

# **YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRAJECTORIES THROUGH RADICAL ISLAMIST MILIEUS**

**Cross-national synthesis  
report**



**MARK DECHESNE**



## **DARE: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality**

### **Young people's trajectories through radical Islamist milieus Cross-national synthesis report**


**Mark Dechesne (Leiden University)**

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## Executive Summary:

From late 2017 until early 2020, researchers in the DARE (Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality) consortium conducted field research and interviewed individuals exposed to and, in some cases, engaged with radical Islamist messaging. Islamist radicalisation is understood here as the process whereby an individual, small group, or larger collective moves towards an 'Islamist' position, and demonstrates a willingness to adopt an extreme stance vis-à-vis what are considered to be political and ideological adversaries. The core premise of the DARE project is that insight into Islamist radicalisation can be advanced by studying the social environment in which radical messages are encountered from the perspective of those in this environment who have been exposed to such messages.

We studied young people in these environments in ten countries across Europe. In Greece, we studied unofficial prayer houses where Muslims, often with an immigrant background, come together. In France, we studied young Muslim men in prison, a third of whom had been convicted for terrorism related offences. In Turkey, we studied civil society organisations that have, over time, taken on an Islamist imprint and played a role in stirring up support for Islamist groupings in the civil war in Syria. In many of the Northern European countries, the focus has been on neighbourhoods that are often associated with Islamist activism, a significant presence of migrants from Muslim majority countries, social problems including unemployment, poverty, and crime, and the burden of stigma. For example, in Russia, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium, the ethnographic research focused on the lives of young people coming from such areas insofar as they had also encountered Islamist radical messages. The Tunisian field research focused on neighbourhoods with similar characteristics and a significant Islamist presence. The Norwegian field research focused on young people in the vicinity of two virtual Islamist networks that eventually become real world advocacy groups.

In each of these fieldwork sites, ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews with young people were recorded, resulting in an extensive dataset of several hundred in-depth interviews and observations, containing a wealth of insights regarding the interviewees' understanding of radicalisation and extremism, their experiences with different types of radical messaging, their perceptions of links between equality and radicalisation, their experience of radicalisation trajectories and their perspectives on the future and their visions of constructive change.

At the most general level, a salient common thread across fieldwork sites and themes studied, concerns the relational nature of radicalisation. Radicalisation and extremism are above all considered relational terms, indicating an often conflictual relationship between someone who applies the labels and the person or group to whom it is applied. Media and state authorities are often thought to play a key role in provoking such contention through their tendency to apply the notion of radicalisation too easily and too generally. In studying experiences with radical messaging, we encountered profound experiences of discrimination and exclusion, combined with the availability of internet Islam, to respectively push and pull some of the young people participating in the study into radical Islamist extremist points of view. The research also revealed an 'in between' world of the neighbourhoods and cultural milieus of many of the respondents, enabling a subcultural identification that was observed, in some cases, to facilitate receptivity to extremist messaging, while in others to forge a resilience to it. Online communication is the dominant source of radical messaging. Internet/social media assisted self-radicalisation was consistently observed as a critical phenomenon in all milieus studied.

Inequalities figure prominently in radical Islamist narratives. But that does not imply that all

inequalities experienced by Muslims lead to radicalisation. Inequalities are not only perceived to be between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also between generations, ethnicities and on the basis of neighbourhood residence. We propose the concept of 'relational inequality' to represent a critical factor in the lives of our respondents. The experience of relational inequality is characterised by a sense of being different (horizontal inequality), and of being subjected (vertical inequality) to an authority perceived as inadequate, unworthy or illegitimate. Consistent encounters with inequalities and injustice in relationships at many different levels combine, leading to feelings of frustration and 'angst' that one is controlled by malevolent authorities. Relational inequality was experienced in relationships with parents, with teachers and supervisors, with the police, and with the state. None of the different types of injustices are by themselves a direct cause of radicalisation. Exposure to radical Islamist narratives may bring a 'cathartic', purifying experience of profound insight into one's own conflictual relationships by situating them in relation to a global struggle between what ideologues refer to as the 'true Islam' and the unbelievers, offering the prospect of becoming a meaningful contributor in this struggle. Most of the respondents, regardless of their location, hold pessimistic views on future global developments, and fear for the position of Muslims in society. Many seek happiness by investing in social connections with family and friends.

We consider the academic contributions of the research conducted to lie in its emphasis on the subjective and relational nature of radicalisation, its focus on the position of those exposed to radical messaging in social context, and its ambition to identify dialogic rather than conflictual measures to counter it.

## 1. Introduction

Islamist radicalisation is the tendency to increasingly embrace a particular form of 'Islamism', whereby Islam is not only seen as the guiding force for personal, social, and political life but alternative worldviews and ways of being are conceived of as threats that must be addressed through hostility and aggression. Over the past three decades, countries across Europe and its near neighbours have witnessed various waves of Islamist radicalisation, making it a top policy issue on national and European political agendas (Pisoiu, 2014; Nesser, 2015; Malthaner, 2017). Europe has witnessed Muslim citizens from European countries travelling to conflict zones in the Middle East and Northern Africa to join radical Islamist organisations and fight on their behalf (Hegghammer, 2011; Lindekilde, Bertelsen and Stohl, 2016), most recently to join the effort to establish an Islamic state in Syria and Iraq. A number of them have returned to carry out massive and deadly terrorist attacks (Stern and Berger, 2015). There has been an influx of Salafist preachers and Jihadi networks from these conflict zones who have propagandised the Islamist cause (Wiktorowicz, 2005). This has led to the emergence of 'homegrown' radical Islamist networks comprising local youth willing to disrupt and attack in Europe (rather than in the conflict zones) to express their commitment to the Islamist cause (Sageman, 2008; Schuurman, 2017). Finally, Europe has also been victim of the contemporary wave of internet-inspired individuals carrying out disruptive attacks to draw attention to the Islamist cause (Gill *et al.*, 2017).

The use of the term 'Islamist' may suggest that 'Islam' is a key factor in understanding Islamist radicalisation referred to above. Yet, a significant share of politicians, policy makers and academics warn against assuming a simple causal connection between Islamic theology, Islamism, and Islamist radicalisation (Lynch, 2010; Wilkinson, 2018). The excesses of Islamist radicalisation, they argue, cannot be directly traced to the intent to use Islamic principles in the political domain, as there are a number of examples where commitment to Islamic principles is not linked to radicalisation. Moreover, Islamism cannot be considered the inevitable consequence of adherence to Islam, as many, if not the majority of, Muslims around the world do not subscribe to Islamist principles.

To understand the phenomenon of Islamist radicalisation - in terms of what it is, how it spreads, what its contributing factors and direct causes are, and how to address it - it is therefore imperative to consider the phenomenon in a broader context, taking into account a mosaic of perspectives. For one, this implies a consideration of the meaning of radicalisation preferably alongside the phenomenon of non-radicalisation, with the latter appearing of far greater prevalence than the former. In addition, this implies a consideration of a wide variety of theological and extra-theological factors, and their complex and dynamic interplay, including factors related to international relations, migration history, communication technology, socio-economic circumstances, networks, individual mind-set and needs (and their demographic context), framing and repression. Moreover, this necessitates a genuine engagement about the nature and functioning of, and response to, radicalisation, with all actors involved, most notably those who are most directly affected by it.

The H2020 project Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality (DARE) has sought to provide a deeper insight into the complex dynamics in processes of Islamist radicalisation as it has unfolded throughout Europe and neighbouring countries. From the outset, the project recognised that radicalisation occurs alongside, and with considerably less frequency than, non-radicalisation, i.e. the tendency to resist radical messaging despite being exposed to it. In the same circumstances, exposure to radical messages may lead to acceptance by some but rejection by others. To fully understand processes of Islamist radicalisation and non-radicalisation, we need to investigate encounters with radical messages in the societal circumstances in which these encounters take places and to consider the voices of those directly involved and affected.



This report presents the findings of a meta-ethnographic synthesis analysis based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted across Europe and its neighbouring countries as part of the DARE project. Islamist radicalisation and non-radicalisation were studied in Russia, Turkey, Greece, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, Tunisia, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom. In each of these fieldwork sites, ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews were recorded, resulting in an extensive dataset containing a wealth of insights regarding the interviewees' understanding of radicalisation and extremism, their experiences with different types of radical messaging, their perceptions of links between equality and radicalisation, their experience with radicalisation trajectories, and their perspectives on the future and visions of constructive change.

Sharing these insights, in addition to the conceptual and methodological considerations underlying the research, constitutes the main objective of this report.

## 1.1 What is Islamist radicalisation?

Radicalisation is a controversial concept (Sedgwick, 2010; Neumann, 2013; Bötticher, 2017; Malthaner, 2017). In a comprehensive review on the concept, Schmid (2013: 5) notes that 'There is no universally accepted definition in academia or government. The concept of radicalisation is by no means as solid and clear as many seem to take for granted.' Among the many descriptions of radicalisation, we can identify two general themes. First, radicalisation is a process whereby an individual, small group, or larger collective increasingly moves towards an extreme social, political or ideological position, often in a climate of polarisation. 'Extreme' in this context is typically described as implying a willingness to engage in unlawful behaviour, and particularly violence to substantiate one's claims. Secondly, in line with the Latin origin of the word, radicalisation appears to imply the propagation of a change at the root (*radix* in Latin) of things, a fundamental change. For this second theme, this change can be achieved by both non-violent and violent means.

The term Islamism is also controversial (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010). It can be defined as the position that Islam should be a guiding force in political, societal, and personal life (Kepel, 1997; Roy, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2005; Mandaville, 2007). Islamist radicalisation is thus a particularly controversial notion referring to, broadly speaking, the process whereby an individual, small group, or larger collective increasingly moves towards an 'Islamist' position and demonstrates a willingness to adopt an extreme stance vis-à-vis what or who are considered to be political and ideological adversaries.

In the context of academic and policy debates on Islamic radicalisation, what is designated as 'Salafism' or 'Neo-Salafism', is paid particular attention. According to an influential description by Wiktorowicz, Salafism stands for a:

[...] common religious creed, which provides principles and a method for applying religious beliefs to contemporary issues and problems. This creed revolves around strict adherence to the concept of *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and ardent rejection of a role for human reason, logic, and desire. Salafis believe that by strictly following the rules and guidance in the Qur'an and Sunna (path or example of the Prophet Muhammad) they eliminate the biases of human subjectivity and self-interest, thereby allowing them to identify the singular truth of God's commands. From this perspective, there is only one legitimate religious interpretation; Islamic pluralism does not exist. (Wiktorowicz, 2006: 207)

For a number of scholars and analysts, Salafism, once politicised, can be considered 'radical' because it is thought to contrast with assumptions of individual responsibility and civil liberty that constitute foundational principles of modern day Europe (see, for example, Weismann, 2017). Political Salafism



is often contrasted with apolitical or quietist Salafism, with the latter implying a fundamental change in only personal lifestyle and not in political viewpoints (Adraoui, 2018). Others link Salafism to extremism, a tendency that not only incorporates excessive feelings of group-based superiority but also active hostility to 'other' groups (Rabasa and Benard, 2014). The link is exemplified by the concept of *Al-Wala' wal-Bara'* that prescribes loyalty and love for the sake of Allah, but also renunciation, implying avoidance, disdain and hostility towards anything other than a purist interpretation of Islam (as discussed in Wagemakers, 2012). Some find in this extremist tendency the roots of the wave of terrorist attacks witnessed since the early 1990s in Europe and around the world (Bin Ali, 2015). These attacks are carried out by what is referred to as 'Salafi Jihadi' advocates of the Salafist stance who believe that violence constitutes a legitimate means to address shared grievances and establish a system of governance (particularly in Muslim majority countries) based on Islamic principles (Lounnas, 2021).

Kundnani (2012) has warned against a too simple consideration of radicalisation, especially in the context of Islam. He notes in the abstract of his influential article critiquing the notion of 'radicalisation' that:

[...] since 2004, the term 'radicalisation' has become central to terrorism studies and counterterrorism policy-making. As US and European governments have focused on stemming 'homegrown' Islamist political violence, the concept of radicalisation has become the master signifier of the late 'war on terror' and provided a new lens through which to view Muslim minorities. The introduction of policies designed to 'counter-radicalise' has been accompanied by the emergence of a government-funded industry of advisers, analysts, scholars, entrepreneurs and self-appointed community representatives who claim that their knowledge of a theological or psychological radicalisation process enables them to propose interventions in Muslim communities to prevent extremism. (Kundnani, 2012: 3)

The focus on security and, as some argue, the 'securitisation' of Muslims have also suffused the academic understanding of radicalisation. Indeed, intelligence and security services have been key stakeholders in the academic literature on Islamist radicalisation that proliferated following the attacks of 11 September 2001, encouraging a focus in this literature on factors that might help to predict at an early stage whether a terrorist attack would take place. In methodological terms this has resulted in the dominance of a process-tracing approach whereby cases of convicted terrorists are selected with the aim of identifying demographic characteristics and key events in the radicalisation trajectories of these convicted terrorists (as reviewed for example in: Silke, 2008; King and Taylor, 2011). The process-tracing approach has been criticised, however, especially for ignoring cases of non-radicalisation (Sarma, 2017). The inference of factors to predict radicalisation process from the life histories of those who ended up carrying out attacks, is blind to the possibility that these factors are also present in the life histories of those who do not radicalise, and leads to the overestimation of the degree to which a factor directly contributes to radicalisation (Cragin, 2014). In the light of the earlier noted security scrutiny of Islam and Islamic institutions, for instance, it is worth emphasising that whereas most Jihadist attacks are carried out by individuals who consider themselves devout Muslims, these individuals represent a minute fraction of the total Muslim population. Moreover, the process tracing approach has also been criticised for its inability to incorporate complex and dynamic interactions between situational and personal circumstances (Malthaner, 2014)

The ethnographic research conducted in DARE adopts a wider social research perspective to Islamist radicalisation, sharing intellectual similarities with an emerging socio-ecological approach to radicalisation (Dawson, 2017; Bouhana, 2019), treating the phenomenon not as a linear trajectory but

as a complex and dynamic process, a process that may also have non-radicalisation rather than radicalisation as an endpoint. It is assumed that to understand how radicalisation and non-radicalisation unfold, we need to place psychological phenomena within context; to observe how the lives of youth unfold as they confront narratives resident in the social structures that nurture them (Costanza, 2015: 2).

A socio-ecological approach to Islamist radicalisation brings greater sensitivity to the complex interaction between the situation and individual factors, and also considers the issue of non-radicalisation relative to radicalisation. The socio-ecological approach zooms in on the question of where radicalisation occurs before explaining why it occurs. The emphasis on locality enables assessment of the dynamics involved in Islamist radicalisation, but also, very importantly, in non-radicalisation among those in similar circumstances. Furthermore, this emphasis on locality provides insight into the ways in which macro- and micro social circumstances interact with individual characteristics and needs to account for the response to radical messaging (Malthaner, 2014; della Porta, 2018).

DARE, even more so than other socio-ecological perspectives, emphasises the importance of going beyond the understanding of radicalisation as a process that can be captured through the description of the mechanics and dynamics of interacting factors (cf. Psoiu, 2013). Those exposed to radical messaging should be recognised as active agents who have their own understanding of the world in which they live, and who actively contribute to the shaping of their world on the basis of this understanding (Truong, 2018). The social circumstances in which one may encounter radicalisation messages are experienced and lived. In this sense, our understanding of Islamist radicalisation would be advanced by studying the social circumstances where radical messages are encountered from the perspective of the people within these social circumstances who have been exposed to such messages.

The ethnographic research conducted as part of the DARE project identified Islamist milieus across Europe and some neighbouring countries where radical Islamist messages might be encountered and explored in-depth the response to these messages from the perspective of the people who encountered them.

## 1.2 The times and spaces of Islamist radicalisation in Europe

The ethnographic research was conducted in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, Norway, Greece, Russia, Tunisia and Turkey. Each of these countries has a distinct history in relation to Islam and Islamism (see also Berger, 2014).

Some of the countries, including Turkey, Tunisia, Russia, and Greece (Crete in particular) have a known presence of Islam since the days of the Umayyad Caliphate of the seventh and eighth centuries. From the fifteenth century until the early twentieth century, contemporary Turkey was a constitutive part of the Ottoman Empire, while Tunisia and Greece also fell under control of the Ottoman Empire, leaving deep historical scars in Greece. From the end of the fifteenth century, Russia also gradually incorporated Muslim territories to the east and south including Kazan in the sixteenth century and Crimea in the eighteenth century where after Russia was able to assert its domination in the Caucasus region resulting in conflict both with various Caucasian peoples resisting the Russian advance and other regional powers (Turkey, Iran) (Yemelianova, 1995: 279-281). Following the conquest of Central Asia towards the end of the nineteenth century, at least a quarter of Russia's population was Muslim (ibid.: 282) and Islam is viewed today as an indigenous religion of Russia. The fall of the Ottoman Empire, in the early 20th Century, came with a wave of secularism in the Muslim majority countries of Turkey and

Tunisia, with repression of Islamist movements throughout the 20th Century. During the years following the Second World War, France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, witnessed a significant number of Muslims arriving and settling as a result of independence wars in countries across the world that had been brutally colonised for centuries by the European powers. In the 1960s and 1970s, the economic boom in Northern Europe led to a significant influx of Muslims including in Germany, France, Belgium, the UK, the Netherlands, and in Norway. Many labour migrants came from impoverished rural areas in Morocco and Turkey. Norway also saw an inflow of labour migrants from Pakistan. During the 1980s-1990s, these Northern European countries witnessed another influx of Muslims, seeking asylum from conflicts in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Chechnya. Some sought refuge on the basis of religious persecution in their country of origin, including influential Islamists (Mullah Krekar in Norway, Fawaz Jneid in the Netherlands, Hassan Dabbagh in Germany, and Omar Bakri Muhammad in the United Kingdom). The 1990s also saw a significant rise of anti-Islamic sentiment in Western Europe. After the attacks of the 11 September 2001, Jihadism became attractive for a segment of the young Muslim population across Europe, introducing the phenomenon of homegrown Islamist radicalisation. At the same time, anti-Islamic sentiment grew in European societies and politics. From 2012, the Arab Spring that started in Tunisia has brought turmoil to the MENA region and Islamist movements in Turkey and the Middle East have strengthened their presence and influence. From Europe, many young people travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the self-declared Islamic State (ISIS) while Europe received a sizable influx of Muslim refugees, most significantly from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

These broad trends have shaped the national and global contexts of the specific milieus studied.

In the largest Muslim majority country studied, Turkey, the specific focus of the research was on civil society organisations (CSOs) along the Turkish-Syrian borders and in Istanbul during 2015 and 2018 (Country-level report, TUR). The research spans a period in which politics in Turkey was deeply influenced by events in Syria; it began around the time the Kurdish North Syrian town of Kobane was under heavy attack by ISIS and continued through to October 2019, a few days after the execution of ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and following Turkey's invasion of the Kurdish territories in Northern Syria. The CSOs were initially considered critical to upholding democracy in Turkey, providing the checks and balances to government. This democratisation in Turkey, in turn, has been seen as a key ingredient in the rapprochement between Turkey and Europe. However, for a number of reasons, CSOs have not functioned in the way envisaged. As the rift between the European Union and Turkey increased, many CSOs began to take on the function of solidifying popular support for the rising AK (Development and Justice) party of Erdogan, whose support mainly emanated from orthodox Muslims in Turkey. In the ethnographic report on Turkey, the focus is specifically on the role of the CSOs in providing a space for Islamist and Salafist influences to take root among young Turkish men and women living along the Turkish-Syrian border at the time of significant conflict. CSOs are also found to be an instrument of the government, allowing it to exert influence across the border in Syria and provide channels into the country for militants. The study also considers Kurdish youth living in the same area, who are also encouraged to fight on behalf of Kurdish militant organisations, both in Syria and Turkey, where they face considerable economic, social, and political discrimination.

In Tunisia, the second milieu in a Muslim majority country, the ethnography (Country-level report, TUN), focuses on three urban centres in northern Tunisia: Thadhamon (a suburb of Tunis), Bizerte, and Menzel Bourguiba. The areas are characterised by unemployment, lack of prospects, and poverty, and have been considered for their significant levels of radicalisation among young people. The research was conducted between 2018 and 2019, a number of years after the self-immolation by Mohammed Bouazizi late 2010, which sparked widespread protests throughout Tunisia initially, and later

throughout the MENA region, against the economic, social, and political deprivation experienced by many, especially young people, in Tunisia and the region. Later, Tunisia saw among the largest groups of youth leaving for Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. This outflow has been thought to be instigated by the poor economic and political situation of the country. In the absence of effective (local) governance and economic prospects, the areas selected for study were those where Islamist influences had been strengthened in particular. While Islam is Tunisia's official religion, many of the Tunisians living along the coast consider themselves primarily Mediterranean, embracing freedom of religion, while Tunisians living in the interior of the country, including those who have migrated to the urban areas under investigation, are typically more orthodox. Islamism and Salafism remain under scrutiny by the authorities.

The ethnographic fieldwork in Russia is focused on the 'urban second generation' from the villages of the North Caucasus republics, Russia (Country-level report, RU). The urban second generation refers to children and younger siblings of migrants from the villages of the North Caucasus republics (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Kabardino-Balkaria) who have settled in large cities. The main destination points for the migration are the large agglomerations of the North Caucasus and neighbouring regions (Makhachkala, Rostov, Volgograd, Stavropol), Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the oil cities of the North (Tyumen, Surgut, Salekhard). Although these young people have settled outside of the North Caucasian villages of their parents, some of the respondents have experience of living in the North Caucasus region. In contrast to their parents and older relatives, who are predominantly adherents of traditional Sufi Islam, the urban second generation often choose 'new Islam' or Salafism. This study focuses particular attention on neighbourhood community activities, sports activities and informal meetings of close relatives (brothers and cousins). The study is conducted against the historical background of the independence struggles of the people of the North Caucasus republics that culminated *inter alia* in the First and Second Chechen Wars of the 1990s and 2000s and significant, ongoing state repression of Islamism. Moreover, as noted in the Russian report, migrants from these republics often face considerable stigmatisation and discrimination, making the relationship between inequality and Islamist radicalisation a very relevant issue.

The Greek report considers unofficial prayer houses in Athens (Country-level report, GR). Once a small Muslim minority community in the days following the Ottoman Empire, a significant influx of Muslim immigrants in recent years has increased the Muslim population to between 5 to 10 percent of the total population of Athens. After being under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, Islam has long been treated with suspicion in Greece, where Greek Orthodox Christianity is the official state religion. This is reflected in the fact that, since independence, no official mosque had been built and it was not until November 2020 that a mosque was opened in Athens. The fieldwork was conducted and completed before the opening, at a time when there were still heated debates on whether the mosque should be allowed to open. According to some media and analysts, the unofficial prayer houses are potential incubators of radicalisation. The ethnographic research investigates the unofficial prayer places in Athens and considers the lives and views of young Muslims who were born in Greece, or who have lived in Greece for a number of years (10 or more) or who have converted to Islam in the last 2-3 years.

The study of links between inequality and radicalisation is of particular interest in France due to France's colonial involvement in the Maghreb and the Middle East, its official state policy of secularism, its experiences in the 1990s as well as during the last decade with major jihadist inspired terrorist attacks, and the socio-economic conditions of the '*banlieues*' where many young Muslims grow up and live. The French ethnographic study was located in a prison, where a third of the young Muslims participating in the study had been convicted for crimes related to radicalisation and terrorism (Country-level report, FR). Prison has been described as acting as an additional catalyst of radicalisation

since the experience of confinement, the sense of isolation, guilt and lack of future prospects combined with the often humiliating behaviour and omnipresence of guards, can create an openness for radical Islamist narratives. The ethnographic study captures experiences and attitudes related to personal history, society, and radicalisation of the inmates to elucidate the complex interrelationship between socio-economic circumstances, psychological processes and radicalisation and non-radicalisation.

In several other northern European countries studied, field research also focused on neighbourhoods where a high proportion of inhabitants are Muslims, often with a migrant background.

The Belgian ethnographic research documents in depth the lives of four (former) detainees from what is known as the 'poor crescent' area of Brussels (Country-level report, BE). This area of Brussels houses a significant proportion of young descendants of Moroccan immigrants in the city, who have experienced a variety of social challenges growing up and have been engaged with delinquency. Many have had at least some engagement with Islamism and some have had sustained and deep association with it. The research provides detailed descriptions of the lives of these interviewees, while providing analysis of the ways in which ethnicity, crime, family, religiosity - and their interaction - relate radicalisation and non-radicalisation.

The fieldwork in Germany focuses on young Muslims living in an urban area (referred to in the report as 'Distown') in a large city in the Rhineland (Country-level report, DE). The Rhineland is a region in western Germany with a significant population of people identifying as Muslims, and a significant neo-Salafist network, which is known beyond the region. 'Distown' can be compared to what is referred to in the Belgium report as a 'poor crescent' area: a district known for social problems, a significant proportion of the population with a migrant background, issues with drugs and crime, and an externally imposed stigma that is reproduced by local and national media. In this area, young people, who represent a significant share of the population, search for their identity as a German, as someone having a migrant background, and as a Muslim. The study also includes several individuals who are converts to Islam. The research explores to what extent the observed circumstances contribute to radicalisation and non-radicalisation.

The Dutch ethnographic research concerned particular urban areas in the western part of the Netherlands: The Hague, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht (Country-level report, NL). These urban areas share similar characteristics with 'Distown' in Germany, and the 'poor crescent area' in Brussels. The study is not tied to a specific urban area, although the centre of gravity is an urban area in The Hague, which in recent years has witnessed a considerable outflow of young people travelling to Syria and Iraq to join ISIS. Within these specific urban areas, there is a high concentration of potential vectors that could hypothetically contribute to the transmission of Islamist radical ideas. Individuals, groups, and organisations that have been dealing with the issue of Islamist radicalisation in the Netherlands are studied. That is certainly not to imply that all were sympathetic to the Islamist or Jihadist cause. However, all involved in the research have first-hand experience with the phenomenon. Many of the respondents have themselves been part of the radical scene, either recently or in the years following the emergence of home-grown terrorism after the 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks, or have known people in their vicinity who participated.

The Norwegian case study involved two networks, 'The Prophet's Ummah' and 'Islam Net' - the two Islamist groups that have been most active and present in the public arena (Country-level report, NO). The interviewees were based mainly in a type of urban area that is comparable to that featured in the Dutch, German, and Belgium studies. This study considered the socio-economic and personal backgrounds of those involved. Both networks emerged as virtual networks that developed into physical groups. They have some overlap in terms of shared connections with each other and members



have also transferred between groups. The milieu consists of young people who surround the cores of these groups and people who have considered going to Syria, or have connections with other young people who have travelled to participate in Syrian conflict, either as combatants or through humanitarian work. The number of friends and acquaintances who had participated in the Syrian war varies from one to ten. This closeness to people who decided to engage in the Syrian war enables analysis of the trajectories toward or away from Islamist extremism and the associated reflections, drives and emotions.

The fieldwork in the UK focuses on what is called 'Muslim street' in Birmingham (Country-level report, UK). The street is one of at least six in the city that is known for its diaspora communities' settlement from former countries of the commonwealth in South Asia, as part of the post-war migration to the UK. The city is also home to the largest number of Muslims for any UK municipality. It is a young and emergent community, reflected in the burgeoning of commercial enterprises, formal and informal organisations that cater to the social needs of young Muslims. The street presented itself as a milieu, because it is an assemblage/constellation of actors and material infrastructure, including mosques, cafes, shops, miscellaneous places of assembly, which gives rise to, and also offers possibilities for, social relations to emerge and crystallise. Muslim Street is not just the site of Muslim diaspora settling down, but of an emergent scene of Muslimness in the city that also transforms public space and culture. This is evident in the attention the street has attracted in recent years in the media as well as among Muslims who have chosen to settle there from other cities in the UK and Europe.

### 1.3 Current themes in Islamist radicalisation research

The findings from the ethnographic research have the potential to make a contribution to current debates about the origins and causes of Islamist radicalisation and non-radicalisation. Indeed, the discussions with the interviewees and the field observation covered several general categories of themes that figure prominently in the policy and academic debates on the topic, including the role of international relations, migration history, communication technology, socio-economic circumstances, networks, individual mind-set and needs (and their demographic context), framing and repression.

#### 1.3.1 International relations

According to Roy (2004), the invasion of the Soviet-Union in Afghanistan, the Islamic revolution in Iran, the internal uprising in Saudi-Arabia, and the Camp David Agreements, all occurring at the end of the 1970s, were significant political events that pivoted political Islam's potential as a uniting force, providing a new sense of global identity and purpose for Muslims. By the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, political Islam became a significant factor in many of the conflicts of the time. Since many of these conflicts involved Muslim populations, including the first Iraq War (1990-1991) and its aftermath, the civil war in Algeria (1991-2002), the continued fighting in Afghanistan (1992-1996), Kashmir (throughout the 1990s), and Chechnya (1994-1996), and the war in the former Yugoslavia (1991 to 2001), Islamism, also in its militant form, was able to emerge during these years as a unifying force coming to the defence of Muslims worldwide.

Because the West often sided against the interests of the Muslim factions in these conflicts, the international relations of the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union provided a fertile ground for the belief propagated by radical Islamists that there is an inherent tension between Islam and the West, and that the former is in need of purification and defence, especially from the allegedly decadent and threatening influences of the latter. The attacks of September 11th 2001 magnified these apparent fissures in relations between the West and Islam and further played into the hands of radical Islamists in search of sympathisers. The indiscriminate killings of civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq, the massive

persecution of Muslims, the treatment of Muslim prisoners most notably in Abu Graib, which all emanated from the Western response to counter the horrors of 9/11, provided evidence for radical Islamists to demonstrate that Muslims were indeed under threat and that political Islam was one of the few forces ready to defend the interests of Muslim communities around the world.

### 1.3.2 The role of migration

While the conflicts in which the Islamists were active took place outside of Europe, they nonetheless have had an increasingly strong impact within Europe partly because of multiple waves of migration, including migration from former colonies in the 1950s and 1960s, labour migration in the 1960s and 1970s, and refugees and asylum seekers hoping to escape the turmoil of the Middle East and Northern Africa starting from the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Migration constitutes a formidable challenge (Alba and Foner, 2015). For the Muslim migrants of Europe, it has often meant cutting ties with traditional social roles and regulation, while effort to adjust to the host countries has all too often been met with inhospitality and resulted in failure. Scholars link the ensuing sense of displacement to the appeal of radical Islamism (Ruggiero et al (eds), 2011). Particularly among the second generation of Muslim migrants, who more than their parents fall in between culture of origin and culture of destination, the embrace of Islam is thought to provide a basis for order and meaning, providing the possibility of grounding oneself in a (global) community. The 'New Islam', including Salafism, which advocates purity and strips religious devotion and practice from specific cultural tradition, also enables connection with likeminded Muslim migrants from other parts of the world who find themselves in the same urban areas (Roy, 2004). The sense of connection to a meaningful global community is empowering, while the Islamist idea that the embrace of Islam can help to overcome personal and societal challenges constitutes for many a source of identity and significance (De Bie, 2016; Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna, 2019).

### 1.3.3 Communication and information technology

This sense of connection has in recent years been facilitated by the widespread availability of satellite television, internet, and mobile telephone. Communication and information technology translates the idea of a global Islamic community into a reality by enabling people to literally connect to the stories and experiences of Muslims worldwide, bolstering and fostering social ties around the globe (Larsson, 2011). Communication and information technology are not only empowering for individuals in search of connections, they also enable political movements and organizations to reach out to a global audience. It has been argued that communication and information technology has greatly facilitated (radical) Islamist movements in projecting their ideals of a pure Islamic life as well as poignant imagery of the threats and humiliations faced by Muslims around the world (Stern and Berger, 2015). Globalisation through migration and communication technology can thus be considered a significant factor in the appeal of radical Islamism in Europe.

