

Involvement Mechanisms of Jihadist Networks

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Abstract

This article aims to illustrate radicalization towards jihadist terrorism as a non-sequential process. It focuses on both continued as well as unsuccessful trajectories of involvement, by studying how jihadists deal with social stimuli from their environment. The material objects of investigation were 28 voluminous police dossiers from the Netherlands; these yielding rich information on 209 subjects. In addition, 28 semi-structured interviews with police investigators, public prosecutors, and defense lawyers were conducted. By studying the factors that enhance, discourage, and sustain possible affiliation with a terrorist network, this investigation found two transformation processes. The first process shows how intended encouragements to internalize the radical ideology can be carried too far, having a counterproductive effect. The second process shows how seemingly discouraging factors are perceived as positive and therefore encourage further jihadist involvement. All subjects studied appear to have been confronted with mechanisms from transformation processes, indicating that even the involvement of experienced subjects is unstable and can fluctuate over time.

Keywords: Netherlands; primary sources; jihadism; radicalization; terrorist organization

Introduction

The process of involvement of new members in extremist networks has been extensively studied [1] and has gained importance due to the ongoing conflict in Syria, the rise of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS), and the recent terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States. Such conflicts and attacks can work as catalysts for vulnerable youngsters, triggering a wish to participate in the jihadist movement. [2] It is therefore crucial to increase our understanding of how young people get involved in the jihadist movement. This paper aims to discuss the mechanisms that encourage, sustain, and discourage involvement into jihadism. To define *involvement*, we distinguish two elements that are often referred to by scholars when they discuss radical involvement: the *radicalization process* into an extremist milieu and the *root causes* that initiated this process. These elements will be briefly discussed to illustrate what exactly is meant with involvement in this article.

Root Causes

A radicalization process is often believed to involve a change in beliefs and the internalization of a new mindset.[3] When trying to understand what this change in beliefs initiates, scholars often refer to so called *root causes*. Previous studies have mentioned numerous potential causes, but scholars do not always agree on the impact of specific causes. For instance, whether or not psychological disorders and mental health problems are disproportionately found among radicals and terrorists, is debated.[4] Some argue that psychological disorders are not more frequently present among terrorists than among non-terrorists.[5] The same goes for the economic background; whereas some scholars argue that there is a relation between terrorism and economic hardship, [6] others argue that there is no relationship at all.[7] A more widely accepted root cause is that a *crisis* situation exists that a potential terrorist experiences before radicalization occurs. The nature of such a crisis may, however, vary; one can distinguish between personal victimization and political grievances experienced directly or vicariously.[8] There are different types of marginalization and relative deprivation [9] and there are also different types of individual or collective identity-problems triggering radicalization.[10] Despite the relative wide consensus about the presence of a crisis as triggered, several scholars criticize this approach and argue that the number of people experiences existential or

situational crises is large while only a few of them radicalize.[11] Moreover, Pisiou [12], for instance, states that it is unlikely that unemployment and discrimination lead to the adoption of such extreme career choices as turning to terrorism. Although these remarks here only scratch the surface of the root cause debate and is far from exhaustive, it gives an idea of the variety of alleged root causes and the debates among scholars regarding these.[13]

Radicalization Process

Building on the presumed root causes underlying radicalization, scholars often discuss how people then deal with their perceived triggering factors and how this can lead to the internalization of an extreme ideology and the search for affiliation with a larger radical milieu or jihadist network. A key element in this radicalization process has been identified as *frame alignment*; it refers to the actual reconstruction of a recruit's mindset in accordance to the extremist movement's narrative.[14] Many scholars appear to agree that this re-framing capitalizes on the aforementioned crises (i.e. root causes), which make new recruits more receptive for alternative worldviews, [15] in this case the Salafist-Jihadist ideology. The material process of frame alignment can be initiated by individuals by themselves, in the form of self-radicalization (e.g. with the help of the Internet), [16]; however, reconstructing a person's mental framework is usually considered to be a social or group process. Some argue that it is triggered by friends or near acquaintances who experience the same crisis.[17] Others highlight the role of so-called recruiters who emphasize the newcomers' problems and then offer them a solution in the form of a romanticizing new life inside a radical brotherhood organization in possession of a superior religious ideology.[18]

The foregoing is obviously only a limited overview of the nature of a radicalization process. It merely serves as a catalyst to discuss the way this radicalization process is often presented. In order to address the radicalization process, scholars often devise theoretical frameworks such as radicalization trajectories or phase models. In these models, the radicalization process is presented as a gradual and sequential process with a clear beginning and a fixed termination point.[19] Every step, from root cause to frame alignment, and from self-radicalization to recruitment, has a particular position in such models. Although some of these models provide a clear and realistic picture of the steps towards affiliation with a radical milieu, they are not uncontroversial. Borum [20] claims for instance, that many conceptual models of radicalization are underdeveloped and often lack a social-scientific and empirical basis; they also have not been rigorously tested. Moreover, although some models offer valuable insights, it is questionable whether an involvement process indeed follows a linear and consecutive order of stages.[21] The reasons for this, according to Veldhaus and Staun, [22] are the selection on the dependent variable and statistical discrimination, ingrained in phase models. Selection on the dependent variable refers to the sole focus on successful pathways of involvement, without checking if radicalization factors are present or absent in unsuccessful pathways. Statistical discrimination means that a very general trait, which is shared by many random individuals, is defined as a specific radicalization factor.

Continued and Failed Involvement

Two issues emerge from the discussion so far; these will function as point of departure for this article's analysis. First, most radicalization models focus on the entry process and the analysis ends after the alleged termination point when a potential recruit is embedded in the jihadist network has been reached. This means that factors and mechanisms that ought to *keep* radicalized people inside the extremist network after they entered, receive little or no attention. Second, as mentioned also by Veldhaus and Staun, the other side of the coin, where alleged involvement factors do not lead to actual involvement, is often ignored. In other words, the unsuccessful pathways of involvement receive little attention. Let us combine these issues and elaborate why it is useful to adopt a slightly different approach.

One could argue that involvement in jihadism does not have a termination point and that recruits are exposed to various factors that influence their degree of involvement long after their initial affiliation. For example, jihadists have to continuously deal with social responses from their environment. Affiliating with a jihadist network initiates informal disapproval and condemnation by the large or smaller sectors of the public or formal criminalization and counter-terrorism measures by the government because both consider jihadism to be deviant.[23] In addition, jihadists can also face reprisals from like-minded peers when they (unintentionally) do not live up to the norms and standards of the group.[24] These negative responses can also – like in the previous section on root causes and radicalization processes – be considered a *crisis* a jihadist has to face, both during as well as long after the initial radicalization or entry process. Moreover, failure to properly deal with these negative responses could actually discourage people to participate at both an early and later stage, thereby leading to a failed or at least disrupted jihadist involvement. Literature on extremist *disengagement* touches upon this issue, when scholars describe the different occasions where jihadists become disappointed and disillusioned, leading them to turn away from the extremist environment.[25] This body of research predominantly accentuates the exit of group members who were already fully involved, not necessarily focusing on the early stages of involvement which might turn out to be unsuccessful.

