YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRAJECTORIES THROUGH RADICAL ISLAMIST MILIEUS:
COUNTRY LEVEL REPORT THE NETHERLANDS

Islamist Radicalisation in the Netherlands

DARE
Dialogue About
Radicalisation & Equality

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AND
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Young people's trajectories through radical Islam(ist) and extreme Muslim milieus: Country level report

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Contents

Executive Summary:

The phenomenon of radicalisation has become strongly tied to disaffected young Muslims. They are thought to increasingly shy away from civic participation in Western European democratic society, to fall into the hands of recruiters and online propaganda, and to develop alternative religiously inspired lifestyles, a willingness to leave the Western world in search for a utopian alternative, and a readiness to pick up arms to advance their ideals. This report documents the findings from extensive ethnographic research that was conducted in the Netherlands to map and understand Islamist radicalisation as it has unfolded in social and national contexts.

During the research, we conducted a review of the literature, media analysis, expert interviews, in-depth interviews and observation. We conducted in-depth interviews with 18 people in their teens, twenties and thirties who had either been involved in a radical Islamist scene or who had had close encounters with such a radical scene. We also collected valuable input from parents and experts.

Virtually all of our respondents, radical and non-radical, reported the experience of an identity crisis during adolescence, often triggered by an event that shattered assumptions about life. Moreover, virtually all of our respondents, radical and non-radical, found an answer in Islam and used Islam to give shape to a newly found identity in response to the identity crisis. There was, however, a striking difference in the reception to the newly found identity. Those who eventually radicalised encountered considerable opposition to the newly found identity, whereas this was not the case for those who did not radicalise. For those who eventually radicalised, the experienced opposition and rejection set in motion a social process of isolation and, fueled by Internet or social media and sometimes recruiters and negativity in the immediate social environment, also set in motion the development of a hostile, Manichean worldview that pits the pure and the true against the *kufir* (the unbeliever), the hypocrite and the impure. Our respondents reported this dynamic of positioning and oppositional positioning in a number of relationships: with parents and family; at school with teachers; at mosques with imams; with community police and other authorities; and with the state. As this dynamic further escalated, the Islamist extremist narrative - that Muslims worldwide are under threat and denied their rights to exercise their faith - combined with vivid imagery to that effect available on the Internet, contributed to the increasing appeal of the 'calling', i.e. that it is an individual duty to pick up arms and fight on behalf of Islam to redress the threats and injustices experienced by Muslims all over the world.

The research contributes to our understanding of radicalisation in three ways. First, it highlights the experience of identity crises during adolescence as a critical element for understanding the impetus for engagement with religion. The process of religious identity formation contributed for some but not for others to radicalisation. Second, it demonstrates the relational nature of radicalisation. Radicalisation is not so much in a person, in a community, or in an ideology, but rather in the relation between individuals, groups, and institutions. Third, it helps conceptualise the link between inequality and radicalisation by considering the perception of inequality, not so much as a cause of radicalisation, but rather as an emergent property that emanates from relational conflict, and once emerged, as a factor in further escalation of the conflict.

1. Introduction

In the public eye, the phenomenon of radicalisation has become strongly associated with groups of disaffected young Muslims, who are thought to increasingly shy away from civic participation in Western European democratic society, to fall into the hands of recruiters and online propaganda, and to develop alternative religiously inspired lifestyles, a willingness to leave the Western world in search for a utopian alternative, and a readiness to pick up arms to advance their ideals.

Although radicalisation among Muslims youth has been in the limelight in the past decades in particular, the interest in the phenomenon has been steadily rising from the 1970s and early 1980s (Roy, 2004; Khosrokhavar, 2008; Nesser, 2015). The Islamic world has been in flux for a long time and, especially since the 1970s, Muslims worldwide have been challenged to reflect and present their religious identity and sense of citizenship in a globalising world (Roy, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2004).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the position of Muslims came particularly to the forefront with many of the (inter and intrastate) armed conflicts of the time occurring in the Muslim world. While the western world was reaping the social, economic, and political fruits of the end of the Cold War, across the Middle East, Northern Africa, South Asia, the Russian Federation and the Balkans, bloody conflicts were waging with devastating consequences. Examples include 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).

In these conflicts, various factions capitalised on Islam as a mobilising political force to unite deeply divided peoples around an Islamic political cause (Wiktorowicz, 2005a). Their message was, on the one hand, to fully embrace Islam and make Islam the cornerstone of public life, while, on the other hand, to reject what was perceived as a decadent and hypocritical lifestyle of the western world, whose representatives, since the 1990s, had often financially, politically and militarily supported the opponents of the 'Islamists'. Factions of Islamists participated with military force in the conflicts were said to be waging 'Jihad', a label used in this context to refer to the armed struggle to advance the Islamist cause (Wiktorowicz, 2005a; Khosrokhavar, 2008; Robinson, 2020). Many of the most influential Jihadist movements of the 1990s were set up, influenced, or inspired by the religious fighters in the Afghanistan War of the 1980s, who came from all over the Muslim world to fight on behalf of Islam against the atheist Soviet invader (Wright, 2006).

The conflicts of the 1990s coincided with the rapid expansion of communication technology, including satellite television, global broadcasting, mobile phone and the Internet (e.g. Sageman, 2008). Consequently, news about events elsewhere in the world and the views of different factions that were fighting in the conflicts of that time became available to anyone, anywhere in the world. Combined with an influx of immigrants and asylum seekers from these conflict areas, this led Muslims also in Western Europe, including the Netherlands, to be exposed to Islamism and Jihadism (Nesser, 2015).

Psychological models (Horgan, 2005; Post, 2007; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; Koomen, 2016; Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna, 2019; Van den Bos, 2020) describe how this exposure might contribute to radicalisation. Exposure to footage and stories of injustices, combined with a search for identity and meaning, can give rise to a strong sense of collective identification (Roy, 2004). This identification, in turn, coincides with a psychological process of social categorisation, i.e. the development of a sense that there is an 'us' and there is a 'them' (Hogg and Adelman, 2013). Once politicised, this identification and categorisation may culminate in a sense of inequality, often implying that the 'us' is entitled to more than 'them', while the current situation shows the opposite, with 'them' getting more than 'us' (Simon and Klandermans, 2001). The grievances associated with this inequality may lead to

activism. If this activism is frustrated through (state) denial or repression, extremism may ensue with violence and terrorism as means to advance the cause (e.g. Moghaddam, 2005).

The attacks of 11 September 2001 on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have constituted a momentous catalyst of these processes of social identification, categorisation, politicisation, activism and extremism (as described in e.g. Kean, Kean and Hamilton, 2004). The attacks were the result of perpetrators going through this process. The Hamburg Cell, as the network of perpetrators became known, comprised Arab engineering students who, during the 1990s, were residing in Hamburg and who, through their shared identification as Muslims, engaged in conversations about the position of Muslims in the world, and the inequalities and injustices Muslims encountered everywhere. Directed by an Al-Qaida operative, a veteran of the Afghanistan war, the group eventually travelled to receive further training for the execution of their notorious plot.

In a broader sense, the attacks of 11 September 2001 also contributed to the intensification of processes of identification, categorisation, politicisation, activism and extremism (Abbas, 2019). First, the attacks raised the awareness that processes of radicalisation were happening, with potentially devastating consequences, not just in the city of Hamburg, or Germany, but throughout urban Western Europe (Bakker and Boer, 2007). Since '9/11', Jihadist terrorism and radicalisation have become household topics for news headlines and political debate. With the emergence of social media platforms, the topics also became the subject of considerable social media debate. For some, Jihadism became a 'fad', something cool to identify with and to be a part of (Stern, 2006). In political context, the issues of Jihadism and radicalisation rose to top spot on local, national and international agendas (Nesser, 2015).

Western Europe 'post-9/11' thus became characterised by a heightened salience of Islam, Islamism, and Jihadism, as a religious and political stance, as a presence in Western Europe, as a source of identification and as a source of politicisation and polarisation (Abbas, 2019; Fadil, Ragazzi and Koning, 2019). This salience never fully dissipated, although other issues, most notably the economic crisis of 2008, came to the fore. In recent years, since 2012, the attention to Islamism and Jihadism reached its peak when the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) managed to seize control over a considerable territory within Iraq and Syria and declared the 'Islamic State', promising a society governed by Islam in its purest form and the defence of Islam against all its enemies with the most ferocious means (Gerges, 2017). The 'Islamic State' attracted a great deal of attention and many, especially young people from Western Europe, often with an immigrant background, travelled to ISIS held territory to begin a new life and to fight on behalf of ISIS. They went despite an awareness of the mass atrocities committed by ISIS, of the personal risks and ramifications, and of leaving their social livelihood behind (Gurski, 2017; Rocha and Mendoza, 2019).

This recent history makes questions regarding Islamist radicalisation relevant today. What pushed individuals beyond a certain threshold to join a group such as ISIS and fight on its behalf? Are there sympathisers who never joined or who decided against the use of violence? Why do people who are exposed to recruitment efforts or information reject the radical path? How do sustained inequalities (objective inequality) and perceived injustice (subjective inequality) impact upon radicalisation? What are the understandings of 'radicalisation', 'extremism' and 'jihadism' among those directly involved? Is there dissonance between public discourse and self-understandings? And if there is, what is the impact of this on radicalisation trajectories? What role do social relationships (in-person or virtual) have in facilitating or mitigating radicalisation of ideas and behaviour? What is the role of social media and Internet, e.g. to what extent do individuals 'self' radicalise on the basis of online activity? How do emotional experiences, sense of identity and 'coolness' of radical milieus shape radicalisation trajectories? How do attitudes differ by gender? And what is the role of gender in radicalisation (or extremism) more generally?