### 1.3.4 Socio-Economic factors

The message of (radical) Islamism also provides a powerful counternarrative to socio-economic realities that many Muslims face in countries throughout Europe. The injustices and humiliations committed against Muslims, to which radical Islamists point in order to underscore the urgency of their social and political agenda, resonate at least in part because they reflect, in one way or another, lived experiences of Muslims in Europe. While there is no war being waged in Europe, there is a sense of deprivation, and humiliation, often not so much related to economic welfare, but to access to suitable work, acceptance by non-Muslims, and treatment by authorities; this feeds into support for the idea that Muslims are under threat and radical Islamism empowers Muslims to address these threats.



Social scientists have noted a social segregation of Muslims and non-Muslims across Europe, with Muslims living in poorer areas of the larger cities, designated in France for instance as the '*banlieues*' (Truong, 2018; Lapeyronnie, 2008). Some speak of ghettoisation (for instance the UK, BE, and FR Country-level reports). Segregation implies limited contact with the outside world, thereby limiting access to essential knowledge, resources and connections necessary to make a meaningful contribution to society. Those growing up in these poorer areas often struggle to keep up at school, but it is entering into the professional world and gaining the opportunity to make a contribution to society that proves especially difficult. As access to essential social resources such as work and fixed income is difficult to attain, the appeal of alternative lifestyle increases. In the localities under consideration, citizens may find a sense of communal identity in their shared migration history, language, and religion. Moreover, young people in particular may find solace and opportunity in alternative lifestyle or delinquency. Islamism (including in its radical form) provides a powerful narrative that promises elevation and redemption away from these local realities, offering instead a clear sense of identity supported by a global movement.

### 1.3.5 Networks

The urban areas also provide opportunities for Islamist networks to operate. Unlike formal organisations, networks are dynamic; no formal (decision-making) structure is involved, making them more difficult to track. As proposed by Marc Sageman (2008), networks play an important role in Islamist radicalisation by bringing together likeminded individuals, reinforcing ideological viewpoints, and mobilizing social action. It has been observed that the presence of neo-Salafist networks have played a critical role in stirring up the appeal of Islamist extremist narratives in the urban areas where Muslims congregate (De Bie, 2016). Islamist networks have been found to be active near mosques, sports clubs, and other civil society organisations, to draw into the networks those with a particular interest in the Islamist calling and those with a special need for safety, meaning and esteem. Radical preachers have attracted the attention of security agencies for their alleged role in bringing recruits into the network (Gendron, 2017). A number of Islamist advocacy groups have raised similar concerns. In recent years, social media has become a crucial factor in this regard. Kinship and romantic relationships can also facilitate access to the network.

### 1.3.6 Individual mind-set and needs in demographic context

Networks, physical or virtual, are instrumental in conveying the radical Islamist narrative to specific audiences and enabling interested individuals to take action, whether it be in the form of participation in group discussions on Islamist topics, participation in advocacy and protest meetings, travelling to conflict areas (e.g. Syria, Iraq, Chechnya, Kashmir) or preparing attacks. Those receptive to the radical Islamist cause have been characterised by specific demographic features. They have been observed to be young, of second generation migrant background and living in the poorer areas of urban Europe. The emphasis on youth is significant from a developmental psychological point of view. During adolescence to early adulthood, identity formation is a key developmental challenge. For those who find themselves in between worlds, such as second generation migrants, identity formation may be especially challenging. This challenge of identity formation is further complicated by negative stereotypes related to their ethnicity and residence in socio-economically deprived areas. In the absence of immediate role models and social structures that support identity development, Islamist narratives and networks can help fulfil the psychological needs for identity, certainty, and significance.

### 1.3.7 Framing and Repression

The process of identity development can be complicated further by heightened societal and political consciousness of identity. Since the end of the cold war, and especially the 9/11 attacks of 2001, Islam,

Islamism, Islamist terrorism and Salafism have become household topics for public debate. In this way, 'Being a Muslim', in Europe in particular, has become publicly scrutinised - often in a negative way. Public portrayals highlight linkages between Islam and maladjustment, fundamentalism, gender inequality, delinquency and especially terrorism, impinging on the fragile trust between Muslims and non-Muslims (Morey and Yaqin, 2011; Kundnani, 2014). Media all too often prey on incidents that involve Muslims while ignoring the many examples of successful integration, and thus contribute to the creation of an image of Muslim as 'others,' deviating from modern-day European society and even posing a security threat.

Since the end of the cold war, anti-Islamic sentiment has made an entrance into politics, in many countries across Europe with considerable electoral success. As a consequence, the past decade saw a growing popular support for repressive measures allegedly to curb the threat of terrorism but often targeting a broader Muslim community (De Koning, 2020). Designated as 'at risk' populations, measures to prevent radicalisation, including attempts at early detection of radicalisation in schools, and security scrutiny of places of worship, have 'securitised' a generation of Muslims, thus fostering the impression among Muslims that European core democratic principles of civil liberty and protection of individual rights do not apply to them, and that there are double standards (Fadil, Ragazzi and Koning, 2019). For some, this may contribute to the appeal of the (radical) Islamist message regarding the (existential) threat the Muslim world is facing and the importance of complete submission and defence of Islam and Muslims worldwide to redress these threats and humiliation.

## 2. Method

In each of the fieldwork sites comprising the DARE ethnography on Islamist radicalisation, we held extensive interviews and observations, revealing insights into the nature of the phenomenon of radicalisation, into how participants in the study encounter messages of radicalisation, into the socio-economic factors contributing to openness to radicalisation, into the social-psychological factors involved in radicalisation, and into participants' visions about their future and prospects for constructive changes. We analysed these insights using specific steps associated with meta-ethnographic synthesis. Before reviewing the findings related to the aforementioned issues, the methodological approach is outlined.

The DARE project adopted a case study approach. Central to the qualitative case study is the recognition of the fundamental importance of understanding the context of social research. As Burawoy (1998: 13) puts it, qualitative research is based on the epistemological premise that 'context is not noise disguising reality but reality itself'. The principle of reflexivity embedded in qualitative social science, moreover, assumes that social research is the product of the interaction of externally produced theory and internal narratives (indigenous narratives, respondents' interpretations of the social world etc.) that are profoundly located in time and space. Thus, the methodological approach adopted in the project starts from the premise that these locations are not limitations on, but central to, the knowledge produced through social research.

At the same time, the project seeks to bring additional insight from the transnational, multi-sited ethnographic approach adopted and to allow a degree of theoretical generalisation, as well as reflect the complexity of radicalisation, in order to inform counter extremism policies and practices. To this end, a two-stage analysis process was adopted. The first stage - single case analysis - is described in the introduction to the individual case studies ([http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1\\_introduction.pdf](http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_introduction.pdf)) and is depicted figuratively in Steps 1-3 of Figure 1 (below). It should be noted that Figure 1 provides an example for an ethnographic study

of an ‘extreme-right milieu’, milieus that were studied in parallel with the Islamist milieus considered in this report (see [http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d7.1\\_introduction.pdf](http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d7.1_introduction.pdf)).

## 2.1 The meta-ethnographic synthesis approach

Cross-national synthesis analyses were conducted separately for the ten ‘Islamist’ milieus, and nine ‘extreme-right’ milieus but using the same methodological approach. Following the coding of data in individual case studies, researchers produced two sets of documents: ‘node memos’; and ‘respondent memos’ (Step 2 in Figure 1). These documents, along with the single case study reports, were used for transnational analyses.

For these transnational multi-case analyses, a meta-ethnographic synthesis approach was applied. This involved the adaptation of classic meta-ethnographic synthesis (Noblit and Hare, 1988; Britten et al. 2002) to allow for the synthesis of transnational qualitative empirical data rather than published studies. This adapted method has been used previously to study cross-European case studies of young people’s activism (Pilkington, 2018). It constitutes an alternative to comparative approaches which pre-determine the parameters for comparison and often translate into a common language only ‘indicative’ interviews or interview summaries, which tend to lose the ‘outliers’ or refutational cases, the inclusion of which is crucial to the principles of qualitative research. It combines context-sensitive coding of data in original language (see Step 1 in Figure 1) with the production of detailed primary data summaries (‘node memos’) and respondent profiles (‘respondent memos’) in English, which are used as the objects of synthesis. In this way, the synthesis approach retains a level of closeness to context that is lost when the object of meta-ethnographic synthesis is restricted to published studies (in this case the individual case study reports). The synthesis approach thus facilitates the construction of a ‘bigger picture’ from profoundly contextually embedded data and allows for not only commonalities but also differences to be elucidated and for the retention of a significant amount of contextuality.

The synthesis was conducted as a five stage process in which first the data set was constructed (Stages 1-3) and then the synthesis process conducted (Stages 4-5).

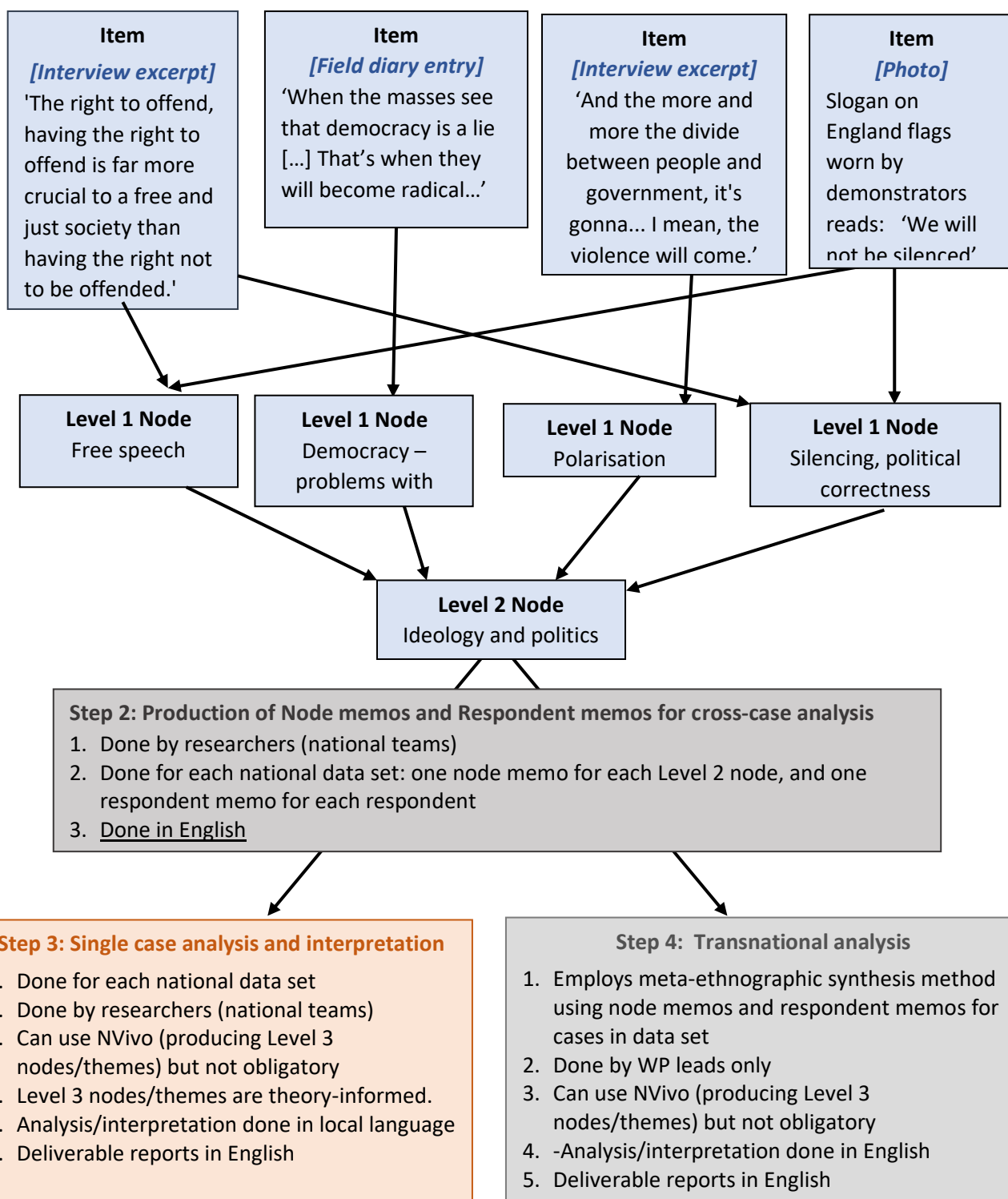
- Stage 1: Constructing the data set
- Stage 2: Scoping the data
- Stage 3: Determining research questions (see Section 2.2)
- Stage 4: Translating the meanings of one case into another
- Stage 5: Generating ‘third-level’ interpretations

These five stages were undertaken as step 4 of the data analysis flow diagram (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Data analysis flow diagram

### Step 1: Coding

- 1) Done for each national data set;
- 2) 'Item' is any segment of interview, field diary or visual data coded;
- 3) Done in NVivo by researchers (national teams) to two hierarchical levels only;
- 4) Done in local language.



In a traditional meta-ethnographic synthesis the researcher, first, has to scope the potential range of published studies to be included in the synthesis. In this case, the data set for each synthesis was pre-given, consisting of those cases included in each of the strands of radicalisation ('extreme-right' and 'Islamist') and included the following data from each case study:

- 'node memos'
- 'respondent memos'
- individual case deliverable reports

Node memos are thematic memos generated in the form of simple Word documents for each Level 2 node and consisting of the descriptions of the content of Level 2 nodes and their constituent Level 1 nodes as well as illustrative quotes for each Level 1 node. The node memos also included a summary of the context of the generation of the Level 2 node (including particular theoretical paradigms or historical or political events important to its understanding) as well as detailed descriptions of the range of content of Level 1 nodes. These node memos were written in English and constituted the primary objects of synthesis. In addition, 'respondent memos' were generated in English for each individual respondent, providing a quick reference point for the main socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent and other contextual information of relevance to the interpretation of the data. Both sets of memos were produced following anonymisation guidelines that ensured all names used were pseudonyms and any other identifying material was removed.

The building blocks of the meta-ethnographic approach are the generation of 'second-order' concepts and metaphors (Stage 4) and 'third-order' interpretations (Stage 5) (Britten et al., 2002: 213; Lee et al., 2015: 347). Definitions of first, second and third-order constructs differ in the published literature (Malpass et al., 2009: 158) although there is consensus that the underlying process involves 'identifying key concepts from studies and translating them into one another' (Thomas and Harden, 2008: 5). The term 'translating' in this context refers to the process of taking concepts from one study and recognising the same concepts in another study (ibid.). Explanations or theories associated with these concepts are employed to develop a 'line of argument', which pulls these concepts together and provides insight beyond that gained from the original studies.

The translation process in DARE was not of concepts extracted from published literature (as in a classic version of meta-ethnographic synthesis) but respondents' own interpretations coded, categorised, contextualised and interpreted in node memos, respondent memos and case study reports. These materials were read repeatedly in the process of the translation of the meanings of one case into another, where necessary clarifying context and interpretation with the field researchers. There are three forms of translation envisaged in the meta-ethnographic synthesis method: cases are directly comparable as 'reciprocal' translations; cases stand in opposition to each other and are thus 'refutational'; cases are diverse but, taken together, represent a 'line of argument' rather than a reciprocal or refutational translation (Noblit and Hare, 1988: 36). In practice, a single meta-ethnography may include all three types of translation (Campbell et al., 2011: 24; Dixon-Woods et al., 2006: 103). Given the diversity of cases in the synthesis analyses conducted for DARE, we anticipated that the end product would usually be a 'line of argument' developed on the basis of the reciprocal translation of cases but taking account of refutational or partially refutational cases.

The second-order concepts that emerged were recorded and described in a table that sought maximum reciprocal translation but recorded also any refutational cases. It also recorded illustrative quotes for both reciprocal and refutational cases in relation to that concept. The use of the term 'translation' indicates that, at this stage, the synthesiser is comparing concepts, each infused with its

The final stage of analysis was the generation of ‘third-order’ interpretations. This stage involved determining what additional insight is brought to the research questions through the synthesis of cases and is least open to procedural systematisation. The aim is to generate a qualitative synthesis that extends knowledge over and above the sum of the individual case studies included in the study whilst recognising that it may also be that no new insight emerges (Campbell et al., 2011: 119). In a further amendment of classic meta-ethnographic synthesis, at this final stage in DARE we did not aim to induce new (‘grounded’) theory (as envisaged by Noblit and Hare’s original meta-ethnographic model) but to revise, refine or reconstruct theory. This approach is based on a critical approach to the presumption in the ‘grounded theory’ approach that entirely new theory can be induced from data analysis. Rather it recognises that theory is essential to interpretation and knowledge production and thus the ‘necessity of bringing theory to the field’ (Burawoy, 2003: 647) with the aim of revising or refining theory rather than generating it anew. In DARE, therefore, we used Goldkuhl and Cronholm’s (2010) explication of a ‘multi-grounded theory’ approach to guide the practical process of bringing theory back in (see Figure 2).

```

graph TD
    subgraph Theory_Development [Theory development]
        direction TB
        TG1["Theory generation I  
- Inductive coding  
- Conceptual refinement  
- Pattern coding"]
        subgraph Explicit_Grounding [Explicit grounding processes]
            direction LR
            TM["Theoretical matching"]
            EV["Explicit empirical validation"]
            ETC["Evaluation of theoretical cohesion"]
        end
        TG2["Theory generation II  
- Theory condensation"]
        
        TG1 --> TG2
        TG2 --> TG1
        TG1 --> EG
        EG --> TG2
        EG <--> RIR[Research interest reflection and revision]
    end

```

The diagram illustrates the iterative process of theory development, structured within a central box labeled "Theory development".

At the top is a box for "Theory generation I", which includes the steps: Inductive coding, Conceptual refinement, and Pattern coding.

Below this is a large box labeled "Explicit grounding processes", which contains three sub-processes: Theoretical matching, Explicit empirical validation, and Evaluation of theoretical cohesion.

At the bottom is a box for "Theory generation II", which includes the step: Theory condensation.

Arrows indicate the flow and relationships:

- A downward arrow points from "Theory generation I" to "Explicit grounding processes".
- An upward arrow points from "Explicit grounding processes" to "Theory generation I".
- A downward arrow points from "Explicit grounding processes" to "Theory generation II".
- An upward arrow points from "Theory generation II" to "Explicit grounding processes".
- A horizontal double-headed arrow connects "Theory generation I" and "Theory generation II".
- A horizontal double-headed arrow connects "Explicit grounding processes" and a box on the right labeled "Research interest reflection and revision".

The main rationale for employing a meta-ethnographic synthesis approach for this stage of the DARE analysis is that it was developed by those engaged in ethnography themselves in order to facilitate the generation of strong interpretive explanations by deriving understanding from multiple cases while retaining the sense of the original accounts (Campbell et al., 2011: 10). Of course, the synthesis process is a ‘triple hermeneutic’ in which the meta-interpretations of the synthesiser are added to those of the



original researcher and the research participant (Weed, 2008: 22) and it is inevitable that some of the ‘thickness’ embedded in individual cases is thinned out in the process. However, in DARE, the two tier analysis and interpretation process outlined above aimed to ensure that the ‘vitality, viscosity, and vicariousness of the human experiences represented in the original studies’ (Sandelowski et al., 1997: 366) was retained in the individual case study reports while genuine new insight might be gathered through the synthesis of cases. Moreover, by using the adapted meta-ethnographic synthesis approach outlined above, we sought to retain as much of the original context and richness as possible by using primary data (in the form of ‘node memos’) as the main unit of synthesis. This allowed concepts to be derived directly from the articulation by respondents of their experience and significant detail and differentiation contained in the original studies to be retained well into the analysis process.

Another strength of the synthesis method – over, for example, a more traditional comparative method – is that cases are retained in their entirety rather than data being gathered only according to pre-selected parameters or dimensions that allow neat comparison. Moreover, by retaining a commitment to including contradictory or ‘refutational’ data in the synthesis, cases that are ‘exceptions’ or ‘outliers’ can be used to enhance understanding rather than excluded because they lack ‘fit’. Indeed the refutational synthesis acts as a powerful reminder not to allow the synthesis method to seek similarity alone and to question why some concepts ‘work’ (in terms of reciprocal translation) better than others. These ‘exceptions’ or refutations were employed in the development of ‘line of argument’ syntheses.

Thirdly, meta-ethnography did not substitute ethnography but added to it by extracting the general from the unique. The DARE research design was premised on an inductive selection of cases that prioritised the importance of contextual validity. While analysis protocols provided a systematic process of coding to two levels, this was completed in the language of the interview, to avoid the loss of linguistically expressed difference. After the initial two-level coding, each team was able to further refine their coding (and interpretation) of data to produce third-level interpretations and published their findings as a discrete case study report (see Appendix 1). Thus, this method (unlike a strict comparative design) allowed the synthesis of findings alongside the production of unique case studies that can be interpreted in context.

Fourthly, this inductive approach meant that the concepts that emerged from the synthesis were not pre-defined by parameters for comparison rooted in the research design (and thus on secondary literature rather than primary data). While a skeleton coding tree was employed to assist the synthesis process, the idea of the ‘skeleton’ was that the coding tree could have flesh put on its bones by the addition of codes reflecting particularly rich data in any one case.

The application of meta-ethnographic synthesis to primary data nonetheless presents some major challenges and has certain limitations. First, although all cases synthesised in this study were drawn from a common research project (supported by cross-project guidelines and protocols) differences between data remained. This was partially a result of the inductive rather than deductive process of selecting cases, which meant that the cases reflected a broad range of milieus (see Section 1.3) experiencing different proximities to radical(ising) messages and being more or less internally homogenous. This meant that some cases were more readily reciprocally translated while others appeared frequently as a refutational case or outlier. For example, the Turkish study was conducted over a more extended time period than other cases, and the circumstances of the respondents at that time, being near to a conflict situation, are markedly different from the urban areas where most ethnographic work in Northern Europe was conducted.

A second challenge lies in the unevenness of cases inherent in any multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 2011: 21). While some studies were deeply ethnographic, including extensive field diaries, visual data



and 20-30 semi-structured interviews, others generated less interviewees. Others secured substantive interview material but the case afforded less opportunity for ethnographic observation.

A third challenge in conducting the synthesis was pragmatic. The process would have benefitted from more time for team reflection and the sharing of practice in the course of synthesis. The benefit of team members conducting different meta-ethnographies simultaneously and sharing reflections on the process is noted by Lee et al. (2015: 340). Although in this study such collective reflection took place during the process of the design and following a preliminary scoping of the data, the opportunities were limited by the transnational nature of the wider team, the constraints on travel during the COVID-19 pandemic and the time intensive nature of the generation of data sets and materials.

## 2.2 Research questions

The research questions guiding the synthesis analysis for this report were arrived at through inductive reasoning - generation of key themes arising from the case studies – followed by a more deductive matching of these themes against the original research questions driving the DARE project (and generated from existing literature in the field). In the interest of future analysis and synthesis across the two strands of radicalisation considered in the DARE project, Islamist and ‘extreme-right’/‘anti-Islamist’, it was decided to focus on questions that were appropriate for both sets of case studies, whilst acknowledging that the concepts synthesised in the course of analysis would reflect both the differences between these radicalisation strands as well as the specific case studies included in the project. The questions selected, and thus the themes around which this report is structured are:

- How do milieu actors understand ‘radicalism’, ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’?
- How and where are radical(ising) messages encountered in the milieus studied?
- How do milieu actors understand (in)equality and its role in radicalisation?
- How do milieu actors recount their trajectories towards and away from extremism?
- What do milieu actors want to change in society and how do they envisage achieving that change?

These questions allow exploration of only a fraction of the material gathered. In particular they do not allow any focused exploration of key tropes in the ideological beliefs of actors or the movements to which they are aligned. This may create the impression that individual, socio-demographic or socio-psychological factors are prioritised in the explication of trajectories of radicalisation over structural drivers, especially ideological factors. In fact, although both specific political grievances and the socio-economic, political and cultural environments that frame them differ in each individual case study, the importance of political sense-making in the radicalisation of the research participants is threaded through the report (especially in the sections 3.2. on radical messaging and 3.3. on the link between inequality and radicalisation).

Moreover, it is important to note that the analysis, while guided by research questions relevant to the field, is essentially inductively constituted. Thus, its focus is on eliciting actors’ perspectives. While actors’ accounts are not automatically privileged in terms of interpretation, the extensive empirical research conducted in radical(ising) milieus is a key contribution of the DARE project and the focus in this report is on presenting the findings of the synthesis of these perspectives. However, a critical approach to these narratives is taken. We view actors’ own understandings of the world, their

experiences of it, and journeys through it, as vital to our understanding of radicalisation. Our role as researchers is to interrogate and interpret these narrations - not to judge their veracity or reliability but in order to enhance our understanding of how to counter extremism and, where appropriate, engage actors in these milieus themselves in that process.

## 2.3 Data sets

This synthesis draws on a total of 199 interviews with 185 research participants across the ten case studies (see Table 1). The target age range was 15-30 years although a number of interviews were conducted with important milieu members outside this age range, often with respondents reflecting back on their engagement with radicalism at a younger age. Interviews with a range of wider community members and professionals engaged in countering extremism and promoting social cohesion were conducted in most case studies but are not included in the formal dataset for analysis. The number of interviewees per case varied from 15 to 27, and the number of interviews conducted ranged from 18 to 30. The vast majority of interviews were audio recorded, although some individuals agreed to participate in the research but did not want to be audio recorded. In these cases, written notes were made by researchers and analysed alongside interview and observational data. Ethnographic observation was undertaken in all case studies.

Table 1: Data set

Country	ISO	No. interviewees	Audio/video interviews	Field diary entries	Other materials
France	FR	18	27	27	6 interviews with additional informants, and 10 text documents.
Germany	DE	18	18	17	Still images (including photos, stickers, and social media content), and relevant offline and online newspaper articles
Greece	GR	17	17	56	Images mainly from the mosque, transcribed audio messages, and downloaded online texts of two interviewees
Tunisia	TUN	15	15	12	9400 words of text documents and 19 still images
Netherlands	NL	18	20	14	3 Text documents and 4 expert interviews
Norway	NO	15	20	0	0
Turkey	TUR	27	27	30	50 still images, 30 minutes of moving images
Russia	RU	20	21	4	Not-specified
UK	UK	20	20	15	Not-specified
Belgium	BE	17	14	200	Notes of observations regarding the 'poor crescent' region
Total		<b>185</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>375</b>	

No new data were gathered for this synthesis study. All data emanate from the case studies conducted by researchers from the national teams and approved for use in this synthesis by them (see Appendix 1 for a full list of these case studies and their authors). The procedures and practices implemented to ensure the ethical collection and storage of research material are detailed in each report as well as in the Introduction to case study reports (see: <http://www.dare-h2020.org/research-reports.html>). Interviewees to whom data are attributed in Section 3 are referenced using pseudonyms (or other form of anonymisation such as Interviewee number) and country (using ISO country codes – see Table 1).

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 How do milieu actors understand ‘radicalism’, ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’?

Across the various field studies, many of the respondents expressed difficulty or hesitancy in answering questions related to their understanding of terms such as ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism.’ In Greece, the ethnographer observed that ‘when it comes to how young people understand radicalisation and extremism, it has to be noted that this was one of the most difficult parts of the interview scenario. Most of the interviewees were unable to handle and define the concepts, and it did not seem appropriate for me to insist on something that was either not clear to them or created confusion as to how to approach it’ (Country-level report, GR: 24). The ethnographer in Germany reported a similar experience as she remarked that ‘none of the respondents expressed a genuine understanding or provided a clear definition of what they think radical or extremist means and what it does not. Almost all respondents mentioned fragments of definitions that relate to concepts discussed elsewhere in society, such as dress, legitimisation of violence and strict gender understandings.’ (Country-level report, DE: 20). However, in some cases, it is important to set this rejection of terms such as ‘radical’ in the context of respondents’ own trajectories and grievances. In the French case, Adrian, who was serving a prison sentence for terrorism at the time of interview, claims, ‘[...] I’ve never understood the word radical. It’s just because they talk about it on TV and that’s where they place me. Frankly, I know I’m a fundamentalist, but being radical I don’t know what it means’. Adil, also a French respondent and also convicted of terrorism after his involvement with ISIS in Syria, adopts a similar stance, stating ‘in the end, the word radicalisation means everything and therefore nothing. Today to use this word in this debate is to take the easy way out’.

What emerges from the interview data above all is that ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’ are intrinsically relational constructs (cf. Malthaner, 2017; della Porta, 2018). Individuals, groups or behaviours that are ‘radical’ or ‘extremist’ are those labelled as such by others. Thus, to understand what constitutes ‘extremist’ or ‘radical’ we need to understand the relation between the subject who assigns the label and the behaviour, person, or group to which it is assigned as much as the behaviour, person, or group itself. This relation, moreover, is infused with power, which is experienced by research participants as profoundly imbalanced:

like it generally is on a global basis, Muslims can be seen as a group which are treated incredibly unfairly. And... for example, if a Muslim kills a non-Muslim, suddenly it’s a terrorist attack. But if America, for example, blows up five hundred people, then it’s allowed – then it’s just a war against terrorism. (Frank, NO)

This exertion of power through labelling can itself set in motion a conflictual dynamic. As Ihsan (TUR) notes: ‘I think this is why Muslims are angry. Because violence is always being analysed by using Islam and Muslims. The result is extreme reaction from the Islamists, they know the West’s sins so well, but they never sees their own sins.’

##### 3.1.1 The construction of ‘Islamist radicalisation’ by media and other interest groups

A significant number of respondents across the fieldwork sites conveyed that the labels of ‘radical’ and ‘extremist’ are intentionally construed by media and the state and anti-Islamic factions for the advance of their own financial or political interest and their animosity towards Muslims. Media is assumed to play a key role in the perpetuation of the image of Muslims as violence-prone and seeking to disrupt society. Respondents lament that media portrayals help to shape the image that outward appearance

of Muslims (e.g. a beard, not shaking hands, a *niqab*) is an expression of radicalism, and thereby spread fear about Muslims in society.