Building on the foregoing, this article aims to discuss both the early and later stages of jihadist affiliation by focusing on factors that both potential new recruits as well as experienced jihadists are exposed to. Furthermore, it will not only focus on the factors that initiate and sustain jihadist involvement, but will also focus on the factors that may lead to unsuccessful involvement of potential recruits and disengagement of experienced jihadists. In other words, we distinguish between *encouraging* and *discouraging* factors. However, the goal here is not to compile a full list of all possible encouraging and discouraging factors. Rather, the aim is to describe how militants deal with these factors and how this particular interaction eventually determines their degree of involvement. In that sense, it is not entirely similar to most disengagement studies, since we are interested in how people cope with discouraging factors to stay involved. Yet, the primary focus of this article is not on individual involvement trajectories. Instead it aims to understand how different social processes can affect these trajectories of involvement in general. Before the findings of this study will be reported, the next paragraph will elaborate on the data utilized and methods applied.

Methods

Approach

This article aims to build a more data driven understanding of jihadist involvement through the use of *grounded theory methods*. Unlike a positivist methodology, Grounded Theory (GT) does not aim to test and verify hypotheses from prior research.[26] Rather, grounded theorists generate a theory inductively (and abductively) through a more open analysis of emergent categories from the data themselves. The principles of *constant comparison* and *theoretical sampling* stand at the core of this approach. The former involves comparison between data and emerging concepts during each stage of the research, [27] while the latter means that emerging categories direct the process of data gathering or sampling over time.[28] In order to adhere to these principles, the procedures of sampling, coding, categorizing, analyzing, and theorizing need to be conducted simultaneously and continuously throughout the research.[29] GT methods have been successfully applied on jihadist involvement by other scholars.[30]

Data

This article is primarily based on a unique source of confidential police files that offer valuable insight in the *modus operandi* of jihadist networks in the Netherlands over time. Access was granted to 28 voluminous

police investigations into jihadist terrorism between 2000 and 2013, [31] focusing on 14 different jihadist networks entailing 209 individuals. Table 1 provides an overview of relevant background characteristics. Due to the selectivity of the data, no additional analyses are conducted on these background characteristics.

Table 1: Background characteristics of the 209 studied subjects, based on police files.

Background characteristics	Absolute numbers	Percentage ¹
Gender		
Male	176	84 %
Female	33	16 %
	209	100 %
Age		
≤ 20	45	22 %
21-25	55	26 %
26-30	42	20 %
31-35	22	11 %
≥ 36	26	12 %
Unknown	19	9 %
	209	100 %
Marital Status		
Married / in relationship	82	39%
Single	36	17%
Unknown	91	44%
	209	100%
Education		
Max. secondary school	35	17%
Started tertiary education	41	20%
Unknown	133	63%
	209	100%
Employment / Study		
Yes	76	36%
No	41	20%
Unknown	92	44%
	209	100%

¹ Rounded figures.

Data were gathered during different periods. The first tier of data, which entailed 12 police investigations from the period 2000-2005, was gathered between May 2006 and May 2008.[32] Based on the preliminary findings from the first tier, a second tier of data was gathered between July 2012 and December 2013 based on 16 police investigations from the period 2005-2013. This extended time-frame enabled the adoption of a long term perspective. A data collection sheet was used to provide structure while gathering data from the voluminous police files.[33] This sheet contained several items and open questions, concerning group structure, activities, ideology, etc. The investigations yielded rich data based on original wire taps of both telephone and Internet communications, recordings of in-house wire taps, transcripts of interrogations of suspects, witness statements, observation reports, forensic reports, house searches, expert-witness reports, but also the complete and verbatim court transcripts and lawyers' pleas.

The basic inclusion criteria regarding the 209 subjects were that: (1) an individual expressed and advocated extremist Salafist-Jihadist ideas or someone explicitly facilitated such jihadism. This means that, to be included in the database, it was not necessary for an individual to actually conduct or prepare violent activities; it was enough that he or she advocated violent ideas; (2) we were able to gather information on the subject beyond his/her personal details; (3) the subject lived or regularly resided in the Netherlands. If the subject did not live in the Netherlands, but played an indispensable role in the network nonetheless, he or she was also included. The current article focuses on the entire group of 209 subjects; not solely the new recruits were studied, but also those who were associated with jihadist networks for a longer period. Since a long-term approach was adopted, particular aspects that affected subjects at different stages of involvement were explored.

This article refers to jihadist networks, since most subjects under observation operated in groups. The 209 subjects can be divided into 14 networks, although some subjects belong to more than one.[34] Individuals were categorized as belonging to one jihadist network when they interacted with each other during a particular episode, while conducting activities together in which the Salafist-Jihadist ideology played a central role. Hence, the network boundaries are foremost formed by the participants' interactions, activities, and shared violent jihadist ideology, rather than these being determined by actual terrorist attacks or other violent acts. The networks studied are therefore not co-extensive with a terrorist organization as defined by law. What they share, however, is the Salafist-Jihadist ideology, which, inter alia, calls for a purification of Islam by returning to the roots, the way of life supposedly existing in the original Muslim community (Umma) at and shortly after the time of the prophet Muhammed. Crucially, Salafists-Jihadists approve of the use of violence to realize this objective.

Several unanswered questions arose while studying these Dutch police data. Therefore, 28 semi-structured interviews with key respondents were conducted during different stages of the research. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to gain access to cooperative (former) jihadists, and therefore relied on key informants such as leading police investigators, public prosecutors, and several lawyers who defended various suspects in the 28 police investigations to provide further information. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, during the final stages of the document analysis, some ten court hearings of four different criminal cases were attended by the author, which resulted in additional case information.

Unlike the original aim of traditional Grounded Theory (GT) approaches, this study primarily aims to develop a grounded understanding of jihadist involvement mechanisms, rather than generating a new theory. Instead of solely relying on inductive reasoning, sensitizing concepts were developed, which functioned as interpretive devices to help analyzing data and preparing interviews.[35]

Analysis

During and after the collection of data, the information was coded with the help of a software program for qualitative analysis (MAXQDA). The analytical process started with an initially open coding procedure, consisting of 'incident-by-incident' coding.[36] While comparing different incidents (segments of texts referring to alleged terrorist activity), particular relevant codes of jihadist involvement emerged. Subsequently, 'focused coding' was applied to assess the initial codes' adequacy and depth.[37] Through this procedure, initial codes developed into categories and sub-categories with associated properties. By constantly comparing data with data, data with codes and categories, and re-examining the properties of the initial (sub-) categories, saturation of data was reached. This meant that no new properties or dimensions of the categories emerged from the data. In this way, the relationship between the categories was specified and elaborated.[38]

Limitations

The findings presented below are solely based on this study's selection of data; they cannot readily be generalized. One reason for this is that the police only have a certain proportion of jihadist activities under observation. In some cases, where the police were unable to obtain information in relation to the past, this also means that some information about the very first moments that militants start associating with jihadist networks might have been missed. Furthermore, the initial goal of the police investigations was to inform a judge. This is in line with Althoff's [39] observation that "court files are a construction of social reality in the context of criminal law". In other words, both offender perspective and circumstances are primarily formulated through the lens of the authorities. Suspects' statements after arrest are generally the result of 'forced communication' which was only selectively transcribed. However, the recorded Internet- and telephone-wiretaps cannot be regarded as 'forced communication'; they should be regarded as unobtrusive information. Except for the fact that these transcripts were selected and processed by police investigators, we can assume that the recorded conversations happened as they did. Moreover, due to the fact that we had access to the original transcripts, we were largely able to check the data ourselves. Finally, police interpretations can be biased since knowledge among police personnel regarding jihadism may not always be present or up to date. Yet, we did not directly copy the findings and interpretations of the police, but used our own definitions and judgment to assess the information.