It should be clear that Islamist radicalisation is a complex, dynamic, and inherently social process that involves a reality as well as social and political discursive construction (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2007; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; Feddes, Nickolson and Doosje, 2016). In order to understand the phenomenon, and address the questions described above, we need to consider it in the social and national context in which it takes place, and directly engage with the stakeholders involved. This report documents the findings from extensive ethnographic research that was conducted in the Netherlands to map and understand Islamist radicalisation as it has unfolded in social, community, and national context.

2. Setting the scene

In a contribution to the National Academy of Science regarding the psychological consequences of terrorism, Butler et al. (2003) formulated a Haddon Matrix inspired by epidemiological research that may also be useful for understanding the multilevel dynamics of radicalisation. The Haddon Matrix identifies *environment*, *vector*, *host*, and *agent* as key units of analysis. In the context of terrorism, Butler et al. describe a terrorist attack as an *agent*, something that affects a *host* (i.e. affected individuals and populations), through a *vector* (i.e., a spreader of terror), within a particular *environment*, which is more or less conducive to the spread of terror (see also Stares and Yacoubian, 2005, 2006; Kruglanski *et al.*, 2007). This framework is also useful to understand the factors at play in the process of radicalisation as it has taken place in urban environments in the Netherlands, and our central focus of the city of The Hague in particular. In the present research context, the agent is the 'calling', the sense that one should leave one's current life behind and join the jihadist cause by propagating it and by fighting on its behalf. The hosts are the individuals who have been exposed to the type of messaging that gives rise to the sense of being called. The vectors are the channels through which this messaging is taking place. The environment is constituted by the physical, social and political conditions in which the host lives. Before turning to the individual hosts and their life stories, it is of pertinence to first consider the evolution of the environment, the agent of the calling and the emergence of vectors of radicalisation in these environments.

2.1 The Environment

At the onset of the research, we considered the Schilderswijk in The Hague and its vicinity as the centre of gravity for our research, although later we also conducted research in other areas. Rightfully or wrongfully, the Schilderswijk, translated as 'painters' neighbourhood' for its streets that are named after famous Dutch painters, has become particularly strongly associated with Islamist activism, radicalisation, and support for ISIS, at least in the public portrayal of the area (Groen and Kranenberg, 2007; Solome and Van der Wal, 2014). A number of high profile jihadism related arrests took place here over the past two decades (Albers and Lensink, 2015). The area is also strongly linked to economic and social inequality (Zeegers, 2013), despite the existence of some successful community and local government initiatives to address these issues (Trouw, 2012; Dosky, 2017). It has persistently been mentioned as one of the most impoverished areas of the Netherlands (De Telegraaf, 2013). News footage on the area frequently concerns crime, unemployment, lack of social services and integration failure (Klein Kranenburg, 2013; Mulders, 2013; Van Bekkum, 2020). Since the 1970s, the area has also undergone an ethnic transition with an increasing representation of migrants, most notably from Morocco, Turkey and Surinam and today includes more than 120 nationalities and fewer than 10% ethnically Dutch inhabitants (Sterkenburg, 2020). Located in the vicinity of the Dutch national parliament, the area has figured as a political stage used by various political parties to express their political views regarding the necessity for urban area development, social policy, crime prevention, and counter-radicalisation and counterterrorism policy

(Spijksnijder, 2001). In May 2013, the national newspaper *Trouw* published an article arguing that a specific part of the neighbourhood had become a 'Sharia Triangle', dominated by fundamentalist Muslims who, according to the journalist, were imposing their strict interpretation of Islam on the neighbourhood (Van der Laan, 2015). Geert Wilders, the leader of the Party of Freedom (Dutch acronym: PVV), was quick to visit the area and express his hallmark concern about the rise of Islam as a threat to Dutch culture and the urgency of a harsh stance towards Islam (Goossens, 2013). The Dutch Labour Party (Dutch acronym: PvdA) leader and Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, Lodewijk Ascher, also visited the area, and during a parliamentary hearing responded to the concerns expressed by the newspaper article and the PVV. The minister denied the widespread imposition of Islamic Sharia Law in the area, but also recognised impoverished economic and social conditions, and an increased presence of Islamic organisations in public life (Asscher, 2013). In 2014, the 'Sharia Triangle' article was retracted by *Trouw* because the journalist was revealed to have fabricated the interviews he had reported in the article but suspicion regarding the area endured. During the period from 2013 to 2014, other journalists, academics, and the government reported a growing interest among Muslim youth in the area in travelling to Syria and Iraq to participate in the fight against Assad and the Iraqi government (Groen, 2013). This 'Sharia Triangle' episode exemplifies the multilevel dynamism that characterises Islamist radicalisation as it has unfolded in the Netherlands, in particular in The Hague and its vicinity.

The story of the Schilderswijk is similar to other urban areas in the Netherlands that received the majority of labour immigrants who came to the country in the early 1970s (CBS, 1986; Obdeijn and Schrover, 2008; Van der Valk, 2009). Immigrants were encouraged to come to the Netherlands from mostly rural Morocco and Turkey to work in a thriving economy that was quickly running out of vacancies. The initial wave of newcomers consisted of males who came to work, not to build a life in the Netherlands. However, many decided to stay in the Netherlands, despite economic downturn in the second half of the 1970s. They also brought their families from the 1970s on.

The urban areas where immigrant families congregated underwent drastic changes in the 1980s. Many of the areas were subjected to grand inner-city restoration schemes. The large-scale initiatives provided opportunities for a significant share of the ethnically Dutch population to move elsewhere as their houses were bought by the municipality, demolished and rebuilt. The Schilderswijk is a prime example where significant reconstruction by internationally renowned architects caused a dramatic change in the social fabric of the neighbourhood (Klein Kranenburg, 2013). During the decade-long reconstruction efforts, the empty reconstruction sites became attractive to drug addicts, squatters, illegal immigration, crimes and vandalism (Mulder, 2001). While ethnically Dutch citizens moved out, the immigrant families stayed, many being reluctant to commit to yet another change in living after their move from their country of origin. Amidst the rubble of construction sites, and lack of social services, a significant share of the second generation of Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch grew up. Their fathers were often unemployed and mothers incapable of adjusting to their new environment. Traditional family roles could no longer be upheld, and at schools the children often faced considerable challenges to keep up.

During the 1990s, the areas became of renewed political interest. In the early years of the decade, the labour party (PvdA) had made urban social development a political priority, with considerable electoral success (Goslinga, 1993). Their main coalition partner during these years, the economically liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Dutch acronym: VVD), also gradually developed an interest in adopting the cause of urban development (Vrijsen, 1999). The PvdA focused on establishing communal ties, while the VVD emphasised stimulation of individual initiatives and entrepreneurship. Both approaches managed to mobilise segments of the immigrant populations.

Because the approaches were distinctly secular, the interest in Islam and the public funding for religious initiatives dissipated. For the overall aim of this report, it is a critical event that Islamic organisations from

the Arab world (e.g. Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Libya) and Turkey filled this void and stimulated a new type of Islam in the Netherlands through the funding of mosques, religious schools, and religious activities (Schmidt, 1995; BVD, 1998; Lange, 2001). This new type of Islam has been more orthodox and more focussed on the Islamic heartland than on integration of Muslims into Dutch society. The imams preaching at the mosques came from the war-torn Middle East, had little knowledge of Dutch culture or language and advocated a strongly orthodox interpretation of Islam, attitudes and practices that many thought were incompatible with Dutch culture, including strict separation of men and women, anti-gay attitudes, and anti-Israel attitudes. Some mosques and Islamic educational centres became meeting places for Arab networks of distinct Islamist signature. During the 1990s, the Dutch domestic security service (Dutch acronym: BVD) began to warn about the threats of Islamic fundamentalism and how influences from the Middle East and Northern Africa could spark tension between immigrant communities in the Netherlands (e.g. between Turks and Kurds) and undermine the concordance of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands (BVD, 1992, 1998). Critics suspected the BVD was projecting Islamic fundamentalism as a threat in order to protect itself against loss of significance after the end of the cold war (De Vries, 1997). Others, most notably the politician Pim Fortuyn, pointed to the threat that Islam as a religion (and not just specific mosques) could pose to Dutch culture, and named the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as one of the symptoms of the failed policies of the ruling 'purple' coalition (made up of the 'red' PvdA and 'blue' VVD, together with the social liberal party D66) during their reign in the 1990s (De Koning, 2016). Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated in 2002 by an infamous animal rights activist, was one of the representatives of the emergence of identity politics in the Netherlands, in which Islam was increasingly considered antithetical to the 'Dutch way of life' (Fortuyn, 1997). Geert Wilders, the leader and only member of the Partij voor de Vrijheid ('Party for Freedom'), eventually became one of the most outspoken representatives of this viewpoint.

2.2 The Agent

A recent documentary entitled *The Calling* ('De Lokroep' in Dutch) screened on Dutch national television features interviews with a number of key officials and stakeholders dealing with terrorism and counterterrorism. In the first part, it narrates the story of the Al-Fourquaan mosque in Eindhoven (Can, 2020a). The mosque is described as a recruiting ground during the late 1990s to win young Muslims for the Jihadist cause. Upon expressing initial interest after sermons or religious classes, some were reported to be enthused by recruiters to join a diving school, where eventually they were trained and prepared to fight for the jihadist cause. In 2002, two Dutch Moroccan men in their twenties who attended the mosque, travelled to India and were shot by the Indian military in Kashmir three days after their arrival in India. According to some of their family members, the youngsters were on holiday. According to the Dutch intelligence service (renamed in 2002 from BVD to AIVD), they were planning to join a jihadist organisation (Schreuder, 2002).

