frowned upon in Islam, it is surprising that Hasna died defending radicalized Islamic terrorists. Despite being fully aware of her cousin's involvement in the Paris attacks, Hasna still helped him. Coolsaet (2016) contends that factors such as social

strains and criminal backgrounds have a great impact on radicalization, stressing that family ties have a great effect on the decision-making process of many would-be jihadists. In addition, Sageman (2005) finds that two-thirds of those who engage in the jihad do so collectively with their friends or family (Sageman, 2005). Despite Sageman's (2005) findings now being over a decade old, it is clear from the evidence provided above that this trend continues today. Indeed, a report called *'ISIS in the West' (2016)* made by the American Think-Tank '*New America'* showed that more than a quarter of Western jihadists have a familial connection to jihad. From the perspective of group dynamics, it can therefore be asserted with certainty that family ties have a significant impact on the radicalization process of terrorists.

Friendship/Comradeship/Collective Identity

As mentioned above, many central figures of the network had been friends with each other for a long time before they had become radicalized. The impact of pre-existing kinship and friendship ties on the overall structure of jihadist networks and, to a broader extent, on the radicalization process of would-be jihadists, has already been stressed by many scholars such as Edwin Bakker, Marc Sageman, Olivier Roy, Rik Coolsaet and Simon Cottee. Peer recruitment appears to be a central aspect in the context of radicalization and jihadist affiliation. Most of those who decided to travel to Syria and/or Iraq or those who became radicalized and stayed in their home countries already knew someone inside the networks: family, friends, sport teammates, schoolmates, old friends from their neighborhood (Coolsaet, 2016). Often, would-be jihadists are persuaded to come by those that are already inside a given network (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). Concrete examples of this phenomenon of peer recruitment can be seen in cities and neighborhoods such as Molenbeek, Laeken, Schaarbeek, Vilvoorde, Antwerp and Verviers in Belgium but also in Lunel, Toulouse and Paris in France and in Delft and The Hague in The Netherlands (Bakker & De Bont, 2016). The demographical and geographical dynamics in relation to radicalization will be further studied in the next section of this paper, which will show how certain neighborhoods can become breeding grounds for radicalization.

Group dynamics may go beyond simple group affiliation or a feeling of belonging, as it can eventually support a collective identity amongst a group. Jihadist groups provide their members with a powerful and seductive narrative by means of which they can make sense of their life and eventually develop this collective identity (Cottee, 2011; Sageman, 2005). In other words, this phenomenon can be seen on a two-level basis; the first one being the fact that many would-

be jihadists join jihadist networks through existing friendship ties; and the second one being the creation of a collective identity among a wider number of like-minded jihadists after they have already joined a given jihadist network. Both levels of analysis can be applied to the pathways of several jihadists that are included in the sample.

Khalid Zerkani, the oldest individual present in the sample, is a Moroccan recruiter, facilitator and propagandist who is currently imprisoned in Belgium. His role in the Paris and Brussels attacks has been unveiled after investigations proved that he had connections with at least four protagonists of both the Paris and Brussels attacks and with many more individuals linked to terrorism (Counter Terrorism Project, 2016). In this sample alone, Khalid Zerkani has known links with five individuals namely Reda Kriket, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, Chakib Akrouh, Najim Laachraoui and Mohamed Abrini. Pieter Van Ostaeyen wrote about the '*Zerkani networ*k' in 2016 and pointed out that while Zerkani certainly played a leading role in proselytizing, the young individuals present in these social networks did also encourage each other to radicalize and to travel to Syria or Iraq (Van Ostaeyen, 2016). The 'Zerkani network' also had the characteristic of mostly targeting unemployed people from the 'croissant pauvre' neighborhoods of Brussels, people with criminal backgrounds, and those with little or no Islamic backgrounds (Van Ostaeyen, 2016). This aspect will further be explained in the next two sections of this paper. Nevertheless, the case of Khalid Zerkani highlights the potential effects of group dynamics on the process of radicalization. Many of Zerkani's recruits eventually decided to leave for the war zones or to plot or commit terrorist attacks on European soil (ibid). In addition, it has been established that the Abdeslam brothers knew Abdelhamid Abaaoud for a long time as they grew up in the same street, in Molenbeek (AFP, 2015).

Another striking example is the manhunt of Salah Abdeslam which lasted for more than four months after the Paris attacks. Thanks to a solid network of friends and accomplices, Salah Abdeslam managed to evade the police for four months following the attacks, despite spending the entire time in or around Molenbeek. Four individuals in the sample were friends of Salah Abdeslam and helped him escape from the police. Mohamed Amri and Hamza Attou drove Salah Abdeslam from Paris back to Brussels on November 14, 2015. Once in Brussels, Salah Abdeslam met with another friend namely Ali Oulkadi who later dropped him in a safe house in the neighborhood of Schaerbeek (AFP, 2015). Evidently, Salah Abdeslam received overwhelming support from a large network composed of old friends and sympathizers (Kepel, 2017). This is especially true given the fact that there is no reason to believe that Salah

Abdeslam organized his escape prior the Paris attacks, since he was supposed to detonate his suicide vest on November 13, 2015. There are therefore many reasons to believe that this entire network of friends and sympathizers organized itself in a rapid and effective manner, probably galvanized by a strong feeling of collective identity.

Demographical and geographical dynamics

The vast majority of jihadists involved in the recent terrorist attacks originate from deprived neighborhoods or cities with high unemployment rates, major educational disparities and an isolation from other, more privileged, parts of the society (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Coolsaet, 2016; Cottee, 2011; Hinck, Karklis, Schaul, Stamm & Williams, 2016; Sageman, 2005). These socioeconomic factors and their impact on the radicalization of young Muslims will be the subject of analysis in the following section.

The average age of the individuals present in our sample is 27. This is representative of the overall contingent of fighters of the so-called Islamic State. Indeed, in March 2016 the British media broadcaster Sky News revealed the identity of twenty-two thousand jihadists belonging to the so-called Islamic State. The American Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) then analyzed this data, revealing that up to two-thirds of the recruits were aged between 21 and 30 years old, with an average age of 26 (CTC, 2016). To reflect this, the sample used in this study consists mainly of young, lower-class, second and third generation Muslims males. They are poorer and less well educated than non-Muslims in Europe and may subsequently face systematic discrimination in the labor market (Coolsaet, 2016). As a result of these perceived inequalities, they are more vulnerable to feelings of being constantly confronted with many types of injustice, which may subsequently manifest in violence as an act of revenge.