Findings

The following section outlines the encouraging and discouraging factors the jihadist militants had to deal with and how this affected their degree of involvement and that of others. The selection of factors is the result of the GT approach, which explains the structure of the text. However, this does not result in a simple compilation of factors, as these factors are often interrelated. It was found that being exposed to encouraging factors on the one hand, and discouraging factors on the other hand, sometimes occurred simultaneously. The result of interacting antagonistic factors, was the militants' degree of involvement could be very unstable. To illustrate this, the rest of this article is divided into two sections.

The first section (Process I) illustrates a process where subjects were initially exposed to encouraging factors that could stabilize and sustain a subject's continued involvement over time. However, these encouragements can sometimes go too far and instead turn out to have a discouraging effect on an individual. By describing a process in which encouragements gradually transform into discouragements, this section shows how certain trajectories towards jihadist involvement turn out to be unsuccessful.

The second section (Process II) illustrates a reversed process. The social environment of the studied subjects often initiates discouraging mechanisms that ought to hamper a stable and continued jihadist involvement over time. Although this can lead to disengagement, this section illustrates how the militants under observation dealt with these supposed discouragements. In other words, the discouragements turned occasionally into encouragements that served to assure their continued involvement in jihadism.

Overall, both transformation processes were continuously present and were not distinctive for a particular step or stage. Although the findings are offered in a particular order for analytical purposes, in reality they may have occurred in a less orderly way. The following sections will deal with these processes more in detail.

Process I: From Encouragement to Discouragement

The first process illustrates the circumstances in which new and experienced jihadists are encouraged by mainly like-minded peers to internalize the Salafist-Jihadist ideology and to behave accordingly. The

following will show how this initial voluntary encouragement can turn into an almost forced alignment of both attitudes and behavior.

Exchanging and Discussing Ideological Materials

Based on the police files, it was found that distribution and production of ideological sources of information was crucial across time. Through the continuous exchange of ideological materials, such as books, files, videos, cassettes, storage devices, and other types of written, visual or audio materials, subjects informed and stimulated each other to gain in-depth knowledge of extremist ideas. This interaction was initially conducted face-to-face, but more recent police investigations show that this process moved over time towards the online environment. Radical websites, social media accounts, or YouTube channels easily supplied the materials and met the needs of the newcomers. The thresholds thereby lowered and the target group expanded. Besides exchanging radical materials, the Dutch militants also created and produced them. Whereas some subjects translated ideological Arabic texts for speakers nor familiar with Arabic, others explained the ideology themselves through written testimonials. Some subjects developed flyers to promote upcoming events such as public readings or protests, while others produced ideological videos to persuade new recruits to follow the lead of the mujahedeen. Interestingly, both newcomers and more experienced militants distributed and produced materials during the entire period under study. This process of Dawah (invitation to practice Islam) appears to be an ongoing core activity of all jihadist militants, amounting to a constant obligation.

These encouragements were not solely open-ended, but could also have a more instructing, even dictating nature. For instance, readings and lectures in private settings were very directive and helped to align attitudes. The police observations, interrogations, and wiretaps showed that these gatherings were regularly organized in living rooms, backrooms of Internet cafés, garages, and mosques; although over time it became more customary to conduct readings and lectures online. Some subjects would lecture others for hours during online chat sessions. Whereas many of such sessions were hierarchical, with a clear teacher-student relationship, other sessions had a more horizontal nature, where all subjects contributed on an equal level. For example, group chats between subjects 170, 171, 172, and several unknown people in 2012, showed how they used Skype or other audio-based online group chats to inform a broader audience and exchange information at any given time. In these group chats, subjects were allotted two minutes of speaking time in which they were permitted by the others to lay bare their arguments. If they exceeded their two minutes, the microphone was shut down, creating a more even playing field.

These off- and online lectures directed the interpretation of the exchanged materials and instructed participants how to behave in accordance with the Salafist-Jihadist doctrine. Particular phrases and stories from the Quran and the Hadith were cited and explained to the attendees. More in particular, the more seasoned militants in the network tried to bring about in the newcomers what Quintan Wiktorowicz' [40] called a cognitive opening. They did so by emphasizing the marginal position of most Muslims in the world, often through the display of videos containing horrific pictures of abused, murdered, or otherwise victimized Muslims. The combination of lecturing and displaying videos of maltreated Muslims was meant to function as an incentive to make newcomers internalize ideological beliefs. It appeared to serve to widen their distance from mainstream society in order to motivate them more strongly to rise against the alleged enemies of Islam.

Whereas the gatherings enhanced social cohesion, segregation between male and female participants was often noticed at the same time. Due to strict orthodox rules, it rarely occurred that both genders followed a lecture in each other's company. Women either resided in a different room while listening to a senior jihadist, or separate female gatherings were organized. A separate lecture was often led by energetic female jihadists, who played an important role in supporting jihadist involvement among women.

The context of gatherings and online lectures developed over time, leading to far more interaction between attendees. Before 2004-2005, the sessions were mainly monologues by senior subjects with jihad experience and extensive knowledge of the material, trying to convince and persuade the attendees. Listeners looked up to these senior jihadists who often portrayed themselves as being ideologically omniscient. This rank disparity often prevented two-way discussion. In later police investigations, however, we noticed that the main speakers tended to be younger and far from ideologically omniscient. This opened up room for debate and discussion. Newcomers to these gatherings began to contribute to the discussions and no longer felt restrained to present their own views. Furthermore, it appeared that many meetings no longer followed a lecturer-listener format. Several participants clustered together to search for answers, and thereby benefited from each other in their collective quest for information. Gradually, a more dynamic, interactive, reciprocal, and less hierarchical process evolved, in which it was less clear who informed whom.

Inflicting Pressure and Starting Conflicts

Directions and instructions were imposed upon subjects while exchanging information, which sometimes developed into pressure. As several scholars have already illustrated in previous studies, peer pressure is often useful to encourage others.[41] This study found similar mechanisms of encouraging peer pressure. However, the data also show that pressure could sometimes carry too far and have a discouraging or even deterring effect. This study found several courses of action, spread over the entire studied time-frame, which balanced on this fault line of encouragement and discouragement and sometimes tipped over to the side of deterrence. Based on wiretaps and interrogations for example, many participants, both new ones and those more experienced, tried to unify the sometimes contradictory attitudes through behavioral criticism. They repeatedly reminded each other how they should arrange their lifestyle and how they should behave in accordance to the Jihadi-Salafist doctrine. Some repeatedly reminded others via phone calls to pray at set times, while others pressured them to quit their jobs, choose a suitable profession or follow a useful education. Most subjects encouraged others to wear particular clothing, grow a beard, and stop listening to music. Some subjects even instructed others whom to interact with. If subjects failed to meet such requirements, their behavior was criticized and widely condemned, and alternative behavior was proposed. Whereas such interactions indeed encouraged some subjects to adopt one particular interpretation, it also caused friction with other subjects. In those cases, criticism of behavior can be interpreted as unwanted pressure. In a minority of cases, unwanted pressure even crossed into intimidation and led to fear, as the following quote by a witness shows.