Other sources reveal how criminal investigations during these years were focused on a broader network of Jihadi ideologues, operational specialists, and criminals, in the Netherlands and across Europe (De Poot, Sonnenschein and Soudijn, 2011; De Bie, 2016). The core of the network was alleged to be linked to the Groupe Salafiste de la Predication et le Combat (GSPC- Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat), an offshoot of the Groupe Islamique Armé (Islamic Army Group) that fought the civil war in Algeria, and to Al-Qaeda. The network comprised a great number of international connections, including with France, Belgium, Tunisia, and Germany. Its members were not only based in Eindhoven and its vicinity but also elsewhere in the country, most notably Rotterdam. The group focused its political activities primarily on the *heartland*, the countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA), rather than on the political situation in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, their external focus did not preclude the intent to stage an

attack with an international impact in the Netherlands. The arrests of several of the leaders of the network in the final months of 2001 led to the first Jihadism related terrorism court case in the Netherlands. A year later, all four suspects were acquitted for lack of evidence (ANP, 2002).

Just as the events of 9/11 had sparked an interest in Jihadism, so the years after 2001 witnessed the increasing appeal of the Jihadi cause among individuals, groups, and networks. The newly involved were different in the sense that they had not visited nor had social ties with the conflict areas of the MENA region. Their common ground was more a focus on local affairs than on unfolding events in the MENA region (Eikelenboom, 2004; Buijs, Demant and Hamdy, 2006). In the international scholarly literature on Jihadism, the Dutch 'Hofstad Group' figures prominently as a prototypical 'homegrown' Jihadi network (Vidino, 2007; Schuurman, 2018). Although the label 'Hofstad' is an epithet for the city of The Hague (it might be suitably translated into English as 'judicial capital', 'court capital' or 'royal residence'), the group was not only active in The Hague but also in other cities in the western, most urbanised area of the Netherlands, including in Amsterdam. The group would meet at mosques but primarily at 'living room meetings', and discuss religious matters as well as the position of Muslims in the Netherlands and the world. Their *takfiri* approach to Islam consisting of declaring apostasy to those Muslims who, in the views of the *takfiri*, failed to live by Islamic prescription, found a target in the Somalia-born Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali who had been outspoken in her criticism of Islam and the treatment of women in Islamic culture in particular. Her public and provocative approach resonated with filmmaker Theo van Gogh, who directed and produced the short-film 'Submission' that was scripted by Hirsi Ali and released in the summer of 2004. 'Submission' highlighted her concern with abuse of women in the Muslim world (Morin, 2009).

Many considered the movie a direct provocation, in part because it shows Quranic verses depicted on a nude female body. A few months after the release of the movie, Theo van Gogh was murdered in Amsterdam on 2 November, by one of the members of the Hofstad group, Mohammed Bouyeri (Buruma, 2007; Cottee, 2014). A week after the assassination of Van Gogh, the police raided an apartment in The Hague to arrest members of the Hofstad group. As they entered, one of the group members threw a hand grenade. The killing of Van Gogh and the hand grenade incident constitute the two most tangible acts by the Hofstad Group. These acts, together with other foiled attacks, constituted the basis for a second series of Jihadism related court cases that took place between 2005 to 2010 (Vermaat, 2006; De Graaf, 2016; Schuurman, 2017).

By the turn of the decade, the interest in Jihadism had faded. In a report during that time by the Dutch intelligence and security service, it was noted that a new, 'neoradical *dawah*' was emerging with a strategic, well-organised commitment to establish, defend, and expand a purist, Salafist interpretation of Islam among Muslims in the Netherlands (AIVD, 2007). This movement was politically focused, contributed to the solidification of Muslim identity, at times engaged in activism, but was much less engaged in extremist acts than the Hofstad group or earlier Jihadist networks. The intelligence and security service did project that the neoradicals of that time period were creating a rift between orthodox Muslims on the one hand and more liberal Muslims and non-Muslims on the other.

In late 2012, extremism and Jihadism re-emerged. The Arab spring that started in the winter of 2010 had re-energised the interest in the political dynamics of the MENA-region and the position of Islam in these dynamics. As the peaceful protests of the early stages of the revolution were brutally repressed, Islamists became increasingly involved in armed resistance. The former *Al-Qaeda in Iraq* group profited from the withdrawal of US troops in Iraq to eventually emerge as a significant force under the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which would claim to fight on behalf of the global Sunni Muslim community and would promise the establishment of a truly Islamic State (Stern and Berger, 2015; Gerges, 2017). Its

sophisticated media campaign made use of the horrors and injustices of the conflicts in the MENA region to enthuse Muslims worldwide to join their cause.

In the Netherlands, segments of the 'neoradicals' that were mentioned in the earlier cited AIVD (2007) report became more focused on raising awareness about the injustices committed towards Muslims in the MENA region, and in the Netherlands. Their activity, which took place primarily in the city of The Hague and its vicinity, consisted of organising groups with the mission to declare testimony (e.g. one of the initiatives was called 'De Waarheid' – The Truth), to spread a 'pure' form of Islam (another initiative was named 'Street *Dawah*') and to raise awareness of the injustices committed towards Muslims (for instance in prison, as another initiative was called 'Behind Bars'). They were met with disapproval and suspicion, but were also instrumental in mobilising a substantial group of young Muslims to join the Jihad in Syria and Iraq (Van San, 2014; Bakker and Grol, 2017). In 2020, at the time of writing of this report, the AIVD estimates that 300 travelled to Syria to join the Jihadist cause of which about a third were females and two thirds were male. Of this group, 115 are still in Syria or Iraq, 60 have returned, 100 have died, 20 are in Turkey, and the whereabouts of 5 are unspecified (AIVD, 2020). The mobilising efforts were the subject of a third major court case concerning Jihadism, known as the 'Context Case' (Groen, 2015), which led to several convictions.

2.3 Vectors

Vectors are the channels through which transmission is taking place. In the context of the current research, vectors are the essential enablers of the development of a socially shared radical worldview (Stares and Yacoubian, 2006). What have been the enablers of the transmission of Jihadism to so many susceptible hosts? The academic and journalistic literature provide us some pointers, although we do not want to propose a priori that transmission of extremism is taking place through these vectors.

2.3.1 Mosques

The role of mosques in fostering radical viewpoints continues to be debated. Here, the focus is more on specific mosques than mosques in general. In a recent Dutch parliamentary hearing held in the first months of 2020, board members of a number of mosques were questioned over the alleged financing and influencing by fundamentalist Islamic organisations from Middle Eastern countries and the impact of this influencing on the propagation of 'anti-democratic' attitudes (Parliamentary hearing on unwanted influencing from unfree countries, 2020). The mosques included were the As Soennah mosque in the Hague and the Al-Al Waqf Foundation, owner of the Al-Fourquaan mosque in Eindhoven. Like the Al-Fourquaan mosque, the As Soennah mosque figures prominently place in the news coverage on radicalisation in the Netherlands (Kouwenhoven, 2018). Located very near the area that was deemed the 'Shariah Triangle', the mosque has built a reputation for attracting orthodox Islamic practice. It has the ambition to become a nationally leading centre for Islamic teaching and activities, with many international preachers provided a stage to share their ideas. It is often described in the media as advocating radicalism. Members of the Hofstad Group and a number of the convicted recruiters in the Context Case were at some point attending the mosque or seen close to it. Fawaz Jneid, the Syrian Dutch imam was the public face of the mosque in the first years of the twenty-first century and gained infamy with his rejection of homosexuality, arranged Islamic marriages, and strong condemnation of Van Gogh and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a few weeks prior to the assassination of the former. Upon the resignation of Fawaz Jneid in 2012, the mosque set itself the task of serving as a bridge between Muslims and non-Muslims. It also explicitly spoke out against Jihadism and worked with the municipality of The Hague. In the most recent years, it has banned a number of young Muslims from its premises for espousing extremist viewpoints. Former mayor of The Hague Jozias van Aartsen has repeatedly commended the collaboration between the mosque and

City Hall (Kouwenhoven, 2018). After Van Aartsen's departure, the mosque has again been the subject of controversy. During the past two years, the mosque was represented as a platform for Jihadism and propagation of the illegal practice of female genital cutting by a public television news programme *Nieuwsuur* (Holdert and Kouwenhoven, 2018) and was also the target of anti-Islam protests and threats (NRC Handelsblad, 2017).

2.3.2 Islamic schooling

Religious foundations also facilitate the provision of formal and informal education. These forms of religious schooling have become the subject of public debate. One particularly salient case concerns the Cornelis Haga Lyceum in Amsterdam, an Islamic high school whose license was retracted by the inspectorate of education after indications from Dutch intelligence service that its religious schooling was inciting polarisation and that affiliates of the school could be linked to Chechen Islamist groups (CTIVD, 2019). The board of the school was outraged in part because the negative assessment of the inspectorate was a reversal of a prior positive assessment. And while many of the parents of the children attending the school vouched for its quality, the minister of education pushed for the replacement of the board of the school. Eventually, the court ruled in favour of the school board, and the National Commission for Intelligence Oversight (CTIVD) reprimanded the Dutch intelligence service for providing unfounded intelligence. In another special coverage of the television news programme *Nieuwsuur* that also covered the issue of Islamic schooling, it was pointed out that various schoolbooks and teaching methods propagated polarising and undemocratic attitudes to young children (Holdert and Kouwenhoven, 2019).

2.3.3 Social Networks

Virtually all of the formal organisational structures on which the day-to-day functioning of mosques and Islamic schools rely, denounce extremism. In contrast, informal social networks have been tied to extremism, in theory and in practice. The unofficial status makes networks less accountable than formal organisations. Relative to official organisations, networks are also more dynamic, i.e. they can change spontaneously without formal decision-making structures. These factors make informal social networks more difficult to track. Marc Sageman has pioneered the study of the role of social networks in understanding terrorism (Sageman, 2008). He notes that networks can serve as echo-chambers that bring likeminded individuals together and in doing so, reinforce ideological viewpoints. This has been observed in the Hofstad group case (Schuurman, 2018) and also more recently in the Context Case (Bakker and Grol, 2017).