Coolsaet (2016) stresses the importance of feelings of injustice and discrimination on the individual's subsequent decision to join the jihad. When viewed in the context of a conductive and wider radical milieu, these feelings are key elements in order to understand the recent phenomenon of homegrown terror and radicalization in Belgium. Indeed, the neighborhoods located within the 'croissant pauvre', namely Molenbeek, Schaerbeek and Laeken, seem to be breeding grounds for Islamic extremism since they are home to a large number of jihadists (Hinck, Karklis, Schaul, Stamm & Williams, 2016). One can argue that the perceived lack of opportunities may be one of the main drivers of Islamic radicalization. This study takes the

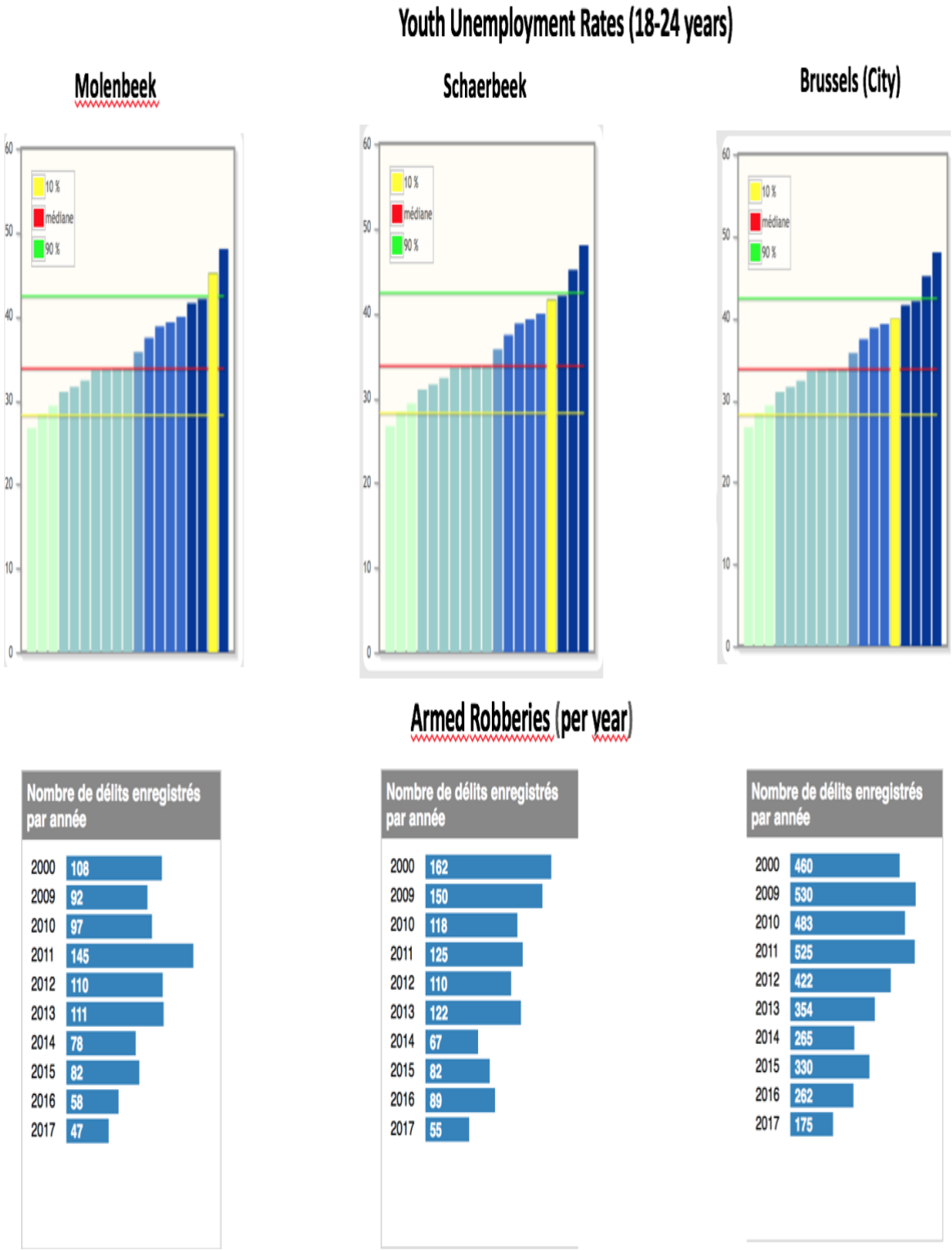
example of the neighborhood of Molenbeek as a central example of such an underprivileged municipality that may breed radicalization, nicknamed the "European capital of Jihad". A study by the European Institute of Peace established that at least forty-seven individuals, originating from Molenbeek, have left for Syria and/or Iraq (European Institute of Peace, 2017). According to the Mayor of Molenbeek, Françoise Schepmans, the area also plays host to around twenty-five 'stay-home' jihadists. In this sample alone, about fifteen jihadists have ties with this Brussels' neighborhood. It is important however to note that not all unemployed young Muslims originating from Molenbeek have fallen into the trap of Islamic radicalization, despite feelings of injustice and discrimination are indeed deeply rooted in this neighborhood, its large non-national population (between 71-81 %) and its large Muslim community (European Institute of Peace, 2017). This begs the question why certain young individuals living in deprived areas are more likely to choose the path of Islamic radicalism, and to discover the extent to which their social and geographical environment, in this case Molenbeek, provided a trigger for this choice.

There are significant differences in terms of crime rates among the nineteen municipalities of Brussels, which, as shown above, affects the likelihood for individuals living in these municipalities to be influenced by Islamic radicalization. A study conducted on behalf of the Belgian Ministry of Justice found that there are strong links between registered cases of juvenile delinquency and socio-economic status (Vanneste, Ravier & Mahieu, 2017). This would mean that young individuals originating from deprived neighborhoods or cities with high unemployment rates, facing major educational disparities and standing in isolation from other more privileged neighborhoods (Hinck, Karklis, Schaul, Stamm & Williams, 2016) are more likely to get in trouble with the law.

Figure 4 shows data on the unemployment rates (in 2012) among young individuals (18-24 years old) in the municipalities of Molenbeek, Schaerbeek and Brussels City as well as the subsequent number of registered armed robberies (per year) committed in these three municipalities. These municipalities can be considered as "difficult urban areas" given the high unemployment rates among young individuals and the large proportion of low-income population with a foreign background. On the other hand, *Figure 5* shows data on the unemployment rates (in 2012) among young individuals (18-24 years old) in the municipalities of Auderghem, Watermael-Boitsfort and Woluwe-Saint-Pierre as well as the subsequent number of registered armed robberies (per year) committed in those three municipalities. These