In Norway, Anwar mirrors the reflections of his compatriot Frank mentioned above, as he says ‘they’ll think that Muslims carry out most terror attacks, when there are actually more right-wing extremists, at least in the US.’ Anwar directly blames the media for this ‘because the people who own the media want people to invest in the Islamophobic industry. People have to continue following that narrative because they earn money from it.’ In the UK, Dhul-Qarnain shares a similar viewpoint:

To be honest, I hear about radicalisation and I hear about extremism, but I never really come across it, to be honest. I never really come across it...So obviously, the media push out whatever they want to push out. And they portray Islam in whatever light they want to. And whenever they do portray Muslim people, Muslim communities, always in the more clandestine activities and the more illicit activities, and it's never anything good in the papers. (Dhul-Qarnain, UK)

In the Netherlands, Respondent 13 reflected on the effects of an alarmist newspaper article that suggested parts of his neighbourhood had become a ‘Sharia Triangle’ dominated by Islamist fundamentalists. Although the article was eventually retracted, as the journalist was forced to admit he never actually conducted the interviews he reported, the article nonetheless set in motion a conflictual political and social dynamic (see Country-level report, NL for details). One respondent reflects:

I also saw, for example, that people started showing off and laughing about it; look, they got us! And then it is another ‘they’, right? The media is seen as the other side. We are given our own Sharia neighbourhood, while we actually don't even have one. And then, let's play along. And so they started to tease the people who spoke a bit negatively about the neighbourhood, about Muslims in the neighbourhood, and about Muslims. They went along with it. [...] And especially with the war in Syria in the background of course. Young people who move to Syria ... If you asked someone 8 years ago, or 10 years ago; what is Sharia? Then they wouldn't know. (13, NL)

In this way, according to this respondent, the media had played an active role in creating conflictual dynamics. In Russia and the Netherlands, there was also mention of a deliberate construction of radicalisation by state authorities. In Russia, Musa says: ‘Well, people are told: “Here are the radicals, it's something bad.” But 90 percent do not know what these terms mean [...] For me, an extremist is a person who belongs to ISIS [...] extremism is more specific. But for police officers, an extremist is anyone who has a beard, perhaps, or goes by definition “oh, they're all like that”, very broad.’ In the Netherlands, Respondent 15 discusses the institutions dealing with counter-radicalisation, and how radicalisation is to some extent defined by:

[...] the budgeting and targets of those institutions [...] It's way too easy. Then, as soon as they have spoken to enough boys, for example, they go back to the office and just sit. You know? You just do that automatically as a person. If at a certain point you already have enough clients, then you think: yes, we have already helped enough people. You know? You don't look there anymore. While if they really know: yes, we actually have no one at all. Then they look a lot more. So that is how the definition of radicalisation is forged. (15, NL)

The perceived active role of media and authorities in the construction of public understandings of radicalisation comes with cynicism regarding radicalisation and terrorism among some of the respondents. In Germany, for instance, Jamil remarks:

No matter how serious these news appear, I no longer believe anything. They can also be purely fictional, or anything else. Or, hired by somebody else, 'Here's \$50,000 or whatever and you march into a church with a fake beard and shoot 50 people, so that the image of Islam is lost.' That's what I believe. Then you'll find some idiot who has a fake beard or something and goes in there for money and kills people, um, shoots them and says, um, 'I'm a Muslim'. (Jamil, DE)

In Greece and Turkey, we observe that the scepticism towards the labels 'radical' and 'extremist' in the context of Islamism is related in part to scepticism towards the antonym of 'moderate Islam.' Some respondents indicate that Islam comprises a unity (*tahwid*), and the distinction between 'moderate Islam' and 'radical Islam' must therefore have been construed by those outside of Islam. In Turkey, the ethnographer observed that some participants opposed the use of the terms of radical and moderate Islam because Islam comprises a unity that can only be followed through the Qur'an and the life of Muhammad. Moderate and radical Islam were considered Western concepts imposed upon Muslims, and essentially alien to Muslims' conception of Islam. The Turkish report refers to respondent Ihsan who believes that 'moderate Islam is a Trojan horse introduced by western imperialism among Muslim societies' claiming that 'the CIA, Open Society Foundation and powerful Western institutions are among those who support the concept of moderate Islam.' Ihsan continues: 'I am not happy with the moderate Islam project. I do not consider it well-meaning. I mean that I have concerns that the moderate Islam project aims to transform Muslims into complicit bodies for the bigger projects of neo-liberalism. On one hand, I am not happy with the violence-centred interpretation of Islam and I condemn it strongly; but on the other hand, I try to refrain from conforming to the concept of moderate Islam. I am suspicious.' The essence of this viewpoint is also reflected in Greek respondent Dimitri's perspective, who notes that 'extremism is not only to exaggerate and go beyond the limits of Allah and Sunna through the addition of new [theological] elements. Extremism is also when someone removes (doesn't comply with) the Islamic duties as they are described in the Quran and Sunna. When for example someone denies hijab in the name of moderation, then this is not moderation but extremism (in the other direction) with regard to the Islamic duties. We can name many examples that belong to this category of extremism'.

### 3.1.2 Extremism is always negative, radicalism may carry positive connotations

To the extent that radicalism and extremism can be considered real phenomena, many among our respondent set consider extremism a universally negative term, while radicalism is perceived predominantly negatively, but some attach positive connotations to the label 'radical'. For them, being radical means being strict, principled, and passionately committed. When radicalism is viewed negatively, it is used interchangeably with extremism.

In Greece, Maria reflects: '[...] I associate the word radical with young people and with Aristotle, who used this concept for young people; that they want to change the establishment all the time [...] A radical is a person who wants to make changes, to change the system.' When the interviewer asked about a positive interpretation of radicalism, Maria continued 'yes, I think it has a positive content as well, while extremism is completely negative. [...] I imagine, that the extremist is closer to jihad, to what we call jihadism, the radical is someone who tries to fight for his rights in a country.' In Russia, Issa says that 'to be radical is to be someone who is trying to observe religion in the fullest possible way. Extremist is practically the same, but he is someone who is already prepared to go against the

authorities in a combative way.’ In Norway, Osman observes that ‘Martin Luther King also had radical aspects. Malcolm X also had radical aspects. There was also a period when Nelson Mandela was pretty, pretty radical. Even Mahatma Gandhi! So these are people I see as revolutionaries, they’re people I see as mentors.’ Somewhat further in the conversation, he continues ‘people come up with unique ideas and opinions about how to improve society. Because after all that is what Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, they, after all, that was what they based themselves on – improving society.’

### 3.1.3 Radicalism and extremism as deviation from norms

In their negative interpretations, ‘radicalism’ and ‘extremism’ appear to denote a deviation from personal, social, theological, and moral norms. Consistent with the relational view of radicalism, the term is often referred to as a means of distancing oneself from the excessive. Few respondents consider themselves radical, and none consider themselves extremist. In France, Ousmane, who openly displays his profound faith in Islam, reflects ‘for me the word “radicalisation” is an invention [...] It doesn't exist for me. It doesn't exist for me, because it refers to radicalised people, radicalised Muslims, and I call them “non-Muslims”. They are not Muslims, they are not Muslims at all.’ In the UK, respondent Sayyid Qutb laments the ignorance of the radicals in his surroundings: ‘again, it comes down to a lack of knowledge. A lot of people, for example, will hear a hadith they heard yesterday and try and implement it today, without knowing everything behind it, the context in which it was used or... And they'll just fire refutations for no reason and... It's quite sad, unfortunately, but, you know...’

#### 3.1.3.1 Deviation on a social-psychological level

The label ‘radical’ is used on a psychological level to indicate that one is deviating from societal expectations, but also sometimes to denote a process of losing self-control. This is sometimes expressed in terms of losing one’s bearings or crossing a line.

In Germany, Melanie reflects that radicalism ‘has a lot to do with the person themselves, [...] because they might be in a period of their life, or they might be, how should I say, at a turning point or something. Where they somehow need support or feeling of belonging, because, for example, if they've just lost a sense of belonging, or something like that, “ok, who do I still have?”, or, “where's my group, where's my tribe?” so to speak. And maybe that leads some people to go to such groups, simply because they have this group feeling and so, yes, ok. ‘I do something, I'm a member of something important, or something that can make a change, in some way’. Another respondent, also from Germany, mentions that:

People who join ISIS are destroyed individuals even before they go there and they may have had a troublesome childhood. That's the thing about all these radical Islamists, they're broken junkies. All of them. Broken junkies, fucked-up junkies or whatever, who had no stability in their lives. You have, you're fucked up. I say I'll take you in and I give you my ideology. You look up to me, you like me, you love me for taking you in. I'm your role model [...] then I'll give you my ideology without you noticing, and one day you'll think like that. (Country-level Report, DE: 23)

In Russia, Said says:

Maybe my understanding of radicalism and extremism is not quite right but when it comes to [...] these extremist Muslims, I think that all the insult has just led them to lose their minds. That's the only way I can understand it. It's like when a person gets hurt as a child and they remain embittered their whole life. I think it's the same here with some of the radicals I see. [...] They cannot see any other way but to do something stupid, something



radical. So they go and do that stupid radical thing. They go out and buy a gun and go and shoot police officers [...]. Well, let's think in terms of a radical Islamic group. So I got a gun and I shot police officers, killed three or four people. Then, a couple of days later me and my whole organisation get bombed. What good does that do for Islam? (Said, RU)

For many respondents across the ethnographic sites, the deviance of the radical is not solely attributed to the individual. Those who joined a radical Islamist organisation (most notably ISIS) are described as being misguided, victims of society or of recruiters.

In the Netherlands, Respondent 3 shares that he has:

[...] known guys who left, with whom I had a good relationship. They have been fooled, lovely guys with whom you normally get along well.... They were enticed with promises of gold and silver in the afterlife. So there are some who have been misguided and otherwise good, guys who have felt they have misbehaved in the past; they are looking for an opportunity to erase everything from the past... I know that. Later I heard that they were dead... I really did worry about that; they have become victims of that ideology. I spoke to one who said, 'look, our brothers are being slaughtered by Assad, we must do something'. They weren't extremists... you can't apply a single measure to all. They had good ideals, but were disappointed. (3, NL)

In Greece, Thanassis reflects that 'an extremist, I imagine, is someone who has been, basically, fanaticised. The fanatic [...] has a lack of knowledge. He is not...I mean he is at a point where he is controlled, he has been manipulated by various people, mainly on the political level, and he has never read actually about religion and he just wants to hurt people who don't hold the same beliefs as he does'. Thanassis then continues 'this means that he is a person who is not going to accept any other opinion. I mean that I myself I can sit down and discuss with a Christian and tell him "Yes, man, you believe that religion has a triadic form [God, Son and the Holy Spirit], while I believe that it is pure monotheism. Let's discuss on some subjects". No, this is something that an extremist would never do.'

The Russian report underscores the argument that radical engagement is associated with deviance from social norms. The findings of the Russian study suggest that involvement in underground resistance and journeying to Syria provide opportunities, including risk, adventure, and freedom, which are not available to young people in their everyday existence. Reflecting on this, Musa concludes 'In the end, they just take advantage of the foolishness of young people. And young people, how can I explain to you... I mean, I was at this age myself – 16-17 years old, blood boiling, I wanted to find adventure. Let's say, my parents don't allow me something at home, I wanted to stand out somehow.'

### *3.1.3.2 Deviation on a religious level*

The labels 'radical' and 'extremist' are also used by research participants in relation to Islam, specifically to disqualify and distance themselves from particular religious/political groups - historically from the so-called 'Kharijites' in particular and, in the present, most notably from Islamic State. Greek respondent Nikos states this directly, saying that radicalism is 'anything that is not Islamic [...] okay, there are gradations within that, but if it is off the path, not in tune with the spirit and the values and principles of Islam, to a greater or lesser extent, it is out.' When the interviewer asks whether this also applies to 'groups like the so called Islamic State etc.', Nikos replies 'Of course, absolutely, they are out [of Islam].'

As alluded to earlier, some respondents emphasise that Islam is a religion of balance and moderation, or '*wasatiyya*,' a concept explained in the report on Turkey (Country-level report, TUR). The researcher describes a conversation with respondent Fatma about her understanding of Islamic radicalisation. She



is observed to strongly oppose the term, stating that ‘Islam is the religion of balance’ using the word ‘*wasatiyya*’ in reference to a hadith. Fatma argues that Islam is a religion of tolerance, although this tolerance is not without limits. Those who deviate from this path of tolerance can be considered radical or extremist.

Mahdiya, a German respondent, echoes this viewpoint. For her, radicals are:

[...] the people who do things that they justify with religion but which are not rooted in religion. So, things that are exaggerated [...] For example, the Prophet said, we must always have the midpoint, not the exaggeration, not the understatement [...]’ She then continues ‘with radical you always immediately think of something evil, of course there are also exaggerations in other things, for example, there is a sect that, um, exaggerates, for example in this Dawah, in missionary work, they exaggerate there, but leave the other things out, but that is not where you say radical. [...] Well, radical is definitely what ISIS is; it’s radical because, for me, it’s not radical anymore, it’s mentally ill for me, um, because that’s just, that’s, that’s just not normal [...] people like from ISIS, that’s radical to me, sick. Or maybe Nazis are radical to me. Whatever you exaggerate about your beliefs. And harming others, so to speak. It’s really just like, being egoistical with it, so, me me me, I’m better than them and I have to do something about it and so, I don’t know, I find it really hard to describe this term ‘radical’. (Mahdiya, DE)

In a number of countries, reference to the ‘Kharijites’ was made as a way of placing extremism within Islamic tradition. Kharijites comprise a religious sect of the early times of Islam who broke away from the caliph Ali who they initially supported, following a feud over the (il)legitimacy of the fourth Khalif Ali’s peaceful conflict settlement with a rival. Kharijites are considered extremist for their uncompromising attitude and strict reliance on the rulership of Allah’s revelations, leaving little room for compromise or tolerance. Their practice of denouncing anyone deviating from their perceived righteous path, referred to by the term ‘*takfir*’, has become particularly strongly associated with Islamist extremist groups of modern times. In Greece, Pavlos remarks, for instance, that ‘all these people who kill, murder, innocent people in the name of Islam and Jihad, planting bombs and organising attacks and assassinations, they are Kharijites [...] and they are heretical offshoots of Islam.’ Turkish respondent Fatma remarks that for Islamist extremist groups, their ‘conception of Islam is incorrect. What they do now is similar to what the Kharijites did once. Like the sects that emerged after Mohammed. There were many extremist sects which used to act inappropriately for Islam, but they made it look like it was Islamic. What ISIS does is similar to Kharijites.’ Another Turkish respondent, Sevgi, comments on the degree of overlap between Salafism and radicalism, mentioning *takfir*. The researcher writes that Sevgi knows a few Salafis and admires them but strongly opposes this association between Salafism and ISIS: ‘Salafism has nothing to do with ISIS. They are just people who adhere to the literal meaning of the Qur’an, they do not rely on reasonings and interpretations.’ When he goes on to ask whether they have a tendency towards violence, however, she concedes, ‘they do. They have the potential of violence and they are too *takfiri* sometimes’ (Sevgi, TUR).

This practice of denunciation, *takfir*, has made an entrance into neighbourhoods of Western Europe in the past decades. In Germany, for instance, *takfir* is brought up by two respondents, recalling how a friend branded them as unbelievers for showing incorrect religious behaviour, and how this led to the end of their friendship. Another respondent in Germany expressed gratitude to a social worker for pointing out the inappropriateness of *takfiri* practice. He mentions ‘in the past [...] I really thought so badly about Christians too, but a social worker talked me out of it. He really, really woke me up, he said: “That’s not right. What are you talking about?” Just like that.’

In Greece, Thanassis also warns against adopting *takfiri* practice, but from an Islamic standpoint:

One thing that Islam teaches us is that we should not divide ourselves into groups. Meaning that we should form a united front and not divide religion, not form sects or parties, something that offers you a clear answer. It tells you that 'you shouldn't be divided into groups'. Having a central administration, a central goal, a common goal of all [Islamic] countries is acceptable. But only if there are no deceitful purposes, etc. meaning political issues, etc. I mean that a state shouldn't say 'okay, now let's go to Greece and Islamise it'. No, there should be a common goal, in order to advocate Islam as it is in reality. Not like ISIS wants and everyone who speaks in the name of Allah and kills people, even Muslims. The greatest sin in Islam is to kill a Muslim. How many Muslims has ISIS killed? I can't accept that ISIS represents my religion, because my religion is very strict on this. (Thanassis, GR)

### 3.1.4 Radicalism but primarily extremism are related to violence

The label 'radical', but primarily the label 'extremism', are often discussed in relation to violence. In some cases, the use of violence is considered to be justified. The labels 'radical' and 'extremist' are assigned to cases where violence is indiscriminate and illegitimate. Violence is sometimes justified in self-defence.

In Russia, Mamuka mentions that 'radical, in my opinion, is a person who is more... I don't even know how to say it, this is a person who doesn't even need a reason to kill a person, to arrange some kind of coup, revolution, and so on.' Ramzan, another Russian respondent concurs, although he differentiates between radicalism and extremism: 'Well, radical is something that goes beyond what is generally accepted, something shocking, and an extremist is something related to the use of weapons. I may have radical views, but I don't want to fight. I can be radical, but not an extremist – my wife must wear a headscarf and that's it, end of story.'

The discussion on the legitimacy of the use of violence in relation to extremism can be found in Russia, but, above all, in France, where the acceptability of the Charlie Hebdo attacks are subject to discussion. Paul, who at 17 years old was in prison for murder, reflects: 'There are certain attacks I understand. There are others I don't understand. Like the Charlie Hebdo attack, I understand, because before the attacks, there were a lot of Muslims who went to the Tribunal in Paris. And the court did nothing, and afterwards you shouldn't be surprised. It is not surprising. Of course, the violence doesn't solve anything, but at least now they know what is waiting for them.' Jeremy, sentenced to eight years in prison for recruiting young people he allegedly encouraged to travel to Syria, makes a similar eye-for-an-eye argument: 'Charlie Hebdo, why do you pick on Muslims? Why not respect people? Why do it deliberately? ... It was deliberate, it was provocation ... If we know we provoke people, why do it? You sow people's anger and you end up receiving it in return.'

Romain, a 21-year-old convert from the French study who was imprisoned on suspicion of planning an attack and trying to reach Syria to join a jihadist group, also propagates the legitimacy of violence as a response to attacks on Muslims. When the interviewer asked Romain about the Charlie Hebdo attack, he replied that his first thoughts had been that it meant 'Good tidings from Allah. [...] Did you see all the Muslim countries, after Charlie Hebdo? They all went out in the street, they were all happy. From Palestine, Somalia, even in Chechnya.' When the interviewer objected to this suggestion, he re-stated his opinion. Further, in response to the interviewer's question regarding Romain's views on the 13th of November Paris attacks, he replied 'Everything they experienced there, on the 13th of November in one evening, Muslims experience it every day. Every day they live it. What they experienced in a few hours, Muslims have been experiencing for years.'

### 3.1.5 Closing: two opposing perspectives

Certainly not all respondents shared this point of view. In fact, as discussed above, many of our respondents condemned the use of violence. But Romain's remarks demonstrate the existence of two perspectives regarding the use of violence. On the one hand, violence that is viewed as the work of extremists, elicits strong negative responses. French respondent Ousmane, for instance, gives a diametrically opposed response to Romain's regarding the 13th of November attacks. Ousmane recalls that he 'cried when the Bataclan took place. Because it's incredible to do that in the name of God, in the name of Allah. It's incredible. It is not possible.'

At the other end of the spectrum, we find respondents who place violence (often perceived by others as 'violent extremism') in relational context, arguing that there is a zero-sum struggle between Muslims and non-Muslims, the West in particular, where violence is an essential feature of both sides. In addition to Romain's remarks, in the Netherlands we encountered this perspective in the words of Respondent 14:

It is war. But, we can't play it holy. America doesn't either. Performing executions. For example, the Kurds in Iraq, the court in Iraq, where the young people are now being convicted for what they have committed in Syria, they are all being murdered. Hung. Yes, that's bad too. We cannot say this is less bad and this is more bad. Do you understand? Both are bad. (14, NL)

### 3.1.6 Summary

Across the various field studies, many of the respondents expressed difficulty or hesitancy towards questions related to their understanding of the terms 'radicalisation' and 'extremism.' If they did come to a description, it was often relational. The use of these labels, moreover, is indicative of the relation between the individual and the behaviour, person, or group being described. Arguably, it says as much about the person applying the label as the object to which it is applied.

A significant number of respondents across the areas of fieldwork conveyed that the labels of 'radical' and 'extremist' are intentionally construed by the state and anti-Islamic factions to advance their own political interest and their animosity towards Muslims. Media is assumed to play a key role in the perpetuation of the image of Muslims as violence-prone and seeking to disrupt society. Respondents lament that media portrayals help to spread fear of Muslims in society. The scepticism towards the labels 'radical' and 'extremist' in the context of Islamism is related in part to a critical attitude also towards the antonym of 'moderate Islam.' Some respondents indicate that Islam is one (*tahwid*), and the distinction between 'moderate Islam' and 'radical Islam' must therefore have been construed by those outside Islam.

Extremism is universally considered a negative term. Radicalism also carries a predominantly negative connotation among many of the respondents, but some attach positive connotations to the label 'radical'. For them, radical means being strict, principled, and passionately committed. When radicalism is viewed negatively, it is used interchangeably with extremism. In their negative interpretations, 'radicalism' and 'extremism' denote a deviation from personal, social, theological, and moral norms. Consistent with the relational view on radicalism, it is often brought up as a label to distance oneself from the excessive. Few respondents consider themselves radical, and none think of themselves as extremist.

The label 'radical' is used in psychological terms to indicate that one is deviating from societal expectations, but also sometimes to denote a process of losing self-control, that one is losing one's bearings, and crossing a line. The label 'radical' is used in relation to others in society to denote

someone who is misguided, as someone who is a victim of society, or of recruiters. The label 'radical' is used in relation to Islam to disqualify and distance oneself from particular groups (most notably Islamic State) and religious traditions. Some respondents emphasise that Islam is a religion of balance and moderation (*wasatiyya*). Radicalism is therefore a deviation from the path of Islam. From this perspective, abandoning Islam for a Western lifestyle is also viewed as radical.

The label 'extremism' is primarily used in relation to violence, although 'radical' is also sometimes used. In some cases, the use of violence is considered to be justified. The labels 'radical' and 'extremist' are assigned to cases where violence is indiscriminate and illegitimate. Violence is sometimes justified, such as in the case of self-defence.

### 3.2 How and where are radical(ising) messages encountered in the milieus studied?

When considering the experiences of the respondents with different types of radical messages, it is pertinent to take into account three fundamentally different categories of messages: 1) discriminatory messages that contribute to feelings of isolation, anomia and humiliation and that obstruct access to civic participation; 2) messaging that contributes to the bolstering of subcultural identity; and 3) messaging that promotes radicalisation. These different types of messaging may 'push', in the case of discriminatory messaging, or 'pull', in the case of Islamist extremist messaging, the individual into adopting extremist points of view. The research also revealed an 'in between' world of the neighbourhoods and cultural milieus of many of the respondents, enabling a subcultural identification that may foster resilience against extremist messaging, although we also observed facilitated access due to subcultural identification.

#### 3.2.1 Discriminatory messaging

In most of the non-Muslim majority countries that were studied, a significant number of respondents reported experiences with anti-Muslim and other discriminatory messaging in their social life, in public spaces, at school, and at work, and in media and politics. Expressions of this type of messaging vary from being spat at while using public transport, to being excluded from friendship, to being unable to find an internship or a job, to being described as radical by media, to being subject to surveillance by security services. This type of messaging discourages participation in public life and contributes to a sense of isolation and 'uprootedness.' In France, Ousmane reflects:

Then we're going to blame the young people of the neighbourhood or the city who get angry because of this or that, but that's normal! It's normal that you let this guy live his life having a finger pointed at him all the time and being told he is bad, that he is a thug, is scum, and this and that, all his life. What do you want him to become? He becomes a thug, a scum, and so on. (Ousmane, FR)

##### 3.2.1.1 Discriminatory messaging in social and public life

Respondents reported experiences with anti-Muslim messaging in their social and public life. In the Netherlands, Respondent 1 recalls:

You often hear that people lose touch with old friends but my friends distanced themselves from me. We always went to Germany with a group of friends. After I had converted I said, I wanted to go, but no pork and no alcohol. Then, the group turned against me. They said: we are going to Germany to be away from those Muslims around us. They knew my history, they came to visit me while I was in foster care. It was hard for

me that they did not support me. Even when I got married, they thought it was strange. [...] Now I still have the same problems, but I did not know how to deal with them then, I had no one to ask for advice. We felt alone. This was the when we started to feel out of place, and we stopped studying and working. (1, NL)

Another respondent from the Netherlands, Respondent 7, shared the social impact of her decision to start wearing a headscarf:

I wanted it so badly, but I was so scared to make that choice because I knew it would entail other things. [...] I noticed right away at school. I was first told 20 thousand times 'shame about that long tail'. That was very annoying. At first you deal with it very normally, but you are also still in your puberty and you don't really know whether to get angry or to stay calm. Sometimes I got very angry and sometimes I stayed very calm. You are still finding your way. I was 17 then. (7, NL)

Respondents from across the fieldwork sites recalled experiences of rejection and discrimination in public spaces. In Germany, a respondent mentions that in a particularly nice area of his city of residence, where the people 'really look very European' with 'almost only Germans', he felt out of place:

Yes, and I'm just 'the foreigner' and I went in there and everyone looked straight at me straight at me, like this, yes, I felt really uncomfortable, directly, yes. I told my girlfriend that I'm never coming back here' because 'sometimes they look really strange, then they think I am from another planet, although I am a German just like them. (Hozan, DE)

Another German respondent shares a similar experience in discotheques. He mentions using a distinction between Germans and foreigners that:

[...] they'd rather let the German than the foreigner in. You know how it is, foreigners always want to fight, this and that. Actually, that's not true at all. Me and my boys just want to party (!) go out. We just want to have our fun, we don't want to beat up anybody in the club, or start a fight. Yeah. (Thinking). I see it in the schools too, how many people are disadvantaged just because they have foreign roots. You can definitely tell. (Hozan, DE)

Even in the Muslim majority country Turkey, some respondents expressed concern about hostility towards them concerning their religion. In Turkey, this is related to the Kemalist striving for a secular society. Respondent Cahide notes:

In Turkish society secularism is practised just inside a certain class. They claim they are free but it's just for a certain society or class. Secularism is just a certain class. For example, they don't have tolerance for the Muslims at all [...] For example, we sometimes go to the hospitals. They treat us like ignorants who know nothing. That's just due to our appearance. Do you know my personality? Do you know my cultural level? Do you know whether I improved myself or not? [...] As I said, the freedom is for the secular people who love Ataturk and praise him. The right of freedom is for them [...] I don't believe that Turkey is secular and libertarian. I never believe that because that freedom isn't something for us. So what should I do with a freedom which hasn't been given to me? (Cahide, TUR)

A number of respondents from different milieus mention that the negativity towards them as Muslims also comes with aggression. In Greece, for example, Pavlos recounted how he was assaulted by a gang

that appeared to specifically target him for his Islamic appearance. Following a conversation in the street with a group of young boys, he agreed to join them for a cup of coffee only to be targeted by them. He recalled how he heard footsteps and then recounted:

I didn't protect my face. They ran over to hit me. Some people with knuckledusters... after I was hit once, I didn't remember anything. I remember getting up and looking at the stars, I didn't even see anyone, except for one who played the role of the good friend. [...] I had blood all over me. (Pavlos, GR)

When the interviewer asked about similar incidents happening to other Muslims, he mentions 'In Athens sometimes. But not to my acquaintances. [...] Yes they threw Molotov bombs into the mosque, scattered leaflets, I know this political party... of course, okay, I do not know if this party actually did this to them [...] it might have been others that did it...' (Pavlos, GR).

The Norwegian report provides an extensive description of the impact of the murder of Benjamin Hermansen, who was killed by neo-Nazis in 2001. Although the murder of Hermansen was racially motivated and not directly related to Islam, it nonetheless has had a profound impact on the Muslims living in Hermansen's neighbourhood of 'Holmlia' and similar neighbourhoods. The description illustrates the effects of hate related messages. Respondent Imran was closely involved at the time and recalled:

It was a huge shock. (...) It really was so tragic because Holmlia had previously been a very lively place. It was as if all the colours had been drained from Holmlia the next day. I remember from my childhood that we were often in Holmlia centre and every year there were always what was known as 'Holmlia days', with the carnival and things like that. It was fun. The place was packed. After Benjamin, the place has never been packed again, not even on the Holmlia days or things like that. It just died out, for one strange reason or another. (Imran, NO)

Imran further reflects on the emotional repercussions of the event and the public consciousness of ethnic background, 'you suddenly became so frightened. So yes, we were terrified. It was like they could suddenly come and take us... It was difficult to be out at night and things like that. We felt like we had to group together, in a way – gather together. So you'd never end up being by yourself.' And he continues:

It divides, in a way – you know, there's a lot of white people in Granbakken. But like, we've never seen them as white, if you understand... They were just 'people'. But you become sceptical of the white man (outside the area), if you get me... I felt like the death of Benjamin was what made us – what gave us the future we had, in a way. [...] Then I started smoking and hanging out in bad areas instead, because there was more unity. We felt, you know, included. ....and when it happened, we were a bit like – really, we went from being nice to standing up for ourselves...after that, things changed for us. We thought, okay...We have to, like, fight back. (Imran, NO)

### 3.2.1.2 Police brutality

We also registered a number of respondents lamenting discriminatory behaviour by law enforcement agencies. In France, for instance, Griezmann complains that there is a lot of discrimination in everyday life. Talking about the police, he says:

[...] When I was checked by the police, they called me 'dirty Arab'. When they saw an Algerian surname on their identity card and all that [...] They threw my money on the ground 'Here, pick up, dirty Arab'. And a black friend who got beaten up 'dirty black, dirty



African'. The police, they are there to make the law and they themselves don't respect it. So that's it. (Griezmann, FR)

In the Netherlands, Respondent 13 described how it had become 'just normal' in his neighbourhood to expect to 'be hit by the police'. It was only later that he questioned 'how can that be?' and reflected on the damage that is done to your individual development by growing up in such an environment. In Russia, Anvar was also highly suspicious about law enforcement agencies for whom it is 'convenient and profitable' to 'think that all Muslims are somehow connected to terrorism'.

### *3.2.1.3 Hostility at school and during Internships*

At a number of fieldwork sites, respondents talked about their lack of schooling opportunities. For some, this meant being lumped together with youngsters with a similar background, often with little support from teachers. Internships proved to be especially difficult to find for our respondents.

In Belgium, for instance, Primo mentioned his negative experiences of secondary school. Regarding the teachers he reflects:

They are hostile because the teaching profession is not respected, it's not new, I've seen ... we were in a welding class, I'm like this, writing, I see a steel plate flying and it breaks against the blackboard near the teacher, you know how many teachers have resigned! It was really sick schools... it's like you have a bench flying through the window (Primo, BE).

Primo goes on to talk about the violence he, and others, experienced, which is referred to 'school harassment': 'I've seen school harassment, there are many people, little girls who have committed suicide, school harassment is no laughing matter' (Primo, BE).

The French report also describes the difficulties experienced during secondary school. Prominent here is the case of Adrian, who despite his intellectual interests was sent to a technical college; an imposed choice familiar to many other young people from minority groups in France. The story of Adrian's school career also highlights the difficulties of finding an internship, something which emerged in a number of fieldwork sites. For Adrian, searching for an internship came with consistent rejection because of where he lived, which trapped him in the stigma of belonging to a 'dangerous category'. He recalls:

I stopped in Year 12 because they made me repeat since I didn't manage to find an internship. Because every time I went to a garage shop to ask about an internship, they looked at the address and saw that I came from an area known for being 'the hood'...and personally, I didn't take that well. It's a kind of rejection, complete rejection...Stay in your neighbourhood, find something in your neighbourhood. What does that mean? And that really pissed me off because as a result of that, I didn't get a diploma. I was completely discouraged because I couldn't even continue since I had to repeat a year. And I never repeated the year...In the end [I got] treated like a piece of shit. (Adrian, FR)

In the Netherlands, several respondents also reported difficulties finding an internship. In all cases, these difficulties were specifically related to the respondents' religiosity. Respondent 2 mentioned that he became more focussed on Islam at the time of his search for an internship. After a number of rejections:

I was offered a nice place at a research agency, but the opportunity didn't work out, because the teacher who offered it said: 'you are not going to ask for a place to pray are you?'... I said I would do it in my free time. But they found someone else instead... Eventually I did find something. It was good. But it was unequal treatment, ethnic



profiling. I did not feel it as discrimination then, I did not think about it ... Well, now that you ask that question, it was a loss of another six months - I had never experienced anything like it. (2, NL)

A Dutch female respondent also recounted difficulties finding an internship noting that when she had been called for an interview, she had been challenged on why she did not shake hands. She reflects: 'Why should that be? The people who I work with have no problems with that. So what's the problem? At one point I really didn't feel at home anymore and then I got really sad. At that point I quit.' (7, NL)

In Belgium, following a six-month incarceration period, respondent Secondo was obliged to undergo training (under the conditional release regime) and embarked on training to become a childcare worker. However, this involved a summer internship at a holiday camp with children, during Ramadan. The fasting in the summer heat, with long days, proved too much to bear. He felt unwell, and eventually dropped out of the training.