“It just got worse, because Azziz [42] was no longer allowed to smoke and drink in his own house. Azziz thought it [JLB: the network] was like a sect.[...]. Azziz did not want this and became frightened. His friend Omar was also there sometimes and he became frightened too. Then Azziz started to make up all these excuses to keep subject 84 out of his house. Subject 84 then started to circle around Azziz’ house with his bicycle. Azziz did not like this at all and got scared.” (Witness about subject 84, 2005, interrogation)

Intimidation and fear were mainly used by relatively experienced militants who, however, lacked natural authority. In order to compensate this deficiency, they intimidated new and vulnerable recruits, especially those individuals lacking self-esteem and looking for a peer-group to belong to. These recruits appeared to find meaning and comfort through association with inspiring people who disseminated appealing ideological ideas and even told them how to behave. When these recruits became disillusioned with the plans of the network, however, intimidating militants increased pressure, causing the vulnerable recruits to follow up orders reluctantly. The police files illustrate, for instance, that subjects 99 and 104 sold their furniture out of fear from subjects 65 and 81. This fear was inflicted through intimidation by showing them weapons and threatening with violent consequences in case of non-compliance. Subject 99 explains how subject 65 sometimes intimidated him:

“He grabbed some kind of Rambo-knife and he made cutting motions with it. He pretended as if he controlled someone under his foot. He said that this was for the Kuffar”. (Subject 99 about subject 65, 2005, interrogation)

Consequently, subjects 99 and 104 became afraid of their peers and they wanted to abandon the group. The most extreme examples in the police files indicate that, in a minority of cases, encouragements carried too far transformed into discouragements. In other cases, the intimidation was more subtle but nonetheless went too far for those exposed to it.

In other cases, the pressure transformed encouraging situations into disputes and conflicts. These conflicts were primarily noticed in the police files from 2004-2005 onwards. The debates led to conflicts because many participants did not accept criticism, while the opportunity to express open criticism presented itself more often. Some participants got very upset when they were contradicted by others, especially when they (usually more experienced militants) considered themselves ideologically superior. This led to disputes in which some participants tried to force their interpretation upon others. Such disputes occurred among both male and female participants of such meetings. Based on wiretap conversations and according to several female militants, the aforementioned energetic female jihadist had a sharp tongue to criticize other females. Irrespective of gender, the disputes were characterized by a survival of the fittest mentality as participants continuously showed off and tried to overrule each other. Several of them engaged in a great deal of boasting and displayed a certain arrogance in their conversations with other militants. By using clamorous communication, they sought to exert superiority over others. Here is an example of this:

A) “So you are saying they will go there, receive education and return afterwards? What kind of bullshit are you talking?!”

B) “It is not me; it is you who is talking bullshit!!” (Subject 78 to subject 79, 2004, wiretap)

Such conversations were particularly noticeable in online environments, allowing participants to express firmly dissenting opinions, protected by the Internet’s relative anonymity. The Internet wiretaps show that most subjects created an account on particular (radical) websites, while using a pseudonym. This enabled anonymous contributions to religious or ideological debates. Online published material, for instance, was often accompanied by a thread of replies from different people with radical sympathies, who all had firm opinions considered by them to be the truth. Likewise, in group chats or one-on-one conversations on MSN, PalTalk, Skype, etc., participants repeatedly tried to overrule other interlocutors by claiming that their perspective was based on proof. The following conversation gives you an idea:

A) “He claims that it isn’t proof. Hahah, this reminds me of school: reading comprehension. Abdullah [43] is ignorant. He is the one talking without proof.”

B) “This is becoming language philosophy how he [JLB: Abdullah] explains it. We were talking about Kuffar and Taghut in NL, right? Abdullah, you must come with a better explanation if you want to discuss.” (Group chat with subject 171, 2012, wiretap) [44]

What often appeared to happen during such conversations, was that neither of the disputing parties was prepared to admit error. They constantly overruled each other in the expectation to have the virtual audience in group chats on their side. Participants sometimes laughed at those who made an arguable claim and ridiculed the other by calling him or her names or making condescending remarks, or spreading harmful rumors. Winning a point in the debate gave them a feeling of importance. The one who tasted defeat was being belittled by the in-group reprisals he received. Therefore, only few tended to give in for fear of losing face. Some of these discussions escalated so much that conflicts became unavoidable, as the following conversation illustrates:

A) *“You are of the hypocrite kind. No you are a dirty hypocrite. Still you haven’t answered me. You point your finger at me, while you don’t have any [proof] to stand on. You benefit from everything the West has invented. You are the colonizer’s bootlicker!”*

B) *“Benefit? Do you regard the West as a God now? Did the West give birth to the world or something? Or is it Allah who created the world?”*

A) *“He is more Mushrik [JLB: polytheist] than he appears.”*

B) *“[...] All wealth on earth is Allah’s. Even a 5-year-old toddler knows that. What a retarded statement does this guy make!”*

A) *“Wollah! Don’t offend retarded people!” (Group chat with subject 172, 2012, wiretap)*

Such unresolved clashes in debates were often followed by severe reprisals from others belonging to the in-group. For example, in 2004 a senior militant (subject 25) spread rumors about visits to prostitutes by another senior militant (subject 146). By way of revenge, the latter reported the former’s name to the Immigration Service, claiming that this person was a terrorist threat. As a result, subject 25 appeared on the government’s radar, and he was prohibited from traveling abroad. The most feared reprisal was the (threat of) repudiation from the group. Declaring a fellow militant to be disbelieving (takfir), was a means to discharge someone. This excommunication of an alleged nonbeliever opened the door to justify punishment. In line with what was found in this study, Schuurman et al.[45] mentioned how many members of the so-called Hofstadgroup indiscriminately used the weapon of declaring someone takfir, leading to severe disagreements between members and, in some cases, disengagement from the group. Despite several threats of cutting off limbs, actual violent punishment was not found in the present study. We did find cases of repudiation. For example, in 2006 one participant (subject 141) did not meet the requirement of orthodox clothing, although he was already involved in the jihadist movement for some years. He was wearing Nike shoes, a sign of apostasy, and was therefore repudiated from his group in the name of takfir. After all, Nike is a Greek god and a Muslim is not allowed to worship another god but Allah, according to the group’s ideology.

The above illustrates how subjects tried to regulate each other’s behavior and how this affected their level of involvement in their group. This very much relates to Akers’ [46] Social Learning Theory, a theory that has been applied by several scholars to the study of terrorism.[47] In his theory, Akers elaborates ‘differential reinforcements’—punishments or rewards that follow certain behavior. When criminal behavior is more punished than rewarded, an individual is less likely to continue this behavior. Peer pressure and internal disputes as sketched above have a comparable effect as the punishments mentioned by Akers. However, the penalties by the subjects in the group studied here were not supposed to lead to disengagement. The intent was to regulate behavior and stabilize involvement, but paradoxically pushed some group members out of the jihadist movement. In other words, the end result may be similar to Akers’ explanation of reduced criminal behavior, but the process leading up to it was never planned to bring about such a result.