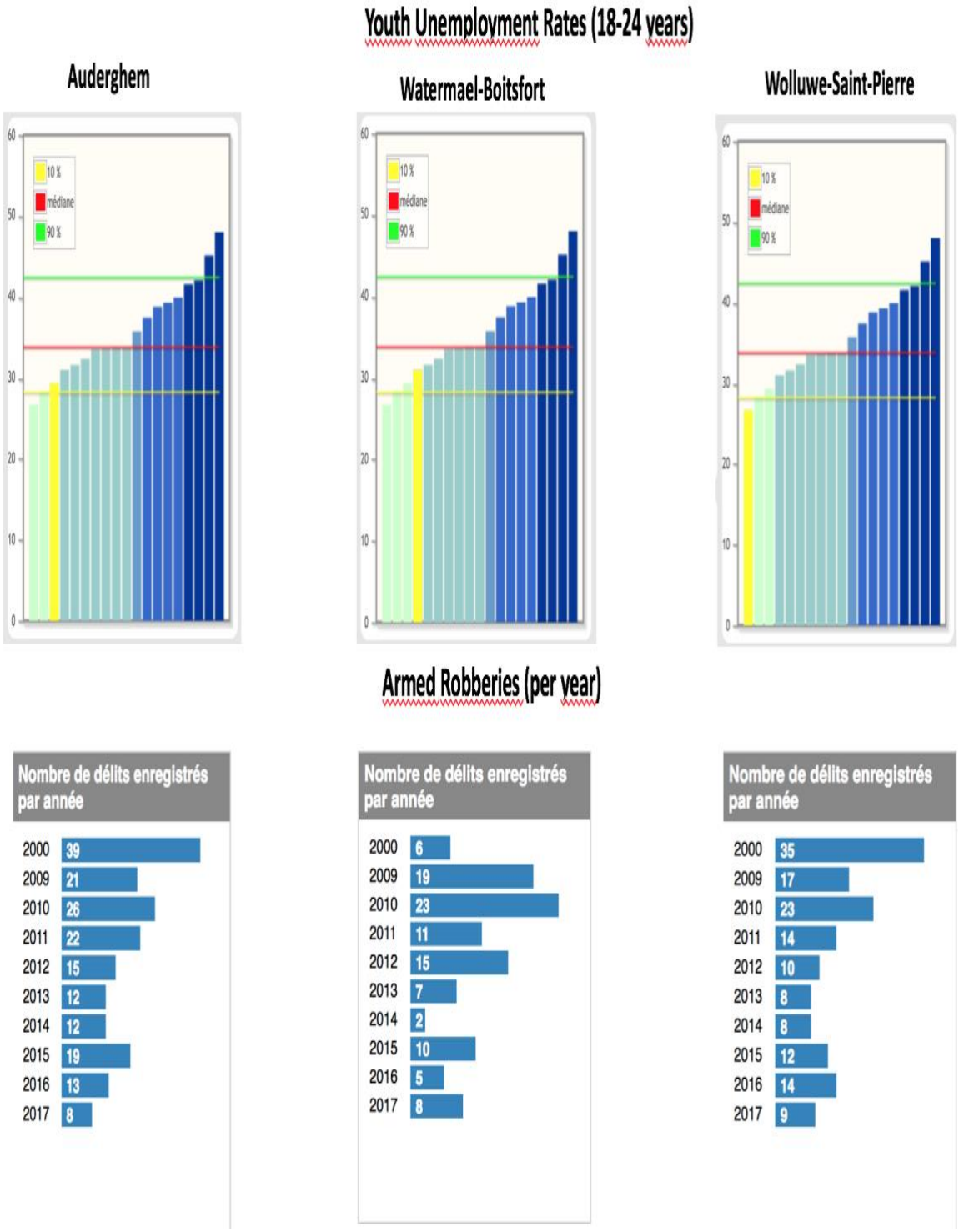
municipalities, for their part, are considered as “privileged neighborhoods” given the low unemployment rates and the large proportion of high-income population.

Figure 4: *data on unemployment rates among young individuals (18-24) and subsequent registered number of armed robberies in the municipalities of Molenbeek, Schaerbeek and Brussels (city). This data gathered by Brussels Employment Agency (Actiris) and the Belgian Federal Police.*



Source: Actiris; BCSS & DRI/BIPOL - Statistiques policières de criminalité

Figure 5: *data on unemployment rates among young individuals (18-24) and subsequent registered number of armed robberies in the municipalities of Auderghem, Watermael-Boisfort and Wolluwe-Saint-Pierre. This data was gathered by Brussels Employment Agency (Actiris) and the Belgian Federal Police.*



Source: Actiris; BCSS & DRI/BIPOL - Statistiques policières de criminalité

Figure 4 and *Figure 5* show that the unemployment rate among youths in Molenbeek is 45.11%, significantly higher than the Brussels average of 38,09%. In addition, both the municipalities of Schaerbeek (41.56%) and Brussels City (39.94%) have higher unemployment rates among youths than the average rates of the Brussels Region. On the other hand, the unemployment rates of the municipalities of Auderghem (29.33%), Watermael-Boitsfort (30.97%) and Woluwe-Saint-Pierre (26.67%) are significantly below this average.

While the disparity between the unemployment rates of these two very distinct municipalities of Molenbeek and Wolowe-Saint-Pierre is not surprising, what is more unpredicted however is the relatively short gap between the average unemployment rate among youths in the Brussels Region, which accounts for 38.09%, and the unemployment rates of youths in the three most "difficult urban areas" mentioned above. Brussels City (39.94%) is only one point higher than the average rate, Schaerbeek (41.56%) has a notable, but still not extremely large, gap of three points, while Molenbeek (45.11%) has, for its part, a significant gap of seven points. On the basis of this data, unemployment rates among youths alone may not provide enough grounds to substantiate the assumption made by many scholars that unemployment plays an important role in the radicalization of many young would-be jihadists (Bakker & De Bont, 2016; Coolsaet, 2016; Cottee, 2011; Hinck, Karklis, Schaul, Stamm & Williams, 2016; Sageman, 2005).

Nevertheless, this data makes one thing clear: there are indeed strong links between registered cases of juvenile delinquents and their socio-economic status. The phenomenon of higher crime rates in lower economically privileged areas has also been observed by Charlotte Vanneste, Isabelle Ravier and Valentine Mahieu (2017) in their report on the links between registered cases of juvenile delinquency and the socio-economic status in the Brussels Region. Their analysis is based on statistics gathered by the Belgian Ministry of Justice on delinquency among young individuals aged between 18 and 25 who live in the Brussels Region (*Figure 6)*. This data was gathered between 2008 and 2012.

There are major demographic variations among the nineteen municipalities of the Brussels Region. Between 2008 and 2012, Molenbeek had the most registered juvenile delinquency in the overall Brussels Region. In Molenbeek, three-thousand four hundred and forty-three (3,443) young individuals have been reported to the courts of justice between 2008 and 2012. This means that in Molenbeek, 10.7% of youngsters from this age group had problems with the law each year during that period. This percentage is 9.9% for Brussels City and 8,5% for Schaerbeek

(in red in *Figure 6*). On the other hand, the municipalities of Auderghem (5.6%), Watermael-Boitsfort (5.5%) and Woluwe-Saint-Pierre (3.1%) had significantly lower juvenile delinquency rates per year during the aforementioned period that has been studied (in green in *Figure 6)*. The average rate for the Brussels Region being 7.9% (in yellow in *Figure 6)*.