In the Netherlands, when the interviewer asked Respondent 10 about the factors at play in 10's radicalisation, the respondent makes a direct connection to his lack of internship opportunities:

Coincidence, meeting someone, it is not only that you have lost someone or you want to deepen your knowledge, it is also coincidence, circumstances. No internship, a lot of time on your hands, you meet someone when you are vulnerable; if I had found an internship I would have been busy and it would have been different. (10, NL)

#### 3.2.1.4 *At work*

Several respondents mentioned encounters with discriminatory messages in their workplace. In the Norwegian report, we find several illustrations. Omar, for instance, a 26-year old of Syrian descent shared how he dropped out of journalism training and eventually felt lucky to find a new job at a restaurant chain, despite the fact that it required him to grill pork most of his time there. But one evening at Eid, the end of the Ramadan, he was approached by senior staff who started to joke about Islam, and the Taliban:

Then one of them says 'Don't you feel well?...I feel sorry for you'. I say 'Why?' He says that the US had just bombed the Taliban and so on, so many people have died. And I think: 'Huh, why is he telling me this. What's that got to do with me?'. So then the head chef comes up, smiling a kind of icky smile. 'What's up? Our little jihadist?'. They made a laughing stock of me... And suddenly I got the shift list. He had put me on all the night shifts, the least wanted and the most unpopular shifts... (Omar, NO)

This experience is shared by other Norwegian respondents. Hassan mentioned that he had similar experiences at his workplace, where, when he started work in 2014, he had been the only foreigner (or at least the only Muslim) who had ever worked in the firm. He describes the company as large and home to 'a lot of racism' including members of the anti-Islamisation movement PEGIDA. He explains: 'it just defines your place there. When I came, there were always...strange questions I was asked all the time. "You saw what happened in France, in Nice? Why do you lot do things like that?" I then get the impression that I'm the one to blame for it.' (Hassan, NO). Gulam, also from Norway, had worked in a shop when he was younger until someone called him something like 'fucking darkie' or 'fucking foreigner'. He reflects that such abuse often happens when people are drinking: 'when Norwegians drink, it's very easy for them to start throwing words like that around, right? And of course they read – they believe what they read in the papers. So they believe – they tar all Muslims with the same brush, you know...' (Gulam, NO).

In Greece, when the interviewer asked about challenges at work, particularly related to following the rituals of one's faith, Vagelis notes that many Muslims hide their faith for fear of losing their job, although recognises that women face many more challenges than men on this front because it is women who are ones who 'cover their body'.

#### 3.2.1.5 Media

In the previous section outlining understandings of radicalisation and extremism, we noted the alleged role of the media in the social construction and allocation of the labels of 'radicalism' and 'extremism.' In this role, the media is also considered a source of anti-Islamic discriminatory messaging. In addition to the respondents' reflections regarding the media mentioned earlier, Adam, in Russia, notes:

On TV we are always bad, even in everyday life some people say: 'Here is a Muslim, here is a Muslim who blew up, here is a Muslim who did it. On TV, we are always bad. And the ones who say 'radicals', I don't know, they know better, these are authorities who use it. I gave an example, a man was caught and he was called radical there, although he was not involved in anything, a simple Muslim who bought a book and this book turned out to be for terrorists. [...] It's a slander, a lie, they say that on TV, although if you talk to a person, I've talked to him, and he said to me: Brother, I had nothing to do with it, [...] and he is called radical there, here's a terrorist. That's not right. This is oppression. (Adam, RU)

#### 3.2.1.6 Closing reflection

The discriminatory messaging that we found in various aspects of the respondents' lives, from social life to public spaces, from schooling to work, from dealings with the police, to reading a newspaper or watching television, discourages participation in public life and contributes to a sense of isolation and 'uprootedness.' As Dutch Respondent 8 reflects:

I started to wonder more and more about who I was. Am I Dutch? Am I Moroccan? And I also had a best friend. He would ask questions about, say, nationality, et cetera. About being a Moroccan. While I wasn't really thinking about that. [...] And then a very important event happened. For many people, this was a turning point. The World Trade Centre. The attack in America. I no longer felt like the Dutch. I was no longer seen as Dutch. I was no longer addressed as a Dutchman. I was suddenly 'the Muslim'. [...] And my own best friend also began to distrust me. And to ask about it: 'How do you feel about it? Do you believe that too?' When he asked me those questions, yeah, that was kind of like a sign of mistrust. I also distanced myself from him. [...] Then I started to study Islam. While I had never done before. I was just a social guy who went along with society and made a contribution. But yes, when I was approached as a Muslim, I wanted to know what my background was. And then of course you start looking for your background. (8, NL)

### 3.2.2 Messaging that contributes to the formation of subcultural identity

In the French report, the immediate environment of the respondents is conceptualised in-depth. The respondents' horizons are described not as 'a distant or imaginary world, but one that is concrete: the family, the mosque, the neighbourhood, the city, the nation' (Country-level report, FR: 46), alongside specific identifications with social movements, for some. The different social entities are said to 'intersect and overlap to produce diverse trajectories' and to contribute to relationships that are formed daily within the living spaces of the respondents' neighbourhood and make, according to the French ethnographer, the neighbourhood a place of identification, with 'those inside the neighbourhood (the Us) against those outside (the Them)' (Country-level report, FR: 47). This territorial identification/opposition allows the expression of rage (in the case of French respondent Paul) as well

the experience of solidarity and self-respect (in the case of French respondent Griezmann). To illustrate, when Paul is asked about the increasingly racist fabric of French society, 'with young people full of rage and all that?', he responds:

That's what's happening. Because they're confusing people, they're lumping terrorists and Muslims together, they're lumping Muslims, thieves and black people together ... then they wonder why you don't like the police, why you don't like anybody, then they wonder why you don't like all that. Afterwards, in our neighbourhoods, nobody comes to piss us off, we are quiet, we don't piss anybody off, we are among ourselves, we know each other. [...] We are in our little village, we have everything we need in our village. In the neighbourhood there is everything we need - food, the bakery, everything. Why should we leave our quarter? To do what? (Paul, FR)

The neighbourhood, or more broadly 'subcultural identification', is relevant to understanding how exposure to radical messages has different impacts on individuals. A subcultural identification and the accompanying patterns of social interaction may contribute to a breaking away from mainstream society and involvement in Jihadist activity for some, while for others, it may contribute to a sense of socio-emotional grounding that allows one to resist radical messages.

In the Belgian report, the importance of neighbourhood identity is also explored, but, drawing on Truong's (2018) notion of 'a factory of loyalty conflicts', in order to indicate the complex and potentially treacherous web of competing relationships young people encounter. Through this concept, we see how young people forge a range of different bonds and loyalties out of the community of experience in the neighbourhood but, over time, new or potential new loyalties can come to compete with, or threaten, existing bonds, engendering a web of potential betrayals and shaping attitudes and expectations. In Belgium, the common denominator of the people residing in the neighbourhood studied lies in their immigrant background and in particular their Moroccan origin. The ethnographer describes how street slang, comprising a mixture of French, Arabic and Berber, reflects a sense of common origin, heritage, and destiny. On the one hand, the emerging identity may provide a feeling of purpose. But on the other hand, this identity is also linked with societal stigma and statistical data indicate poorer school performance and educational support, decreased chances on the labour market (particularly white-collar work), and lower salaries.

Neighbourhood community identification is also observed in the UK. In the British 'Muslim Street' study, as in Belgium, physical proximity in a neighbourhood and shared experiences (often of discrimination and exclusion) are described as contributing to the formation of subcultural identity, but the sense of identity is particularly based on shared Islamic faith and practice. UK respondent Mo John explains:

[Muslim Street] is a place where it's very mixed, you know. There are a lot of people round here with different backgrounds. We integrate a lot. There's no, you know, a long time ago, yeah, there was probably a lot of racism as well. But now, because of the *masjids* that are opening around this area, it's very... it's brought people together basically from different backgrounds, I think. Personally, that's what I think anyway. You know, four, five years ago it wasn't like that. People were, you know, on their own; had their different views. (Mo John, UK)

It is interesting to note that the ethnographic studies from the Muslim majority countries of Turkey and Tunisia also report on specific neighbourhoods, and report a far stronger presence of Islamic influences in the neighbourhoods of study - Salafist presence in particular - than in non-Muslim majority countries. In Tunisia, the resourcefulness of Islamist organisations are described as

incentivising young people to adopt an Islamist cause, providing what respondent Montasser labels ‘mad money’. In Turkey, it is noted that national leadership that promotes Islamic interests, state funding of civil society organisations and the fostering of Salafist private initiatives from businesses to meeting places and mosques, stimulate young people to adopt an Islamist but not necessarily radical cause.

Turkish respondent Rodin mentions that:

In our neighbourhood, Allah is something that you are threatened as well as rewarded with; something that loves as well as hates you. When something happens, Allah plagues you; when another thing happens, Allah blesses you. I mean, think about the fact that we were raised with this language and perspective until we were 5 years old. At that age, there is Allah and religion in every good or bad thing that you hear: ‘May Allah bless you, may Allah be with you, may Allah plague you’ [...] Political propaganda is conducted through mosques. Something that I don’t hold ideologically is marketed to me through my religion, and this bothers me. (Rodin, TUR)

When Turkish respondent Nuri is asked whether the increased appeal of religious devotion as a result of the increasing Islamist presence in public life is a bad thing, he responds:

It would be disrespectful to religion to say such a thing, at least in my understanding of those years. I mean, we were saying ‘you are praying, you are doing good. At least you pray. Your way is better, you stay away from [bad] things’. We used to think that this change is a positive sign. After many years now, we realised that actually we made a mistake. This was wrong. Back then, we did not know that these gatherings/groupings (*cemaatleşme*) are wrong. No one knew. We were in high school. The social profile of the youth is clear in [name of town]; if you pray, that is good, if you do not pray, that is bad. I do not know how to say, young people were invited to *madrasahs* by the elder brothers from *madrasahs*, from the neighbourhood. I could observe the transformation of young guys after their attendance at the *madrasahs* - slow changes in the discourse, in behaviours... I mean there were positive sides to this and negative sides [...] Positive... They tidied themselves up, for example. They quit smoking weed and taking drugs. They used to get involved in fights and gangs; but now, they were inclined to religious violence. This is another thing. (Nuri, TUR)

These observations from Muslim majority countries provide a noteworthy contrast to the non-Muslim majority countries studied, where there is also mention of Islamist influences, but where such presence is much weaker and less visible, and under security scrutiny, and disincentivised by state and society. In the previously described ‘Muslim’ areas in non-Muslim majority countries, radical Islamist presence and religious violence is described as a fringe phenomenon.

When discussing the lived neighbourhoods of the respondents in the fieldwork sites of the project, mosques and sports clubs, were considered of particular interest.

### 3.2.2.1 Mosques

Mosques are reported to play an active role in providing a religious environment and education that fosters religious identity, and in this way as a messenger contributing to subcultural identification.

In the UK, it is noted that some mosques are increasingly taking responsibility for reaching out to youth and to society at large. Respondent Sayyid Qutb (UK) notes:

I think what the masjid are doing now is good. They're getting more involved with the youth and doing projects and such. They're actually taking a lot more responsibility for the youth as an organisation, and they know it's their responsibility now. Because obviously, learning from the past mistakes and looking towards things that have happened now, they know it's much more important (Sayyid Qutb, UK)

Another UK respondent, Abu Abdullah, who also volunteered as an Imam at a UK mosque that was frequented by a young person who had been radicalised, commends the response by a mosque to the Grenfell Tower fire that occurred in London in 2018, pointing to how this helped contribute to a more positive image of the mosque:

I mean after Grenfell, it's helped change people's perceptions – some people's perceptions. It's all about that contact. A mosque needs to have that contact and the contact comes through the people. So, the Prophet's biggest form of like call to Islam and stuff like that, was that one to one, that physical contact sort of thing. It's not by killing and stuff like that. So, the Prophet established that. And as Muslims, they say about two, three million Muslims live in the UK. If, for example, every Muslim spoke to every person that he met, within a month you would reach all seventy million people that live in the UK on a conversational basis. But, a lot of people give a bad perception of Islam, or a bad image. First impressions count man. A lot of Muslims are not holding up what Islam teaches them. (Abu Abdullah, UK)

In Russia too, mosques are described as providing moral fabric and community, and a non-radicalising message. Said notes:

I believe that if there is a mosque, it is possible to get a law enforcement person there dressed in civilian clothes, who is a law enforcement officer... Let him visit and see if there is something extremist there, let him close this mosque. You can understand when an Imam says something extremist. If he says something extremist, they can close it. If he doesn't say anything, just says – 'Don't drink, don't smoke, don't kill', then why should this mosque be closed if, on the contrary, he promotes a good way of life? (Said, RU)

Russian non-official clergy (i.e. those who do not work on behalf of the government) are described as being able to reach out to radicalised youth and in so doing, play a key role in countering radicalisation, for instance by functioning as a resource for religious knowledge when countering radicalisation. Salafi Jamaats are particularly noted in this context, despite their propagation of quite a radical agenda to bring about a 'pure' Islam, for their ability to maintain and establish connection and converse with *takfirists* in 'their' language and thus deter them from violence. In the Dutch report, there is also mention of efforts by an Imam to engage in conversation with a group of *takfiri* youngsters, of whom many would later die in Syria. Eventually, the conversations were cut off as a result of pressure from the municipality to refrain from contact with extremists.

The potential of mosques to espouse deradicalising messages, appears to be largely overlooked by state representatives in many of the fieldwork sites. Instead, mosques are very much considered a vector for fostering radicalism and state authorities appear to act accordingly. In Russia, Said mentions that:

[...] the authorities in Dagestan shut down Salafi mosques and detained many believers after Friday prayers 'as a precaution'. They registered me, but to be honest... I've never been a part of anything extremist, I am against extremist activity in general. They registered me – I was said to attend the wrong mosque. Well, you know how they

registered me; I just came in as usual, did the prayers, left, and they asked me to go to the district department. Law enforcement agencies approached me, asked me to go to the department, so I did. That's all. We just talked, they asked if I had relatives in Syria, if I had relatives among terrorists, I said 'no.' (Said, RU)

In Greece, Dimitris told the interviewer about a raid in the mosque by the Greek anti-terrorist agency: 'We started [the mosque] as we had started and the day we had the presentation, which was Friday, it was a Friday, they came, they broke down the door with the anti-terrorist agency [...]. There was a panic here and of course I realised that this was the plan of the secret service. It was a clear secret service plan to scare us, to let us know "we are here".' Dimitris then reflects on the relationship between the mosque and the Greek Muslim community:

The bad thing is that we had too much confidence in the Secret Service and we used to talk to them, but we learned our lesson. No, it's not that we're hiding something. We never hide anything. That is, the website is open for any activity, for any talk, i.e. [name] is the most open book of all the communities, which is a Greek Muslim community, right? It's not Arab or Pakistani and unfortunately no one respects that. I would say 'come here' I know how to 'talk things through', to have a certain level of understanding, of a good relationship compared to foreigner Muslims. Now, I don't know, I think they count me as an Egyptian, I don't know. (Dimitris, GR)

To be sure, there are a great variety of mosques, and clearly not all mosques are capable of providing adequate spiritual support for our respondents. Respondents indicate that for reasons such as lack of state funding (for instance in Germany), lack of competent clergy (as mentioned in the Netherlands and in Germany), division and tensions among young Muslims (for instance in the UK), or lack of connection between the offerings of the older clergy and the needs of the young in search for identity and social connection, mosques throughout Europe fail to live up to their capacity to respond to the needs of young Muslims. In Germany, for instance, respondent Jakub observes that:

[...] there's far too little preaching in German. Also in Turkish mosques not only Turks go there, but also Africans or Moroccans. Uhm, yes, and I think that simply, is partly missing the target group somehow. Especially when it comes to deradicalisation, when preaching is only conducted in Turkish, then you just don't reach many people and they then of course search for groups where they preach in German, and then the groups can also be the wrong ones. (Jakub, DE)

In the Netherlands, Respondent 1 recalls the initial stages of his radicalisation experiences:

During work and visiting the mosque I came into contact with Moroccan youth. I came into contact with them, came into mosque with them. The mosque was not accessible to young people, the sermon was not translated, it was an inaccessible place, we could not learn about faith. I learned from the interpretations of other young people, a harsh interpretation of Islam on the basis of the idea that many rejected us. (1, NL)

These recollections by respondents in Germany and Netherlands may indicate that in many of the northern European countries, there is limited opportunity for well-informed education on the Islamic faith, pushing interested young people to find their own version of what it means to be a Muslim and resorting to the internet, where they easily encounter radical(ising) messages, as the primary source of information.



### 3.2.2.2 Sports clubs

Respondents indicated that a number of other social groups contribute to the formation of social identity. Sports clubs, often focused on martial arts bring together likeminded young Muslim males.

In the UK, the ethnographer observes the activities of a group of young Muslim men and notes that ‘despite the optic placed on Muslim men and the surveillance of them’ they would still show enthusiasm for going out and being adventurous. In this context, the report includes a picture from the Instagram account of the organiser of the Friday night gatherings, showing two bearded young men engaged in a stick fight in open woodland. The gatherings generally do not exclusively focus on fighting, but the picture nonetheless illustrates how, particularly among young male respondents, contact sports such as martial arts resonate and were an important aspect of social gatherings, playing a role in the formation of collective Muslim identity. As noted in the UK report, these gatherings have attracted the attention of security services as moments in the radicalisation trajectory of young Muslim men.

The Russian report provides a more explicit analysis of martial arts and wrestling in relation to radicalisation. Those successful in sports are described as role models with a significant influence on youngsters. Russian respondent Khabib remarks that ‘for some reason people believe that our fighters and MMA [mixed martial arts practitioners] are a kind of bastion of Islam, that our group should uphold the strictest Islamic canons, but actually most MMA fighters are ordinary people whose lives are just disciplined and who are into religion.’

The Russian researchers note that social affiliation with friends from the gym is often the starting point for an increased interest in religion, especially for those informants who grew up in secular families, as Mamuka explains:

A guy trained with me, he is my best friend now, and we worked out together, and I saw that he prayed, went out to pray during training, I liked that, it got me thinking. So I became a Muslim by learning to pray, he taught me to pray, and I became interested in religion, [...] only then did I take up the Koran and read it in Russian, and I came across a *sura* from the Koran that God created people and *jinn*s only for them to worship him. And I realised that I should devote my life to the worship of God. (Mamuka, RU)

The desire to imitate role models thus plays an important role in awakening and maintaining an interest in religion, something that is also explicitly noted in Germany. Most of the role models mentioned openly declare their religiosity. Some informants point directly to the fact that famous athletes were original role models or ‘trendsetters’, galvanising the appeal of radical Islam among North Caucasian youth. In Russia, an explicit connection is made between involvement in martial arts and radicalisation. Indeed, a number of high profile athletes had been killed prematurely as a result of their involvement in the ‘Caucasus Emirate’, ISIS and other Islamist groups. The Russian report notes that in May 2009, Beslan Chagiev, a two-time winner of the World Cup in Greco-Roman wrestling, carried out a suicide attack in Grozny. Ramazan Saritov, a bronze medallist in the Russian freestyle wrestling championship, led a group of militants and was killed in a shootout with police in 2012. In 2016, an American drone strike killed Chamsulvar Chamsulvarayev, a 2009 European freestyle wrestling champion.

In Turkey, too, we find indications of a link between martial arts and religiosity, and indeed, Islamist radicalisation. The ethnographer observes:

On another occasion, I found myself a side observer of a Salafi physical training in the gym I used to attend in the city. There, I got to know a martial arts trainer and a Salafi

fighter-to-be in action. Haji was a man in his thirties, muscled, loud and quite imperious towards his pupils, who were taking taekwondo classes and were not necessarily fanatical or religious. I would observe this man preparing these teenagers for martial arts under a military discipline, ordering them to stretch their limits in jumping higher, hitting harder and moving quicker. At the time, I could tell that Haji was a religious person: his beard, his long sleeves and his manners reminded of fanatics I have observed throughout my life. However, it took me years to learn that Haji moved to Syria with his family and some of his siblings to live under the Islamic State. Haji himself became a *mujahid* and lost his life fighting for ISIS. Whether he dragged anyone else to the conflict zone, beyond his extended family, is a mystery to me; but it is likely that he tried and perhaps was well-connected to the structured bodies. (Country-level report, TUR: 26)

### 3.2.3 Messaging that promotes radicalisation

Russian respondent Mamuka was born into a non-religious family, but introduced to the basics of Islam by a friend in a judo club. After a serious injury, Mamuka was forced to stop participating in the sport. When his sporting friends moved away from him, he began to search for a new social circle and knowledge about Islam on the internet. On the Russian social media site Vkontakte, he eventually contacted members of ISIS located in Syria.

#### 3.2.3.1 Internet and Social Media

When it comes to messaging that promotes radicalisation, this story of Mamuka is illustrative of a very striking and dominant trend that was observed in all milieus studied, perhaps with the exception of Turkey; the internet and social media are the dominant factors in the spread of radical messages. The internet and social media provide the opportunity for isolated individuals to search for religious content, to have direct communication with recruiters for the Islamist cause, and to make small contributions to the cause (e.g. sharing content). The internet is described by some respondents as a point of access to networks of likeminded others, enabling the formation of a 'new family.' Via the internet advocacy initiatives for particular, often humanitarian, causes are also mobilised, thus facilitating in-person connections between followers of the internet sites.

In Russia, in addition to Mamuka, other respondents underscore the critical role of the internet in mobilising North Caucasian youth for the war in Syria. Adam reflects on the motivation to leave and fight in Syria, saying, '[...] a lot of them are sincere, probably the guys went there because they saw – Muslim children are supposedly killed there. Although you see, they just went because of this provocation, there are different videos on YouTube, there is a child being killed, stepped on, trampled'. He continues:

[...] they have an image ... even girls go there. [...] I mean an image, yes, the Sharia state, everything according to Shariat, all the laws, everything is completely according to Shariat. This is what they have in their mind. They, for instance, just started to listen to *nashids* [i.e. Islamic songs] on Vkontakte and Instagram, all that – they see everything through rose-coloured spectacles, their view changes. They don't look at it through the prism of religion, they look at it through the prism of emotions, that there is Shariat there and they start going there. (Adam, RU)

The internet and social networks in Russia, similarly to other countries studied, act as an enabling factor that reduce the distance between ideological and behavioural radicalisation, and provide a wide range of activities and 'jobs' with relatively low risk and resource costs, which do not require full dedication, but create a sense of belonging to a common cause, for example participation in the distribution of video and audio content, discussions with opponents of radical ideas in public and

thematic forums, fundraising for militants, etc. Social networks enable young people to have the opportunity (or think they have) to communicate directly with recruiters and direct participants in terrorist organisations. In this way, Mamuka recalled how he got connected on Vkontakte: ‘they wrote to me – “I’m in Syria”, and so on. I asked – “what are you doing there?” They told me what they were doing, that they were fighting. But they explained it differently, you see, they explained that it was for their own good.’

In France, it is observed that ‘the encounter between the supply (namely the narrative of radical Islam) and the demand (the subjective dimensions encompassing experiences, fears, needs, etc.) takes place via spaces of sociability that enable individuals, who are isolated and/or in search of roots, to identify with, or even dissolve into, the community of ‘true’ believers.’ (Country-level report, FR: 40) Here, the cases of three respondents are particularly illustrative for the process of self-radicalisation through online messaging. Adrian recounts his radicalisation experience mentioning that ‘this whole phase happened on the internet, there was no one who guided me. It happened in a really isolated way: just me and the internet... During that time, I learned about religion on the internet.’ Romain further mentions ‘I’ve never been to a mosque and I’ve never spoken with Imams... But the internet is a way to connect with scholars... Online, if you follow the Qur’an and the Sunna, you can’t go wrong... That’s the source.’ In this way, Romain converted to Islam without any contact with the traditional Islam associated with mosques: ‘I’ve only been to the mosque twice. Then the police came and arrested me’. Romain is described as having latched onto this new ideology, first through social networks, then in prison. The ethnographer describes how, in response to Romain’s feelings of isolation and anomia, the newly found community becomes a substitute family:

Muslims are like a family. For me, Muslims are family... I don’t know them, but I don’t need to know them. Just by reading the Qur’an, I know them already. From the moment someone confirms their faith, I defend his kin. How I see it, a Muslim—whether French, American or whatever else—is more valuable than a non-believer from [his country of origin], even if we come from the same mother. It might be surprising, but that’s how it is (he laughs, somewhat awkwardly). What ties us together is faith, Islam... [we are] a community. We’re like parts of one man. If one of us is attacked, the whole body feels the pain and is going to do whatever it takes to heal itself. (Romain, FR)

Blaise, a 37-year-old convicted for terrorism, also spent considerable time on the internet, in part to cope with his sense of isolation, but now shows regret:

It’s because I had often been disappointed by real people and I gravitated towards virtual people, Muslims... At the time, I spent too much time on social networks. Every time someone asked me for help, I helped them, I sent them money, etc. I was too naïve. But that virtual life is over for me. When I get out, I don’t want to get close to the internet again, not even the phone. (Blaise, FR)

In Norway, Aziz similarly shares his experience of isolation after he cut connections with a criminal environment, and how religion learned via the internet provided a new basis of belonging:

I started making religious friends, and you also have a more religious environment here. The thing that made me more religious was that I started practising prayers and customs to distance myself from... stop being involved in drugs, selling and drinking and snorting and going to parties and taking other people’s women ... that is the gangster life [...] I’ve distanced myself from that. I only did that because I was betrayed by my friends, right? I didn’t believe in that friendship anymore. So I started distancing myself and became practising. Then it was the internet. Sitting and talking... because I didn’t really have a

clue about Islam, you know? [...] My religion was the thing that made me stop all my bad habits as well. (Aziz, NO)

The fieldwork in Germany further indicated the importance of online information, and its potential role not only in providing religious information but in contributing to radicalisation. One respondent talked about an acquaintance who became radicalised. He explains that, after connecting with Islam 'he watched videos, this Pierre Vogel, all kinds of things and then, got, so to speak, brainwashed. [...] He brainwashed himself.' (Latif, DE)

The German case study also identified a particular vulnerability to online radicalisation among converts. One of the six respondents referring to themselves as a convert noted:

[...] if you convert to Islam and have nothing to do with Muslims and you only get to know them through the internet, at the beginning you have no idea what Islam is really like. And then, when people approach you, who do a good job psychologically, and convince you that, 'yes, the media, they lie, there is no war here really, no people being slaughtered – it's all lies, people are following *haqq* [righteousness] and all that [...] it's really good here' and then of course they always send nice videos and stuff. (Mahdiya, DE)

This insight seems to be consistent with accounts from respondents elsewhere such as those discussed above of Romain in France and of Mamuka in Russia.

In a fieldwork diary note in Greece, Alekos remarks that he would have been more militant, in part in response to Western aggression, if he had been younger (although he was only 23 years old) and if he were more involved in online activity. Alekos believed that many people shared radical views and thought that those who expressed radical messages did so because of the easiness and anonymity of the Internet, which also, according to him, suggested that proponents of such views were also ready to implement them in practice.

Pavlos, another Greek respondent, comments on the dominance of Salafists on the internet in Greece relative to other Islamic creeds, despite their more limited physical presence. This is an observation that was also registered in Turkey and in Germany. Pavlos shares that:

[...] we have Salafists who are numerically very few as far as I know, from the 100 [unofficial] mosques in Athens only two are Salafi, but they are those who do a lot of work on the Internet. Not in terms of quality, [...] but in terms of quantity their propaganda is the best in any sense...not meaning propaganda in the bad sense of the word, okay with that sense too, but also in the sense that they disseminate their views. There is also the Muslim Brotherhood. Ordinary people may embrace their ideas, but might have no relation to the group's extreme acts, because many people believe that this organisation just wanted the revival of Islam in Muslim countries, it wanted regimes based on the Sharia law, which is something right for Muslims, okay? But this led many people to get carried away and not be able to understand the wrong aspects of the organisation's views. (Pavlos, GR)

The insights from the fieldwork in Turkey provide the most notable exception to the narrative that the internet is the primary influence on respondents and, as such, the main driver of radicalisation. The ethnographer in Turkey does describe that 'in addition to *masjids*, *madrasahs* and public gatherings, Salafists use social media very effectively, and broadcast their religious classes and teachings on YouTube, Twitter and other social media platforms' and that 'most of these accounts were managed very professionally and broadcasted religious teachings and propaganda in multiple languages'

(Country-level report, TUR: 25). Ebu Hanzala (Halis Bayancuk), a young preacher who had YouTube channels, Twitter accounts, Facebook pages broadcasting in multiple languages, including Turkish, English, French, and Arabic, is considered particularly influential. However, it is noted that among the interviewees, only a few stated that they follow online preachers or indicated social media and internet as the main source of their religious reference. Some argued that social media could be beneficial and mentioned examples of how it has helped to provide religious information. But others complained about the moral corruption among the youth as a result of the internet and social media. In this sense, Turkey appears to deviate from the generally observed widespread impact of internet based messaging, including radical messaging, possibly as a result of a greater reluctance to use internet and social media given it is perceived to be a morally corrupting influence.

### 3.2.3.2 Radical Preachers

Besides the Internet and social media, radical preachers were reported to facilitate access to radical content, and radical networks. However, in some cases, radical preachers were rejected because of their personal characteristics. Thus, in various countries, including the Netherlands, Germany and Greece, the presence of preachers responsible for the spread of radical messaging was found to be an important issue in the milieus although the significance of their influence was not always clear.

The Greek report, for instance, makes a critical note of an article appearing in the '*I Kathimerini*' (*The Daily*) in 2017 with the title of 'Imams of hate'. The newspaper article claims to be based on a highly confidential police report about Islamist extremist activities in Greece and in particular in Muslim prayer houses. In the article, it is mentioned that one of these unofficial mosques had close relations with the Muslim Brotherhood 'an organisation of political Islam, which has as its slogan "jihad is our path" and has been characterised as a terrorist organisation by Russia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Emirates, but not by the U.S.A. and the E.U' (Country-level report, GR: 10). The Greek ethnographer indicates in the report that during his prolonged engagement with the prayer houses, he had found little to corroborate the claims made in the article.

In the respondents' description of actual encounters with preachers, we can identify three pillars of the content of radical message espoused by radical preachers: 1) the call to extreme loyalty and disavowal of the *kuffar*; 2) the promotion of Muslim identity as an interpretative framework to understand injustice; and 3) a call to defend the global Muslim community.

#### A call to extreme loyalty and disavowal of the *kuffar*

The German report considers the emergence of neo-Salafism as a movement during the 1990s, and mentions the neo-Salafist Imams Hassan Dabagh (aka Abu I-Husain) and Muhammad Bin Husain (aka Abu Jamal), who preached in the city of Bonn (Rhineland). Their expanding impact from the mid-2000s, coincided with the emergence of other preachers including Pierre Vogel and his mentor Ibrahim Abou Nagie, both from the Rhineland, who organised and contributed to the growth of the neo-Salafi movement, although internal conflict caused its eventual demise.

A German respondent recalled his encounter with an Imam in the neo-salafist tradition who encouraged the respondent to adopt a *takfiri* stance requiring the denunciation of the anyone who deviates from what is perceived to be the righteous path:

[...] he gave me a mission to convert all kinds of people. [...] and I should stay away from the *kuffar* and the *kuffar*, they want to lead me astray from the right path, um, and it was always '*kuffar*', '*kuffar*', '*kafir*', those were the words he used most [...] he would also go, if his brother were no longer a Muslim, then that would no longer be his brother, he would have nothing to do with him. The father of [names friend] confirmed that. So, 'yes, if my

brother says that he no longer believes in Islam, then I wouldn't have anything to do with him [...] unless he returns to religion'. (Ben, DE)

#### Muslim identity as an interpretative framework to understand injustice

In the Netherlands, Respondent 10 recalls coming into contact with a Syrian Imam at the start of the 2000s. This recollection is particularly illustrative of the second theme of the radical Islamist narrative identified, namely the use of Muslim identity as an interpretative framework to understand injustice:

I went to the mosque on a Friday, I saw a man with a long, impressive beard. He talked to the guys in the neighbourhood, I remember it well. I stood nearby, heard him talk about the religion and thought [waving away, ironically] 'interesting'. But those guys said, 'listen to what he has to say'. He introduced himself. He was of Syrian descent. I said, 'I'm from this neighbourhood, I am not in school, I have no internship.' 'How come?', he said, 'they do that [refuse an internship] because you are Muslim.' 'What do you mean?' He did not say 'because you are Moroccan', but 'because you are Muslim. Jews and Christians will never accept you because you are a Muslim. That is stated in the Qur'an.' 'Is it really there?' 'Yes there and there.' I looked it up and asked again, 'what does it mean?' On the internet you see so many different answers, so I asked again, asked parents.... I got a vague answer [laughs]. I also went to an Imam, and got another unsatisfactory answer, or they say: 'is it not better to learn Arabic first?' So counter-questions, whether there are more important things, not answers that you had hoped for, or that made you feel good or satisfied with. So we asked that man again, 'what do you mean?' He said: 'they will not allow you to be successful', he said, 'will not let you become more powerful or influential. Look at Palestine and Chechnya, for example, what is done to Muslims.' He gave me a DVD with films about the Palestine state of the ummah. It shows all Muslims who are at war - Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya, Iraq. It was a propaganda film. You saw a woman being pushed to the ground by an Israeli soldier ... it is brutal, there is so much hatred towards Muslims. I started to study the internet... came into contact with more people, also via the Internet. That man gave me the phone number of a guy ... they often meet, he said ... contact me, so I ended up in a living room where everything was discussed ... (10, NL)

This quote is not only of interest for showing the narrative of radical Islamist preachers, but also for clearly showing the preacher's attempt to make a connection between the personal circumstances and everyday frustrations of the respondents and the plight of Muslims worldwide. Moreover, the quote illustrates the interplay between internet search behaviour and offline influences. Respondent 10's recollection appears to provide a direct insight into processes that must have been experienced by many of the respondents across the fieldwork sites.