Process II: From Discouragements to Encouragements

Alongside the first process in which encouraging factors sometimes transformed into deterring factors, the militants covered in our police files were simultaneously confronted with an opposite process. The social environment – being friends, family or society as a whole – plays a very important role in this process. On the one hand, the environment can harbor the root causes of jihadist involvement, and can also further such involvement and push a vulnerable individual through the radicalization process. On the other hand, the social environment can also explicitly respond to a person’s jihadist affiliation, which is usually in the form of condemnation.

Especially after 9/11 and the murder of cineast Theo van Gogh in 2004, the Dutch government intensified its focus on jihadist networks. Government policies were devised that extended police authority, increased

surveillance of suspicious milieus, and raised the number of interventions such as by arresting several individuals who formed a security threat.[48] Moreover, media attention and concern by members of the public about extremism rose. This created an environment of increased apprehension about the doings of Muslims and immigrants within Dutch society.[49] Both new and more experienced jihadists needed to operate within this changing context. The question is how this intensified focus by government and society affected the involvement of young Muslims in jihadist networks. The next section will illustrate how the militants coped with this environment.

Dealing with a Hostile Environment

Mainstream society disapproved and condemned the militants' jihadist ideology in the form of negative media attention and public censure by right-wing politicians. This hostile social climate was present all the time, but rapidly increased after 2004.[50] In addition to a more general shift in both political climate and public opinion, the police files consulted also show that the militants also encountered disapproval from people in their direct social environment. For instance, several militants noticed how people in their neighborhood looked frightened when they saw a subject dressed in traditional Salafist clothing. Moreover, friends and family members also often criticized them and threatened with counter-measures to change their attitudes and behaviors. This usually started with encouragements to choose another path in life, for instance, by forwarding job applications to them or introducing acquaintances who were eligible to marry the subject. Relatives often assumed that when a subject found a job, a wife or husband, and became a parent, he or she would start living a more tranquil and civil life. Some partners of militants took more extreme measures. A police investigator interviewed for this study recalled:

“His girlfriend started to act really strange. She feigned a pregnancy at a particular moment; we had the idea that it was fake. It was the way she talked and it occurred completely out of the blue. From their telephone conversations, we had the idea that she was afraid, that she knew what he was about to do. This [JLB: feigning a pregnancy] was a means to prevent him from departing.” (Respondent 14 about subjects 118 and 122, interview August 2012, police investigator)

Some relatives also tried to influence the militant's associates, for instance by threatening a suspected recruiter with violence if he did not leave their son alone. Furthermore, when such measures had no effect, relatives sometimes reported the young man or woman and his/her associates to the police or the intelligence agency. In several instances, this measure led to police arrests, which will be discussed later. Eventually, the situation often escalated to an actual breach between the militant and his or her family. Whereas such reprisals could hamper or question a militant's jihadist involvement, this study also documented the following mechanisms that subjects applied in order to cope with adverse reactions in their own (family) surrounding.

The first coping mechanism noticed was brotherhood, which relates to what is often referred to in the literature as social identity or social solidarity.[51] Brotherhood is a highly valued asset in the jihadist movement and was continuously emphasized in conversations during difficult times. Brotherhood offers a sense of belonging and companionship—something many of the subjects studied claimed not to have experienced before. Many admitted that they came from environments deficient of the warmth of togetherness, solidarity, and attachment. The affection between the militants, who continuously call each other brother and sister, sometimes resulted in genuine friendships, something greatly appreciated. Brotherhood had great appeal and needed to be cherished. Some young men in the movement even claimed that a particular peer was the brother they had always wanted to have. Here is an example:

“Brother, know that I wish you the best. Whatever you wish for me, I wish even more for you. Whenever you did something wrong, I immediately forgave you.[...] Have faith, my little brother. We will not be abandoned. Have patience, Janah [JLB: Paradise] is close, I will never forget you. I have loved you since the day I met

you. You are a little brother to me. Whenever you suffer, I suffer. Have a little more patience.” (Subject 163 to subject 198, 2005, text message found in confiscated phone)

The perception of brotherhood not only met personal needs, but also hardened suspects against the exclusion from, and condemnation by, society. The idea that their brotherhood was under threat motivated suspects to neutralize out-group reprisals by arguing that the brotherhood was superior to the out-group. This social differentiation [52] seemed to stimulate the adoption of radical beliefs and routines. Group members encouraged each other to continue their battle against nonbelievers for the sake of the brotherhood, which increased their willingness to protect the in-group and oppressed brothers elsewhere. For example, one newcomer (subject 147) communicated in 2011 with an unknown jihadist in a faraway jihadist theatre of conflict. They talked about the fact they “are determined to sacrifice everything for the sake of Allah”. This jihadist congratulated him for his determination, but warned him to be careful. In reaction subject 147 was very pleased with him and called him the brother he had wished for a very long time.

A second coping mechanism is boasting. This study found that participating in a jihadist network seemed to generate perceptions of self-importance. The militant’s reasoning, customs, possession of weapons, and use of historic *noms de guerre* appeared to give them prestige. Especially the use of boasting during conversations and discussions suggest this. Whereas boasting could be a hampering factor during Process I, it could also be noticed that boasting was simultaneously useful to deal with discouraging factors in Process II. For instance, being publically labeled a ‘terrorist’ can be seen as stigmatizing and act as deterrent to further jihadist participation. However, several subjects used this criminalizing classification as a confirmation of their importance. The label ‘terrorist’ became for them a badge of honor, depicting their toughness and fearlessness. This emerges from the following example:

“I have been busy lately. Plotting an assassination attempt here, carrying out an attack there, enough to drive you mad [...] I’m just busy now motivating people to slaughter a father.” (Subject 79, 2004, wiretap)

The media played an important role in boosting their ego; increased attention from journalists seemed to confirm the militants’ feeling of importance. Based on wiretaps and forms of in-house bugging, it was found that several militants explicitly followed different media outlets to see what was said about the jihadist movement. They cancelled appointments in order to watch talk-shows, watch the news, in the hope of obtaining information about their deed’s impact. A senior militant (subject 81) even kept a record of all his media appearances. He had a bulletin-board in his basement documenting with newspaper clippings his arrests, trial proceedings, and court verdicts; he also used online search engines to look for his own name. When media attention led to an in-depth interview or TV appearance, militants turned such negative attention into positive financial benefits, as some of them started to ask for money. For example, one militant (subject 80) was interviewed twice about his jihadist involvement by a weekly national magazine and a national television program in 2005. He sought acknowledgement for this ‘achievement’ by repeatedly asking his ‘brothers’ whether they had read and seen his interviews. He claimed that he was awarded 1,500 euros for a single appearance and called it “a bonus for talking rubbish”. Thereafter, he functioned as an intermediary between journalists and other brothers to arrange additional interviews. According to a wiretap of a conversation between a journalist and one militant (subject 80), the newspaper offered 1,750 Euros for an interview or 1,500 Euros if they could follow him for a day. He was, however, too greedy with his counterproposal of 2,500 Euros; the newspaper declined. (Subject 80, 2005, wiretap).