Figure 6: *registered amount of juvenile delinquency in the nineteen municipalities of Brussels and in the overall Brussels Region (in yellow) between 2008 and 2012. Data collected by the Belgian Ministry of Justice.*

	Pop moyenne 18-25 ans	Nbre jeunes signalés 2008-12	Tx jeunes signalés 2008-12 (%)	Nbre moyen annuel jeunes signalés	Tx moyen annuel jeunes signalés (%)
Molenbeek-St-Jean	9744	3443	35,3	1043,0	10,7
Saint-Josse-Ten-Noode	3368	1184	35,2	352,2	10,5
Anderlecht	11038	3804	34,5	1103,8	10,0
Bruxelles	17111	5678	33,2	1691,2	9,9
Koekelberg	1905	593	31,1	169,6	8,9
Schaerbeek	13590	4051	29,8	1161,2	8,5
Saint-Gilles	5093	1464	28,7	420,2	8,3
Berchem-Ste-Agathe	2082	570	27,4	158,6	7,6
Evere	3461	916	26,5	268,4	7,8
Forest	4986	1317	26,4	388,6	7,8
Jette	4636	1162	25,1	339,8	7,3
Ganshoren	2004	491	24,5	144,0	7,2
Ixelles	9608	1968	20,5	569,8	5,9
Etterbeek	5053	993	19,7	293,6	5,8
Auderghem	2949	557	18,9	165,4	5,6
Uccle	7598	1412	18,6	397,4	5,2
Watermael-Boitsfort	2288	422	18,4	126,2	5,5
Woluwe-St-Lambert	5282	724	13,7	200,8	3,8
Woluwe-St-Pierre	3829	479	12,5	120,4	3,1
RBC	115623	0	27,0	9114,2	7,9

Source: Belgian Ministry of Justice/INCC

The link between socio-economic status and delinquency rates is consolidated by the findings extracted from *Figure 4* and *Figure 5*. Coolsaet (2016) suggests that the negative perception of the future resulting from high unemployment rates or precarious job situations may raise the risk of social unrest. Young people growing up in these neighborhoods may thus be keener to

translate their anger into various types of radical behaviors and eventually into violence. Undoubtedly, some individuals evolving in such an environment may experience feelings of not being able to enjoy the equivalent opportunities as their peers from more "privileged neighborhoods" (Coolsaet, 2016). Almost every individual present in the sample have in common the fact that they are second or third generation Muslim immigrants who have been raised in "difficult urban areas" in which they have been exposed to different types of radical behaviors including the use of violence. Significantly, fifteen were born or were raised in one of the neighborhoods of the 'croissant pauvre'. Two more, namely Khalid Ben Larbi and Soufiane Amghar, were not residents of Molenbeek, but had been raised there. For their part, Reida Kriket and Hasna Aït Boulahcen were born and raised in deprived suburbs of Paris (Kepel, 2017).

In addition, some of these individuals also faced personal difficulties in their youth, such as strained family relations. For instance, the Abdeslam brothers, Salah and Brahim, had great difficulties at school and were unemployed at the time they decided to open a bar which may have served as a 'terrorist hub' for organizing the Paris attacks of November 2015 (Kepel, 2017). The el-Bakraoui brothers, Ibrahim and Khalid, also had great difficulties at school and subsequently became involved in crime (AFP, 2016). To explain simply, out of the twenty individuals sampled, eighteen did not engage in higher education. One the other hand, the correlation between poor academic engagement and crime is not absolute, as two individuals sampled engaged in higher education. Najim Laachraoui was indeed considered as a good student and was enrolled in two Belgian universities, one in Brussels and the other in Louvain, where he studied electromechanical studies before dropping out after one year (ibid). Another jihadist, Bilal Hadfi, was a student in electricity at the "*Instituut Anneessens-Funck"* before becoming radicalized. In countries such as Belgium and France, access to education is free and accessible to everyone. The fact that so few jihadists have engaged in higher education is the result of an overall climate of separation from the rest of the society and a possible lack of incentive. Consequently, the majority of the jihadists present in our sample were either unemployed or held a series of small and unqualified jobs.

A common denominator linking all the individuals sampled is an early confrontation with policing and the justice system. More specifically, two-thirds of the fifteen jihadists sampled originating from the 'croissant pauvre' have criminal backgrounds. Additionally, 80% of the jihadists who do not originate from the 'croissant pauvre' also have criminal backgrounds. In

our sample only, jihadists with criminal backgrounds account for 70%. In light of this, socio-economic status clearly impacts juvenile delinquency, which may eventually have an impact on the individual's decision to become radicalized.

The last two sections – 'group dynamics/networking' and 'demographical and geographical dynamics' – can be seen in the light of the second condition (*the individual has been exposed to an excess of definitions favorable to crime*) of 'Differential Association' theory for explaining crime, and in this case, crime of a terrorist nature. Among the twenty jihadists present in our sample, many were born and raised in deprived areas of Brussels or Paris, in neighborhoods with a high amount of "definitions favorable to crime". This questions the relationship between socio-economic status and the tendency to commit crimes. It has been seen that in municipalities where unemployment rates are high, crime rates are also high. It has also been shown that the exact opposite relationship is true since criminal rates are lower in municipalities with lower unemployment rates. The assumption is that individuals growing up in deprived cities or neighborhoods are more likely to be exposed to definitions favorable to crime than individuals evolving in more "privileged" cities or neighborhoods. Being exposed to an excess of definitions in favor of crime may eventually lead to a commitment to crime. The common denominator however linking the individuals sampled here is their early confrontation with policing and justice. More specifically, two-thirds of the fifteen jihadists present in our sample originating from the 'croissant pauvre' (Molenbeek, Schaerbeek, Laeken) had criminal backgrounds. Some would-be jihadists, having criminal backgrounds, may become exposed to definition favorable to jihadism. This process most often takes place as a result of group dynamics and peer recruitment. The rapid radicalization of young 'westernized' individuals highlights this phenomenon of a brutal change of mind that may be due to the presence of an excess of "definitions favorable to jihad".

Skills transfer from criminality to terrorism / Criminal background

The last two levels of analysis have taught us that peer-recruitment is likely to take place in local friendship and kinship networks, as well as in specific parts of the society mostly affected by high unemployment and the lack of prospects. This section will analyze a sphere that may have an even larger effect on radicalization and on the commitment to engage in a terrorist act, namely the criminal background of would-be jihadists. As mentioned above, 70% of the jihadists sampled had criminal backgrounds prior to committing acts of terrorism, ranging from

petty crimes and drug trafficking to large-scale organized crime or involvement in terrorist activities. As mentioned above, the so-called Islamic State finds the majority of its recruits in European deprived areas, among the European underclasses who have previously been engaged in violent acts or criminal activities. It appears that criminal and terrorist groups have come to recruit from the same pool of people with radical predispositions and originating from the same demographics, often from the same neighborhoods or cities (Basra, Brunner & Neuman, 2016). This link between criminality and terrorism has previously been labelled as "from small-crimes to terrorism" by the French newspaper *Le Monde*.