#### A call to defend the global Muslim community

Next to a focus on the need for a pure Islam, and on the wrongdoings against Muslims around the world, a third theme is the need to redress injustices committed against Muslims even it implies the use of arms. An example of this is described by the ethnographer in Turkey, who reports on a public speaker during a public event:

The public speaker mentioned the many trips he made to Syria and Egypt to reach out to the suffering Muslim siblings. I heard him speak and thought that he is laying out his credentials in order to speak on behalf of the oppressed. After telling his personal story, he strongly expressed that it is Islamic duty to help those in need. Donations, 'active work for the relevant CSOs, prayers, writing a poem or a story to draw attention to the



situation’ were named as a few examples of what we could do for ‘our Muslim siblings’. His talk was accompanied by a Power Point presentation containing graphic images and videos of suffering people in refugee camps. His voice trembled and his index finger was shaking as he pointed out the eternal enemies: ‘Israel and the USA, the West, the tyrannical (*tağuti*) regimes, and Russians were all responsible for this tragedy. Towards the end of the slides, the pictures of ‘role models’ appeared on the gigantic screen accompanied by a rhythmic Islamic anthem. I wondered how I knew this anthem, and figured out that it is a well-known example of the genre heard in Hizbullah music albums. That was the moment when I realised the event was organised by a legal entity close to the Kurdish Hizbullah. The pictures of Jihadists who lost their lives in Chechenia, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Egypt and Syria followed.

Later that day, I wrote in my field diary: ‘The talk went on for little longer than an hour. I looked around and saw young men and women surrounding me in this university auditorium. I wondered what they might be thinking and how the event influences their perception of Islamic duties.’ (Country-level report, TUR: 19)

These messages, combined with the experiences of discrimination and humiliations, and the complexities of living in urban areas across European major cities, may galvanise what earlier was described as the mind-set of the Islamist radical, i.e. that there is a war going on between the West and Islam and that it is a duty to pick up arms and join the fight.

### 3.2.4 Summary

We have considered here three fundamentally different categories of messages: 1) anti-Muslim discriminatory messages that contribute to feelings of isolation, anomia and humiliation and that obstruct access to civic participation; 2) messaging that contributes to the bolstering of subcultural identity; and 3) messaging that promotes radicalisation.

In most of the non-Muslim majority countries that were studied, a significant number of respondents reported experiences with anti-Muslim messaging in their social life, in public spaces, at school, and at work, and in media and politics. Expressions of this type of messaging vary from being spat at on public transport, to being excluded from friendship, to being unable to find an internship or a job, to being described as radical by media, to being subject of surveillance of security services. This type of messaging discourages participation in public life and contributes to a sense of isolation and ‘uprootedness’.

Concerning messaging that contributes to the formation of subcultural identity, we find that the ‘neighbourhood’ provided a sense of belonging and brotherhood, to cope with adversity. In so doing so, it may contribute to a sense of being rooted and prevent the feeling of being ‘uprooted’, which is typically thought to be linked to excessive behaviour including radicalisation. In a number of countries it was observed that a high degree of segregation between ‘Muslim areas’ and non-Muslim areas promotes the initiation of businesses, internet cafés, and reading groups within the ‘Muslim areas,’ with these initiatives being of distinct Islamic (but not necessarily Islamist) signature. The discourse in these areas contributes to the centrality of Islam in identity formation.

Mosques are reported to have an active role in providing a religious environment and education that fosters religious identity. It also noted that mosques bolster resilience against radical messages by offering a grounded perspective on Islamic practice and belief. This observation qualifies the suggestion by security services and media that (particular) mosques contribute to the spread of radical messaging.

Respondents indicated that a number of other social groups contribute to the formation of social identity. Sports clubs, often focused on martial arts, bring together likeminded young Muslims. Endorsement of religious institutions and civil society organisations by (sports) celebrities guide youngsters to particular initiatives.

Regarding messaging that promotes radicalisation, respondents described their experiences with messages promoting radicalisation coming from preachers but increasingly and predominantly from the internet and social media. Online communication is the dominant source of radical messaging. Internet/social media assisted self-radicalisation is observed as a critical phenomenon in all milieus studied. Radical preachers were reported to facilitate access to radical content, and radical networks although sometimes also rejected because of their personal characteristics.

Respondents mostly used the internet to search for religious content but instead found radical Islamist messages. The internet provided information that often could not be obtained at home or at mosques. Relative to other creeds, Salafism dominates online presence, offering professional sites. The internet and social media provide the opportunity for isolated individuals to search for religious content, to have direct communication with recruiters for the Islamist cause and to make small contributions to the cause (e.g. sharing content). The internet is described by some respondents as a point of access to networks of likeminded others, enabling the formation of a 'new family'. The internet also mobilises advocacy initiatives for particular, often humanitarian, causes, thus facilitating in-person connections between followers of the internet sites. In this way, too, humanitarian concern may lead to participation in radical networks.

The radical message focuses very much on the wrongdoings against Muslims around the world, and the need for a pure Islam, and in its most militant, Jihadist form, on the need to take up arms to defend the Muslim community.

### 3.3 How do milieu actors understand (in)equality and its role in radicalisation?

From the call to extreme loyalty and disavowal of the *kuffar*, the promotion of Muslim identity as an interpretative framework to understand injustice, and the call to defend the global Muslim community, we can infer that the Islamist extremist narrative is characterised by an extreme focus on in-group exclusivity, in-group based grievances and militancy to redress those grievances. At the heart of this narrative appears to lie a strict demarcation between in- and out-group, the sense that the in-group is unjustly treated, and a readiness to use of violence to defend against out-group aggressors. These notions, in turn, justify a closer examination of the inequalities that are reported by the respondents across the fieldwork sites. Do inequalities constitute the basis of the need to build a protective wall against external oppressors? We should note that very few experiences of inequalities experienced by Muslims lead to radicalisation. Furthermore, perceived inequality has multiple dimensions. Inequality also involves multiple 'self' and 'other' categorisations. The inequalities are not only perceived to be between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also between generations, ethnicities, and neighbourhood origins. Indeed, the observations from the fieldwork sites underscore the complexity of the relationship between inequality and radicalisation, as for instance documented by Franc and Pavlović (2018) and Poli and Arun (2019).

#### 3.3.1 Financial and material inequality

Inequalities are viewed as central to the understanding of radicalisation especially in the Greek and French reports. Drawing on the work by Basbous (2003) on Algeria during the 1980s and 1990s, the Greek report emphasises the role of economic and socio-political inequalities, objective or subjective,

in existing literature on radicalisation in Europe and elsewhere around the world (Country-level report, FR: 32). The economic crisis in Algeria, it is reported, meant the country's youth – who became referred to as 'Hittistes' from the word '*haït*' meaning 'wall', because lack of employment opportunities meant they were reduced to spending their days standing on the city walls - became an easy target for Islamist propagandists. In the French report (Country-level report, FR: 52), the work of Farhad Khosrokhavar is cited to support the argument that, since only a minority of youth in Europe become radicalised, 'the social question is at the heart of jihadism'. In the report it is argued that:

Jihadists essentially come from working-class contexts, live in marginalised neighbourhoods and endure exclusion and poverty. It is in these 'jihadist-breeding' spaces and under these socio-economic conditions that the offering of radicalism becomes acceptable. This makes it possible (or at least that is the promises) to reverse the condition of being 'outcast', 'oppressed', 'excluded' or 'trapped' and to provide the prospect of a new status: 'chosen', 'pure', 'fighting for an ideal', 'defenders of justice' (via the defence of Muslims). (Country-level report, FR: 52)

These socio-economic conditions were registered in the majority of the fieldwork sites. In Belgium almost all respondents are described as coming from a working class background, being involved in low-skilled jobs with limited pay, or unemployed. As discussed in greater detail below, involvement in crime is for some a substitute for labour market participation. Similarly, in Germany it was observed that 'the structural economic situation of many respondents was reflected in a relatively low standard of living. Many respondents reported that their household income was based on one person's earnings; in most cases, that was the father's income. With only two exceptions, single earners – fathers and mothers – were blue-collar workers' (Country-level report, DE: 32). In the UK, it was observed that many respondents had jobs that were low paid and insecure. Some respondents had their own business. There were similar descriptions for the Dutch, Tunisian, Turkish, Greek and Russian fieldwork sites.

The only deviating description comes from Norway, where the respondent set in the study is reported to be markedly different from an earlier study published by PST, the Norwegian Police Security Service on the backgrounds of those frequenting extreme Islamist milieus in Norway before they are radicalised (PST, 2016). The Norwegian report states that the PST defined 'relevant' milieus (in the context of radicalisation) as 'multi ethnic, consisting of mostly young men with little education'. In a survey of some of these men and women, presented in the report: 61 percent had immigrated to Norway as children or youth; they had been involved in crime; experienced longer periods of unemployment; and had reduced connections to Norway presumably because of little work experience; 17 percent had lost one or both of their parents during childhood or youth. They are assumed to have had a difficult time growing up, and tend to be badly integrated in Norwegian society (PST, 2016: 2). In contrast, it is noted in the Norwegian report regarding the respondents in the DARE study that 'almost all of them are employed, mostly in good jobs – eleven in full-time and two in part-time jobs, with one in full-time university studies – and in general seem relatively well integrated, despite their many experiences of grievances.' Those individuals involved in radicalised groups and networks are thus unlikely to be effectively profiled in terms of simple characteristics such as being poor, having social problems or mental health issues.

It is noteworthy that it is only in the Tunisian case that the researchers link economic conditions to the appeal of Salafism, although not necessarily, Jihadism. In a social environment of poverty and lack of governance, Salafism is described as providing material aid and socio-economic integration for young people experiencing difficulty in finding a place in society. This is, for example, the case for Kamel from Menzel Bourguiba who is described as preferring to dress in more fashionable clothing than the

Salafists' Kamis (typical Salafist dress) while nevertheless maintaining contacts with the so-called 'Salafist people' in order to access material resources to help his family financially. The report argues that economic needs drive young Tunisians to Salafism.

The Belgian ethnographer notes, however, that growing up in an impoverished area does not necessarily mean a lack of money. Several of the respondents in the Belgian report found their way to considerable financial prosperity through crime. But the experience of emptiness brought some of the respondents to Islamist radicalism. Primo notes:

[...] I stole all the time, I only worked a little, otherwise I stole all the time, I wasted it on the 'haram' (illicit) - discos, casino, trips. I said to myself that this is not life, I found myself many times saying to myself, 'Imagine dying in this condition...' And then you end up being convinced and you say to yourself that those who are against jihad, who are Muslims because there are many of them, we hear them speak on television and so on, they don't have as many arguments as those who are for jihad and who have arguments, they have hadiths, the Koran and so on. (Primo, BE)

In Russia, too, a complex relationship between respondents' economic environment and radicalisation is observed. In the Russian context, radicalisation is described as a way to realise professional ambitions and to claim social status. It is described how in Dagestan, as a special case in a generic social process for Muslims from the Caucasus region, tribalism and corruption prevents young people from realising their potential. Musa explains:

Religion is something that can be used to entice a person. Young people in the Caucasus are such, they have potential, and guys want to achieve something special. Within the framework that Dagestan currently has, there is no work, no place for self-realisation. And, for instance, they begin to get acquainted with religion, and someone takes them to the wrong place. And they are boiling inside, they want to do something good; it seems to them that they are going there to do something good. (Musa, RU)

The Russian ethnographers mention that their interlocutors emphasise that it is not poverty per se, but the striving for recognition, respect, and status, which in combination with the lack of access to a clan controlled labour market and the xenophobia of the host community outside the region, motivates young people from the Caucasus region to leave to join ISIS or local networks. The ethnographers detect a paradox during interviews:

On the one hand, almost all narratives about trips to Syria include young people who before leaving were employed in the unskilled and low-paid service sector (security guards, salesmen, sales representatives), For instance, someone who worked as a security guard at McDonald's, lived with his sister, with his mother. He was a young, handsome guy, 20 years old, he went there. And he was killed there immediately. On the other hand, we also noted that often young people who join Jihad come from wealthy families and therefore do not need money. After the interview, he said that even though his family is quite wealthy, he does not want to take money from his father, who is engaged in the construction business. But his older brothers, both the one who works in the police, and the other, a businessman, do not hesitate to do this. (Mamuka, cited in Field diary entry, RU)

The Russian report also notes an additional macro-economic shift that has further complicated the relationship between economic conditions and radicalisation, in particular the shift from a production-based economy to a service-based economy. In this new service based economy, women have been faring much better than men, challenging what in the honour culture societies of the Northern

Caucasus is considered by men to represent the ‘natural’ male hegemony. This appears to affect the young men’s sense of significance; significance which may be restored by fighting on behalf of Islam.

These notions identified in the Russian report are also noteworthy in that they underscore that the relationship between inequality and radicalisation cannot be described in terms of simple direct causal connections between poverty (or other singular economic indicators) and radicalisation. Rather, this relationship involves a complex relational dynamic on societal and social levels whereby perceived inequality in combination with perceived threat to one’s position, increases the interest in cognitive frames and behavioural repertoires to take a stance vis-à-vis the threat. Focusing on this relational dynamic, more so than on static and abstract economic indicators, may help to elucidate the relationship between inequality and radicalisation.

### 3.3.2 Relational inequality

In the context of the link between inequality and radicalisation, it may be therefore more appropriate to consider inequality as a subjective experience that emerges out of a relational context consisting of a complex set of interactions, rather than as an isolated factor, whether it be an economic factor, a social, or a political factor. We consider the term ‘relational inequality’ to cover interactions that take place on multiple levels where the experience of inequality is characterised by a sense of being different (horizontal inequality), and of being subjected (vertical inequality) to an authority perceived as inadequate, unworthy or illegitimate. Relational inequality was experienced in relationships with parents, with teachers and supervisors, with the police and with the state.

#### 3.3.2.1 Relationships with parents

Inequality in the relationship with parents constituted an important theme in many of the country-level reports. The relationship between parents and respondents was frequently discussed in relation to the drastic changes to the social family fabric associated with labour migration. The French, Belgian, and Russian ethnographers mention how migration has contributed to the erosion of traditional family patterns characterised by a dominant authoritarian father, and a mother responsible for the household, and the everyday presence of extended family. In the new environment, fathers are sometimes described as having lost their social position underpinning their status within the family, while mothers are described as incapable of preparing their children for a life in their new habitat. The children are left with a sense of living in between worlds, on the one hand being educated and prepared for a life in Western societies but on the other hand being ingrained in the migrant background as a result of personal loyalty, social pressure or stigmatisation. Out of this in-betweenness may emerge the experience of relational inequality for which radical Islamism may offer a way out.

The French report draws on the work by Khosrokovhar (2018) on the ‘decapitated patriarchal family’ to help delineate three types of problematic family dynamics, which were quite substantially registered across the fieldwork sites and constitute one of the possible indications of experienced relational inequality as discussed above.

The first type, the absence of both parents, was mentioned as a theme in the French and Dutch reports, although in both cases among a very small subset of the respondents. The German report registers not so much the actual absence of parents, but rather the absence of moral guidance by parents as an impetus for the initial interest in religion. The Belgian ethnographer similarly speaks of ‘the moral and commiserative de-legitimisation’ of parents by their children. In Germany, this was brought up during a conversation between the ethnographer and a respondent who had converted, and hence does not apply specifically in the context of migrant families, although these families may experience a similar intergenerational dislocation. The observation hints towards a relationship between the sense of

absence of parental guidance and religious conversion to Islam that was also noted in the Netherlands. The German respondent mentioned:

Yes, the question is, how do you define 'good person'? Well, everybody can define that for himself, but where is the standard and where, well, tsss [annoyed] For me, for example, a good person is someone who clearly says, um, alcohol is harmful to society, let's put it that way. Yes, and my father would never think of such things on his own. So, I think that's what religions are for. (Jakub, DE)

In a number of cases in Russia, the opposite was observed with parents seeking full control over the destiny of their children, apparently in line with a traditional patriarchal family model. The Russian ethnographers argue that the parental control provided an impetus for some of the respondents to seek refuge in alternative lifestyle. The ethnographers note the widespread authoritarian style of parents that is focused on discipline, dominance and punishment. Russian respondent Idriss comments in this context: 'Well, it is clear that if your parents are at home, [ ... ] you will be softer, make different jokes, you will not laugh out loud, hit someone – this is clear, it is just simple things. With parents, you still try to behave, firstly, obediently, and secondly, politely.'

The ethnographers argue that traditional parenthood is characterised by high demands towards children combined with a lack of emotional attachment. Thus, the children are left to manage high expectations whilst receiving little apparent care and attention. Khabib from Russia articulates this based on his own experience:

Probably, our family relations are again the traditional ones, as is customary in Dagestan. I call my father now, and basically, while living in Dagestan, we communicated; we always had a good relationship, but my father never talked to me if it wasn't necessary. Somehow, we always talked about important things. That is, he never started a conversation with me on any side issues. So, generally, maybe, at some points he didn't pay the necessary attention to how my life was going. I'm not speaking only about my studies, even sports, he often wasn't interested in my sporting life either. (Khabib, RU)

The second type of family situation - where only the mother has an affective bond with the child and the father is absent - was described in the French report to apply to about half of the respondents. This situation, it is explained, 'includes those who grew up in single-parent households, generally with a mother who was completely overwhelmed with her children. In some cases, the father's death is what triggered the breakdown of the family unit and the disruption of emotions and domestic norms, leading sometimes to delinquency and violence. In most cases, the father is a stranger or has simply abandoned the household, in a relinquishing of paternal duties that is a permanent feature of the prison population' (Country-level report, FR: 27). In Germany too, it is observed that 'The loss of the father - through death or withdrawal - was a recurring experience among the respondents. One female respondent's father killed himself when she was a small child after her mother announced to him that she wanted to end their relationship' (Country-level report, DE: 53). In the Netherlands, Respondent 8 provides extensive testimony of how the breakup of his parents and the drug addiction of his father contributed to an increasing self-uncertainty during adolescence. Arguably, a tendency among respondents in the Russian fieldwork may also relate to the gender asymmetry in familial attachment, where the ethnographers observe that trust relationships develop mainly with relatives of the opposite sex (sisters, female cousins) and argue that these relationships provide a substitute for child-parent relationships.

The third type is described in the French report as a 'reversal of generational roles, with sons replacing their fathers as authority figures within the fragmented family' (Country-level report, FR: 28). In France,



respondent Adrian adopted a strict vision of Islam at the age of 16, and then ‘took on the role of moraliser and became controlling towards his parents, who he accused of being infidels’ (Country-level report, FR: 28). In the Netherlands Respondent 8 recalls, ‘When I radicalised, I started to tell my sisters to wear headscarves. At home, I started to address my mother about Islamic customs, because I thought I had the truth. I thought I had really found the path of Islam and that now, yes, I was going to teach my own family.’

Although the case material does not allow us to suggest the representativeness of these specific cases for the population as a whole, or establish the degree to which the delineated types of contentious family dynamics can be directly linked to radicalisation, we nonetheless believe these findings are noteworthy in the context of our present consideration of relational inequality and radicalisation. First, we see how these contentious family dynamics may motivate young people to search for alternative guidance. Secondly, we have observed in various countries that the neo-Salafist narrative makes explicit reference to parent-child relationships and encourages young people to disavow their parent. Accordingly, in Turkey it is observed that ‘ties to their families hardly survive, especially if the family is not happy with the participation of their sons. The young *mujahids* are told that they are not obliged to obey their parents if it contradicts the orders and wishes of Allah. Many examples of the young believers from the time of Muhammad are presented to them. Mus’ab Ibn Umair (585-625 AD), a young member of a wealthy family who converted to Islam despite the objection of his parents, becomes a role model for these new arrivals or potential recruits. They are advised to resist their families and adhere to the path of ‘true Muslims’ (Country-level report, TUR: 24). Similarly, in Germany, Ben recalls a neo-Salafist preacher who told him during a conversation that ‘your parents are *kuffar*, and you have to save your parents from hell and they’ll go to hell if you don’t convert them.’

In this respect, for those who follow the path, radical Islamism becomes what is referred to in various fieldwork sites as a ‘new family’ that at least at first sight, helps to overcome the contentious dynamics of one’s ‘old family.’

### 3.3.2.2 *Relational inequality at school and at work*

In the section on encounters with radical messages, we considered the negative content of the communication to which many of our respondents have been exposed. In the context of the current discussion on relational inequality and radicalisation, it is of pertinence to note that, in several cases, these negative messages emanated from people who by reason of their professional position held authority and control over respondents. Across the fieldwork sites, teachers and supervisors, as well as parents, were found to have negatively impacted the personal and professional development of some of the respondents. Teachers and supervisors have power over the future prospects of young people and a significant proportion of respondents felt subjected to prejudice and insincerity from them.

In the Netherlands, the future schooling advice given by teachers at primary school in the final year before transitioning to high school is perceived as a critical life event by some of the respondents with a migrant background. These respondents felt that the assessment had been too negative, leading them to follow an educational pathway that was below their intellectual capabilities. Illustrative here is the case of French respondent Adrian, who did not speak French when he arrived as a refugee but soon built a sense of pride around his success at school (as noted in Section 3.2.1.3). Although Adrian aspired to study linguistics, he was sent to a technical college against his wishes and ended up dropping out of college when he failed to find an internship.

At work, several respondents were received with scepticism, or had difficulty finding a job in the first place as a result of being of migrant descent or being a Muslim. In Germany, a respondent mentioned

a job interview, in which his potential future boss asked him for his opinion on Erdoğan. Despite his antipathies towards him, the respondent refused to reply and instead noted the inappropriateness of the question. In Greece, Eleftheria reflects on the consequences of wearing a headscarf for her prospects of finding a job, saying

a boss will not hire me in a supermarket the way I look, will not accept me in a business, as a nurse in a hospital, being realistic. I myself have not encountered such a situation, but if you go to work, you will have a lot of trouble. If it is not my own job or a job working alongside a person close to me, no one will hire me and one will definitely have a problem. It's not easy at all. That is, no matter how much you study, a girl wearing a headscarf finds it difficult to be hired by anyone. They might put you in the laundry, they might take you on somewhere to clean, so you will not be front of house. (Eleftheria, GR)

These cases show that at school and at work, several of the respondents have been judged on the basis of their background and beliefs rather than their performance, shattering their personal aspirations and creating the perception that is characteristic for relational inequality, that one is different and being subjected to the will of an illegitimate authority.

### 3.3.2.3 *Relational inequality with state authorities*

The sense of relational inequality is particularly pronounced when respondents describe their relationships with state authorities, in particular with the police, but also with security services and the courts. Respondents across the Muslim minority countries being studied report being unfairly treated by the police, and not protected. Respondents also lack trust in the legal system. They see a double standard. Police and security services are considered to indiscriminately target particular ethnicities, people from particular neighbourhoods, and under the banner of 'counterterrorism' and 'preventing violent extremism,' Muslims. This 'securitisation' of Muslims is felt across Europe, although particularly strongly among respondents from the study in Russia.

The French ethnographer writes 'labelling, stigmatisation and discrimination make for a conflictual relationship with the state, which is often reduced to its repressive institutions: the police, the justice system and prison. The stories shared by respondents detail an almost warlike relationship with law enforcement resulting from riots, police brutality, disputes, provocation, beatings and insults. For some, violence is told through the scars they bear on their bodies, which stem from violent escalations or even cumulative violence and become spaces of memory that symbolise hatred towards the state' (Country-level report, FR: 24). In the Netherlands, Respondent 13 reflects:

[...] let me put it this way; in the past when we sat on a square and a policeman drove past and got out, everyone already assumed they would be hit. Before we even did anything, let alone if somebody had shouted something or if somebody had done something the previous night and was thinking, 'Okay, it could just be that he's coming for me.' Everyone in the neighbourhood grows up with the idea of 'okay, I'm going to be hit by the police'. (13, NL)

French respondent Momo shares his point of view:

Fighting with the police? Yeah, I used to do that when I was a kid. I've done it before; I was even convicted for it. [...] Violence against law enforcement. That's what they call it... I got arrested by the Anti-Crime Squad and since they always go above and beyond to abuse their power, I head-butted them, and there you go... It makes me laugh when I think back on it. (Momo, FR)

The ethnographer characterises Momo's current relationship with prison guards as binary, even warlike. Momo reflects:

The guards here are heartless... Excuse my words, but they're huge assholes. They do whatever they can to break us psychologically... They'll do anything to break you. If you don't have a brain, you're screwed... They can try whatever they want, they won't break me. But then, personally the only thing I was scared of was one day getting a hold of one or two of them and slaughtering them and then getting four or five extra years like that. Actually, I wasn't scared of them, I'm really just scared of how I would react. (Momo, FR)

While this type of conflictual relationship with law enforcement was documented outside of the context of counterterrorism operations, across many of the fieldwork sites we found that counterterrorism operations by state authorities fuelled a sense of injustice and humiliation, and contributed to this 'warlike' relationship.

Respondent Momo is just one of the many respondents who shared his experiences in this context. Adrian, another French respondent mentions:

There were the attacks and on 16 November, they came hooded and armed. They broke down the door and then jumped on me. I didn't understand and they told me 'Yes, sir, you are going to be put under house arrest', without any explanation... I couldn't stay with my wife either, who was pregnant. I had to stay at my parents'... So yeah, I began reporting in four times a day. Honestly, I wouldn't wish that on anyone. It completely destroyed me.... I'd never felt such anger before. I'd never felt such anger towards France. (Adrian, FR)

In Belgium, the ethnographer describes an interview with a respondent suspected of being the 'man in the hat', one of the three terrorists involved in the attack of 22 March 2016 in a metro station and at Brussels Zaventem airport. The respondent was arrested and charged on suspicion of 'terrorist murders' and 'participation in the activity of a terrorist group.' He spent two days in jail before being released because his fingerprints did not match with fingerprints found at the airport. Nonetheless, the charges remained, and he was only cleared from all charges in January 2021, four and half years after the attacks. Apparently, as the ethnographer suggests, the attacks in Paris and Brussels of 2015 and 2016 respectively, have sparked a political situation of moral panic and fear, that has been conducive to a social climate of suspicion and denunciation, focused primarily on the Muslim population, depicting them as, at least potential, radicals.

In the UK, we observe a very similar sequence of events where, after the Manchester Arena bombing of May 2017, Abu Abdullah shares the experiences of people he knew: 'Yeah, in Manchester yeah. [...] I believe he set the first, second and third term longest arrests without charge. So, I think his brother was fourteen days without charge, that was the longest because there was no charge.' Abu Abdullah later refers to the brother of this acquaintance: 'I know his brother and a year later he still can't even leave his house. Because people know or recognise his face because the police released his photo...I mean, imagine his brother recently had a baby and you can't even go to the hospital without people recognising you and stuff like that.' Out of fear of further prosecution, Abu Abdullah suggests, the Libyan community kept quiet: 'So, yeah man. [...] I don't think there was much discussion. It was more like let's just move on and I think everyone kind of just wanted to move on quickly. Like the Libyan community, the government, the police. Everyone just kind of wanted to like, let's bury this and move on.'

In the Netherlands, Respondent 21, a parent of someone who left and travelled to Syria, further underscores the impact of police counterterrorism efforts on the community as he says that:

[...] a number of parents have even been raided by the police. The police should be deeply, deeply ashamed. And still, today it still happens in some cases. If someone robs a bank, will the parents be arrested? If someone rapes someone, are the parents arrested? No. But it is very strange, in this case the parents are always arrested. The day before yesterday, the father of an attacker in Strasbourg. That man did not ask for it, but is immediately arrested. And it was like that with all those previous ones, also that one famous father of those attackers from Bataclan in France. Also arrested then, when they are also victims. (21, NL)

These observations echo those shared in the Belgian report by a psychologist working for the unit for combating social exclusion in Molenbeek: 'parents have been strongly traumatised by the events and by the targeting and the global labelling of this community [...] the population is very, very badly affected by this. Always bearing in mind, I don't know if you've met other people in Molenbeek, but for the moment, we've been targeted [...]' (Auxiliary interview, BE)

Also in the Norwegian context, several of the respondents point to a series of incidents where both the ordinary police and the PST (the Police's secret service) have entered living space without appropriate authorisation, contacted the respondents at work, asked for information from their friends and families, followed them without giving proper reasons, unnecessarily halted them at borders, to the extent that some informants characterise the police presence as contributing to a sense of severe 'paranoia' in their everyday lives.

These experiences and reflections demonstrate the substantial impact of the conflictual relationships between the state and young (male) Muslims, growing up in urban Western Europe. But the extent to which police and security services are felt to infringe on basic rights appears to be far greater in Russia than any other country investigated.

The Russian report states that state rhetoric increasingly emphasises the threat of Wahabbism (as Salafism is traditionally referred to in Russian state discourse) and measures to address it have become strict. Young people are said to be put on watch lists for reasons of prevention, armed raids are carried out on what are considered to be 'unreliable mosques' and there is persecution on the basis of appearance. The ethnographers note that this type of what they call 'institutionalised violence' can create grievance and potentially cumulative radicalisation.

In this context, Salafism has increasingly become associated with Jihadism because the federal security services (the military, police and FSB) started to use strict measures against those suspected of supporting the armed underground. In 1999, when there was an attempt to create an Islamic state in the regions of Dagestan bordering Chechnya – the 'Kadar zone' - the attempt was suppressed by the military, the police and militias using heavy artillery. Thereafter, the radical wing of the Salafist underground adopted a network strategy, making it more difficult for the security forces to identify militarised groups and leading to the whole community becoming subject to suspicion and surveillance. Respondent Mamuka laments the attitude of the security forces in this context when asked whether he thinks Russia is a just state where people are treated fairly:

Yes, except for Dagestan and Chechnya, because the Russian government has no power there, and they live completely separately there... I mean, I have nothing against these people, of course, I consider them my brothers, but the police; they speak openly – 'What law? What law of the Russian Federation? I am the law' (Mamuka, RU)

The Russian report describes how the killing of two young herdsmen, the Gasanguseinov brothers, in the village of Goor-Hendah, Shamil district of Dagestan on 23rd August, 2016 by security forces has become symbolic of this 'lawlessness'. According to the official version, the brothers opened fire in response to the security forces' demand to show documents, and were killed during the clash. The relatives and fellow villagers of the victims claim that the young men were herding their cattle and had no connection to the jihadist underground. The murder caused a great public outcry in the republic. In some interviews, as well as in a number of other studies, this case was explicitly named as one of the reasons for radicalisation. Omar for instance notes:

This is just a security agencies' craze. The lads were killed, many lads like them are killed in Dagestan, but the problem is that these are neighbouring villages, and there have never been any Salafis or anyone else in this village, and everyone knew these shepherds, because they grazed the whole village herd, that is, every resident of the village knew these guys, knew their family, and because of this there was a deep resonance. We have probably hundreds of such dead people though. The top officials at first said that they had eliminated militants, but when people rose up and it became known that they were killed simply because of lawlessness, they denied it. They started to deny it and so dug a hole for themselves. (Omar, RU)

From these observations and reports the Russian researchers infer a sense among their respondents of total threat, a sense that 'we are being killed,' which according to the researchers is fuelled, among other things, by individual experiences of religious discrimination, and contributes to the construction of group identity and solidarity, which extends to the Ummah of the whole world. But as a result of this extended community, the fate of Muslims around the world can become part of another, vicarious trauma, which bears resemblance to one's own, and for some, justifies a forceful response.