2.3.4 Internet and Social Media

Internet and social media have played a critically important role in transmitting Jihadism to audiences around the world (e.g. Stern and Berger, 2015). The Internet has enabled the spreading of a tailormade message, while social media such as Facebook and Twitter has enabled individuals from around the world to participate in the discussion. In the Netherlands, websites including the now defunct www.dewarereligie.nl (the website's name translates as 'the true religion') and social media sites such as Twitter account Free_Aseer, propagated a pro-Islamist and pro-Jihadist voice. Islamist extremism on social media is the topic of a separate report of research conducted within the framework of DARE (Dechesne and Paton, 2020).

2.3.5 Advocacy

Particularly in the Context Case, advocacy constituted another potential channel of influence (Bakker and Grol, 2017; De Koning, Becker and Roex, 2020). Public meetings to advocate, for instance, the humane treatment of individuals who have been incarcerated for terrorist offence, have played an important role in the outflow of young Dutch Muslims to Syria. Sharia4Belgium and its Dutch offshoot Sharia4Netherlands are examples of advocacy groups that staged various protests against individuals and

issues that, in the eyes of the group, were offending Islam and that actively recruited for the Jihadist cause in Syria.

2.3.6 Prisons

Prisons are considered an important recruiting ground for extremists (Khosrokhavar, 2013). Non-ideological convicts often possess skills that can be instrumental in achieving aims of extremist organisations. At the same time, the political or religious aims of the extremist organisation can provide prospect and salvation for convicts. The treatment of prisoners may also contribute to radicalisation, both of those in prison and those outside. For instance, the humiliations and horrors experienced by Abu Ghraib prisoners have been a critical factor in the resurgence of the global Jihadist movement (Stern and Berger, 2015). In the Netherlands, those convicted of terrorism related offences are guarded in specially designated prison wings (Veldhuis, 2016). Two prisons have such wings where prisoners are kept together. There is an ongoing discussion about whether the prisoners in these wings are treated appropriately; a matter that has become the subject of public protest.

2.3.7 Anti-Islamic political events

Over the past years, the number of incidents of hate crimes against Muslims and mosques has increased (Van der Valk, 2012, 2015, 2017). These incidents coincide with a public and political discourse that is increasingly suffused by anti-Islamic sentiment. The resentment that these crimes and discourses trigger, may enable the transmission of Islamist extremism as a counter-response. This is surely not to say that extremism is the only or the dominant response by Muslims to attacks and provocations. But the assassination of film director Van Gogh could at least in part be attributed to his persistent mockery of Islam. In the political sphere, the primary spokesperson of anti-Islamic sentiment in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders, attracts a global coverage by Islamist extremists who use it to stir up support and promote extremist acts. Anti-Islamic messaging also has a considerable presence on social media, including Twitter. A consideration of online anti-Islamist messages in the Netherlands can be found in the DARE report on media assisted self-radicalisation in the Netherlands (Dechesne and Paton, 2020).

2.3.8 Counterterrorism measures

Blowback refers to unintended side effects of (covert) governmental intervention (Watts, 2016). In the context of counterterrorism, blowback is a common phenomenon. Intelligence and law enforcement intervention may affect more people than intended and being the target of an intervention without being involved in extremism could turn into frustration and openness to extremist causes. Relatedly, in the academic literature, the concept of securitisation (Weaver, 1995) is discussed to highlight the extent to which security measures have affected the Muslim communities of Western Europe as a whole. Securitisation may fuel anger and feeds into the narratives of extremists (De Koning, 2020).

2.4 Locating the milieu

As stated earlier, the goal of this research is to understand Islamist radicalisation as it has unfolded in the Netherlands over the past several years. During these years, activity has become much less overt compared to the years following the start of the Arab spring, in part as a result of security measures. Some may also say that the appeal of Islamist extremism has faded with the defeat of ISIS and the negative public image of the organisation. Still, according to an annual report by the AIVD (2018), a group of several hundred still sympathises with the cause.

During the period of active research, we approached individuals, groups, and organisations that were dealing with the issue of Islamist radicalisation in the Netherlands. That is certainly not to imply that all were sympathetic to the Islamist or Jihadist cause. Rather, all involved in the research have first-hand

experience with the phenomenon. Our initial intent was to focus foremost on the city of The Hague, and the area of the Schilderswijk in particular, as this area for the reasons outlined above, has been described in the media as one of the most significant hotbeds of Islamist radicalisation in the Netherlands. Within the area, there is also a high concentration of potential vectors that could hypothetically contribute to the transmission of radical ideas. At the same time, the Netherlands is a small country with public transportation facilities that make other major cities, including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht within an hour's reach from The Hague. Networks thus extend beyond city boundaries. Also, some have noted that heightened security vigilance has led the movement to settle elsewhere. As a result, the Islamist extremist movement as we sought to identify is not specifically tied to the Schilderswijk nor The Hague. We conducted the research across the most urbanised, Western part of the Netherland to find an answer to our research questions.

3. Field Research

During the research, which was conducted between November 2017 and January 2020, our main interest was in the 'vectors' that could potentially contribute to the transmission of radical ideas. That is, we went to mosques, we attended educational settings, we approached social groups, we attended advocacy meetings, we scanned the Internet and social media for activity, we approached prisons and individual prisoners, we kept track of anti-Islamist political events and attended their meetings, and, finally, we talked with representatives of law enforcement and policy and with academics who had conducted field research prior to our own. During each of these meetings, we made observations and collected relevant information. After identifying potential participants through these channels, we approached individuals who we deemed of particular interest for our research purposes. We explained this purpose to the potential participants using the standard DARE information sheet and invited them to take part in a recorded interview. Often, the interviews were conducted over more than one session.

In approaching the participants, we were aware that we were potentially implicating participants as radicals or extremists or at least connected the participants to issues of radicalisation and extremism. This is an important ethical issue that merits particular attention. As we established through the research, many, even those convicted for extremism related offenses, rejected being labelled as 'radical' or 'extremist'. Their external framing as radical represented a persistent grievance among the people we spoke to. Furthermore, as the issue of Islamist extremism was at the top of the national security agenda at the time of research, we found it more difficult to find individuals who were willing to contribute to this research project than has been the case in the past. It should also be mentioned that the Netherlands has an active community of researchers interested in the topic of radicalisation. There were several projects with similar objectives conducted at the time the DARE field research was conducted, while other projects had just been completed (Bakker and Grol, 2017; Bergema and Van San, 2019; De Koning, Becker and Roex, 2020). Given the relatively large pool of radicalisation researchers and the relatively small pool of Islamist extremists in the Netherlands, a small group of respondents have influenced a relatively large share of the research output in the Netherlands. During the research we encountered respondents who had been involved in at least three projects. Although several of our respondents have indeed been involved in multiple other projects, we do think that this specific issue of multiple use of respondents merits reflection. For one, the persistent questioning may cause the respondent to fixate on their 'radical identity'. Also, as the same questions are asked, the respondent may become trained in providing particular answers. Furthermore, the limited set of respondents who are willing to participate may have a disproportionate impact on the general portrayal of the state of Islamist extremism in the Netherlands.

3.1 Data collection

Table 1 summarises the data that were used for the analysis of our case. Of course, there were more informal conversations and observations that were never recorded, but that served as background knowledge for the interpretation of the data. Interviews (often continued over multiple sessions) were held with the 18 respondents who constituted our primary respondent set. Two experts provided extensive, in-depth experience and perspectives on record, yielding a total of 20 audio interviews. We also kept field diary entries, and included text documents in the database for more formal processing. Alongside the two audio-recorded expert interviews, we also conducted interviews with two additional experts, and used the written notes of these conversations for further analysis.

Table 1: Summary of data sources

	Number	Total length/brief description	Average length
Respondent memos	18	n/a	n/a
Audio interviews	20 (18)	1,928 mins (32h 08 mins)	107.11 mins
Field diary entries	14		n/a
Text Documents	2	One text document contains a 13 page collection of essay on the topic of Islamist radicalisation. The other text document provides further links to books, television and radio interviews, and internet sites, containing contributions by former participants in the radical scene.	n/a
Expert Interviews	4	Length of interviews varies from 1 hour – 3 hours. The interviews have not been recorded, but notes ranging from 1 page to 4 pages were made.	Unknown

3.2 Access and researcher-respondent relations

We contacted a variety of stakeholders to facilitate access to the field. We attended public meetings organised by relevant organisations. We were invited by organisations to contribute to public debates on radicalisation and used the opportunity to expand our research network. We sought the advice of other researchers who had conducted, or who were conducting, similar research. We approached youth workers as well as lawyers who had defended individuals in terrorism related cases. We looked on social media sites to identify potential interviewees and approached them via these sites. Finally, after each interview we asked the participants if they could help us to find other potential participants. In general, the conversations were polite and a number of individuals and institutions have been particularly helpful in providing background information and contributing to the project. The mosques we approached were welcoming and open to collaborating and their representatives being interviewed. At no point did we feel that relevant information was being withheld. As we attended religious sessions, we were met with openness and there was a general willingness to talk. Several youth workers were accommodating in our efforts to approach young people. Also, among the interviewees there was a willingness to ask others to

participate. In contrast, when we attempted to approach participants via social media sites, most notably Facebook and Twitter, less response and enthusiasm were generated.