Dealing with Actual Repudiations and Arrests

In addition to condemnations from a hostile environment, both new and more experienced militants also had to cope with more concrete measures taken by members of the out-group. For instance, most subjects followed a particular Imam whose interpretation of the Islam they initially approved of. However, when they openly voiced their disagreement with the Imam due as they radicalized, they were, according to several

witnesses, often excluded from local mosques. Likewise, they were banned from religious websites when they expressed extremist opinions. Furthermore, many of them experienced interventions by the police, such as regular controls on the street, close surveillance through wiretapping of which the more experienced militants appeared to be aware of, but there were also arrests resulting in criminal charges. Many of those affected expressed the view that such actions were deliberate punishments due to their religious affiliation and the way they dressed. Both new recruits and older group members discussed how police and government tended to see all Muslims as potential terrorists. In 2006, for example, one militant girl expressed her distrust of the police and claimed that they made everyone with a beard, a white djellaba or a burqa a suspect. She got very upset when she was asked to take off her niqab during an interrogation, telling the officers:

“Allah is the only legislator. I follow the Quran and the Sunna, the path walked by the prophet. I only abide to the Islamic law and I do not have to justify my actions to you people.” (Subject 153, 2006, interrogation)

The fact that some Muslims had to identify themselves more often than others to the police was perceived by many of them as unjust and discriminatory. This made them feel that they were constantly watched and that they could be arrested without a probable cause. It is a fact that since the beginning of 2000 several Muslim militants in the Netherlands had been arrested for involvement with jihadist networks or for being participants in the preparation of terrorist acts. Whether such arrests led to an acquittal and dismissal, or a conviction, they could leave a heavy burden on those arrested. Arrests often led to a lengthy period of pre-trial detention, with no contacts with the outside world, led to a loss of employment, and had several other negative consequences for those detained. Those affected reacted in different ways. Some felt stigmatized and found it hard to be viewed as criminals, while according to them, they had done nothing wrong. Criminalization was bad enough for them, but they were accused of ‘terrorism’, making the stigma even more severe. In a number of cases, the police had entered their homes by force, using overwhelming manpower, they were blindfolded and often apparently not informed about details of the indictment—all intense experiences for some of them. In a few cases, they accused the authorities of disproportionate use of force or psychological manipulations during interrogations or detention.[53] One lawyer recalled how his client, a newcomer to the group, was affected by his trial:

“After the arrest he never had anything to do with the rest of these guys. The trial had a substantial impact on him and he therefore chose to distance himself from them.” (Respondent 21 about subject 140, interview May 2014, lawyer)

Whereas the interventions discussed above de-motivated several of the Dutch jihadists, or at least disrupted their plans, other militants were not immediately discouraged. Instead, such interventions led to a desire for revenge among them, while others even felt empowered. In other words, the interventions had a rather encouraging effect on some of the Dutch jihadist militants. Several scholars have already stressed how the troubled relationship between the government and particular groups in society can become a causal factor for terrorism, [54] or how state responses to terrorist behavior can fuel and initiate acts of vengeance among members of extremist groups.[55] As a result, a vicious cycle can emerge in which both parties repeatedly respond to each other’s actions, thereby sustaining jihadist recruitment and operations.

The first situation in which a vicious circle can get started is where jihadists are expanding their scope in response to interventions. When militants were deprived of platforms for ideological discussions (such as websites or mosques), they often saw this as an opportunity to create their own community and expand their scope. The police materials studied indicate that some of the militants covered in the investigations actively attempted to reach out to new audiences. This resulted, for instance, in going beyond engaging in joint readings and organizing lectures, but also in initiating spontaneous conversations with strangers in the streets. In addition, some of them started to organize public protests and communal gatherings. These religiously oriented demonstrations aimed to propagate their ideology, inform nonbelievers about their interpretation of Islam, but also to provoke, according to a police respondent, law enforcement to initiate

new interventions. Just like the readings and lectures, the protests enabled subjects to meet other like-minded young Muslims, in an effort to bring them into the fold. Another more organized and structured form of scope expansion was the branding of the movement. Over the years, several of these militants had tried to brand their radical milieu by a specific trademark. Their marketing strategy aimed for a more credible movement while also distancing themselves from terrorism. The idea was that creating a new brand could sell the ideology, attract more people, but also raise money. For example, some of the demonstrations they organized were advertised under a trademark. Scope expansion was primarily initiated by the more experienced militants, and their primary objective was to win new recruits.

In addition to scope expansion to gain new members, the militants also focused on preventing being arrested themselves. Following several arrests by the police, those who felt that they could be next tried to adjust their modus operandi to prevent future arrests. For example, by meeting in remote and secluded locations, they hoped to escape raising attention. Some of the Dutch militants even exchanged their traditional Islamic clothing for more Western attire and, in their own words, 'sexy' outfits. By doing this they tried to keep their lifestyle a secret to avoid any negative attention. Furthermore, the militants were very suspicious of newcomers, warning each other to be alert for potential infiltration by government agents. They also advised each other not to be seen at certain notorious mosques. This increased situational awareness sometimes resulted in very concrete measures such as the issuing of a pamphlet called 'Lessons in Safety'. Initiated by one of the senior members of a militant group, it explained how to act in case of an arrest and how to position oneself during an interrogation. With a tone of paranoia, the information sheet warned its prospective readers about Abu Ghraib- and Guantanamo Bay-like behavior in Dutch detention facilities:

"During detention they put you in an isolation cell, they give you little to no food, the food is burned, they don't allow you to sleep due to strong light, they wake you up every two hours, they undress you regularly, turn on loud music in your cell, they turn the temperature up and down, pour cold water over you, make you wear woman's clothing, put you in unhygienic areas and prohibit you from contacting the outside world." (Pamphlet found with several militants)

A third type of response to government interventions consisted of boasting. Due to the intense experience of arrest, trial and detention, those affected often expressed a strong, and over time increasing, antipathy towards the intelligence agency, the police, the public prosecutor, and the Dutch government as whole. By boasting about their encounters with law enforcement, some of those who went through such experiences apparently tried to handle their frustrations and transform them into status-enhancing events. To illustrate this point: several senior militants, when discussing their arrests by the police, claimed their own supremacy over the government agencies they faced, bragging about their resistance during arrest, and praising the violent resistance of others like them. Being arrested in a large-scale police or intelligence operation acknowledged, in their view, their own importance, something they took pride in. Three of them (subjects 79, 81, and 82), for example, boasted about their arrest and how bravely they resisted. One boasted about his knowledge of the prison's corridor structure, while another claimed that, although he was blindfolded, he knew the exact transportation route of the police. During this trip he allegedly frustrated the driver by mentioning the street names the car was driving through. While in detention, they bragged about their triumphs in not abiding to penitentiary rules. In such ways, despite being limited in what they could, they still tried to pretend that they exercised a degree of control over the situation, thereby transforming objective defeat into subjective victory in the mind of those who believed them.[56]

Finally, the militants studied here were also concerned about the after care of their detained brothers and sisters. Those arrested faced material and logistic problems, but they were not forgotten by their peers. These discussed, for example, the choice of particular defense lawyers in order to assemble a good team for the trial; they also raised and transferred money to those detained. Moreover, the wives of those convicted also received financial support during the absence of their husbands. For example, in 2005, one militant (subject 104) ran into the wife of a detained other in a bookshop and gave her 50 Euros because her husband's absence

had caused significant problems in feeding and dressing her children. In addition, the employer of the same bookshop (subject 113), requests her radical husband (subject 117), to wallpaper the apartment of a detained brother (subject 86) before her husband returned from detention. Despite the fact that this type of support was small-scale, such gestures helped to maintain social bonds with fellow jihadi-sympathizers, which functions as an encouragement to return to the jihadist movement after detention.[57]