#### *3.3.2.4 Relational inequality on a global scale*

The sense of collectively experienced injustice, humiliation and threat, was registered among many respondents and reflects a sense that there is relational inequality between non-Muslims and Muslims on a global scale with the former dominating and abusing the latter.

Respondents point to specific cases where this relational inequality is particularly poignant. Norwegian respondent Frank refers to the conflict between Israel and Palestine as a typical example of the injustice directed against Muslims in various parts of the world:

I think there's an awful lot of injustice against Muslims more generally in wider society. ...But I see it ...as a way in which God is testing me, you know. To see how strong my belief is. I automatically feel for them in particular, in the situation in Gaza, for example... I've visited a number of family members down there. Been in their homes. And they've even been denied doing renovations to their own flats because they've received a strict message that they're not allowed to do that. Israel just want the flats to be all the same so they can take over their properties...It was a very difficult situation. You could touch and feel it... Like it generally is on a global basis, Muslims can be seen as a group which is treated incredibly unfairly. And... for example, if a Muslim kills a non-Muslim, suddenly it's a terrorist attack. But if America, for example, blows up five hundred people, then it's allowed – then it's just a war against terrorism. They kill civilians as well, but they're worth just as much. (Frank, NO)

Osman, another Norwegian respondent points to the UK drone strikes in Pakistan:

I learnt about the insidious way this drone system works in Pakistan. Against the innocent. Even if they somehow manage to kill one person, they've killed ten innocent people. And what makes me really angry is when, for example, Tony Blair recently talked about the Iraq War and confirmed that they did this to topple Saddam. And then he said, with tears in his eyes, he said 'sorry'. I feel angry about that because ... I think there must be some accountability for their actions. (Osman, NO)

In Russia, when respondent Idriss is asked whether America is an enemy of Muslims and Islam, he replies:

I believe, again, I believe, we mustn't generalise, but, in fact, it is an enemy of Islam. What they have been doing in the Middle East over the past ten years, what they did with Gaddafi, with Saddam Hussein, what they did in Egypt, the coup, it's still there. And now it started in Syria, and what will happen then? They had some plans for Turkey, but in Turkey they did not succeed. (Idriss, RU)

In the Netherlands, 14 mentions that:

[...] money is spent to make more planes and to send them to Syria rather than being invested here in people, to help people. Where does the money actually go? To the military, to weapons, to war, to belonging to NATO, to say in the United Nations in which I am also participating? That's what they are looking at: I also participate, I also belong. Actually, like young people, who want to belong somewhere, I actually also think that countries actually want to belong somewhere. [...] The Netherlands made that mistake once. That they were neutral in World War II. They don't want to let that happen a second time. I understand that too. But that you make the others pay for it!? [...] Get your planes out of there. Spend the money you put into bombs on people here. To make everything better here, to help people start to learn, that people are helped with work. Just spend it here in society. If you really care about your society. (14, NL)

Dutch Respondent 3 shares the bitterness. In response to the interviewer's question about Western involvement in the Middle East, he replied:

I ignore it for myself, am not happy with it, don't want to think about it too much, of course it's wrong. They want to intervene to bring peace, but in fact it is devastating for a country; Iraq was better under Saddam than it is now. Intervened for peace and then it's all a mess... not happy about it. Intervention has no political motives, but many commercial motives; that's my take on it. We are being fooled, it is a sham. (3, NL)

### 3.3.3 Searching for a way out of relational inequality

Whether it concerns the relationship with parents, teachers, police, security services or global powers, none of the experienced inequalities are by themselves a direct and inevitable cause of radicalisation. However, the continued confrontations with inequalities and injustice in relationships at many different levels, lead in conjunction to the accumulation of frustration and the 'angst' that one is controlled by malevolent authorities, to a search for an alternative lifestyle. In this context, exposure to the radical Islamist narrative may bring about a 'cathartic', purifying experience of profound insight into one's own contentious relations in terms of a global struggle between the true Islam and the unbelievers, and the prospect of becoming a meaningful contributor in this struggle.

The French report draws on Benslama (2016), who interprets radicalisation in relational context, as the symptom of a desire to be rooted, experienced by someone who no longer has roots or who



considers themselves to be unrooted. From this viewpoint, Jihadism projects a new utopian family, based on a combination of tradition and modernity; a family which comes with a strict division of tasks and roles, stemming from an asymmetry between man and woman (see: Ferret and Khosrokhavar, (eds) 2022, forthcoming). In the case of French respondent Jeremy, this new family that he created with a woman and her two daughters, is described as providing a refuge from his conflictual relationships with society at large and the state. In this new familial sphere, Jeremy has taken the role of absolute authority, as he puts it simply, 'I'm the authority!'. In this way he is able to experience a reversal of his position relative to the relational inequality he experiences within society. The French report notes that Jeremy's particularly authoritarian hold on his two adopted daughters lasted only a short time before social services separated the girls from what was defined as an 'unhealthy relationship' (Country-level report, FR: 33).

The desire for (legitimate) authority is a common theme among a number of respondents from various fieldwork sites, although authority is more often attributed externally than to the self. In Russia, 'Western freedoms' and democratic institutions that have been put in place since the fall of the Soviet Union are considered by a significant number of respondents to be responsible for lawlessness, inequality and corruption. To redress their experienced relational inequality, the respondents advocate a political structure that presupposes the sole authority of one person or group of persons with strict adherence to Shariah law. Such a regime, according to informants, can ensure the implementation of public justice and prevent society from descending into chaos. As Russian respondent Abdul explains 'a monarchical regime, monarchy, because well, if this monarchy is based on Shariat, I like it better if it is based on Shariat'.

In the UK, we found a quite remarkable parallel in a conversation with respondent Abu Abdullah. In line with the present discussion, the ethnographer observes that most of the male respondents lacked an authoritative male figure to help guide and inspire them. There were differences in response to this lack of guidance, and this affected their views on leadership. Abu Abdullah reflects: 'you look at them [leaders] and sometimes, there's less admiration, but there's more like the thought: so if, for example, as a president of the Islamic Society, I'd want to see how people thought, like manage problems and stuff like that.' Abu Abdullah then finds a quite remarkable example: 'I mean, look at Hitler. He was a, he was a killer basically. He murdered people, but the way he thought and the way he managed, crisis management, was one of the best out there. So, you look at his sort of tactics and crisis management, how he kind of like pushed his weight around wherever he had to deal with problems.'

Abu Abdullah continues:

[...] I think, someone said, 'the worst people provide the best examples', because you can kind of look at how many mistakes they've made and you can learn from that. But at the same time, you look at, again Hitler, and his approach and the way he spoke to people. The way he established that connection with people. He had a massive following, hundreds of thousands used to attend his rallies and because he spoke. I mean, Donald Trump, thousands attend his rallies. Politicians fail to get these sort of numbers, but he brings these numbers because he speaks the same way as the layman does. He speaks to them, he's very like vocal and he's focussed on what's out there on the street. What are people talking about? What are my audience talking about? And he'll come out and speak about that. (Abu Abdullah, UK)

### 3.3.4 Radical Islamism as a reversal of power dynamics

Radical Islamism offers a reversal or way out of power dynamics in order to redress relational inequality. The logic of this is explained in the French report as being: 'he who is "pure" is superior to

he who is not, beyond the knowledge they possess or try to gain. This allows one to reverse power relationships with others, beginning with non-believers' (Country-level report, FR: 40). French respondent Jeremy claims, 'non-Muslims change their minds 40 times a day. But I don't change'. Romain (FR) expands on this, explaining how strength and power is rooted in the certainty furnished by belief:

I have no doubts. Never. May Allah keep it that way. Doubt is for those who don't have the strength... The Prophet taught us that everyone questions themselves, but that people go astray on their own [...] I have no uncertainty, ever. Doubt is for those who act unjustly towards themselves. (Romain, FR)

The Dutch report refers to the classic developmental psychological theory of Erik Erikson (1968) to argue, in similar vein, that the individual who follows Islamist messaging becomes increasingly sceptical of the way he or she is perceived by others and the grounds on which this judgement by others is founded. This scepticism coincides with an increasingly strong confidence in one's newly acquired 'proper' standards for judgement. In this lies the root of perception of former friends, parents, or religious clerics as 'impure', 'hypocrite', or '*kufir*' (unbeliever), as well as the commitment to the pursuit of one's own path. This is encapsulated by French respondent Romain who states, 'It's actually a war that's been going on for centuries. Between right and wrong. Between true and false. That's it. [...] We're all part of this war. Even you, you're part of it [we laugh]... There's no neutral, you're either against or for.' When the interviewer asks whether there will be a winner and loser in this war, Romain replies 'of course. We're the winners. Here and in the afterlife, we will be the winners'.

### 3.3.5 Summary

Inequalities figure prominently in radical Islamist narratives. But that does not imply that all inequalities experienced by Muslims lead to radicalisation. Perceived inequality has multiple dimensions. Inequality also involves multiple 'self' and 'other' categorisations. The inequalities are not only perceived to be between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also between generations, ethnicities, and neighbourhood origins.

Few of the respondents directly report relative financial deprivation, although a number of respondents lament their inability to find stable employment. Some attribute this inability to their religion, but others point to their ethnic background or neighbourhood origins or, in Russia, to corruption.

We propose relational inequality to represent a critical factor in the lives of our respondents. The experience of relational inequality is characterised by a sense of being different (horizontal inequality), and of being subjected (vertical inequality) to an incapable, undeserving, or illegitimate authority. Relational inequality was experienced in the relationships with parents, with teachers and supervisors, with the police and with the state. Conflictual relationships with parents, fathers in particular, were very common across the fieldwork sites. A number of respondents comment on experiences of discrimination as indicative of the unequal position of Muslims, migrants, and those from deprived neighbourhoods. Some respondents noted being more negatively evaluated at school by teachers on the basis of their ethnicity or faith. Many respondents report particularly problematic relationships with state authorities. Police and security services are considered to indiscriminately target particular ethnicities, people from particular neighbourhoods and, under the banner of 'counterterrorism' and 'preventing violent extremism,' Muslims. This 'securitisation' of Muslims is felt across Europe, although particularly strongly among respondents from the study in Russia. Respondents across the Muslim minority countries being studied report being unfairly treated by the police and not protected.

Respondents also lack trust in the legal system. Some respondents express their belief in inequalities on a global scale, with global elites dominating and humiliating the Muslim world.

None of the different types of injustices are by themselves a direct cause of radicalisation. However, the continued confrontations with inequalities and injustice in relationships at many different levels, lead in conjunction to the accumulation of frustration and the 'angst' that one is controlled by malevolent authorities. Exposure to the radical Islamist narrative may bring about a 'cathartic', purifying experience of profound insight in one's own contentious relations in terms of a global struggle between the true Islam and the unbelievers and the prospect of becoming a meaningful contributor in this struggle.

### 3.4 How do milieu actors recount their trajectories towards and away from extremism?

The remarks by Romain that 'It's actually a war that's been going on for centuries' invoke the conclusions drawn in Section 3.1, where it is noted that there are respondents who place violence in relational context, arguing that there is a zero-sum struggle between Muslims and non-Muslims, the non-Muslim West in particular. Moreover, in Section 3.2 (on 'Experiences with different types of radical messaging') we saw how anti-Muslim messaging and radical Islamist messaging, especially in the absence of secure personal, social, and religious bearings, are respectively pushing and pulling the individual to drift away from their family and society, and into this idea of a zero-sum struggle. In these previous sections, then, we have set the context to provide a more in-depth understanding of how, on an individual level, the process of radicalisation or, conversely, the rejection of Islamist messaging takes shape and what factors are involved.

We find that the respondents' accounts of their (non-)radicalisation trajectories involves a complex and dynamic interplay of factors that exist on multiple levels, including experiences during childhood, school failure and unemployment, honour culture, experience with violence, involvement in delinquency, crisis events during adolescence, identity development in a social context of anomie and rejection, state repression, narratives of collective annihilation, and networks facilitating the spreading of radical Islamist messaging and access to battle grounds. None of these factors can explain radicalisation on its own, but all contribute to anxiety and dread, a sense of isolation, alienation, and a sense of being subjected to persecution, feelings and emotions that radical Islamist messaging addresses.

#### 3.4.1 Childhood experiences

In a number of countries studied, respondents report profound negative childhood experiences, alongside positive experiences of youth. Negative childhood experiences centre on problematic relationships with parents, especially fathers who are sometimes characterised by their authoritarian parenting style or as absent, and, in other cases, as perpetrators of domestic violence. In France, Belgium, and Russia, some of these problematic relationships are explicitly linked to migration that is described as having caused significant changes in family role patterns away from a traditional patriarchal family, and with parents, often less educated than their children, struggling to meet the children's needs in the new setting.

As already noted, many of the respondents interviewed in a French prison, including Adrian and Griezmann, reported on negative childhood experiences that, according to the ethnographer, was the starting point for later dysfunctional and often aggressive behaviour. In the German study, domestic abuse and neglect were found to be a recurring theme among the respondents. For several Dutch and

German respondents, dysfunctional familial relationships associated with alcoholism, abuse, and mental disorder of the parents, were explicitly linked to their subsequent conversion to Islam. This was also the case for a German respondent whose 'father had left his mother for reasons he associates with modern images of sexuality, and his mother ended up drinking too much alcohol. From his perspective, (neo-salafist) Islam was the cure for the diseases that a modern society had sprung on him and his family' (Country-level report, DE: 29).

Other reports document the presence of street violence as an inherent part of growing up in a particular neighbourhood or conflict area. The Norwegian report contains extensive descriptions of growing up in the urban area of Granbakken where Benjamin Hermansen was killed, the first racially motivated murder in Norway (see section 3.2.1.1). According to the Norwegian researchers, being raised in a climate of racial tensions, and experiences of racially motivated violence, may engender grievances and feelings of injustice, which may increase the appeal of radical messaging. Respondent Hassan grew up there and speaks about his childhood as 'peaceful and nice', but also complains 'about the problems with criminal groups selling drugs, some related violence (even shooting), and also outsiders' negative image of where he lived'. The themes of crime and violence also constitute an intrinsic part of the observations during fieldwork in the Belgian study.

The question of whether childhood exposure to domestic violence or violence in one's environment causally links to radicalisation is difficult to answer on the basis of ethnographic observations and interviews. We have some cases where domestic turmoil during childhood contributed to an open, spiritual, although unconventional view on life, as for instance in the case of Dutch Respondent 9. However, it does appear likely that across the fieldwork sites, for many of the respondents who eventually radicalised, the conflictual relationships and associated violence experienced during childhood laid the foundation for a readiness to adopt a view of the world that divides social life in terms of 'us and them,' of threats and humiliation, and of a sense of urgency and legitimacy to respond to perceived threat. In Turkey, the ethnographer observes during his fieldwork that most of those who, he had heard, had joined Al Nusra or ISIS reported:

a lost father, suffering of family members at the hands of the state, mental health issues among some family members, an older brother active in the same or similar organisation, the lack of family, growing up in an orphanage, or some members' affiliation to such an organisation in the distant family. These connections served as facilitators to radical ideas and movements. On the social and political level: the experience of forced displacement, growing up in ghettos and shantytowns, observing the widespread presence of violence, state crimes and impunity, and the presentation of the resisting forces (the freedom fighters or the guerrillas) as role models seem to be among the many reasons that youth radicalise, not only in religious mediums, but also across ethno-nationalist, Kurdish or leftist lines' (Country-level report, TUR: 28).

### 3.4.2 Falling behind at school or work

Falling behind at school and being unable to find employment were brought up across the fieldwork sites when radicalisation trajectories were discussed. In Belgium, respondent Primo mentioned that after initially meeting very caring teachers, he eventually had increasing difficulty keeping up at school: 'It was problems, you know, I didn't have the facilities that other people have, you know, they have facilities to read, to write... and then it was over the years, you know...' (Primo, BE).

This experience echoes what the French ethnographer considers typical for France, as he notes that 'education is emblematic of unequal access to resources within French society. With the exception of François, a 17-year-old who was studying at university before being arrested for terrorism (associated

with the far-right), almost all of the respondents quit school early. Dropping out of school has several causes: the material and psychological circumstances at home, the need to bring home money in order to offset the family's financial difficulties, the desire for money, the initiation into delinquency and the difficulty of conforming to a normative framework at odds with family life and the rules of the streets. Others dropped out against their will, sometimes following incarceration. Some do not hide a deep feeling of waste. The conflictual relationship with school is often described as one of the first manifestations of unequal access to resources, in what appears to determine an individual's place in society' (Country-level report, FR: 26).

### 3.4.3 Social ties prevent interest in radical messaging

The previous section emphasises the social challenges at home and at school that promote a sense of isolation and alienation that makes one particularly vulnerable to radical messaging. We should note that across the fieldwork sites, we also encountered respondents who explicitly mentioned that they rejected the radical cause because of their existing social ties. A German respondent notes 'I mean, you would lose so much, in general, if it would come out, so, with me it would be a topic like that, everybody would know that and yes.... Assuming I would quit then, where would I go? Nobody would want to have anything to do with me anymore. I think that's what's keeping me from it.' (Salih, DE)

Indeed, the German report contains a number of instances where respondents expressed that following the radical path would imply the loss of social ties. Latif from Germany chose not to join ISIS although he could, because 'In the end, it only leads to crime and a minus in life. No way.' Another German respondent, Ben, mentioned that he knows of cases of radicalisation in his surroundings, but he did not join because he 'did not want to move any further away from his mother, who had already been very critical of these developments.' Yet another respondent in Germany sums up the role of existing social ties in non-radicalisation:

I think I am perfectly happy in Germany, so. Even if inequality, even if there is inequality here, that is not so relevant. If I don't get into a club, what do I lose? And I think my friends are like that, I was against it from the beginning, so. For me it was far away and terrible how one can do something like that. If a guy like that would come to me and try to persuade me somehow, there would be no possibility from the beginning, because I take something like that with a smile and reject it [clicks] I wouldn't do something like that. But what is it now, what really stops me from doing that? [gasps]. My friends, I'd say. (Salih, DE)

In France, the case of Momo further underscores the importance of social ties. Momo is actually very critical of France:

I hate France. I don't like France. And if someone asks me, 'why do you stay in France?', I'd say, 'I don't like France, but I like what people have made of it and by people, I mean all the immigrants basically'... Well I'm glad I grew up in the hood. That's the kind of ambiance I like. [...] The only thing that's good [about France] is the social security system. That's it!... It's a country of cowards, French people are all cowards! They prefer rapists over robbers, they prefer rapists to drug dealers. (Momo, FR)

But the ethnographer simultaneously observes that 'Momo desperately tries to cling to such ties so as not to cross a threshold into jihadism that would mean going down a path of no return, a path filled with heavy consequences [...] First, he evokes the 'myth' of a return to Algeria—the country 'that drove out the French'—then speaks of the 'hood' as a social and physical space of identification, the last defence to protect a wounded identity. Lastly, he makes reference to his family and in particular to a

mother he feels indebted towards and who, despite everything, is still there to offer him a path to salvation through sentimental bonds' (Country-level report, FR: 31).

The importance of social ties is also underscored by French respondent Adrian who notes:

If someone really wants to see me change, the only way to do it is through my parents. They're the only ones who are able to calm me down and hold me back. If I feel like doing something stupid, they're the only ones who can stop me. To be honest, it's really my mom. For me, they're the solution. (Adrian, FR)

### 3.4.4 Violence, delinquency and toxic masculinity culture

Where social ties are considered to prevent radicalisation, violence, delinquency, and masculinity culture are considered contributing factors to radicalisation, or at least a response to rejection by society. Various reports focus in depth on experiences with violence, not just at home, but also as a consequence of being excluded from school or work. Delinquency is a common theme among many of the respondents across Europe when discussing their radicalisation trajectory. The Russian report mentions that being roughed up as a child is part of a 'toxic masculinity culture.'

In the French report it is noted that social life on the streets provides an alternative to a societal life that is denied by social environment. The street is thought to provide opportunities for success, acceptance, and wealth, which are not provided by studies or the workplace. In this context, Marco, who grew up around gang wars in an overseas territory of France, is quoted as saying: 'I didn't like my situation. I wanted money. I wanted to get whatever I wanted. And everything I couldn't have, well I went looking for it, I went out to take it'.

In the Norwegian report, the story of Aziz is used to illustrate the context in which individuals become involved in crime. It starts with Aziz experiencing bullying at school for being overweight, something Aziz attributes to working at his father's kebab restaurant. But as members of a well-known local criminal gang started to attend the restaurant, Aziz could call on the gang to deal with his bullies. Aziz recalls:

[...] then three cars swung in before I even managed to hang up. And I saw from the other side that they were coming. There was one called [name] and [name] who came out of the car, [...] There was no fight, but I was suspended from school for 5 days. On paper, the reason was 'for calling the X gang to the school'. When I was thrown out, it was the first time I had experienced a walk of fame and not a walk of shame! That day totally transformed my life! [...] Suddenly, I was a superstar. I was the one in [names area] who could get the X gang to come that very second. I called them and they came immediately, you know? [...] And the whole of the school thought, you know what, that guy there is dangerous, he called one time. [...] Started being more and more ...and started fighting more often. I also wanted to be a gangster like the ones in the X gang. I understood that if I were one of them then I wouldn't be bullied. (Aziz, NO)

The Norwegian ethnographers reflect that the case of Aziz represents an example of upward mobility that most of his peers consider ambivalently; while it may represent a stepping over to the bad side, this 'bad side' comes with considerable glamour, and the opportunity for a 'walk of fame' rather than walk of 'shame.' Aziz would eventually find in Islamic faith a way to leave his criminal life behind.

The appeal of criminal life also plays a role in the lives of many of the Russian respondents where violence and crime are discussed in the context of a generalised society of violence that can, according to the ethnographers, be labelled as a 'toxic masculinity culture,' with children and adolescents being



subjected to violence to build courage and resilience. Russian respondent Said is quoted: ‘in Dagestan, it turns out; the child should be hit in the face. Living in the Caucasus basically, they are the ones to hit you in the face. This is normal and manly. Such a wild stereotype. A wild concept, that he is young, and he is simply hit in the head’.

Russian respondent Omar reflects on this society of violence in Dagestan where ‘it’s cool to be bad among young people fuelling crime gangs and a cult against the police.’ According to Omar, there is a clear connection between anti-police attitudes and Islamist radicalism, as he mentions that there is ‘this cult against the police, and they went to Islam, and just found in Islam, not really Islam, around Islam, let’s say, some direction that is against it and for war [...] This is a connection of such internal, I don’t know how to say, such popularisation of crime [...] and they just come to Islam and find there, how can I describe this picture, they remain the same bad guys.’

Belgian respondent Primo provides some detailed insight, as the ethnographer describes:

His early socialisation into violence, delinquency and then banditry, and finally into the prison world, and later his confrontation with the traumatic experience of death, that of his childhood friends but also that of his little brother, can be cited among the deep causes of his entry into extremist political violence. Not to mention the fact that robberies and hold-ups project him into a world where the initiation to the handling of weapons becomes an obligatory passage, as attested to by the exchange I have with him about the entry into prison of one of his childhood friends who, with other acolytes, had robbed the town police station to recover uniforms, computers and, for one of them, a handgun. This weapon was at the centre of a drama between two of his childhood friends. The latter shared a flat with the owner of the weapon but was absent on the day of the tragedy. While they were in the flat, the owner of the gun strutted around showing it off to his sidekick, having removed the magazine thinking it was empty, he pointed it at his friend, pulled the trigger thinking the gun was unloaded and unintentionally killed him. Primo then explains to me by offering to draw me a picture of how the safety works on this particular handgun, which he tells me is one of the ‘best in the world’. (Field diary, BE)

### 3.4.5 The search for identity

The search for identity is described as a critical phenomenon in the understanding of radicalisation trajectories. This search is a fundamental element of adolescent development, but in the reports of the respondents, it is intensified as a result of (traumatic) life events, such as the death of a loved one, a serious accident, or a conviction. Many of the respondents eventually found, at least at some point in their lives, (neo-) Salafism as their new social identity. Consistently, the French report observes that ‘For these young people who are often marginalised and struggling with ‘double absence’ (Sayad, 1999)—the feeling of being neither French nor from the country of their parents—Islam appears as a ‘refuge’, a new identity and/or a means of subjectivation (Khosrokhavar, 1997; Göle, 1995; Roy, 2004)’ (Country-level report, FR: 8). In Russia, the ethnographers speak of age-related socialisation, in particular related to adolescence. They suggest that participating in an armed underground movement and travelling to Syria provides the opportunities of an adventurous and free life that the young urban second generation is lacking, being subjected to parental authoritarianism and a life of dullness.

In the Dutch report, the search for identity is described as a key marker in the context of radicalisation, although it is not necessarily directly causally related to radicalisation nor non-radicalisation. Consistent with Erikson’s developmental theorising, many respondents experienced during adolescence a moment of loss of ‘sense of personal sameness and historical continuity’ that marks an

identity crisis. The identity crisis led to an intensified interest in religion and for many it meant that being a Muslim becomes a defining element of identity (cf. De Koning, 2008). Respondent 1 (NL), for instance, recalls how a fight with his stepfather eventually led him to leave home at the age of sixteen and, after a year of foster care, to start to live on his own and to reflect on his life and eventually to convert to Islam. Respondent 2 (NL) mentioned how at the age of nineteen, he and a friend were victims of a random act of violence that killed his friend and nearly himself, that led him to reflect on life and death and ultimately to embrace Islam. Respondent 8 told us how the breakup of his parents and the drug addiction of his father contributed to an increasing self-uncertainty during adolescence. Respondent 3 (NL) recalls how a near fatal car accident spurred his interest in religious affairs. Of the 15 respondents we directly asked about their life stories, we found that during the interview, eight respondents had made explicit references to an experience during adolescence that corresponds to Erikson's description of identity crisis as a loss of sense of personal sameness and loss of continuity. For two respondents we did not obtain information about adolescence. For the remaining five respondents, we did not find a direct reference to a particularly profound identity crisis.

The German report corroborates these observations as it also emphasises that 'personal challenges and crises, often linked to family life, had led to significant need for political and/or spiritual orientation and finding a way to feel at ease' (Country-level report, DE: 57). Samira (DE) mentioned that she joined a neo-Salafist group 'Because I just had no other community, because otherwise I would have gone completely crazy, with my parents.' German respondent Ben believes his conversion to Islam, as a result of falling in love with a neo-Salafist woman, had helped him recover from psychological problems he had experienced growing up. For another German respondent, the identity crisis related to gender, and body objectification in particular. The ethnographer explains:

She did not feel beautiful, something that was not important or defined differently in her neo-Salafist environment. She was not sure about her plans for her professional future, but as a neo-Salafist woman and an early mother, these problems were far away from her. Traditional Muslim family life gave her a promise to build her own functional family after her family of origin had fallen apart. When asked about what characterised her besides her religiosity, she simply stated: being a mother (Mahdiya, DE).

The German ethnographer concludes that 'among the set of respondents, there is a link between biographical challenges, lack of spiritual orientation, and (non-)radicalisation. Young adults who have experienced both – biographical challenges and a lack of spiritual orientation - are more likely to join neo-Salafist groups than those who did not have such experiences' (Country-level report, DE: 59).

### **3.4.6 Relational complexity of adolescent Muslim identity development**

In most of the reports, it is emphasised that among many of the respondents, the process of identity formation, often starting with a crisis situation and leading to a strengthening of religious faith, was far from straightforward. Instead, the search for identity is complicated by a number of factors. In some cultural contexts 'honour culture' implies that one's identity is inherently related to the social honour of the family and clan, with whom the individual may have conflictual relationships. Another complicating factor concerns the absence of a cohesive and supportive social environment. The respondents from many of the countries being studied, report disorder and the lack of social fabric, although some find belonging in subcultural identification. In addition, the identity formation process for Muslims across Europe takes place under continuous public attention and scrutiny, especially since 11 September 2001.

In line with this general argument, the Russian ethnographers observe that for the urban second generation migrants at the heart of their study, identification with religion is stronger rather than

weaker. Religious identity is thought to provide a foundation for normalcy in a world of deviance from the standards with which one is brought up. Religion provides a sense of belonging that the world of liberal secularism fails to provide. The researchers further note that new Islam, or 'confrontation-oriented Islam' provides an opportunity for young people to position themselves to challenge the generational hierarchies that prevent young people from self-realisation. By living up to the word of the Supreme Authority, one simultaneously acknowledges that there are higher authorities than one's father, and thereby greater priorities than family interests. In this context, Russian respondent Mamuka notes that 'I am a Sunnite, and for Shiites this is the number one enemy [...] And, of course, I had problems with my father, mother, and brothers [...] They said that I was born a Shiite and should be a Shiite. I said "no, the Supreme Authority has denied that. God forbids us to follow our fathers if they are in error. God forbids it in the Koran."'

The ethnographers note in this context that the emphasis on individual rather than collective responsibility that is characteristic of the new Islam, contributes to the erosion of traditional relationships, and the formation of an individual identity as opposed to the dissolution of the individual in the collective. The Russian respondents appear to indicate that authoritarian families are often unable to cope with even the simplest manifestations of non-conformity of their children. In this way, the Russian ethnographers note the complexity of identity formation among young North Caucasians and delineate two underlying dimensions of this complexity, the conflictual relationship with a society marked by ethnic and religious xenophobia, and the conflictual relationship with one's parents and family seeking to control the youngsters and impeding the youngsters' personal and societal aspirations.

The Tunisian ethnographers observe a tension between parents and their daughters in particular when the daughter decides to publicly display her religious devotion. The case of Samira is illustrative here. Samira had chosen to wear a *niqab* against the wishes of her parents and in so doing, crossed a cultural fault by rejecting traditional Tunisian culture and embracing the global *ummah*. In the Turkish report, however, we find greater concordance between family and respondents who choose the Salafist path, at least initially. Those who choose the Salafist path tended to stop taking drugs, to start wearing religious attire, and to live a disciplined life, which was positively perceived in their social environment and did not raise particular suspicion.

The Turkish ethnographer states that later in the radicalisation process, the individual may actually break away from his or her family. However, that is not to say that in all cases, the newly found 'family' of the religiously like-minded provides the social connection one is searching for. In the UK, we find very similar observations regarding family relations as in Tunisia for some of the respondents. In the UK, there were some respondents who developed conflictual relations with direct family members such as parents and siblings because of the religious commitment of the respondent or the lack thereof of the respondent's engagement with their broader social environment outside of the home. For other respondents, there were no such tensions. The parents of UK respondent Abdullah hoped that religion would help their son to get back on track after he had dropped out of college and was working in dead-end jobs. Having a problematic relationship did not imply that these respondents automatically found their 'new family' in the Spiceland group, a network of young people that was studied as part of the milieu. Despite its apparent appeal as a 'home away from home', the ethnographer noted that participants in the Friday night gatherings would occasionally experience a sense of disappointment and frustration from being there, causing some respondents to occasionally slip in and out of the network. This observation is of importance as it shows the complexity of involvement in potentially radicalising groups, and casts doubt on a 'conveyor belt theory' proposing a direct line from experiences of discrimination, family tensions, identity crisis, to involvement in religion, to

radicalisation. Spaces that were imagined as supportive structures for young people who were not in education or in low paid, occasional work did not always turn out to be as fulfilling as those young people expected. This led to a range of sentiments and actions ranging from disappointment to outright disengagement.