At times, individuals we approached showed initial interest in participating but later withdrew. For some, spending multiple sessions of more than an hour was just too time consuming. Others expressed concerns about the consequences of participating, although this was not a common response. Consistent with the DARE ethical guidelines, it was emphasised that participants could withdraw at any point in time.

Although we spoke to a number of individuals with convictions for extremism or terrorism related offenses, we did not identify a socially cohesive group who shared a common extremist worldview. As a result, we were also unable to track the evolution of the social process over time. We did make an effort to identify such groups by asking other researchers who had conducted fieldwork in the same or similar settings, and by asking the various stakeholders in the field. Many suggested this absence was due to the decline in resonance of Islamist radicalism or extremism. Others mentioned the security environment; as Islamist extremism was a top security priority and returning foreign fighters were considered to pose a serious national security threat, stringent surveillance was forcing those who still adhered to Islamist extremist viewpoints to lay low and certainly not to talk with researchers who they had not met before.

The vast majority of interviews were conducted by a female senior researcher with decades of experience of conducting research on issues of extremism, migration and discrimination. Another male senior researcher conducted one interview. Together, they assembled a comprehensive network of relevant stakeholders, and were able to identify and approach those respondents whose combined insights provide a substantial knowledge basis to effectively address the research aims.

3.3 Ethical practice

Participants had been either approached directly by the researchers on the recommendation of other respondents, or based on the recommendation of stakeholders such as other researchers and youth workers. Upon establishing a first contact, participants were made aware of the aims of the DARE project. The aims were verbally conveyed. The participants also received a formal Participant Information Sheet describing the objectives of DARE and outlining their rights. In line with standard guidelines for ethical research practice, it was emphasised that the participant could withdraw from the research at any time he or she deemed appropriate. We did not encounter any specific issues related to ethics with our sample although we did observe a general research fatigue among a broader set of potential participants. As noted earlier, there have been a substantial number of ethnographic projects on Islamist radicalisation in the past few years, and many of these projects have sought the participation of the same participants. First, the repeated requests have put several individuals off, in part because of an absence of a debriefing or prospect of a tangible benefit of participating. Secondly, being approached as a subject in a research project on radicalisation implicated the participants in a milieu that is allegedly associated with radicalisation. As our engagement with the field deepened, it became increasingly clear to us that this implication was often experienced as aggrieving.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analytic strategy for the present report closely followed the common data analysis strategy that is described in detail in the General Introduction to this series of ethnographic reports. Data were analysed by multiple coders who independently coded the chunks of text into the prespecified coding scheme. Level 1 nodes were constructed on the basis of an initial attempt by all members of the Dutch research group to categorise the data. Multiple researchers were involved in subsequent coding and submission

into the database. Accordingly, researchers could check whether they had interpreted the chunks of texts in the same way. Disagreement between coders was settled through discussion.

We used all Level 2 nodes as prespecified by the 'skeleton coding tree' (see General Introduction). We added three Level 2 nodes that we thought were needed to capture relevant aspects of the respondents' narrative. A first added Level 2 node was labelled 'Organisations and movements'. This Level 2 node was added to capture the complexity of the dynamics between factions on the ground in Iraq and Syria that was discussed by some of our respondents. Secondly, we added a separate Level 2 node on 'deradicalisation' as it played a role in the experiences of some our respondents. Finally, we added a Level 2 node 'Experience with violence' because some of our respondents shared relevant input.

3.5 Socio-demographic portrait of the respondent set

Detailed information about individual respondents is contained in Appendix 7.1. It is important to note that the number of people in our 'respondent set' generally corresponds to the number of respondent memos we collected as reported in Section 3.1, with two exceptions. For privacy reasons, we do not provide socio-demographic data for [R8] and [R17].

The respondent set described in Table 2 comprises two separate categories. The first category, referred to as [R1] to [R18], collates those respondents who reflected on their own engagement with radical messages, irrespective of whether they responded to the calls or not. The second category – [R21] to [R24] – relates to respondents who reflected on the radicalisation process of close others. This second category involves for instance parents of individuals who left for Syria. For the first category, we sought respondents under the age of 30. For the individuals within this category who are older than 30, their most intensive engagement with radicalisation occurred when they were under 30. For the second category, there was no specific consideration of age. In practice, it proved to be more difficult to tease apart the two categories than initially foreseen. Some of the respondents in the first category reflected on radicalisation as they had observed it in others. [R18] for instance reflected on the time when she was married to someone she suspected of being radicalised, while also reflecting on what this engagement meant for her own attitudes.

Figure 1 shows the age distribution for our respondents in Category 1. Of this category comprising n=16, three were younger than 20, four were in their 20s, eight were in their 30s, and one was 41.

Figure 1: Age distribution of respondents (Category 1)

Figure 1: Age distribution of respondents (Category 1)

■ <21 ■ 21-30 ■ 31-40 ■ >41
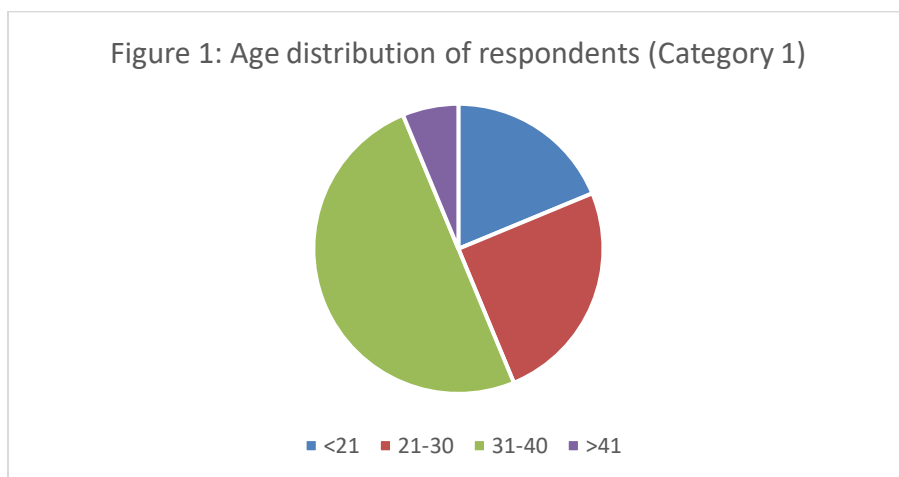
Figure 2 displays the place of birth of the respondents of Category 1. Of this category, 11 are born in the Netherlands, four in Morocco, and one in Afghanistan. Of Category 2, one was born in Morocco, three others in the Netherlands.

Figure 2: Place of Birth of respondents (Category 1)

Figure 2: Place of Birth of respondents (Category 1)
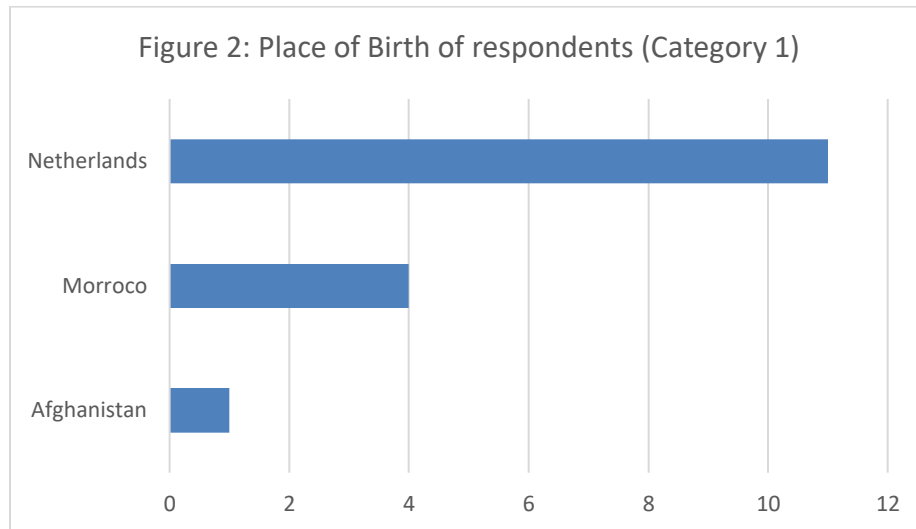
Figure 3 shows the educational background of the respondents in Category 1. Higher Vocational Education is taken here as English translation of 'HBO'. Vocational Secondary Education is the translation of 'MBO'.

Figure 3: Education of respondents in Category 1

Figure 3: Education of respondents in Category 1
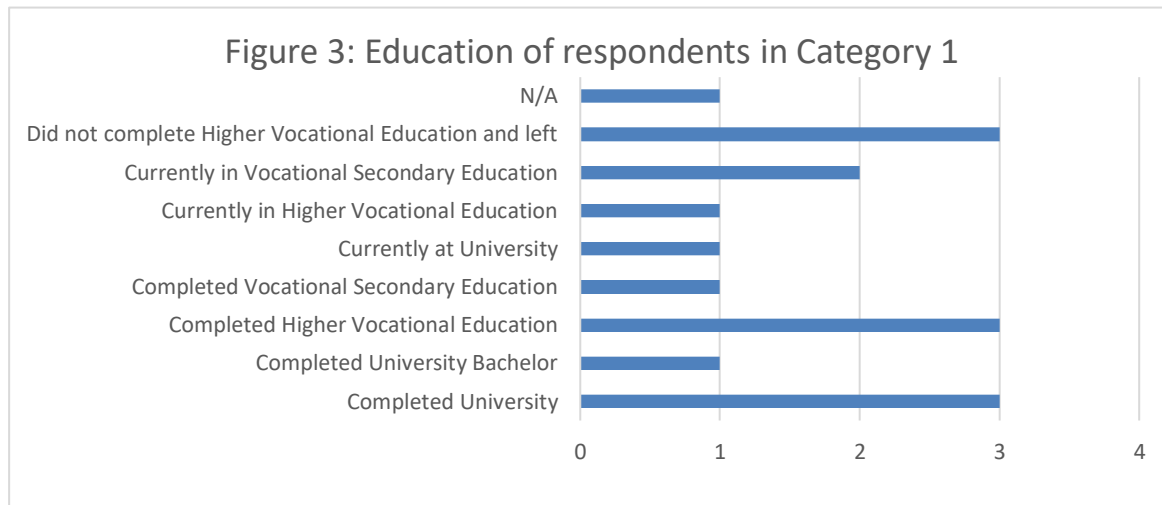
Of our Category 2 respondents, one had completed university and one had completed Vocational Secondary Education. Two respondents did not indicate or were not asked about their education.