In order to understand this, it is first necessary to determine whether there is a merging between criminal and terrorist milieus in Belgium. Moreover, individualist is necessary to discover the extent to which those who have been confronted with policing and the criminal justice system in the past as a result of their radical behaviors are more likely to engage in other forms of radical conducts in relation with Islam. The impact of jail time on the radicalization process of certain individuals does also comprise a key issue (Basra, Brunner & Neuman, 2016). Prisons have proven to be genuine incubators for Islamic Extremism lately and there are many cases of radicalization among individuals spending jail time for crimes completely unrelated to terrorism (Kepel, 2017). In France, half of the incarcerated individuals come from Muslim backgrounds (French Ministry of Justice), while in Belgium this figure stands at 45% (Belgian Ministry of Justice). This relatively high number of despondent followers or former followers of the Muslim faith influence others inmates in prisons. Many prison inmates are young, and are often charged with violent crimes without any backgrounds in extremist religious behavior, making the influence of extremists views the last piece in the puzzle of their pathway to radicalization (Kepel, 2017). There is a small proportion of individuals who converted to Islam and then became radicalized in both Belgian and French jail populations (Belgian and French Ministries of Justice). At the time of the last census made available to the public in January 2017, there were a total of four hundred and fifty radicalized individuals imprisoned in the different Belgian jails. Among them, one hundred and sixty (35%) were sentenced for terrorism-related crimes, while two hundred and ninety (65%) were sentenced for common law crimes but became radicalized in jail (Belgian Ministry of Justice).

There are a few significant examples of terrorists who became radicalized during their jail time and who later committed terrorist acts. Amedy Coulibaly became radicalized in 2005 during a jail sentence in the French prison of *Fleury-Mérogis*, later murdering a police officer before

taking twenty people hostages and killing four of them in a Jewish supermarket located in Paris, France in 2015. Although Amedy Coulibaly was known for his sympathy for radical Islam before going to jail (Kepel, 2017), he became radicalized in jail through connections with Djamel Beghal, who Kepel (2017) identifies as his "mentor". Another example is Mohamed Merah, who killed three French soldiers (one in Toulouse and two in Montauban) before killing four Jewish individuals (including three children) in a Jewish school located in Toulouse, France in 2012. In 2008 Mohamed Merah was sentenced to eighteen months in prison for a simple "bag-snatching" crime (ibid). Another example is Mehdi Nemmouche, a chronic offender who was sentenced to jail on seven different occasions (AFP, 2014). He became radicalized between 2007 and 2012 in a prison located in south of France (ibid) where he got in contact with a group of inmates known to be radical Islamists (ibid). In May 2014, Mehdi Nemmouche killed four people in the Jewish Museum of Brussels.

Along with the examples outlined in the previous section of this study, the actions of these individuals do not only highlight the connection between prison and Islamic radicalism, or between delinquency and radicalization, but also that jihadist networks mainly consist of young delinquents. The members of the French-Belgian jihadist network had previously been engaged in drug trafficking, petty crimes and street violence, resulting in the majority having outstanding criminal records. Some newspapers and scholars talked about this phenomenon as "*Gangster Islam"* (The New York Times, 2016), *"Part Terrorist, Part Gangster"* (The Washington Post, 2015) or *"Gang of Street Thugs"* (Coolsaet, 2016). There are indeed some common features between street gang dynamics and the modus operandi of the French-Belgian jihadist network. Coolsaet (2016) identifies shared patterns inherent to both forms of radicalism: the way in which individuals commit to engagement; age range; group dynamics by which members end up to follow the opinion of the rest of the group; feelings of revenge, injustice and discrimination; and an inclination for violence and radical behaviors.

This merging between criminal and terrorist milieus may either take place in deprived neighborhoods such as Molenbeek or in jails, but the final result is the same: recruits with history of petty criminality or large-scale organized crime are better equipped to engage in terrorist activities (Van Ostaeyen, 2016). Criminals develop skills that are extremely useful in the context of a terrorist attack, for example being able to evade the police for significant periods of time, as has been shown by Salah Abdeslam's evasion of the authorities that lasted for more than four months in the aftermath of the Paris attacks. Through the use of fake

documents and access to multiple safe houses, Abdeslam leveraged his access to criminal networks which mobilized to his aid quickly and effectively (Basra, Brunner & Neuman, 2016). Other members of the French-Belgian jihadist network also leveraged their capacity to stay under the radar, and therefore managed to avoid being captured during the entire period before the Paris attacks took place. Furthermore, the fact that Abdelhamid Abaaoud managed to come back from Syria to Europe before the Paris attacks was quite revealing about his capacity to stay hidden. Indeed, Abaaoud went through countries such as Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Austria, Hungary, Serbia, France and Belgium using fake travel documents without being challenged, most probably benefitting from the flaws inherent to European borders (AFP, 2015).

Another skill that can be transferred from criminality to terrorism is the acquisition and use of weapons. As demonstrated by the recent terrorist attacks in Western Europe, terrorists typically have both the access and knowledge necessary in order to use both assault rifles and explosives devices in their attacks. On the other hand, even without access to sophisticated weaponry, terrorists may also use knifes or trucks in order to achieve their goals. In the context of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, it is important to question how the terrorists involved get the access to an arsenal of powerful weapons, as well as kilograms of explosives in the European Union. According to a recent study funded by the European Commission and conducted by an international network of firearms experts, it has never been easier for criminals and terrorists to obtain firearms and heavy weapons through illegal black markets (SAFTE, 2018). The study further explains that would-be terrorists who are members of certain low-scale criminal networks do also have the capacity to acquire heavy weapons, provided that they know the right people able to helping them (SAFTE, 2018). In light of this, a would-be jihadist with criminal backgrounds and living in a deprived city or neighborhood, would either know or be able to get in contact with someone able to provide him/her with weapons and explosives.

As a matter of fact, out of the fourteen jihadists sampled with criminal backgrounds, eight were known to have committed violent crimes (for example, assault, robbery, or the use of firearms). Among them, Brahim Abdeslam was sentenced to twenty months in jail for the traffic of arms and false identification documents (AFP, 2015). Mohamed Abrini was a former drug dealer previously imprisoned on charges of petty crimes and robberies (AFP, 2016). Abdelhamid Abaaoud was believed to have been radicalized during his stay at the prison of *Saint-Gilles* in Brussels while serving a sentence for the crime of theft (AFP, 2015).