Alongside the frictions with one's family and in other immediate social circles, we also found that the public debate surrounding Islam, being a Muslim and ethnicity have increasingly complicated identity development among young Muslims. In the Netherlands, Respondent 8 mentioned how the public reaction to September 11 was a critical event in this regard. Dutch Respondent 14 further comments on the impact of stigmatisation on Dutch-Moroccan youth in the context of religiosity:

There are plenty of Moroccan youngsters who dare not say anything about it. Yes. They really don't dare to say anything about it. [...] if Dutch society gets to see what is in their head and what the purpose is, then they are seen as radical. Do you understand? And they have radical ideas because they don't feel at home here. And why don't they feel at home here? [...] they have not been given opportunities. So because he couldn't learn well, he couldn't get a good job. (14, NL)

The Norwegian ethnographers also note the heightened consciousness around Islam and Muslim identity as a complicating factor in identity formation. Building on Fukuyama's analysis of identity politics (Fukuyama, 2020) and Griffin's concept of a 'nomic crisis' (Griffin, 2012), the ethnographers argue that grievances push the young people in the study to an interest in, and need to defend, their Muslim identity.

### 3.4.7 Internet as the most important source of radicalising influence

Respondents in virtually all countries indicate that in the absence of a supportive social and religious environment, the internet becomes the primary resource in one's search for identity. The outcome of the search for identity, the adoption of religious identity, in some cases as a strengthening of pre-existing faith and in others as a religious conversion, is largely based on information taken from the internet. The role of internet and social media was discussed above, in our consideration of different types of radical messaging (see Section 3.2.3.1); here we consider its role in radicalisation directly.

The Russian ethnographers note that informants attributed a crucial role to the internet in spreading religious messages; without directly recruiting for the radical cause, it provided information for those searching for it. The internet, they suggest, is now overtaking direct physical meetings with clergy, in part because of disillusionment with traditional forms of Islam, which are seen as legitimising the current status quo and ignoring wrongdoings and injustices.

In France, Romain (FR) notes that his Internet-acquired religious identity brought him peace and 'helped me to reconcile myself with myself.' The French ethnographer maintains Romain's Internet-acquired 'idea of detachment, expressed through the doctrine of *al-walâ' wa al-barâ'* (loyalty and renunciation) that drives the faithful to systematically break with all elements associated with unbelievers in contemporary society, provides Romain with an explanatory framework that is clearly ideological. Such a framework replaces inefficient and disappointing familial bonds with new ties in a process that appears as the epiphany of a new subjective social order' (Country-level report, FR: 33). Romain is recorded saying, 'we don't choose allies among our enemies, even if they're from our tribe, our clan, our family. We don't choose an ally against our brothers, against the cause of Allah... [It is] negation and affirmation. Renunciation and alliance.'

We observed that the Turkish case provides a notable contrast to the other fieldwork sites where the role of the Internet is concerned (Section 3.2.3.1); very few respondents mentioned the internet as the

most important source of radicalising messages in their lives. At the same time, the Turkish report emphasises the role of family ties, kinship and neighbourly culture that are assumed to 'help Salafi members to stay together and remain in solidarity' (Country-level report, TUR: 23).

### 3.4.8 Further social rejection and a sense of persecution

Respondents often mention social reception to the newly found religious identity as a key trigger in the radicalisation process. A sense of rejection, by one's immediate social surrounding but predominantly by an anti-Islamic and secular society and a repressive state, sets in motion a further distancing and isolation, and immersion in internet fora.

In the French report is noted that 'the neo-Ummah is synonymous with warmth and solidarity against the coldness and inhumanity of the post-modern world. In this way, cold is opposed with heat, chaos with order, the individual with the community, cold rationality with warm feeling (Roy, 2004; Khosrokhavar, 2006). It is within this immaterial space, which knows no borders and is not embedded in tangible traditions, that the isolated and anomic individual can reinvent him or herself and be reborn in with a new rewarding identity' (Country-level report, FR: 33). The ethnographer in the UK also appears to stress the warmth of the 'new rewarding identity' relative to an uneventful family life and disappointment experienced when seeking to access mainstream education and employment.

The Greek report narrates the story of Evgenia who had left the Christian faith and converted to Islam. The ethnographer notes about his encounter with her that:

[...] while we talked after the end of the interview, she was experiencing a lot of pressure from her relatives and family because she had changed her religion as it was considered a betrayal to abandon the Orthodox religion and convert to Islam because of Turkey and the Ottoman past. They had often spoken badly of her and had called her a *Turkosporos* (a Greek word meaning literally 'A Turkish Seed' connoting someone of shameful origin from a Turkish place) and a jihadist, among other names. They had spoken insultingly also when they saw her wearing a headscarf. All this put her under such pressure that she had sometimes contemplated moving abroad to a European country with many Muslims, for example, the UK or Germany or to a Muslim country. She told me she often understands why some Muslims react and join extremist groups, but she does not necessarily justify their actions unless they are defensive in the societies they live in, e.g. fighting against a foreign invasion (e.g. of the United States in Iraq). In general, she believed that Islam was being persecuted and that it is the actions of Westerners that are responsible for both the waves of immigrants and the violent reactions by Muslims. (Country-level report, GR: 28).

In Turkey, it is noted how the just noted traditional ties and kinship help Salafi members to keep underground and safeguard them from prosecution, contributing to the solidification of these ties. The ethnographer notes 'in this regard, the perceived sense of danger is kept alive and new members are frequently advised that they live in a hostile society, where almost everyone is considered as dangerous for one reason or another. Social categorisation and psychological distance from out-groups allow the Salafi brothers to create a close sense of in-group dynamic (Moghaddam, 2005: 166), where almost everyone could be a potential enemy or spy' (Country-level report, TUR: 23).

### 3.4.9 Muslims under threat

The sense of threat and persecution is also an important theme in other fieldwork sites. In Norway respondent Osman for instance reflects:

[...] the thing is that they place so much focus, indirectly, on Islamic elements...I feel that it's a problem because people can't be themselves. People are slowly but surely attacking

Islam. Because they're not talking about prohibiting the kippa, they're not talking about forbidding the turban. Usually it's about hijabs in the police, hijabs for children. And again, it's the media playing on that and the politicians fall into the trap. I feel that this is negative too because it will lead to people saying: 'You know what? We don't want to have you here in this country.' It's a bit like when Trump decided to have that travel ban on different countries and then people still voted for Trump anyway and a lot of his policies played with this business of racism and exploited racism and hostility towards Muslims. (Osman, NO)

Humiliation and injustices committed towards Muslims are a common theme in the (digital) discourse of Islamist extremist, contributing to vicarious trauma, and sometimes even a sense of collective annihilation. The footage of injustices and humiliation of Muslims around the world resonate with individual experiences of rejection, conflict and repression. This renders 'being a Muslim' an effective interpretative frame for understanding one's own dejection while the purification of Islam from corrupt influences and the defence of this pure Islam against its enemies worldwide becomes a path to redemption.

In the Netherlands, for instance, Respondent 8 discussed his experiences of involvement in an internet discussion forum:

I was in contact via the Internet. I first went to search for Islam [...] and I ended up on very radical sites. I was shocked. Then I went to Morocco.nl [a chat forum] I expressed my dissatisfaction there. About the war started by Bush. He said very clearly that 'you are either with us or you are against us'. So for me I had the feeling as if he spoke to me, that I have to make a choice. And of course, I was not with him. I was not on his side. But whose side was I on? Then I did some research. I started to write stories on Morocco.nl about Palestine, which is a kind of common thread in many radicalisation stories. The Palestine Conflict. Because you get a lot of videos of Palestine of Palestinian children being murdered, Gaza being bombed. And that is going to be very bad, yes, in a kind of propaganda video, it is shown to you. And they are trying to create a kind of awareness in you of helping your fellow Muslims. So those kinds of movies came to my eyes. And those movies started to work a bit in my system. I started to get angry. [...] And who should I be angry with? At some point it started to cultivate. It was made so black and white actually. We are the believers, we are the Muslims. And those are the unbelievers, they are our enemies. So it kind of got polarised. A black and white image. (8, NL)

This experience was shared by Belgian respondent Primo for example, who talks about the more recent start of the war in Syria. He shares:

I look on the internet at the first video I see, in fact I understand why they left, I'll even write something down for you if you like, it's a video I'll give you, it's the first two videos I saw and that's when I said to myself I understand why they left... because at that moment we're far from the Islamic State, we know that there is Al Qaeda, there is Jabat al Nosra, there are many small groups and many Syrian inhabitants are joining these groups against Bashar Al Assad... as the first world power, the United States, is not doing anything, so we are going to do it. And so when I see these videos, I am shocked... They arrived in a mosque, because Bashar Al Assad's soldiers were helped by the Iranians... this video on YouTube is called 'more than 51 dead children in a mosque'. The first image I see is a '*padre*', a father, *meskin*' [the poor man]! He takes a girl and says 'O country of Arabs! Is this little girl old enough to die?' and you see the girl, her teeth, her jaw completely ripped



off, and a little boy who had his whole top part removed and you see his brain exposed... Wallah the kid was 4 years old... and there is another one called 'Treason from within' it's Snowden who delivered images that were top secret... I when I'm on leave from prison, I look at these videos and I see a woman who calls for help, come and help us oh Muslims all over the world, look what they did, they killed my five daughters, and she has a Kalashnikov in her hand, she says I'm going to go towards the white palace until he kills me, if I don't kill him before talking about Bashar... when you see a lot of videos like that, I was shocked, I didn't know all that, because I'm far away from all that, I don't pray, I'm in a world where I'm doing my own thing, come on, what are we going to do tonight? (Primo, BE)

The Dutch report maintains that exposure to this extreme violence and these injustices contribute to the bolstering of the perception that the world is characterised by a struggle between one's own cause vis-a-vis an opposition. This perception of the world leads to a continual focus on threats that may come from what is perceived to be a hostile social environment. This focus on threats, in turn, comes with a blind eye for anything other than the conflictual relationship. And because of this strict focus on the conflictual relationship, the perception that there is a threat 'out there' is intensified, further accelerating the conflictual dynamics, and creating 'a prison of hate' (Beck & Deffenbacher, 2000). In support of this assertion, Dutch Respondent 8 is quoted:

I no longer saw the other as an equal. I saw the unbelievers as the beasts, as the enemies of Islam. They kill Muslims elsewhere. They kill Muslims in our Islamic countries. They dehumanise those other people, so that they no longer see them as human beings. That's how I started to see the unbelievers too. Not as humans anymore. Those are the enemies. I was watching a decapitation video. I watched a lot of those videos. First time you see it, you will probably get the same reaction of disgust. From nausea. I did too. But after a while I watched it every time, every time. And at a certain point I didn't feel anything anymore. Because I've been told over and over that it's the unbelievers, that's the enemies that must die. So at one point I didn't feel anything for those people at all. And later I also understood why. Of course they wanted some kind of hardening. Yes, make yourself tough. And very cold. Because I had no emotions either. And that manifested itself at that moment. (8, NL)

### 3.4.10 Networks

Radical Islamist networks facilitate radicalisation by providing internet content, recruiting motivated individuals into the network, organising advocacy initiatives, providing meeting facilities, and facilitating access to conflict zones.

The French report notes that Adrian and Romain, who embody the concept of internet-inspired self-radicalisers, eventually became active offline, and united through a peer group. Romain mentions about his circle of friends in the prison ward: 'I always have brothers who are here for jihadism. We're connected, even if we don't know each other. Religion is what unites us.' (Romain, FR).

In this context, the French ethnographer observes that:

[...] the internet, neighbourhood groups, Syria and finally prison become the social spaces comprising a network. In detention, in prisons where jihadists come together (Chantraine et al, 2018; Micheron, 2020), but also in outlying prisons, 'radicals' constitute a specific group (De Galember, 2016 and 2020; Khosrokhavar, 2018; Conti, 2018). This label is given not only by institutions and other prisoners, but also by the individuals themselves. These

‘radicals’ know each other and communicate (or at least attempt to) and in doing so create a sense of solidarity. Such solidarity allows them to collectively draw strength and some attempt to assert themselves in prison as a distinct group. Others, however, try to fade away. In particular those who are deeply involved, they knew each other before arriving in prison. They do not do this in person, but as members of a network, in which everyone’s pseudonym, or even battle name, is known. This is a network of a limited number of people united by an ideological vision, that of creating an Islamic state, governed by a certain vision of Sharia law, which can be called the ‘jihadosphere’. It is a network that includes men and women, who marry amongst themselves, revealing a small community that broke with not only French society, but with traditional Islam and family bonds. Thus, even in prison, they try to organise marriages amongst themselves, with the goal of founding a new, explicitly jihadist family as part of a new community, the neo-Ummah. Jeremy had allegedly tried to force his 16-year-old adopted daughter to marry an inmate. Adil, transferred on suspicion of wanting to manufacture a 3-D weapon in prison along with another TIS, had a religious wedding with the sister of a shooter from the Bataclan attack. This is a jihadosphere that today, as we shall see, no longer attracts people like it used to and which is less and less functional. (Country-level report, FR: 41)

The Turkish report also mentions the important role of networks in the radicalisation process, particularly their ability to divide the individual from his or her prior social life. The ethnographer claims that ‘Most of these young men cut their relationship with their families soon after they arrive in Syria. In some cases, their families follow them to Syria but are misguided by people in charge, and they return empty handed. Meanwhile, the young *mujahids* see their comrades and friends die on a daily basis. They often have to change their houses due to bombings, attacks and security operations. The trauma of losing friends, and the possibility of an immediate death by a barrel bomb, encourage some of these young *mujahids* to carry out *istishhad* operations (suicide bombings)’ (Country-level report, TUR: 24).

The Dutch report further covers several of the respondents’ experiences with networks. Respondent 15 for instance shared how his initial interest in world conflict led him to become involved in a Jihadist activist group:

I always thought it was interesting to follow world conflicts. I also researched and read a lot about Chechnya, but also about the First World War, which is of course relevant to Turkey and Afghanistan. When it started in Syria, I thought it was also interesting to follow. Back then, the violent footage that was readily available. Now that is not the case anymore. Yes, up to a point. But then it was really just the torture and bombing you could see. I could see absolutely everything. And then, for example, if you watched a sermon from someone from England that was about, say, the story of a prophet's wife or something and sometimes related videos included a video about Syria. Then we started to look into that and thought that is also interesting and about that group that fights for whatever. Then you had about 200 groups fighting there. Really a lot. Then I ended up in a Facebook group. And yes I actually went to my first demonstration through them. Afterwards, I felt more excited than convinced about the cause. (15, NL)

From a distance, Dutch Respondent 4 recalls about the in-person meetings of this group:

A group of radical guys gathered on a football field with their own *dawah* plans. I know their leader personally. He studied to be a sports teacher, he used to be a good guy, sports teacher, good football player ... he has been changed by a bad environment. I thought he

was sensible. At one point he came back to us, but then completely radicalised... jihadist, *takfiri*, those are people who denounce others. He is now in jail for sedition. One of the first to congratulate El Baghdadi on the caliphate. (4, NL)

Dutch Respondent 1 joined the group and participated in the activities of group, and shared his experiences:

I went to Mecca in October 2012. When I returned, a lot had changed in my circle of friends. Everyone behaved differently, I was invited to their homes, watched videos about jihad, conflict, Syria, it was new to me. Shortly afterwards the first left for Syria, they talked to me, you are obliged to help your brothers and sisters. I went along, in Feb 2013 after the birth of my son I decided to go there. [...] I was talked into it by [person x] ... you have to go that way too, you can't stay behind here, he made me believe that the war was almost over, sounded nice to me – I can build something there and then my wife can come. He said, 'The people will love you, you can build the land, you can choose whether you want to participate in battle or do other things, for example help in the camps, in a month Assad will be expelled. Then the caliphate...'. (...) It is a concept in Islam that you should not be afraid of, you should only be afraid of Allah, I tried to talk the fear out of me. (1, NL)

Dutch Respondent 14 narrated a more militant account of his encounter with the radical scene:

In the army you are not going to grab a weapon right away, you will be observed first, you get a screening, who are you? what do you need? you must have discipline, you must clean your closet, for example. That's exactly what happens here, you have to have discipline to start fighting. In the army, you can't go fight, you can't go get a weapon and go into the army. That will not offer much, we start with the basics, the faith. That is something your heart holds, to fight. To help people. That's going to keep you focused. [...] They started the discussion about how 'the majority of you don't see how people are oppressed in such countries'. They say, 'who is the oppressor? the country we live in. And why don't you understand that yet?' I think you will see later, when you see the news, you see F16s flying towards there, from ships, which actually have no business there. They say they are neutral, that they care about society, but that's not how you help a society, I don't think that's security. (14, NL)

When the interviewer asked whether there were people who thought the same way, Respondent 14 replies:

Yes, everyone. In the neighbourhood, first someone from my neighbourhood, then it expanded. We need to have a network so that we can come into contact with real people, because I will not follow something that I do not know. I don't believe what's happening on TV anyway. So, just to ask, what's going on? How do you see the situation? How do you actually see it? Are you going to ask, are you going to talk to people. At some point, brotherhood emerges. Love, warmth. Well, over time, over time you meet up together, go paintballing together, go together, you do activities together, or if you need money they give you. [...] That's brotherhood. Everybody will get a warm feeling from that, right? You get a very warm feeling from that. You actually belong. [...] I actually felt... when I see everyone laughing at school, clapping hands, I also laugh, but then I think to myself, you are all living a bubble of niceness, all the children live in happiness, in peace. But injustice is happening on the other side of the world. (14, NL)

### 3.4.11 Summary

How respondents report their (non-)radicalisation trajectories indicate a complex and dynamic interplay of factors that exist on multiple levels, including experiences during childhood, school failure and unemployment, honour culture, experience with violence, involvement in delinquency, crisis events during adolescence, identity development in a social context of anomie and rejection, state repression, narratives of collective annihilation, and networks facilitating the spreading of radical Islamist messaging and access to battle grounds. None of these factors can explain radicalisation by themselves, but all contribute to anxiety and dread to which radical Islamist messaging speaks.

In a number of countries studied, respondents report negative childhood experiences, although there were also reports of positive youth experiences. Negative childhood experiences centre on problematic relationships with parents, especially the father who is sometimes characterised by his authoritarian parenting style, perpetration of domestic violence or absence. In some countries, respondents recount their broken home history as a factor in their conversion to Islam. Falling behind at school and being unable to find employment were brought up across the fieldwork sites when radicalisation trajectories were discussed. Some respondents report on their hesitancy to join the radical cause out of fear of losing ties with their families. Various reports further emphasise experience with violence, not just at home, but also as a consequence of being excluded from school and work. Delinquency is a common theme among many of the respondents across Europe when discussing their radicalisation trajectory. The Russian report mentions that being roughed up as a young person is part of a 'toxic masculinity culture'.

The search for identity is a critical phenomenon in the understanding of radicalisation trajectories. This search is a fundamental element of adolescent development, but in the reports of the respondents, it is intensified as a result of (traumatic) life events, such as the death of a loved one, a serious accident, or a conviction. This search for identity is complicated by a number of factors. In some cultural contexts 'honour culture' implies that one's identity is inherently related to the social honour of the family and clan, with whom the individual may have conflictual relationships. Another complicating factor concerns the absence of a cohesive and supportive social environment. The respondents from many of the countries studied, report disorder and a lack of social fabric, although some find belonging in subcultural identification. Some respondents lamented the lack of religious authorities in their vicinity. Respondents also reported division and conflict between religious organisations in their neighbourhoods. Mosques that do provide authoritative religious guidance are mentioned as factors of non-radicalisation. A final complicating factor is that the identity formation process for Muslims across Europe takes place under continuous public attention and scrutiny, especially since 11 September 2001.

Respondents in virtually all countries indicate that in the absence of a supportive social and religious environment, the internet becomes the primary resource in one's search for identity. The outcome of the search for identity, the adoption of religious identity, in some cases as a strengthening of pre-existing faith and in others as a religious conversion, is largely based on information taken from the internet. Respondents often mention the social reception of the newly found religious identity as a key trigger in the radicalisation process. A sense of rejection by one's immediate social surrounding, but predominantly by an anti-Islamic and secular society, and a repressive state, sets in motion a further distancing and isolation and immersion in internet fora.

Digital Islam predominantly aims to address a global community and covers issues that concern Muslims from across the world. Humiliation and injustices committed towards Muslims are a common theme, contributing to vicarious trauma, and for some even a sense of collective annihilation. The footage of injustices and humiliation of Muslims around the world resonate with individual

experiences of rejection, conflict and repression, making 'being a Muslim' an effective interpretative frame for understanding one's own dejection, and the purification of Islam from corrupt influences and the defence of this pure Islam against its enemies worldwide, a path to redemption.

Radical Islamist networks facilitate radicalisation by providing internet content, by recruiting motivated individuals into the network, by organising advocacy initiatives, by providing meeting facilities and by facilitating access to conflict zones.

### 3.5 What do milieu actors want to change in society and how do they envisage achieving that change?

Given the prevalence of the mind-set described in the previous section, it is of relevance to consider respondents' perspectives on the future and their visions of change regarding radicalisation and extremism. Across the fieldwork sites we register general pessimism about society at large and global conflict. At the same time, many of the respondents focus on their own situation, and particularly through connecting with family, hope to make a constructive contribution.

#### 3.5.1 Perspectives on the future

When respondents were asked to share their vision of the future, the answers were quite varied in terms of valence and of the levels of responding.

On a religious level, Jeremy from France reflects 'you can't find God by looking for Him, because He finds you. He comes to us... no one can discover on their own. He's the one who imparts knowledge, who decides things. He gives what he wants to whom he wants. This is sustenance - *Al baqa*. We ourselves are nothing... My path - everything - led me to this. Everything comes from Him.' In this context Romain (FR) shares: 'it is destiny. It is Allah who decides our future'. In Russia, respondent Issa also provides a religious answer when asked about his ideal world:

[...] for me the ideal world will only be in heaven, on this earth the ideal world will not exist and it is impossible to imagine it, because here people have such qualities that the ideal world is impossible with such qualities [...] With those qualities that are inherent in people, the ideal world as such cannot be achieved. (Issa, RU)

In France, Antoine is asked about his wishes regarding change for himself and for the world. He answers: 'I would let God do things [...] Yes, there's a God [laughs]. It's not me, but it's fate [...] it's God who does things.' Antoine then answers a question regarding the influence of his faith on prison life: 'At first it was shocking. Plus I was far from my family and it was hard. But as a believer, I accepted it as a test from God.' French respondent Jeremy concurs: 'Islam is the search for the absolute. God has created a destiny for everyone; each person has to fulfil the task God has set for him or her.' Jeremy then continues:

The wise men know well the soul, the ego, the defects of man, and how the devil works. You see, if you're in prison and you say it's unjust, then go against God's will, because it's God who put you there, in the face of this test... God will give you that for the afterlife, not for this world... I told my wife, when you ask for a husband, for children, for the afterlife, not for here... you have to accept what God decides for us. (Jeremy, FR)

In Russia, respondents use religious terms to describe a gradual moral decline. The ethnographers observe that the respondents share the idea that the world experienced its best days at the times of the prophet Muhammad and has since then been in moral decline. Indicative of this moral decline is

foremost the intermingling of the sexes in all parts of life and the loosening of sexual morality. Western attempts to militarily intervene in the lives of others, primarily of Muslims, are considered another indication of moral decline. In Russia, there is limited belief among the respondents that they can make a contribution to the world beyond their immediate social environment. Instead, they focus their lives on family and spiritual improvement within Islam. Religion is defined by respondents as the most important value for themselves and their inner circle.

Although Norwegian respondents generally express a greater sense of agency, the pessimistic views regarding moral decline, and injustice, are shared with the Russian respondents. The Norwegian ethnographers observe that some respondents thought the world was on a downward trajectory, contributing to a deep feeling of insecurity. For Norwegian respondent Hassan, public acceptance of homosexuality constitutes a sign of moral decline that he worries about, particularly in the context of his children being exposed to public homosexual displays at school. Aisha (NO) fears for more attacks against Muslims and mentions a generally hostile climate towards Muslims in Norwegian society. Despite a widespread positive attitude towards Norway, a number of respondents were considering leaving Norway including some who were born and raised there.

This general negativity about society, and sense of threat to Muslims, is also found in France, where several respondents discuss the prospect of war. Respondent Adrian notes: 'It's going to be very complicated, very hard ... I watch the news a little bit, but it looks complicated with Salvini ... the world that is going to emerge here, it's scary ... we're going to expect a civil war everywhere'. Anissa concurs 'I'm afraid there's going to be a war in France. With everything that's going on - the yellow vests, all that, people who don't agree, those who are demonstrating... I'm afraid we'll get to a point where they're actually waging war.' (Anissa, FR)

Blaise's views are particularly pessimistic: 'I see a very bad future for Muslims. I think they are going to suffer what the Jews have suffered in the past.' (Blaise, FR)

These pessimistic views are of importance in light of the future of Islamist radicalism, at least in the views of respondent Ihsan from Turkey who draws a direct connection between the threats faced by Muslims and support for Islamism:

I think that Islamism has a future as long as the Middle East wars and the Western intervention continue. I don't think Islamists have a future if these conflicts end [...] We are people who were born in the eighties and nineties, and today I come together with many young people in many places in Istanbul, in Taksim, nobody favours a marginalising Islamist discourse. Even the children of Islamist families are tired of religion, as some sociologists say. We are truly tired of religion. For example, I feel uncomfortable when I hear Islamist opinions to determine the world order [...] I do not see any future for an Islamist. I do not see any kind of future for orthodox ideas. These thoughts need only one thing: war. In wherever the West bombs, there will be ISIL and radical Islamism. It will be a reaction, a reflex, an oppressed voice. Whenever things become normal, the Islamist will have nothing to tell the world, as he loses his own context and space. Why are we radical Islamists? Because they showed us that the Palestinians were killed in front of us every day; they showed us that people in Afghanistan and Chechnya were killed. We were Islamists because they showed us those things. When you remove these acts, there is no need for Islamism. (Ihsan, TUR)

Several respondents expressed their desire to live in purity. In Russia, respondent Said shares:



Well, the ideal world, I think that all people, well, all countries where people are according to their ideological aspects. That is, that all communists are in one country, all democrats are in another, Muslims are all - according to Sharia - in another. Christians there in their country, Jews in their own according to the Talmud. If everyone had their own country and lived in it, I think it would be perfect. (Said, RU)

In the Netherlands, when Respondent 2 is asked about his rejection of Dutch democracy and gender relations and a desired Islamic alternative, he replies:

There is an ideal but it is hard to achieve... To me the ideal would be similar to the time of the prophet, how people acted and ruled... It is complicated, I am not focused on that right now. In this society it is about accepting each other and being free to believe whatever you want to believe in. That is important for Muslims and non-Muslims. [...] Try and make your own circle and surroundings a better place. That is what I want. On a global scale, things are happening that are not right. A lot of things happen behind the scenes, I do not want get involved. I am mostly focused on things that I can control. (2, NL)

Indeed, above and beyond political aspirations, the respondents across the fieldwork sites express a desire to have their lives in order and be in a good relationship with their direct social environment. When French respondent Antoine is asked about his future, he responds: 'I hope for a good job, a nice house, quiet, with my kids. [...] I know that what keeps me going and makes me resist and behave myself is my children. I'll do it for my children.' French respondent Kylian said of his future:

I hope, appeased. I'm really going to stop everything... not stop everything, I'm really going to take my life in hand and take care of my mother, my little brother. I'm actually going to try to start my life. In fact, to break this kind of life that I had there for years, on a plane a little, I was getting high a lot. I want to break all that. (Kylian, FR)

Jeremy (FR) shares his ideas for the future: 'I will be on the farm with my wife and daughters. We will produce organic vegetables and meat, that is to say natural meat. And we will welcome people. I want to call my farm "Find yourself".'

But making a contribution is not always easy. When French respondent Ousmane is asked what he would want for himself and for society in general if he were to have a magic wand, he replies:

Frankly, a magic wand... the problem is that you've come to a period of my life where I'm broken, in fact. That is to say that I have only one desire and that is to think only of myself. Even then, if you give me a magic wand right now, I'm going to create something that will only benefit me and my family, and not the rest of humanity. Because I am ... there is a certain fear that has clung to me there and that fear is pushing me to become selfish, to become ... to think only of myself and me. Me, my wife, my children, my family, whatever. [...] That's preserving, protecting. (Ousmane, FR)

In Germany, respondents' answers to questions about their future share similarities with the French respondents' focus on family and on the responsibilities of being a parent. At the same time, the German ethnographer notes that respondents differ quite substantially in their views of the future. It is noted that some respondents were rather optimistic, some have mixed feelings about the future but none was completely pessimistic. The ambitions of the respondents were summarised by the ethnographer in a field diary:

Daniel wants to get by in life and be successful to show what he has achieved to teachers who subjected him to discrimination; Hamid wants to successfully complete school;

Hozan wants to be self-employed one day because he knows that, in his job, prospects are limited; Jamil wants to successfully complete school to make his parents and himself proud, he wants to achieve everything that he wanted to achieve before he dies; Safiya imagines her future self as independent, successful and on holiday; Saif wants to complete his studies; Salih wants to successfully complete his school to show that 'Kanacks [a German-speaker with roots in the Middle East] can be clever too'; Samira wants to be a professional translator; and Selek wants to earn a lot of money and be self-employed. (Field diary, DE)

In Germany, we find many of the respondents express satisfaction with their lives and their place of living. In contrast to the German research participants, respondents from Russia and Norway appear to exhibit doubt about whether to remain in their current location or return to their family's region of origin. In Russia it is observed that the topics for respondents' reflection about their futures are common for all, i.e. career, family and money. However, some of the respondents were considering quite specific migration plans, including moving to the Northern Caucasus, rooting oneself and building a future in one's current city of living, but also leaving Russia, with some specifically referring to moving to a Muslim country.

In Norway, ideas about moving out of the country appear quite frequently, when considering the summary of future prospects gathered by the Norwegian ethnographers. Hassan hopes to continue to live in Norway, but without being held responsible for what other people do. Einar (whose pseudonym after conversion is Abdullah) would like to move to Somalia where he can do humanitarian work, as he feels criminalised and not treated as what he sees as a normal person in Norway. Abdi would like to live in Norway in the future, as he sees it as 'a great country' that he loves, but he says he will move if it becomes too difficult for himself and his family to live according to his religion. Frank hopes to be living here for the rest of his life, but also feels it as problematic to continually be judged for being a Muslim. Osman is worried for the future and that his children will be struggling so much that it affects their mental health, because of the increasing negative attention: 'You never know how bad conditions can get', he says. Gulam just wants to have 'a normal life, just be doing well. I'm not that demanding'. Anwar wants to be living here, and thinks 'he has something to offer'. Ali thinks it will be more difficult in the future to live in Norway as a Muslim, but feels it is difficult to take the step and move out, like several people he knows have done. Zakir is also considering moving away because of the hostile atmosphere. Alam speaks about so many people who want to leave Norway, and he knows several who have already moved to Pakistan. He is disappointed, as he and his friend of the same age at first believed that he was seen as equal, but found out that 'we are not'. Aziz wants to leave Norway after encountering so much suspicion when he became practising. He fears what he terms 'a lynch mob' atmosphere at some point in the future. Imran wants to get away and seek a good life in another country with his own farm and his own way of living. He feels excluded, powerless and alone. Aisha thinks there will be a new world war 'where everybody fights everybody based on religion'. She longs to be accepted the way she is.

### 3.5.2 Visions of constructive change

When French respondent Teodoro is asked to name three things he wants for himself and for society, he replies 'Freedom, equality, fraternity.' As the interviewer pushes Teodoro to put a meaning behind the words, Teodoro responds:

Precisely, these are gaps that I would like to fill. Simply. It would be good if we could fill them, instead of thinking about filling only the bank accounts. That's what we need to fill in. In equality, we have to create much more equality. The same with freedom. In relation

to freedom, let people think, do as they want and accept. And brotherhood. That's it, and we will be... That's what's missing in the end. We put up the flag, we ask people to sing the Marseillaise, but that's not enough. You have to explain it to them, you have to explain the story. What the history of France is. They have to be able to become part of this history. That's what's important. (Teodoro, FR)

To the extent that respondents provided their views on ways to bring about constructive change, most appear to agree with Teodoro that establishing connections with something larger constitutes a key element, whether it be connections with family, the nation, or religion. These connections help to address a sense of loss of personal sameness and historical continuity that is identified by the Dutch ethnographers, using Erik Erikson's developmental psychology, to characterise the mental state of the majority of respondents.