Coping with Danger

Many of the Dutch militants prepared for, or at least discussed the idea of joining the holy war in a foreign battlefield.[58] The prospects of successfully participating in such a jihad are in general far from positive for young Muslims in Western diasporas who grew up in peaceful circumstances. Most of those seriously considering the idea to go to a jihadist battlefield were aware that they would have to operate in hazardous circumstances while not being sufficiently trained, which greatly increased chances of experiencing severe injury or death. Hence, such prospects appear demotivating and not conducive to participation in a jihad as foreign fighter. Whereas some indeed dismissed the idea of foreign fighting, other were not deterred by the prospects, interpreting the challenges they would face and overcoming them as symbolic awards.[59]

Those who did not appear deterred to engage in jihad tended to embellish the experience of war and death. Participating in jihad was usually described by them as an adventurous and enriching endeavor. Several videos were found by the Dutch police, recorded by foreign fighters who encouraged Western Muslims to follow their lead. They tried to persuade them by glorifying the battlefields and idealizing the training camps. A quote from one of these videos illustrates this:

“We expect all our Turkish brothers on these beautiful holy battlefields. This must be the most beautiful thing Allah offers you. I have never been this happy. There is nothing more beautiful than a holy battlefield.”
(Documented by subject 167, 2006, videotape)

Attending jihad was often related to Mohammed’s own quests. Several militants recalled that the Prophet engaged in numerous holy wars in his life in order to save the Umma. This type of appeals appeared to persuade both senior Dutch Muslim militants as well as new recruits to follow Mohammed’s example. Placing themselves on the same pedestal as the Prophet made participation in a jihad a glorious prospect. In addition, by glorifying violence or at least expressing a positive attitude towards the jihad, several militants seem to be able to deal with the almost inevitably negative earthly consequences of entering the combat zone. They talked with excitement about harming the enemies and demonstrated a fearless attitude towards their own death:

“We are not afraid of death, because we love death. For us, death is just magnificent.” (Suspect 157, 2006, wiretap)

By romanticizing combat and death, attending jihad was often portrayed and perceived as a higher cause worth pursuing. Both new and experienced militants claimed in various statements to pursue a martyr’s death, because it is considered the highest possible goal for a Muslim, which comes with multiple status-enhancing awards. Martyrs are considered heroes, their actions are framed as compassionate, and their death is glamorized. In such a context, even suicide bombings are regarded as an altruistic act, not to be compared with ‘ordinary selfish suicides’. Furthermore, according to some testimonies, martyrs are attributed with exceptional qualities. Some of the militants also convinced each other, according to the police documents analyzed, that when mujahedeen die, their dead bodies would remain intact. For example, subjects showed each other videos with pictures of fallen mujahedeen who had a smile on their face, indicating that they were satisfied with their sacrifice that would lead them straight to paradise. Photos and videos of such peaceful and delighted faces continue to be spread throughout the jihadist movement to encourage viewers to follow the

lead of the killed mujahedeen. This romanticisation of death had an inciting effect. For some militants a place in paradise even appeared to be their primary goal, as this quote implies:

“It is not important and it is not even our wish to witness the rise of a true Islamic State. The most important goal is to be awarded by Allah.” (Documented by subject 167, 2001, videotape)

To conclude this section on coping with danger, the above discussion illustrates how subjects dealt with many (real and alleged) negative responses, consequences, and prospects that arise when one embraces a Salafist-Jihadist ideology. Several coping were used to neutralize and overcome discouragements. Some were portrayed as ordeals they had to pass through before being awarded by Allah. Other situations were not perceived as negative at all. Moreover, subjects seemed to have learned from past experiences, making it easier for them to adapt to present and future discouragements. These findings relate to several criminological theories. Again Akers' Social Learning Theory comes to mind. On the one hand, the findings about the symbolic rewards as positive prospects to cope with danger are in line with Akers' logic that rewards increase the chance of criminal behavior. This logic also applies to the encouragement of brotherhood, which rewards them in the form of being part of an alternative environment. On the other hand, the punishments, such as arrests and detention, did not always have the envisioned effect of reduced criminal behavior, as Akers postulated. Our findings show that certain reinforcements are not continuously perceived as punishments, but can have a counterproductive effect when they are transformed into rewards in the jihadist mental framework. This finding of counterproductive punishments touches upon a second criminological theory, which is Lemert's Primary and Secondary Deviance Theory.[60] Lemert defines sporadic and minor rule violations as primary deviance. Secondary deviance is criminal behavior that emerges from the authority's response to the primary deviance. The deviant is stigmatized by the authority's intervention and will subsequently act in accordance to this stigma. In that respect, the labeling of a subject as 'terrorist' by society or the government, can enhance a subject's status within the jihadist network, thereby encouraging continued jihadist involvement. Likewise, government interventions such as a police arrests can generate a feeling of increased importance, thereby encouraging continued involvement in an extremist jihadist movement.

Conclusions

This article analyzed the process of jihadist involvement in the Netherlands between 2000 and 2013, while using Grounded Theory methods and studying the records of 28 voluminous police investigations, while conducting also semi-structured interviews with police investigators, public prosecutors, and defense lawyers, and attending several court hearings. Several conclusions can be drawn from this analysis.

The first conclusion is that jihadist involvement covers more than the initial entry process. By focusing on social mechanisms that influence individual trajectories, it has been shown that involvement is an unstable process. Subjects have to constantly deal with factors and consequences that either encourage or deter them from further involvement, leading to different degrees of involvement over time by many members. Such factors often originate from their social environment, and continue to be present long after an initial affiliation with the radical milieu. Although the type, shape, and intensity of particular factors may have been dissimilar in different periods studied, and have affect individuals in different ways, both encouraging and discouraging factors were continuously and often simultaneously present. This finding shows that involvement is more than a sequential process leading to an enduring and solid membership.

Secondly, the social mechanisms that were found appear to interact with each other. As a result, the antagonistic involvement mechanisms could transform encouragements into discouragements and vice versa, as the two described transformation processes illustrated. These processes suggest how particular social responses can lead to unintended consequences. On the one hand, the first transformation process showed how particular processes of alleged involvement or recruitment fail to succeed. When intended

encouragements by fellow jihadists are carried too far in the early stages of a recruit's involvement, this can sometimes lead to pressure and conflicts that make potential recruits hesitant to engage more deeply with the jihadist movement.. On the other hand, the second transformation process showed how government interventions do not always have a discouraging effect, but rather empower some jihadists to continue to pursue their plans and even feel encouraged to influence others in that process. In other words, some government interventions can have counterproductive effects.

Finally, the foregoing transformation processes applied to both new (prospective) recruits as well as to the more experienced militants. Furthermore, it was also found that all subjects were influenced by other subjects, which means that not only new recruits but also more experienced subjects were still influenced by others. Nevertheless, the degree of influence differed per subject and the direction of influence developed over time. Whereas horizontal influence between subjects was always reciprocal, vertical influence was not. In the earlier cases, before 2004-2005, leading jihadists primarily influenced the lower ranked newcomers, but not the other way around. In these incidences the categorizations 'recruiter' and 'recruit' may have been more appropriate. In later investigations, however, hierarchical structures started to level out, which meant that subjects in alleged lower ranks began to influence those with a higher position as well.[61] This development was enhanced with the rise of the Internet, which facilitated more horizontal interaction and removed communication constraints.