The pathways of Ibrahim and Khalid el-Bakraoui show some striking features of the skills that are used by criminals and that are then transferable for the purposes of terrorism. Even though they both engaged in criminal activities relatively early, Khalid el-Bakraoui was the first one of the two el-Bakraoui brothers who fell into a delinquent lifestyle. In 2009, Khalid el-Bakraoui took part in multiple carjackings before kidnapping a bank employee (AFP, 2016). Later that year, he was arrested by the police in a warehouse full of stolen cars but was not charged at that time (ibid). Khalid was then arrested again in 2011 for charges of illegal possession of heavy weapons (ibid). As a result of these charges, Khalid was sentenced of five years in prison by a Belgian court for criminal conspiracy, armed robberies, possession of stolen cars and possession of weapons (ibid). On the other hand, Ibrahim el-Bakraoui was arrested in 2010 as a result of a failed robbery of a *Western Union* office in Brussels (ibid). Surprised by a police patrol, Ibrahim opened fire on police officers using a heavy weapon hitting one police officer in the leg (ibid). That year, he was sentenced to nine years in prison for the attempted murder of a police officer (ibid). Both brothers became radicalized in prison through their contact with Islamic radical inmates (ibid). After being released in 2014 and 2015, both brothers were again arrested at the Syrian border with Turkey in 2015 (Counter Extremism Project, 2016). They both had predispositions for violence, knew how to use weapons and were both radicalized in jail. They were therefore perfectly equipped for the planning and perpetration of terrorist attacks.

Another jihadist present in our sample having a prolific criminal background is Reda Kriket. Kriket was arrested by the French police in March 2016, suspected of being involved in the plotting of an imminent terrorist attack (AFP, 2016). In his apartment, the police found an unprecedentedly large arsenal of weaponry, composed of five assault rifles, seven handguns and 500 grams of the same type of TATP explosives that were used by the suicide bombers for both Paris and Brussels attacks (ibid).

Khalid Zerkani is the oldest individual sampled in this study. As opposed to his counterparts, Zerkani has not been involved in the planning nor the perpetration of terrorist attacks. He was, however, sentenced to 12 years in prison for participating in the activities of a terrorist organization for assuming the role of mentor, recruiter and propagandist (Couter Extremism Project, 2016). Khalid Zerkani has been able to develop a recruitment network so significant that it has been informally labeled as the '*Zerkani Network'* by many newspapers. The

singularity of the network was that it was composed of former criminals originating from Molenbeek and some other municipalities of Brussels. Zerkani understood the strategic need to recruit criminals in order to take advantage of their knowledge of guns, safe houses and criminal milieus (Van Ostaeyen, 2016). In this sample alone, Khalid Zerkani has known links with five other individuals, namely Reda Kriket, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, Chakib Akrouh, Najim Laachraoui and Mohamed Abrini. These jihadists leveraged their previous criminal backgrounds and were able to stay under the radar as well as to rely on contacts in the criminal milieus in order to acquire all the weapons and explosives needed for the attacks in which they were involved.

Recruiters thus have many environments from which they can operate. The fact that so many jihadists become radicalized in jail calls into question the ability of the authorities to contain this phenomenon. Countries such as France and Belgium are currently experimenting new methods of imprisonment for radicalized inmates (AFP, 2016). The experimentation consists of isolating the most dangerous inmates from the rest in order to prevent them from engaging in proselytism (ibid). It is too early however to draw any conclusions regarding the potential effects, positive or negative, of such measures. Besides, prisons are not the only environment in which criminals can become recruited for terrorism purposes. The example of the *Zerkani Network* clearly highlights the fact that there are indeed breeding grounds for Islamic radicalization. Zerkani targeted mostly unemployed youngsters with criminal records in deprived areas of Brussels. This modus operandi works as many of his recruits either managed to reach Syria and/or Iraq or to stay under the radar throughout the entire process leading to the Paris and Brussels attacks. If not all young individuals with criminal backgrounds are terrorists, the vast majority of the terrorists have indeed criminal backgrounds. In light of this, it seems that the attackers of the recent terrorist attacks of Paris and Brussels have benefited from both their criminal networks and criminal skills. The strength of the French-Belgian network therefore lied in its flexibility, adaptability and capacity to mobilize various actors from different milieus.

The last section – skills transfer from criminality to terrorism / criminal background– can be seen in the light of the first condition (*the individual has learned the skills and techniques for committing crime*) of 'Differential Association' theory for explaining crime, and in this case, crime of a terrorist nature. It has been shown that there are indeed connections between criminal and terrorist milieus. Terrorists will take advantage of the skills they have acquired throughout

their criminal “careers” and use them to better engage in the planning of terrorist attacks. If it is true for the vast majority of the individuals sampled that the learning of these skills and techniques were not originally intended for organizing terrorist plots, they however most certainly understand how useful these skills and techniques can be when used for the purposes of terrorism. This is why Islamic recruiters tend to target young individuals with criminal backgrounds. For instance, Khalid Zerkani understood the strategic need to recruit criminals in order to take advantage of their knowledge of guns, safe houses and criminal milieus (Van Ostaeyen, 2016). A total of 70% of the jihadists sampled had criminal backgrounds ranging from petty crimes and drug trafficking to large-scale organized crime or involvement in terrorist activities. They were therefore equipped to commit crimes in general, and terrorism related crimes in particular.

Table 1: *Table 1 contains data and information on the individuals sampled that served as empirical basis for this discussion.* 0 = No / X = Yes

#	Name	Country	Involved in plot	Foreign Fighter/Attempted	Extremist Religious Background	Criminal Background	Time in Prison	Kinship with member(s) of the network	Friendship/comradship with member(s) of the network	Residents of the Croissant Pauvre (Molenbeek/Schaerbeek/Laeken)	Year of Birth
1	Khalid Zerkani	BEL	0	0	X	X	0	0	X	X	1975
2	Naim Laachraoui	BEL	X	X	0	0	0	0	X	X	1991
3	Salah Abdeslam	BEL/FRA	X	Attempted	0	X	X	X	X	X	1989
4	Brahim Abdeslam	BEL/FRA	X	X	0	X	X	X	X	X	1984
5	Mohamed Abrini	BEL/FRA	X	0	0	X	X	0	X	X	1984
6	Chakib Akrouh	BEL/MOR	X	X	0	0	0	0	X	X	1991
7	Khalid el-Bakraoui	BEL	X	0	0	X	X	X	X	X	1988
8	Ibrahim el-Bakraoui	BEL	X	Attempted	0	X	X	X	X	X	1986
9	Abdelhamid Abaaoud	BEL	X	X	0	X	X	X	X	X	1987
10	Ayoub el-Khazzani	BEL/FRA	X	X	0	X	X	0	X	0	1990
11	Bilal Hadfi	FRA	X	X	0	0	0	0	X	X	1995
12	Reda Kriket	FRA	X	X	0	X	X	0	X	0	1982
13	Hasna Aït Boulahcen	FRA/MOR	X	0	0	0	0	X	0	0	1989
14	Khalid Ben Larbi	BEL	X	X	?	X	0	0	X	0	1992
15	Soufiane Amghar	BEL	X	X	?	X	X	0	X	0	1989
16	Hamza Attou	FRA	0	0	0	X	0	0	X	X	1994
17	Mohamed Amri	FRA	X	0	X	X	0	0	X	X	1988
18	Ali Oulkadi	FRA	X	0	?	?	?	0	X	X	1984
19	Mohamed Belkaïd	ALG	X	X	X	0	0	0	X	X	1981
20	Mohamed Bakkali	BEL	X	0	0	X	0	0	X	X	1987