Figure 4 displays the employment status of our respondent set. As can be inferred from the graph, there was a high level of employment, presumably reflecting the economic boom at the time of the research.

Figure 4: Employment status of respondents (Category 1)

Figure 4: Employment status of respondents (Category 1)

- In full-time employment
- In part-time employment
- Not in paid employment but occupied as carer or unpaid work / housewife
- Unemployed
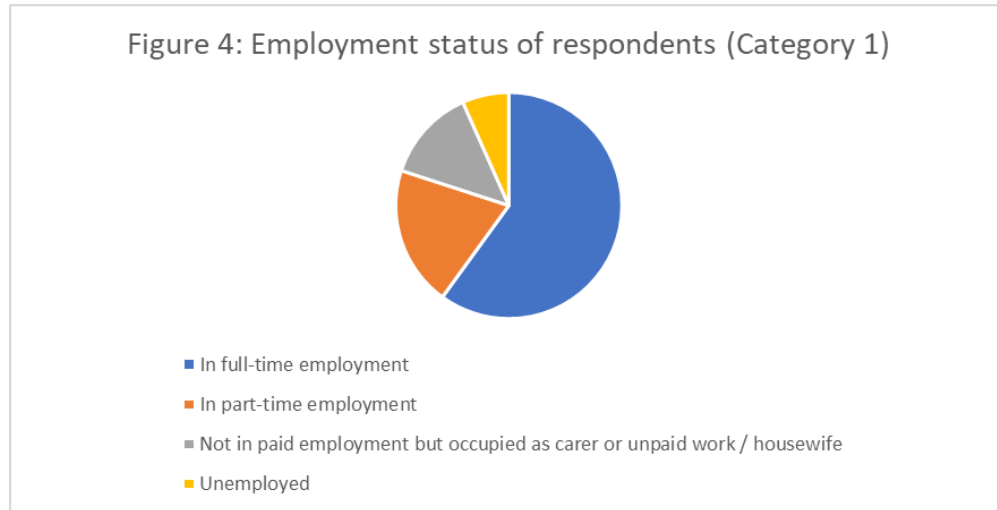
Figure 5 displays the nationality of our respondent set (Category 1). Category 2 comprised two people who were Moroccan/Dutch, one who was Moroccan/Belgian, and one who was Belgian/Dutch.

Figure 5: Nationality of respondents (Category 1)

Figure 5: Nationality of respondents (Category 1)
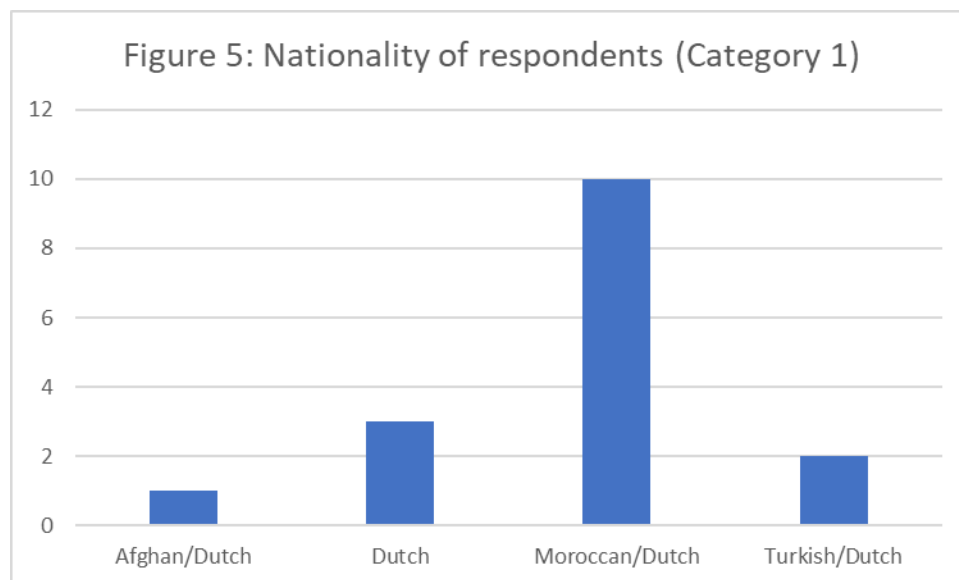
Figure 6 shows the marital status of Category 1 respondents. Category 2 respondents were married with four children (1), divorced with four children (2), or single.

Figure 6: Marital status of respondents (Category 1)

Figure 6: Marital status of respondents (Category 1)
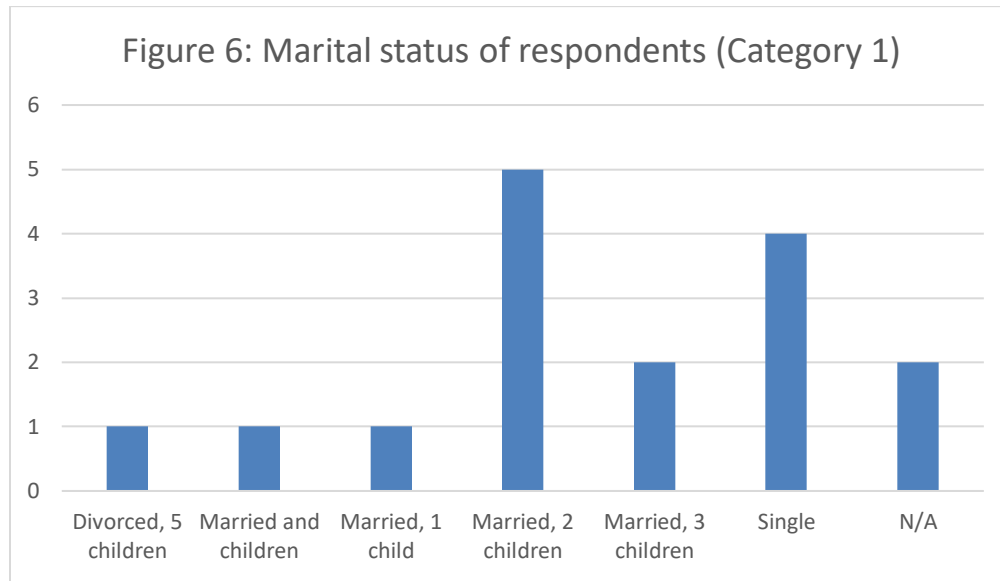
Figure 7 and 8 respectively show the gender composition and religion of the respondent set of Category 1. The corresponding numbers for Category 2 are: four males, with three believing and practising Islam, and one atheist.

Figure 7: Gender (Category 1)   Figure 8: Religion (Category 1)
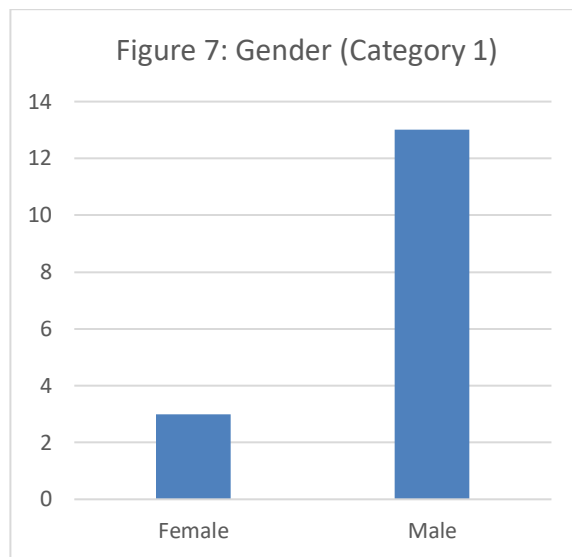
Figure 7: Gender (Category 1)   **Figure 8: Religion (Category 1)**
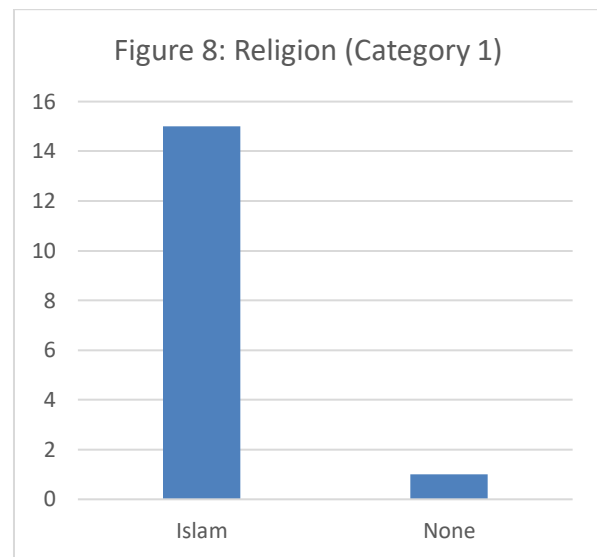
Figure 9 shows the residential status of the Category 1 respondents. Category 2 respondents all lived independently with partner and children.