The French ethnographer underscores the importance of narratives to address this lack of historical and personal continuity, as he cites Yuval-Davis (2006: 202): 'identities are narratives, stories that people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)... These identities may be connected to the past, to an origin myth; they may aim to explain the present, and most importantly, they serve to imagine future life paths.' The ethnographer posits that 'storytelling thus has a liberating function, especially for the young people who—in Teodoro's words—are 'uprooted', because they have a hard time articulating coherent narratives about themselves (and a particular identity) which would allow them to plan for the future and conflictualise a sense of injustice' (Country-level report, FR: 28).

According to the French ethnographer, the family has a central role in the narratives of the respondents, as he notes 'the creation of a personal narrative, finding the words to describe a wounded identity, occurs when family history is put into words. These family histories occupy a central place in the trajectories of the young people who are constantly trying to bring coherence to their lives in order to rebuild themselves: knowing where one comes from makes it possible to think about where one is going. This work of bringing order to one's biography operates in particular through family memory and through the (re)discovery of familial sentiments and bonds' (Country-level report, FR: 43). French respondent Teodoro is observed to 'envision an escape from delinquency through rebuilding a family history, in which references to his father and grandfather enable him to explain his journey and to articulate the ethics he is building' (Country-level report, FR: 44). Griezmann is described as building his identity in the image of his grandfather, who, as a role model, helps Griezmann respond to the feeling of injustice and the pain of double absence:

Personally, I always loved my grandfather, my father's father. He was French... My grandfather had an enormous heart. And I always look up to him and think, 'they're not all the same'. At one point I told myself I didn't want to see them anymore - French people, whites and everything - but then I thought to myself, 'no, they're not all the same'. (Griezmann, FR)

Family, and children in particular are described as central to a desired future. Anissa (FR) is observed to 'dream of leaving her ghetto to ensure a better future for her three children'. Saïd (FR) is noted to consider 'his three sons as another tool to become stable and open towards society, since he wants to guarantee them a good education and success in French society.' Antoine is also quoted, emphasising the crucial role of family in dealing with adversity: 'It's because if we have the desire to live, it's always for something. I know that it's my family, my children... I live for them.' (Antoine, FR).

Besides family, we also found other attempts to connect to others and how this connection brought about a profound personal transformation. In the Netherlands, Respondent 8 recalled how he connected to the mayor of Amsterdam, Eberhard van der Laan:

Dear Mayor, ... then...I told a bit of my story.... As an adolescent I started to look into the Islam. And because of certain circumstances, which I also told you a little about, I ended up on the wrong path. I really wanted to help with this touchy issue so to speak. But what can I do and what are the possibilities? The mayor wrote me a letter back. What a beautiful letter, 'we are happy to hear that you are so to say on the other side again. We are willing to accept you again'. Because I am of course the norm. He says, 'I would like to invite you for a conversation'. (8, NL)

He then received a response and was invited: 'So I have also seen the mayor. And I think the mayor [...] is really a lovely, a wonderful person. Eberhard van de Laan, I have never met such a person like him. Really very lovely. A person with a really beautiful heart.' (8, NL)

The importance of connecting is also very much underscored by Dutch Respondent 4, who wants:

More dialogue! The goal is to find the truth. Instead of talking about each other and pointing fingers... Dialogue to come closer together and have more understanding... That is better than being prejudiced against each other; instead of approaching each other, join hands to achieve joint goals, stand up for what is right, tackling discrimination, violence, crime, that is in the interest of everyone, we have a lot in common, we should not focus on our differences too much. (4, NL)

For Dutch Respondent 7, participating in the DARE research project represents a way to connect and to establish what she hopes will be constructive change:

I kind of hope that these kind of studies show the actual true Muslims who live in the Netherlands. And that it will be useful, when talking about radicalisation. That it also will be truly useful organisationally, when they read these kinds of studies. How they actually should approach people, how they should treat Muslims as individuals and look at the Muslim in front of them, how that person is. And how he does his job. I think that is the important thing. When you look at a true Muslim, he is very scared. Not scared, but afraid of himself, in the sense of: when he works, he want to do a good job, because he gets paid for it. He views that as something very serious. He works long hours, because he really does not want to earn money that is forbidden money to us, when you say you work but actually you don't. Actually it is something very beautiful. He gives it the full 100%, because it is his cost. That is actually what a real Muslim is. He would not lie and cheat to make his money. (7, NL)

## 4. Conclusions

From late 2017 until early 2020, ethnographers of the consortium DARE (Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality) conducted field research and interviewed just under 200 respondents who had been exposed to, and some who have engaged with, radical Islamist messaging. We have defined Islamist radicalisation as the process whereby an individual, small group, or larger collective increasingly moves towards an Islamist position, with a willingness to adopt an extreme stance vis-à-vis what are considered to be political and ideological adversaries. To study this process as it has unfolded across Europe over the past decades, the DARE consortium has contributed to the introduction and further

development of a milieu perspective on radicalisation. Central to this milieu approach is the idea that insight into Islamist radicalisation can be advanced by studying the social environment where radical messages are encountered, from the perspective of the people within this social environment who have been exposed to radical messages.

In 10 countries across Europe, we studied young people in these social environments. In Greece, we studied unofficial prayer houses where Muslims, often with an immigrant background come together. In France, we studied young Muslim men in prison, a third of whom had been convicted for terrorism related offences. In Turkey, we studied civil society organisations that increasingly have carried an Islamist overtone and have played a role in engendering support for Islamist parties in the civil war in Syria. In many of the Northern European countries, the focus has been on neighbourhoods that are often associated with Islamist activism, a significant presence of migrants from Muslim majority countries, social problems including unemployment, poverty, and crime, and the burden of stigma. In Russia, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, and Belgium, the ethnographic research focused on the lives of young people coming from these areas where they had also encountered Islamist radical messages. The Tunisian field research also focused on neighbourhoods with similar characteristics, and a significant Islamist presence. The Norwegian field research focused on young people in the vicinity of two virtual Islamist networks that eventually become real world advocacy groups.

## 4.1 Overview of Findings

The ethnographic research has yielded a wealth of information about a great variety of topics. For the purposes of the present report, the synthesis of research findings, we confined ourselves to five questions that we deemed of greatest pertinence to the overall aims of DARE to contribute to the elucidation of the nature of radicalisation as it is unfolding across Europe and neighbouring countries: How do milieu actors understand ‘radicalism’, ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’? How and where are radical(ising) messages encountered in the milieus studied? How do milieu actors understand (in)equality and its role in radicalisation? How do milieu actors recount their trajectories towards and away from extremism? What do milieu actors want to change in society and how do they envisage achieving that change?

### *What are respondents’ views on ‘radicalism’, ‘extremism’, and ‘terrorism’?*

Regarding respondents’ own understanding of the key terms of ‘radicalism’, ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’, we should note first that a number of respondents expressed difficulty or hesitancy. If they did provide an answer, the answer often pertained to the relational nature of the phenomena. The application of the label ‘radicalism’, and to a lesser extent ‘extremism’ and ‘terrorism’, is considered to signal a relation between the subject who applies the labels and the behaviour, person or group, to which it is applied. We therefore need to consider the subject who applies the label as much the object to which the label is applied.

Media and particular politicians were considered by respondents to intentionally overstate the prevalence of Islamist radicalisation to portray an image of Muslims as a threat to European nations. A significant number of respondents across the areas of fieldwork conveyed that the labels of ‘radical’ and ‘extremist’ are intentionally construed by the state and anti-Islamic factions for the advancement of their own political interest and out of animosity towards Muslims. Media is often brought up for its role in perpetuating the image of Muslims as prone to violence and undermining society. The scepticism towards the labels ‘radical’ and ‘extremist’ in the context of Islamism is related in part to a critical attitude also towards the antonym of ‘moderate Islam.’ Some respondents indicate that Islam

is a unity, and the distinction between ‘moderate Islam’ and ‘radical Islam’ must therefore have been construed by outsiders of Islam.

Across all fieldwork sites, we found that ‘extremism’ carries a negative connotation. Radicalism is also predominantly considered negatively, but some respondents view it in a positive light, as reflecting genuine commitment, discipline, and passion, and potentially contributing to a fundamental, constructive change. When radicalism is viewed negatively, it is used interchangeably with extremism. In their negative interpretations, ‘radicalism’ and ‘extremism’ denote a deviation from personal, social, theological and moral norms. Consistent with the relational view on radicalism, it is often invoked as a label to distance oneself from the excessive. Few respondents consider themselves radical, and none think of themselves as extremist.

The label ‘radical’ is used in psychological terms to indicate that one is deviating from societal expectations, but also sometimes to denote a process of losing self-control, that one is losing one’s bearings, and crossing a line. The label ‘radical’ is used in relation to others in society to denote someone who is misguided, as someone who is a victim of society or of recruiters. The label ‘radical’ is used in relation to Islam to disqualify and distance oneself from particular groups (most notably Islamic State) and religious traditions. Some respondents emphasise that Islam is a religion of balance and moderation (*wasatiyya*). Radicalism is therefore a deviation from the path of Islam. In this view, abandoning Islam for a Western lifestyle is also viewed as radical.

The label ‘radical’ but primarily the label ‘extremism’ are used in relation to violence. In some cases, the use of violence is considered to be justifiable. The labels ‘radical’ and ‘extremist’ are assigned to cases where violence is indiscriminate and illegitimate. Violence is sometimes justified, such as in self-defence.

#### *How and where are radical(ising) messages encountered in the milieus studied?*

We have considered here three fundamentally different categories of messages: 1) anti-Muslim discriminatory messages that contribute to feelings of isolation, anomia and humiliation and that obstruct access to civic participation; 2) messaging that contributes to the bolstering of subcultural identity; and 3) messaging that promotes radicalisation.

In most of the non-Muslim majority countries that were studied, a significant number of respondents reported experiences with anti-Muslim messaging in their social life, in public spaces, at school, and at work, and in media and politics. Expressions of this type of messaging vary from being spat at on public transport, to being excluded from friendship, to being unable to find an internship or a job, to being described as radical by media, to being subject to surveillance by security services. This type of messaging discourages participation in public life and contributes to a sense of isolation and ‘uprootedness’ and, among some of the respondents, a grievance.

Concerning messaging that contributes to the formation of subcultural identity, we find that the ‘neighbourhood’ provided a sense of belonging and brotherhood, to cope with adversity, and in doing so, it provides a position of stability and ‘rooting’ from which radicalising messages can be more critically conceived. In a number of countries it was observed that a high degree of segregation between ‘Muslim areas’ and non-Muslim areas promotes the initiation of businesses, internet cafés, and reading groups, within the ‘Muslim areas,’ with these initiatives being of distinct Islamic (but not necessarily Islamist) signature. The discourse in these areas contributes to the centrality of Islam in identity formation.

Mosques are reported to have an active role in providing a religious environment and education that fosters religious identity. It also noted that mosques bolster resilience against radical messages by



offering a grounded perspective on Islamic practice and belief. This observation qualifies the suggestion by security services and media that (particular) mosques contribute to the spread of radical messaging.

Respondents indicated that a number of other social groups contribute to the formation of social identity. Sports clubs, as observed in Russia, Turkey and the UK, often focused on martial arts, bring together likeminded young Muslims. Endorsement of religious institutions and civil society organisations by (sports) celebrities guide youngsters to particular initiatives.

Regarding messaging that promotes radicalisation, respondents described their experiences with messages promoting radicalisation from preachers but increasingly and predominantly from the internet and social media. Online communication is the dominant source of radical messaging. Internet/social media assisted self-radicalisation is observed as a critical phenomenon in all milieus studied. Radical preachers were reported to facilitate access to radical content, and radical networks. Sometimes, radical preachers were rejected because of their personal characteristics.

Respondents mostly searched on the internet for religious content but found radical Islamist messages. The Internet provided information that often could not be obtained at home or at mosques. Relative to other creeds, Salafism dominates online presence, with professional sites. Internet and social media provide the opportunity for isolated individuals to search for religious content, to have direct communication with recruiters for the Islamist cause, and to make small contributions to the cause (e.g. sharing content). The internet is described by some respondents as a point of access to networks of likeminded others, enabling the formation of a 'new family'. The internet also mobilises advocacy initiatives for humanitarian causes, thus facilitating in-person connections between followers of the internet sites and opening the possibility for humanitarian concern to lead to contact with radical networks.

The radical message focuses very much on the wrongdoings against Muslims around the world, and the need for a pure Islam, and in its most militant Jihadist form, on the need to take up arms to defend the Muslim community.

#### *How do milieu actors understand (in)equality and its role in radicalisation?*

Inequalities figure prominently in radical Islamist narratives. But that does not imply that all inequalities experienced by Muslims lead to radicalisation. Perceived inequality has multiple dimensions. Inequality also involves multiple 'self' and 'other' categorisations. The inequalities are not only perceived to be between Muslims and non-Muslims, but also between generations, ethnicities, and neighbourhood origins.

Few of the respondents directly report relative financial deprivation, although a number of respondents lament their inability to find stable employment. Some attribute this inability to their religion, but others point to their ethnic background or neighbourhood origins or, in Russia, to corruption.

We propose relational inequality to represent a critical factor in the lives of our respondents. The experience of relational inequality is characterised by a sense of being different (horizontal inequality), and of being subjected (vertical inequality) to an authority perceived as inadequate, unworthy or illegitimate. Relational inequality was experienced in relationships with parents, with teachers and supervisors, with the police and with the state. Contentious relationships with parents, fathers in particular, were very common across the fieldwork sites. A number of respondents comment on experiences of discrimination as indicative of the unequal position of Muslims, migrants and those from deprived neighbourhoods. Some respondents noted being more negatively evaluated at school

by teachers on the basis of their ethnicity or faith. Many respondents report particularly problematic relationships with state authorities. Police and security services are considered to indiscriminately target particular ethnicities, people from particular neighbourhoods, and under the banner of 'counterterrorism' and 'preventing violent extremism,' Muslims. This 'securitisation' of Muslims is felt across Europe, although particularly strongly among respondents from the study in Russia. Respondents across the Muslim minority countries being studied report being unfairly treated by the police and not protected. Respondents also lack trust in the legal system. Some respondents express their belief in inequalities on a global scale, with global elites dominating and humiliating the Muslim world.

None of the different types of injustices are by themselves a direct cause of radicalisation. However, in conjunction, the continued confrontations with inequalities and injustice in relationships at many different levels may lead to the accumulation of frustration and the 'angst' that one is controlled by malevolent authorities. Exposure to the radical Islamist narrative may bring about a 'cathartic', purifying experience of profound insight in one's own contentious relations in terms of a global struggle between the true Islam and the unbelievers and the prospect of becoming a meaningful contributor in this struggle.

#### *How do milieu actors recount their trajectories towards and away from extremism?*

How respondents report their (non-)radicalisation trajectories suggests a complex and dynamic interplay of factors that exist on multiple levels, including experiences during childhood, school failure and unemployment, honour culture, experience with violence, involvement in delinquency, crisis events during adolescence, identity development in a social context of anomie and rejection, state repression, narratives of collective annihilation, and networks facilitating the spreading of radical Islamist messaging and access to battle grounds. None of these factors can explain radicalisation by themselves, but all contribute to anxiety and dread to which radical Islamist messaging speaks.

In a number of countries studied, respondents report on negative childhood experiences, although there were also reports of positive youth experiences. Negative childhood experiences centre on problematic relationships with parents, especially the father who is sometimes characterised by authoritarian parenting style, perpetration of domestic violence or absence. In some countries, respondents report on their broken home history as factor in their conversion to Islam. Falling behind at school and being unable to find employment were brought up across the fieldwork sites when radicalisation trajectories were discussed. Some respondents report on their hesitancy to join the radical cause out of fear of losing ties with their families. Various reports further emphasise experience with violence, not just at home, but also as a consequence of being excluded from school and work. Delinquency is a common theme among many of the respondents across Europe when discussing their radicalisation trajectory. The Russian report mentions that being roughed up as a young person is part of a 'toxic masculinity culture.'

The search for identity is a critical phenomenon in the understanding of radicalisation trajectories. This search is a fundamental element of adolescent development, but as reported by respondents, it is intensified as a result of (traumatic) life events, such as the death of a loved one, a serious accident, or a conviction. This search for identity is complicated by a number of factors. In some cultural contexts 'honour culture' implies that one's identity is inherently related to the social honour of the family and clan, with whom the individual may have conflictual relationships. Another complicating factor concerns the absence of a cohesive and supportive social environment. The respondents from many of the countries studied, report disorder and a lack of social fabric, although some find belonging in subcultural identification. Some respondents lamented the lack of religious authorities in their vicinity. Respondents also reported division and tensions between religious organisations in their

neighbourhoods. Mosques that do provide authoritative religious guidance are mentioned as factors of non-radicalisation. A final complicating factor is that the identity formation process for Muslims across Europe takes place under continuous public attention and scrutiny, especially since 11 September 2001.

Respondents in virtually all countries indicate that in the absence of a supportive social and religious environment, the internet becomes the primary resource in one's search for identity. The outcome of the search for identity, the adoption of religious identity, in some cases as a strengthening of pre-existing faith and in others as a religious conversion, is largely based on information taken from the internet. Respondents often mention the social reception of the newly found religious identity as a key trigger in the radicalisation process. A sense of rejection by one's immediate social surrounding, but predominantly by an anti-Islamic and secular society, and a repressive state, sets in motion a further distancing and isolation and immersion in Internet fora.

Digital Islam predominantly aims to address a global community and covers issues that concern Muslims from across the world. Humiliation and injustices committed towards Muslims are a common theme, contributing to vicarious trauma, a sense of collective annihilation. The footage of injustices and humiliation of Muslims around the world resonate with individual experiences of rejection, conflict, and repression. This renders 'being a Muslim' an effective interpretative frame for understanding one's own dejection while the purification of Islam from corrupt influences and the defence of this pure Islam against its enemies worldwide appears as a path to redemption.

Radical Islamist networks facilitate radicalisation by providing internet content, by recruiting motivated individuals into the network, by organising advocacy initiatives, by providing meeting facilities and by facilitating access to conflict zones.

#### *What do milieu actors want to change in society and how do they envisage achieving that change?*

Across the fieldwork sites, respondents were concerned about their future and what in their view are deteriorating relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in Europe. Some foresee a civil war, or a forced exodus or genocide of Muslims in Europe. These dark perceptions may appear extreme, but very few respondents expressed an alternative, positive global outlook. Instead of focussing on world events or even national events, most of the respondents in most of the field work sites told us that their future happiness would, to a considerable extent, depend on their ability to establish themselves and to lead a stable life, surrounded by family, loved ones and offspring. In this sense, the respondents appeared to primarily seek to be rooted, to be connected and to make a meaningful contribution.

## 4.2 The contribution of the milieu approach to the field of radicalisation research

In many instances, the observations could be related to the ever-expanding literature on (Islamist) radicalisation. Many of the tendencies we have noted, have been identified by others before us. It is therefore of importance to consider the extent to which the present research makes a contribution to our understanding of radicalisation above and beyond what is already known.

The nature of the DARE consortium provides a basis for innovation, but also for corroboration of existing findings in a variety of contexts. Indeed, there are very few research efforts on Islamist radicalisation of the scale of the DARE project, with 10 different countries and a number of different types of milieus involved. Moreover, there are very few research efforts to have attempted extensive ethnographic investment in an in-depth understanding and rapport with actors (young people) who have been directly exposed to radical (Islamist) messaging.

But beyond the size of the consortium and the diversity of countries and people studied, and the depth in which respondents participated in the research, there are also potential theoretical contributions stemming from the ‘milieu’ approach advocated by the consortium. The focus on the social environment where radical messages are encountered, and on the people within this social environment who have been exposed to radical messages, yield insights into the nature of the radicalisation process that cut across the macro, meso and micro levels, levels on which the phenomenon of (Islamist) radicalisation is typically dissected. While each of the country-level reports have their own focus of investigation and describe the specificities of each country, the findings from the synthesis suggests that despite considerable geographic, societal, and institutional differences, there are substantial communalities across cases that can be synthesised to substantiate (at least) three interrelated claims regarding Islamist radicalisation.

#### 4.2.1 Islamist radicalisation as an intrinsically relational phenomenon

From our observations, we infer that relationships, more so than individual characteristics or profiles, trigger factors, groups, communities, or ideology, should be the central focus for any effective analysis of (Islamist) radicalisation. We found the importance of the role of relationships in the respondents’ consideration of the phenomenon of radicalisation (see Section 3.1). We also found relationships to be central in the complex dynamics of anti-Muslim messaging and Islamist messaging (see Section 3.2). We also introduced the notion of relational inequality introduced to understand the link between inequality and radicalisation (see Section 3.3), which also conveys the centrality of relationships. The recurring theme of conflictual relationships (with parents, teachers, employers, police and other state representatives) as a key element in the build-up towards radicalisation further highlights the relational nature of radicalisation (see Section 3.4). We also observed that respondents’ visions of a better future were strongly connected to a strengthening of relationships with beloved close others (see Section 3.5), suggesting that non-radicalisation is also a relational phenomenon.

In their consideration of radicalisation ‘*Friction*’, McCauley and Moskalenko (2011: 223) make a similar argument as they conclude that ‘focusing on them is not enough, focusing on us is not enough. Focusing on the dynamics of conflict over time is essential’. The relational view is also strongly advocated by della Porta (2018) who argues that ‘radicalization stems from complex and contingent sets of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutional actors [...] It takes place during encounters between social movements and authorities, in a series of reciprocal adjustments.’ (della Porta, 2018: 463). In a comprehensive theoretical treatment of the literature, Malthaner (2017:393-394) similarly argues that one of the challenges for the conceptualisation of radicalisation will be ‘to move beyond a static understanding of social environments of radicalization and towards analyzing (and conceptualizing more precisely) the co-evolution of individual pathways and social (i.e. Salafist) movements in interaction with their broader societal and political environment, and to examine the formation and transformation of radical cliques and networks as specific environments of radical micro-mobilization’.

Our findings underscore the importance of the relational view on radicalisation, but go beyond the current view and its intellectual roots in social movement theory to suggest that the constitutive relational dynamic of radicalisation implicates a great variety of levels outside of socio-political context and social movements, and that this dynamic may be multidimensional, in the sense that dynamics of radicalisation involve more than anti-Islamists versus Islamists, or Islamist versus state, Islam versus the West, or Muslims versus non-Muslims, but also involves conflicts at home, on the street, at school, at work, with authorities, etc, dynamics which may not be easily be reduced to a single dimension, as we have, for instance, highlighted when discussing the ‘decapitated patriarchal family’, and ‘toxic masculinity culture’.

For the individual, each of the conflictual relationships may contribute to the formation of a conflict mindset through which a broader range of social relationships are perceived and the world is understood, focusing attention on possible outside threats, survival and struggle, and hence contributing to the transference of conflict frames to new social encounters. Islamist narratives match well with such conflict frames held by the individual. When the world is perceived through a conflict frame, there may be an openness to the Islamists' themes of a global divide between Muslims and non-Muslims and of a Muslim world under threat and in need of (armed) defence. The individual's conflict mindset and the Islamist narrative afford each other and connect the individual's personal situation and conflictual relationships with the situation of Muslims and conflictual relationships around the world. The struggle with one's personal situation and of one's community and neighbourhood comes to be perceived as the same as the struggle of Muslims in places such as Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan. One's own misery becomes the misery of the global community, and the solution to one's own problems is the same as the solution to the problems of the global community: to fight against wrongs, to wage Jihad.

It is a significant finding that in many cases of non-radicalisation, and in descriptions of the perspectives on a constructive future, the frame of conflict is replaced by a focus on belonging, on being connected, to family and to one's community and society. Indeed, connection with one's self, one's family, and one's community emerged as a core aspiration for many of the respondents. Accordingly, non-radicalisation, as much as radicalisation, turns out to be about relationships, with the conflict frame of understanding these relationships being replaced by a connecting, cooperative frame. We should recognise here that the transition from a frame of conflict to a frame of collaboration is not a matter of simply changing mind-set. There continues to be vivid evidence to fit the conflict frame. Many of the topics we encountered in the conversations with respondents, including domestic violence and turmoil, crime, racism, Islamophobia, discrimination, right-wing extremism, stigmatisation, unfair treatment by state authorities including the police, excessive surveillance, the fate of the Palestinians, and the ever increasing number of casualties as a result of Western foreign politics, are very much realities rather than merely a frame of mind, realities which hamper faith in cooperation and connection.

#### 4.2.2 Considering position (of inequality)

Cooperation and connection, as well as conflict, imply relationships and thereby imply a position from which an individual relates to someone else. By adopting a milieu perspective and considering radicalisation in relation to inequality, we have been able to consider in greater detail the spatial dynamics and the importance of position involved in radicalisation. By space, we mean physical space, such as a street, but primarily, social space, covering a far wider area where people meet and interact on the basis of a shared background, common destiny, interest, shared emotions and grievances. Increasingly, the digital world is becoming an integral part of this social space.

The stories of the respondents and their answers to the interview questions underscore the importance of considering the process of positioning in social space as a key element for a genuine understanding of radicalisation. The importance of positioning can be inferred from the idea that radicalisation is about being 'uprooted', and that social position allows one to allocate the labels of 'radical' and 'extreme' to others or that makes one vulnerable to be described as 'radical' or 'extreme.' (Section 3.1). Positioning is also relevant in considering the position from where one encounters discriminatory messages and calls to fight the status quo (Section 3.2). Furthermore, without focussing on position, it is impossible to understand relational inequality and the respondents' stories of marginalisation (See Section 3.3). The stories of the respondents also reveal position as a crucial factor for understanding radicalisation processes. Position relates here to the insecurity of life as a migrant

and growing up in-between cultures rather than within a culture, to the age related interest to define one's place in the world in the form of a personal and social identity, and to the social tensions inside and outside of one's family this interest bring about (See Section 3.4).

Social psychology informs us that dignity, self-respect, or what is in the literature typically referred to as 'self-esteem' represents a fundamental human need. According to sociometer theory (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), self-esteem is to be considered an indicator of one's social position in a group. Terror management theory (Greenberg et al., 1986; Pyszczynski et al., 2002) considers self-esteem as the sense of being a valued contributor to a meaningful world, both elements that enable an individual to ward off existential anxiety. According to this theory, self-esteem consists of faith in particular culturally prescribed standards of value and the sense one is living up to these standards. Significance quest theory (Kruglanski et al., 2017; Kruglanski et al., 2019) places the notion of self-esteem striving (significance quest) at the heart of the psychological radicalisation process, as it argues that this process 'requires the presence of three ingredients: (1) arousal of the goal of significance, that is, activation of the significance quest, (2) identification of terrorism/violence as the appropriate means to significance, (3) commitment shift to the goal of significance and away from other motivational concerns resulting in that goal's dominance and the relative devaluation of alternative goals.' (Kruglanski et al., 2014: 74)

Indeed, we also found across fieldwork sites that the desire for identity, respect and self-esteem was a significant motivator for many of our respondents. But when this desire is considered in the context of the lived social space of the respondents, the impression is not so much that violence is considered an appropriate means to significance. Instead, as we have seen with many of the respondents who engaged in radical behaviour, the key factor was that their search for identity, recognition, and respect, was taking place in the social context of relational inequality, impeding their significance quest as a result of their weaker *position* in their social space (emanating from sociological factors such as migration background, class, lower education level, but also personal factors such as young age, and possibly psychological fragility). The response to this situation of relational inequality was to shift to alternative standards of value that allowed them to become a meaningful contributor and/or the engage in conflict with the stronger party undermining their striving for significance.

#### 4.2.3 The importance of dialogue about radicalisation and equality

It is ironic that these findings and ideas appear to underscore the ineffectiveness of many of the approaches that have been undertaken to address radicalisation. Respondents across the different fieldwork sites lament that a number of institutions, including political parties, security agencies, and media, have played a role in stirring up the perception that, to borrow the image of Kundnani (2014), we should be alarmed because 'the Muslims are coming', and this constitutes an existential threat to Western society. Regardless of their actual engagement in Islamist radicalism, a significant group of young people have been approached under the label of 'preventing and countering violent extremism.' One of the critical goals of counter-radicalisation has been to develop effective counternarratives. But in so doing, both in adapting labels such as preventing violent extremism and formulating counternarratives, and particularly the crucial word of 'counter', we find an inherently competitive conflict frame.

The underlying assumption of these approaches is that the excesses of the terrorist attacks are to be attributed to 'them'. But as noted throughout this report, and in line with the quote by McCauley and Moskolenko (2011), the appropriate focus for addressing the excesses lies much more in the dynamics of conflictual relationships. The image of '9/11' and terrorist attacks across Europe may elicit a strong tendency to fight back, to counteract. But as we know from Deutsch's influential model of conflict



resolution (Deutsch, 1973), in the end, cooperative rather competitive frames offer the best prospects for constructive solutions. Islamist radicalisation is not a zero-sum game, and this report has identified that framing it as such will significantly contribute to further rift.

We hope to have shown that dialogue about radicalisation and equality could represent a viable first step towards an alternative.

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## 6. Appendix 1: Acknowledgment of Country-level contributors

This synthesis is based on the work and reports of the following ethnographers:

Country	Ethnographer and affiliation	Title of Country-level report and hyperlink
	<b>Mark Dechesne</b> Leiden University <b>Hilary Pilkington</b> University of Manchester	Introduction <a href="https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_intro_final.pdf">https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_intro_final.pdf</a>
France	<b>Bartolomeo Conti</b> , École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS)	Trajectories of (non)radicalisation in a prison milieu <a href="https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_france_final.pdf">https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_france_final.pdf</a>
Germany	<b>Sara Nanni</b> , University of Applied Sciences Düsseldorf	Neustadt and beyond <a href="https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_germany_final.pdf">https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_germany_final.pdf</a>
Greece	<b>Alexandros Sakellariou</b> , Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens	Young Muslims in unofficial prayer places of Athens <a href="https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_greece_final.pdf">https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_greece_final.pdf</a>
Tunisia	<b>Chokri Memni</b> , University of Sfax	Young people's trajectories through radical Islamist milieus: Tunis (Tadhamon), Bizerte, Menzel-Bourghiba <a href="http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_tunisia.pdf">http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_tunisia.pdf</a>
Netherlands	<b>Mark Dechesne and Ineke van der Valk</b> , Leiden University	Islamist Radicalisation in the Netherlands <a href="http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_netherlands.pdf">http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_netherlands.pdf</a>
Norway	<b>Viggo Vestel and Mohamed Qasim Ali</b> , OsloMet	Globalisation, identity and Islam – the case of radical Muslim youths in Norway <a href="http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_Norway.pdf">http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_Norway.pdf</a>
Turkey	<b>Mehmet Kurt</b> , Marie Curie Global Fellow, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Lecturer, Yale University	When the Salt Stinks: The Syrian War, Kurdish Question and Borderline Radicalisation in Turkey <a href="https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_turkey_final.pdf">https://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_turkey_final.pdf</a>
Russia	<b>Sviatoslav Poliakov and Yulia Epanova</b> , Centre for Youth Studies, HSE University	Urban second generation Muslims from the North Caucasus in St Petersburg and Moscow, Russia <a href="http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_Russia.pdf">http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_Russia.pdf</a>
UK	<b>Ajmal Hussain</b> , University of Warwick	'Muslim street' <a href="http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_UK.pdf">http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_UK.pdf</a>

Belgium	<b>Chaïb Benaïssa,</b> European Network Against Racism	Radicalisation from the 'poor crescent' area <a href="http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_Belgium.pdf">http://www.dare-h2020.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12176018/d6.1_Belgium.pdf</a>
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