Ideological dimension

This paper has discussed multiple factors having an influence on the process leading to radicalization. There is, however, one dimension that has been missing from the above discussions: the influence of Islam as a religion on the process leading to Islamic radicalization. It has been stressed in the 'state of the art' section that there is a long-standing debate among scholars over whether the recent radicalization of many European would-be jihadists can be explained by a "radicalization of Islam" or an "Islamization of radicalism" (Roy, 2015). The questions arising from the potential importance and impact of religion on the radicalization process are legitimate. There are indeed many reasons to believe that Islam is the driving force behind the radicalization of the perpetrators of the recent terrorist attacks. The so-called Islamic State, by claiming the responsibility of the vast majority of the attacks on European soil lately, wants to reinforce anti-Islam feelings across the continent in order to increase the phenomenon of stigmatization that can eventually exacerbate the feelings of anger among young European Muslims. Despite the fact that the recent terrorist attacks have been perpetrated in the name of Islam, the vast majority of perpetrators, in fact, did not come from Islamic backgrounds. The role of Jihadist propaganda, Salafi preachers and recruiters across Europe is essential in the so-called Islamic State's efforts to recruit European would-be jihadists. However, the importance of Islam on one's decision to radicalize may not be as obvious as it is commonly perceived.

The motivations behind the recent terrorist attacks that took place in Europe are the ones of a terrorist organization engaged in a religious war against the Western secular societies (Kepel, 2017). Their claims are strongly linked to Salafism and Islamic Extremism, explaining why all terrorist attacks have been legitimized in the name of Islam. When looking at the motivations behind the radicalization of a great number of young European Muslims, such as those sampled here, it appears that they have no extremist religious backgrounds and that heir only link with Islam is the religion they inherited from their parents and grandparents. By being born and raised in Western European countries, these individuals are "westernized" in the sense that they often speak the language of the European country in which they were born better than their own parents. They have all shared the "youth culture" of "westernized" Europeans by occasionally chasing girls in night clubs, smoking hashish and drinking alcohol. They most often have criminal backgrounds which is some cases has led to imprisonment. Most of the time, families and relatives speak about the "rapid radicalization" of terrorists as if nobody in their family circle could have anticipated it (Roy, 2015). The extensive analysis of the pathways of the

twenty jihadists present in our sample shows that the answers to almost all interviews given by the families of would-be jihadists who left for Syria or the families of terrorists are almost identical. Most of the time the families did not know anything about the radicalization of the individual. The members of the families frequently said that their relatives were good people with insignificant delinquent records. Despite most not being practicing Muslims and not following Islamic dogma, the vast majority of them seemed to suddenly change their life style overnight, becoming pious and stopping smoking and drinking. As such Islam appears to play a key role in the radicalization process. Islam as a religion is indeed relevant in this debate however it seems that Islam tends to be more important for the so-called Islamic States' decision makers than for the perpetrators of the terrorist attacks themselves.

Getting back to the findings extracted from our sample, it has been possible to draw patterns of radicalization out of the pathways of the twenty individuals sampled. The sample consists mainly of twenty socio-economically unprivileged "westernized" males, second and third generation moderate Muslims. The first pattern that has been identified concerns the group dynamics behind radicalization. A case in point with relation to this would be the fact that among the twenty individuals that have been selected for the purpose of this study, six have direct family ties while all others knew each other way before the planning of the terrorist attacks. In this sense, the participation in a jihadist movement may be the result of previous interactions among like-minded next of kin or friends. Most often, would-be jihadists are radicalized by a group of close friends who they have met in sport clubs, at school, in their neighborhood or in prison. They are poorer and less well educated than non-Muslims in Europe and may subsequently face systematic discrimination in the labor market (Coolsaet, 2016). As a result, they may have the feeling of being constantly confronted with many types of injustice along with a deep sense of revenge. Their situations may be due to the environment in which they have been raised. The municipalities of Molenbbek, Scaerbeek and Laeken are indeed considered as "difficult urban areas" with a high proportion of low-income population with a foreign background, mostly Muslims. This conductive environment mixed with a low-proximity with their families lead to a high proportion of them having criminal backgrounds and a common inclination for radical behaviors, of any types.

Out of the multiple factors that may have an impact on radicalization, predispositions for radical behaviors, lack of prospects and feelings of discrimination may be central features for explaining why so many young Muslims choose the path of Islamic extremism. As Coolsaet

(2016) explains, the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011 and the appearance of the so-called Islamic State merely offered a new and additional way to engage in radical behaviors, on top of drug trafficking or petty criminality. They may feel part of a bigger cause, causing them to transform from juvenile delinquents evolving in their neighborhoods into *mujahedeen* engaged in a global jihad. The assumption here is that while not all radical young Muslims become terrorists, all terrorists are radical. Their radicalism takes the form of delinquency, the rejection of the Western values or even the rejection of the family values. In the light of this, the gap between radical behaviors and terrorism is relatively small, especially given the fact that being part of the jihad promoted by the so-called Islamic State does not require any religious knowledge or learning. For young radical individuals with no future, jihad could seem like a once-in-a-life-time opportunity in an overall logic of the rejection of society at large.

While it is true to say that the majority of the jihadists originate from neighborhoods where there are structural difficulties, it is also important to stress the fact that not all youngsters living in these neighborhoods become jihadists. This means that State and local authorities are not the only ones responsible for the high number of jihadists in these areas. If the causes of radicalization were indeed structural they would affect a greater number than the evident minority that became radicalized. With regards to this point, Roy (2015) explains that homegrown terrorists do not constitute the radicalization of the entire Muslim population, but rather the radicalization of a specific category of youths, who mostly come from Muslim backgrounds. Furthermore, there are many examples of casualties of the recent terrorist attacks who were Muslims. These youngsters not only abandon their former lifestyle, their family or their friends but also abandon the wider European Muslim population by propagating and facilitating islamophobia across the continent. This may indeed be the ultimate goal of the so-called Islamic State.

The third condition leading to crime according to 'Differential Association' theory - *the individual has the objective opportunity to carry out the crime* – can be seen in the light of the personal situations of the jihadists present in our sample. As Roy (2015) contends, the radicalization of so many young individuals lately may be more of a "*personal and nihilistic revolt"* rather than a radicalization of movement. These individuals reject the society in which they live most likely because they experience discrimination, stigmatization and inequality. As a result of their brutal change of mind, young radical individuals with no future, may see the jihad as a once-in-a-life-time opportunity in an overall logic of rejection of society. The path of

jihadism may seem like the only alternative they have, and may therefore comprise a formidable opportunity to engage in something meaningful with a great symbolic weight.