Figure 9: Residential Status (Category 1)

Figure 9: Residential Status (Category 1)
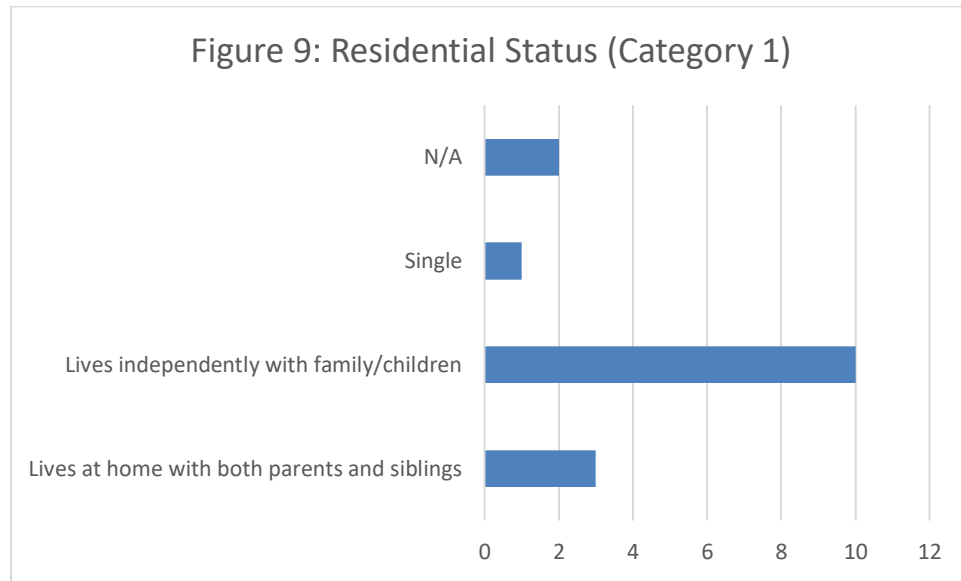
Figure 10 shows the number of people in one household for the respondent set (Category 1). For Category 2, we registered two respondents living in a household of one, one living in a household of four, and one living in a household of six.

Figure 10: Number of people in household (Category 1)

Figure 10:
Number of people in household (Category 1)
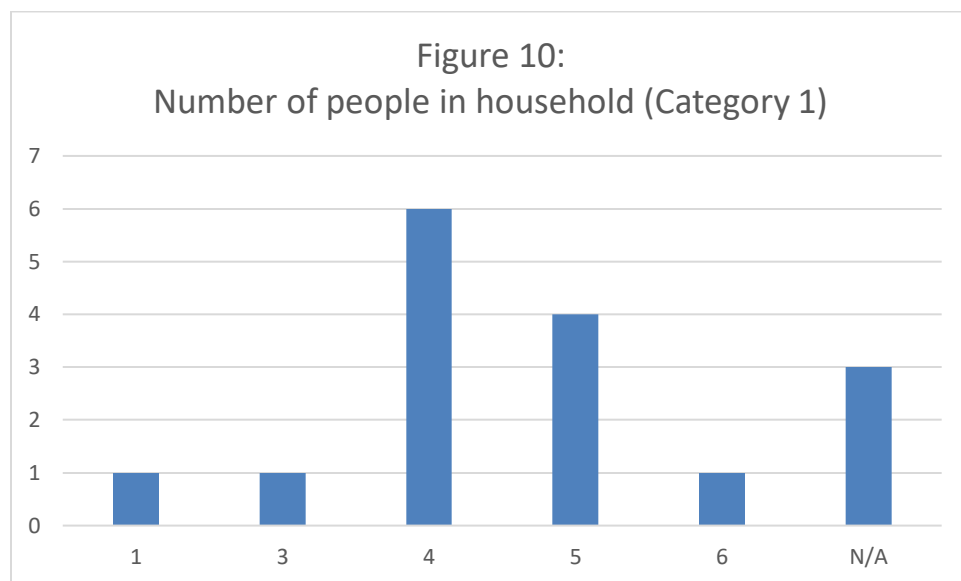
4. Key Findings

The data analysis focussed on answering the questions set out in Section 1: What pushed individuals beyond a certain threshold to join a radical group and fight on its behalf? Are there sympathisers who never joined or who decided against the use of violence? Why do people who are exposed to recruitment efforts or related information reject the radical path? How do sustained inequalities (objective inequality) and perceived injustice (subjective inequality) impact upon radicalisation? What are understandings of

'radicalisation', 'extremism', 'jihadism' among those directly involved? Is there dissonance between public discourse and self-understandings? And if there is, what is the impact of this on radicalisation trajectories? What role do social relationships (in-person or virtual) have in facilitating radicalisation of ideas and behaviour? What is the role of social media and Internet e.g. to what extent do individuals 'self' radicalise on the basis of online activity? How do emotional experiences, sense of identity and 'coolness' of radical milieus, shape radicalisation trajectories? How do attitudes differ by gender? And what is the role of gender in radicalization (or extremism) more generally?

4.1 Radicalisation and non-radicalisation trajectories

As we made our observations, conducted our interviews and analysed our materials, it appeared to us that the trajectories of radicalisation and of non-radicalisation were determined less by collective than by personal factors.

Radicalisation and non-radicalisation, at least in the Netherlands, is a personal rather than collective phenomenon. That is to say, the pathways of our respondents were not the result of a mobilisation in response to collectively experienced inequality or discrimination. We found few references to a general sense of inequality in opportunities or treatment in the Netherlands, although there was a concern that an anti-Islamic political sentiment may produce structural inequality and discrimination in the future. We did not find indication that the radicalisation process was shaped by formal schooling, ways of upbringing, or persistent religious messaging. The process that eventually brought our respondents to firmly embrace a religious identity, and for some to engage in extremism, started with a search that was instigated by personal circumstances. One of the experts we interviewed for the study aptly summarised our observations:

> Ideology and ideologies do not grip people, hold people. It's people who hold ideologies. Unless the psychological groundwork is prepared, the ideology or the radical ideas will not be gripped. Fundamentally, radicalisation is a psychological state of mind, it has to be understood psychologically, that it is more or less content-free. It hasn't yet decided which ideas it's going to adopt. So the meta mechanism I'm describing behind everything means: unless the psychology is there, a radical idea will not be gripped.

Especially since September 2001, academia has seen a tremendous growth in interest in studies addressing the psychological mechanisms that create an opening for the acceptance of radical ideas (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008; Victoroff and Kruglanski, 2009; Horgan, 2017). Authors have pointed to a variety of psychological drivers and mechanisms, including self-completion (Post, 2007), uncertainty-avoidance (Hogg and Adelman, 2013; Van den Bos, 2020) and significance quest (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2009), to name a few. Some have advocated typologies to deal with the diversity of psychological motives underlying radicalisation (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008).

4.1.1 The relevance of Erikson's concept of Identity Crisis

For present purposes, we found in Erik Erikson's classic analysis of identity crisis a foundation for our analysis of the radicalisation process (Erikson, 1968). Various authors have pointed to the importance of identity crisis in the context of radicalisation (Simon and Klandermans, 2001; Van San, Sieckelink and De Winter, 2001; Gielen, 2008) and many use essentially the same ideas as originally formulated by Erikson, although sometimes without explicit reference (Wiktorowicz, 2005b). In describing the nature of the phenomenon of identity crisis, Erikson (1968) recalls in his classic 'Identity: Youth and Crisis' how he first came to take note of it among American youth during the Second World War. He writes:

> Most of our patients had neither been 'shellshocked' nor become malingerers, but had through the exigencies of war lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity.

They were impaired in that central control over themselves for which, in the psychoanalytic scheme, only the 'inner agency' of the ego could be held responsible. Therefore, I spoke of the loss of 'ego identity'. Since then, we have recognised the same central disturbance in severely conflicted young people whose sense of confusion is due, rather, to a war within themselves, and in confused rebels and destructive delinquents who war on their society.(p.17)

A striking similarity among our respondents, regardless of whether they would eventually engage in extremism, was their mentioning of this moment of loss of 'sense of personal sameness and historical continuity' that marks an identity crisis. Consistent with Erikson's developmental theorising, this moment was experienced during adolescence. 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). [R1] 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. [R2] 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. [R8] told us how the breakup of his parents and the drug addiction of his father contributed to an increasing self-uncertainty during adolescence. [R3] recalls how a nearly fatal car accident spurred his interest in religious affairs.

Of the 15 respondents we directly asked about the 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.

For many of the respondents, religious engagement meant a new perspective on life that provided order, equanimity and purpose (Paloutzian, 1981). [R3] described how religion provided him peace of mind and brought together the missing pieces of the puzzle. For [R9], religion helped to establish a spiritual relationship with her lost mother. [R7] recalled how her engagement with religion contributed to a sense of control and the prospect of a hereafter.

4.1.2 Diverging forms of identity formation

We found experiences of identity crisis during adolescence both among those who would eventually be convicted for terrorism related offences as well as those who had rejected or were rejecting the Jihadist call. For both groups, the experience of identity crisis led to an acceleration of religious identity formation, and here we found considerable divergence between radicalisation and non-radicalisation trajectories.

Erik Erikson (1968) provides a detailed description of the identity formation process:

In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. This process is, luckily, and necessarily, for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated 'identity consciousness'. (p.23)

The details of the description are particularly informative in the sense that they highlight important components of the search process we found in the life stories of our interviewees. As many of them underwent an identity crisis, religious identity became a frame of reference for conduct, learning and

judgement. In turn, understanding and experiencing this religious identity as a Muslim requires reflection and observation, and an attunement to one's social surrounding for validation.