Regardless of the value of these new insights, and despite of the systematic analysis, the current findings cannot be applied to the phenomenon of jihadist involvement as a whole. Recent Western jihadists' affiliation with ISIS in Iraq and Syria have not been incorporated in the data. For broader applicability, future research should test the presence or absence of the transformation processes identified here, while including also ISIS and other jihadist movements as case studies.

Nonetheless, this article offers an alternative perspective on jihadist involvement. It illustrates that involvement processes are far more dynamic than has often been assumed and that government responses, such as condemnations and prosecutions, can sometimes have unintended consequences which favor the jihadists. Therefore, these findings can be useful for the development of prevention policies, especially when such policies focus on the two transformation processes described. To counter involvement in jihadist groups, it may be worth considering to devise policies that stimulate the first transformation process where encouraging involvement factors carried too far and become discouragements instead, and at the same time disrupt the second transformation process where subjects have managed to turn discouragements into encouragements.

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- [25] Mary Beth Altier, Christian Thoroughgood, and John Horgan, "Turning away from terrorism Lessons from psychology, sociology, and criminology," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no.5 (2014): pp. 647-661; Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008); Tore Bjørgo, "Dreams and Disillusionment: Engagement in and Disengagement from Militant Extremist Groups," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 55, no. 4 (2011): pp. 277-85.
- [26] Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967).
- [27] *Ibid.*, p.106.
- [28] Barney G Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory* (Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1978), p.36.
- [29] See also Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (London: Sage, 2008); Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz, *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory* (London: Sage, 2007).
- [30] Daniela Pisoio, *Islamist Radicalization in Europe. An Occupational Change Process* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Robyn Torok, "Developing an explanatory model for the process of online radicalisation and terrorism," *Security Informatics* 6, no. 2 (2013): pp. 1-10.
- [31] The 28 police investigations were purposefully selected with the help of terrorism experts from different investigative authorities. Criteria of inclusion were the richness of the data and diversification over time.
- [32] Christianne Poot and Anne Sonnenschein, *Jihadi Terrorism in the Netherlands: A Description Based on Closed Criminal Investigations* (The Hague: WODC, 2011).
- [33] Derived from Edward R Kleemans, Ellen A.I.M. Van den Berg, and Henk G. Van de Bunt, *Organized Crime in the Netherlands* (The Hague: WODC, 1998).
- [34] For a more in-depth analysis of the network structures, see Jasper de Bie, Christianne de Poot, Joshua Freilich, and Steven Chermak, "Changing Organizational Structures of Jihadist Networks in the Netherlands," *Social Networks* (in press).
- [35] See e.g. Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London: Sage, 2006), p.16.
- [36] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, p.57.
- [37] *Ibid.*, p.57.
- [38] For a more extensive outline of the used grounded theory methods, see Jasper de Bie and Christianne de Poot, "Studying police files with grounded theory methods to understand jihadist networks," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 39, no. 7-8 (2016): pp. 580-601.
- [39] Martina Althoff, "Multiple Identities and Crime: A Study of Antillean Women and Girls in the Netherlands," *European Journal of Criminology* 10, no. 4 (2013), p.397.
- [40] Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Joining the cause"; *op. cit.* (note 1).
- [41] See also on group extremity shifts Clark McCauley and M.E. Segal. (2009). Social psychology of terrorist groups. In J. Victoroff and A.W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Psychology of Terrorism: Classic and Contemporary Insights* (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2009): pp. 331-346; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of political radicalization," p.422. See on peer pressure in relation to terrorism and radicalization: John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*. London: Frank Cass, 2005.
- [42] Fictitious name.
- [43] Fictitious name.
- [44] It was not always clear who the other persons were in a group chat, except for subject 171. Therefore, we indicated the quotes A and B.
- [45] Bart Schuurman, Quirine Eijkman, and Edwin Bakker, "The Hofstadgroup Revisited: Questioning its Status as a "Quintessential" Homegrown Jihadist Network," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, no. 5 (2015): pp. 906-925.
- [46] Ronald Akers, *Deviant Behavior: A Social Learning Approach* (Belmont, MA: Wadsworth, 1973).
- [47] Ronald Akers and Adam Silverman, "Toward a social learning model of violence and terrorism." In M.A. Zahn, H.H. Brownstein, and S.L. Jackson (Eds.) *Violence: From Theory to Research* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004): pp. 19-30; Tina Freiburger and Jeffrey Crane, "A Systematic Examination of Terrorist Use of the Internet," *International Journal of Cyber Criminology* 2, no. 1 (2008): pp. 309-319; Lieven Pauwels and Nele Schils, "Differential online exposure to extremist content and political violence: Testing the relative strength of social learning and competing perspectives," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28, no. 1 (2016): pp. 1-29.
- [48] See for instance Maartje A.H. van der Woude, *Wetgeving in een Veiligheidscultuur. Totstandkoming van antiterrorismewetgeving in Nederland gezien vanuit maatschappelijke en (rechts)politieke context* (The Hague: Boom Juridische Uitgevers, 2010), pp. 202-310.
- [49] Frank Buijs, "Muslims in the Netherlands", *op. cit.* (note 23).
- [50] *Idem.*
- [51] See also Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*; Max Abrahms. "What terrorists really want: Terrorist motives and counterterrorism strategy." *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008): pp. 78-105; Dina Al Raffie, "Social identity theory for investigating Islamic extremism in the diaspora," *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 4 (2013): pp. 67-91.
- [52] John Rex, "Race as a Social Category," *Journal of Biosocial Science* 1, no. 1 (1969): pp. 145-152; Henri Tajfel, "Social identity and intergroup behaviour," *Social Science Information* (1974): pp. 65-93.
- [53] These accusations were not backed by evidence, which makes it difficult to assess the reliability of these claims.
- [54] Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (1981): pp. 379-399.
- [55] Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence*; Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of Terrorism"; Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization."
- [56] See also David Simourd, "The Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified and Pride in Delinquency Scale Psychometric Properties and Construct Validity of Two Measures of Criminal Attitudes," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 24, no. 1 (1997): pp. 52-70, regarding criminal attitudes and the concept of criminal pride, which functions in a similar fashion.
- [57] See also Ian Cuthbertson, "Prisons and the Education of Terrorists," *World Policy Journal* 21, no. 3 (2004): pp. 15-22; Mark Hamm, *Terrorist Recruitment in American Correctional Institutions: An Exploratory Study of Non-traditional Faith Groups* (US Department of Justice, 2007); Greg Hannah, Lindsay Clutterbuck, and Jennifer Rubin, *Radicalization or Rehabilitation: Understanding the Challenge of Extremist and Radicalized Prisoners* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), regarding prison populations that are targeted for recruitment. Similar processes are detected in those studies.
- [58] Jasper de Bie et al. "Shifting Modus Operandi", *op.cit.* (note 2).

[59] Such perceptions could also relate to cognitive dissonance. This will not be discussed further though, because the data is not fit to illuminate this in detail.

[60] Edwin Lemert, *Social pathology; A Systematic Approach to the Theory of Sociopathic Behavior* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1951).

[61] See also on this development Jasper de Bie et al., "Changing Organizational Structures", op. cit. (note 34).