'Differential Association' theory may therefore be used as an analytical framework to better understand the phenomenon of radicalization among young individuals in deprived areas of Brussels. The fact that so many jihadists have criminal backgrounds and the subsequent proximity of both criminal and terrorist milieus gives credit to this assumption. It is even more interesting when focusing on peer recruitment when taking into account that, according to the 'Differential Association' theory, crime is learned through the receiving of basic skills and techniques in parallel with the spread of definitions favorable to crime. In the case where the crime is of a terrorist nature, the exposure to definitions favorable to crime, through group dynamics and peer recruitment, can be seen as step towards the individual's process of radicalization. This can be experienced in environments such as prisons or "difficult urban areas" where definitions in favor of crime are more frequently present. Islamic radicalization, in its current form, can be understood as a process that is linked to the degree of exposure to definitions or discourses in favor of jihadism and the degree to which an individual has experienced feelings of discrimination, anger and stigmatization in the past. This mix may eventually lead to a commitment to crimes, in this case crimes of a terrorist nature.

Conclusion

The recent terrorist attacks that took place in various European countries have sparked debate regarding the phenomenon of Islamic radicalization among young citizens or residents of the European Union. This paper examined the factors and variables that may have had an impact on these individuals' decision to engage in jihad. This has been articulated around four broader dimensions that aimed to test multiple factors in order to eventually identify patterns of Islamic radicalization among young individuals who are members of the French-Belgian jihadists network. The first goal of this study was therefore to assess the impact of factors such as group dynamics, socio-economic context and criminal backgrounds on the radicalization process of twenty members of the infamous French-Belgian jihadist network. In order to do so, this study engaged in the examination of their twenty respective pathways, gathering information emanating from news-reports, Think-Tank reports and government reports. The access to data has been facilitated by the fact that the names, profiles and pathways of the twenty individuals sampled have been disclosed to the public in the aftermath of the various terrorist plots in which they were involved. 'Differential Association' theory, has offered prescriptive approach towards this phenomenon, offering insights into how criminology can be adapted to understand terrorist-related crimes.

The sample employed in this study consisted of twenty socio-economically underprivileged "westernized" second and third generation moderate Muslims. The first pattern that has been highlighted through this thesis is that often, would-be jihadists are persuaded to become radicalized by those that are already inside a given network. As Coolsaet (2016) contends, radicalization has to be seen and understood as a process of socialization, in which group dynamics may be even more important than ideology itself. The case in point is the fact that of the twenty individuals sampled here, six have direct family ties while all others have known each other way before planning the terrorist attacks. The nature of the friendships connections among these individuals may vary from old school friends or neighborhood playmates to criminal associates. In this sense, participation in a jihadist movement may be the result of previous interactions among like-minded next of kin or friends.

Peer-recruitment is likely to take place among local friendship and kinship networks, as well as in specific parts of the society affected by high unemployment and a lack of prospects. Socio-economic status has a substantial impact on the probability of engaging in crimes, and to a

broader extent, of engaging in crimes of a terrorist nature. What strikes the most when analyzing the pathways of the individuals sampled is the fact that the vast majority of them come from deprived neighborhoods or cities with high unemployment rates, major educational disparities and an isolation from other, more privileged, parts of the society. The Brussels' neighborhoods of Molenbeek, Schaerbeek and Laeken have become synonymous with terrorism after both the Paris and Brussels attacks. These neighborhoods are considered as "difficult urban areas" in which unemployment rates among young individuals are high and the majority of inhabitants come from low-income and foreign families, mostly from Muslim backgrounds. As a matter of fact, fifteen of the individuals sampled here were born and/or have been raised in one of these neighborhoods, with two more who were not resident at the time of the terrorist attacks but who had been raised there.

This study further shows that there are strong links between socio-economic status and the rate of juvenile delinquency. Being born or having been raised in a deprived neighborhood or city with high unemployment rates, major educational disparities and an isolation from other, more privileged, parts of the society could therefore create strong feelings of revenge, injustice and discrimination, especially for Muslim minorities. These feelings can result in a higher prevalence of violent or radical behaviors. With this in mind, it seems that the environment in which the individuals present in our sample evolved did indeed play a role on the process leading to their radicalization. 70% of the jihadists present in our sample have criminal backgrounds ranging from petty crimes and drug trafficking to large-scale organized crime or involvement in terrorist activities. It has been shown that the so-called Islamic State found the majority of its recruits in European deprived areas, among the European underclasses who have previously been engaged in violent acts or criminal activities. It also appears that criminal and terrorist groups have come to recruit from the same pool of people having radical predispositions for violence. This is why many cases of radicalization have also been found to occur within jails. This merging between criminal and terrorist milieus can be seen at the level of our sample and may either take place in deprived neighborhoods such as Molenbeek or in jails but the final result is the same: recruits with a history of petty criminality or large-scale organized crime are better equipped to engage in terrorist activities.

This lead us to the final point addressed in this study, which is a discussion about the ideological dimension behind Islamic radicalization among young individuals. This put into question the genuine role and impact of Islam as a religion on an individual's decision to radicalize. There

are indeed many reasons to believe that Islam is the driving force behind the radicalization of the perpetrators of the recent terrorist attacks. If it is true that the recent terrorist attacks have been perpetrated in the name of Islam, it appears however that the vast majority of perpetrators, including the ones sampled in this study, did not have Islamic backgrounds. Out of the multiple factors that may have had an impact on radicalization, predispositions for radical behaviors, lack of prospects and feelings of discrimination may be central features for explaining why so many young Muslims choose the path of Islamic extremism. However, Islam does not come across as the most prominent factor, far from it. As Coolsaet (2016) explains, the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011 and the appearance of the so-called Islamic State merely offered a new and additional way to engage in radical behaviors, next to drug trafficking or petty criminality. They may be feeling as part of a bigger cause transforming them from juvenile delinquents evolving in their neighborhoods into *mujahedeen* engaged in a global jihad. This study showed that while not all radicals young Muslims become terrorists, almost all terrorists sampled had radical predispositions. The analysis of the pathways of the twenty individuals sampled here support the claim that their radicalism most often takes the form of delinquency, the rejection of the Western values, or even the rejection of the family values. In the light of this, the gap between radical behaviors and terrorism is relatively small, especially given the fact that being part of the jihad promoted by the so-called Islamic State does not require any religious knowledge or learning. For the majority of the individuals present in our sample who had no future, the jihad may have seemed like a once-in-a-life-time opportunity in an overall logic of rejection of society.

To the question *"To what extent can the phenomenon of 'Homegrown Terror' and 'Islamic Radicalization' by individual members of the 'French-Belgian Jihadist Network' between 2012 and 2016 be explained by 'Differential Association' theory (Sutherland, 1947)*, it was prescriptive, from an analytical point of view, to apply 'Differential Association' theory to analyze the process leading to radicalization. There are indeed several similarities between the factors outlined by Sutherland (1947) that lead to crime and the factors leading to crimes of a terrorist nature. These similarities can be seen at three different levels, first in the learning of skills and techniques that can be useful for the perpetration of terrorist-related crimes, second the exposure to definitions or discourses which favor terrorist-related crimes, and third the objective opportunity and aspiration to commit terrorist related crimes.

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