The (perceived) reception by others in relation to one's self-evaluation was markedly different for those who were eventually convicted for terrorism related offenses and those who never have been fully involved in the jihadist scene. Those who radicalised and eventually were confronted with law enforcement, encountered a lack of understanding and rejection of their increased religious commitment. The group that rejected extremist viewpoints did not report this lack of understanding or rejection. Rejection came for instance from friends who would not accept the implications of the conversion of [R1]. He recalls:

> After my conversion, I felt disappointed to see that I was not accepted. You often hear someone losing 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 want 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.

In addition to rejection, Erikson's notion of 'identity consciousness' also plays an important role in the stories of some of our respondents. As Islam, Muslims and ethnicity are increasingly becoming topics of public debate, consciousness of 'being a Muslim' has come to the fore. [R8] mentioned how the public reaction to September 11 was a critical event in this regard:

> I used to listen to my dad a lot, but when that fell away, yes, then I got derailed. And then a few things happened that triggered me to radicalise. The first point was that I started to wonder more and more about how 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 never did 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.

The portrayal of Muslims in the media since 9/11 was brought up by others as having had a similar stigmatising effect. [R13] for instance reflected on the earlier described 'Sharia triangle' article (see Section 2.1.) that appeared in a national newspaper and was eventually retracted:

> At the time of the article, there were, say, very few Syria-goers[1] – you could have counted them on the fingers of your hands. So, none of those parents could relate to the story [on the Sharia triangle]. Parents got together to talk about things together and about that story. It did not sound familiar to anyone. […] Then soon it became like, 'okay, things don't add up.'

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[1] The label of 'Syria-goer' is a literal translation of the Dutch label of 'Syriëganger' that is used to refer to someone who travels to Syria to join a jihadist organisation. We recognise that the word may sound awkward in English, but we are unaware of alternative, more appropriate translations.

But on the other hand, 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 a bit 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.

The public imagery of 9/11 and young Muslims who are publicly portrayed as 'radicalised' further contributes to a rift between self-judgement and judgement of others. In accordance with Erik Erikson's framework, the individual 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 '*kuffar*' (unbeliever), as well as the commitment to closely follow one's own path. [R8] recalled:

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. While one would think 'you are brat'. Wet behind the ears and then you want to tell your mother, yes, how Islam should actually be. So. […] I withdrew myself. That was my radicalisation process. From the age of 16 I started to behave more and more, yes, different. My clothes also changed. I started to wear Islamic clothes.

A close relative of someone who travelled to Syria, recalled a similar process:

At one point my aunt chose to send him to military service in Turkey. His brother too, by the way. Also compulsory military service, because he was also struggling. […] Well one brother just kind of got out like the service and he was like, no dude, what is this? The other saw the injustice there. He decided, I will join the Dutch army. Well, then he started working in the Netherlands, as a professional soldier. But there, he soon had problems with his conscience on the one hand, in the sense that he could not support the choices and actions of the Dutch government and army. And at the same time he also had difficulty with the culture within the Ministry of Defence. And he noticed that it was not really favourable for people with a, well, Islamic background. And in this case an Arab Turkish background too. At one point it stopped. […] He was actually already in the process. We always talked to him about problems, world politics, the Netherlands, the war. And he was a very good orator. Very convincing. Charismatic. Deep knowledge of what is happening in the world. But above all, convinced of his own right.

An imam told us how, in part as a result of pressures by the authorities, he was forced to break the connection with a radical group of youngsters he had been in a discussion group with.

Around 2012, recruiters started recruiting for Syria. A group of radicalised people was then expelled from the mosque. In fact a pity because the best reaction is to talk to them a lot, even when you are faced with all kinds of accusations (hypocrite, collaborator with intelligence service ... these are actually all reproaches out of powerlessness). People started moving to Syria and the media accused the mosque of being involved in radicalisation. At first we thought: they are reasonable but they started to leave… We had to answer to the outside world every time. After leaving the mosque, the group gained more authority and power vis-à-vis other young people in the neighbourhood and the city and moved into their own space

where they gave lectures that attracted other young people. They began to compete with us — don't go to the mosque , they told other youths, we were seen as competitors who ruined it for them, they didn't want disruption of their message.

4.1.3 Contextualised and decontextualised identity formation

As some of our respondents were moving away from their immediate social networks of family, teachers, and imams, the Internet and the fringes of religious communal life became their primary source of knowledge regarding what it means to be a Muslim. In these engagements, the interpretation of Islam and outlook on life were much less rooted in the local context and, during critical time periods, they became infused with a narrative of struggle and injustices committed against Muslims worldwide. The Internet was also instrumental in transferring visual imagery of the horrors of the armed struggle in the Middle East.

In the previous interview segment describing the imam's recollection of his dealing with a group of radicals, the fear of being linked to radicals and the reputation damage this might bring about was one factor that contributed to the breaking of the connection between the religious authorities within mosques and the young radicals searching for purity, truth and justice. Another factor, which we found in a conversation with a respondent, was that the mosques, traditionally serving communities of immigrant workers, were not able to connect to these youngsters. Some of these mosques provided them a place in the mosque without connecting at all. [R1] explains:

> 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.

Disconnected from local religious authority or support, the eventual radicals would thus find affirmation and validation among each other, and on the Internet. [R10] was involved in the first group of the radicals in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, additionally found inspiration from a mysterious Syrian:

> I learned reading and writing, at home we only spoke in dialect, not classical Arabic, that was important. This allowed me to read many things myself, including in the Qur'an and on the Internet. […] 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 by, 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 please you because you are a Muslim. That is stated in the Quran.' '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, there also an 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. See for example Palestine and Chechnya, 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 a phone number of a guy ... they often meet, he said ... contact me, so I ended up in a living room where everything was discussed ... then in 2003 or 2004 there were more physical meetings, later it went on more via the Internet.

[R8] discussed similar 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.

These accounts diverged from those of the respondents who did not affiliate with extremist, or hostile thought and actions. This group of respondents, without exception, connected to their parents, their school teachers, their work, or local religious authorities. This connection solidified a social/communal context that helped to root their identity formation process and to prevent the adoption of a worldview characterised by hostility. [R2] explains:

Anyone can be susceptible, some are resilient, they can turn to others; some deal with the wrong people. We are taught: Ask someone who knows more about It. Don't ask someone who doesn't know about it. At the time, the youngsters had no patience to take classes. The lessons made us resilient, by gaining knowledge. Develop a sense of distinction between what is false and what is true. The message plays on the feeling of young people: What are you doing? There is rape... children die... nobody does anything... and what are you doing? God is going to ask: what have you done in a positive way? He does not ask to take up arms. Instead, deal with matters that affect you personally. Leave the larger context out. How do you deal with it? It's horrible, it hurts, a country has lost half its population... but what can you do? Nothing, what do you achieve when you take your own life? You can recognise it ... you can feel it ... other Muslims have those feelings too... it is unjust ... but how do you deal with it? They see the wrong people, do not listen to advice ... were warned but did not listen ... the main factor is knowledge, going to mosque and taking classes, that is a shield against radicalisation, they go now and then and now and then not... do you have well-founded knowledge that provides guidance, or fragmented knowledge, or a little bit of everything and you actually don't know anything, but have you picked something from everywhere.

4.1.4 Prisoners of hate

Our observations suggest that the key element that differentiates the trajectory of 'radicals' versus 'non-radicals', is their social reception of the newly developing identity during the identity formation process.

Radicalisation and non-radicalisation trajectories, while both driven by identity formation processes in response to deeply disruptive life events, take different turns as a result of responsiveness by respondents' immediate social environment or the lack thereof. For those on a path to radicalisation, the neglect or rejection of their newly developed identity that was formed in response to identity crisis, constituted the starting point of a spiral. In this spiral, the uncertainty associated with the identity crisis could not be effectively addressed in the absence of social validation, and thus formed the psychological groundwork for the appropriation of a worldview that not only *did* affirm the newly found identity but also, through a Manichean narrative of the pure versus evil, provided a powerful answer to social rejection and the negative affect that this rejection elicited. As the embrace of the radical stance was met with further rejection, the mixture of identity-related uncertainty and negativity caused the spiralling down in further opposition to the views of the immediate social environment and society at large, and the further solidification of one's newly acquired identity, a vanguard of the Islamic cause.

This process differs from what Erikson (1968) described as negative identity formation whereby the individual increasingly assigns him or herself negative attributes to take an oppositional stance vis a vis society. In the case of negative identity formation, the individual is aware of the negative valence of the attributes but persists in his or her adherence to the societal norms on which the judgement of negativity is based. In our case, the standards for evaluation were substituted by alternative standards that made the behaviours, views, and aspirations to be subjectively perceived in a positive light and came with explicit denouncement of societal standards.

This process also diverges from theories that maintain that the adoption of a radical way of life and extremist worldview stems from a desire to reduce uncertainty (Hogg and Adelman, 2013; Van den Bos, 2020). Although (identity-related) uncertainty plays a role in the process, it also plays a role in the increased religious interest during an identity crisis among those who did not radicalise. Adherence to an extremist point of view puts one in contention with one's immediate social environment and increases the likelihood of social rejection, thereby fanning further uncertainty rather than reducing it. Radicalisation and extremism thereby imply an identity-constituting social dynamic of opposing and positioning that is not addressed by models that assume that extremism reduces uncertainty. Furthermore, although it has often been argued that an extremist worldview is simpler and therefore more suitable to reduce uncertainty, the degree of simplicity of a worldview is very difficult to diagnose and to compare, and the notion of simplicity is especially difficult to apply to ideologies as they exist in real life. One might for instance conceive of conspiracy theories as bringing complexity rather than simplicity.

Instead, among our respondents who chose the radical path, social denial and rejection appears to have triggered a 'survival response' described in various analyses of radicalisation (Chemtob *et al.*, 1997; Beck and Deffenbacher, 2000; Pyszczynski, Solomon and Greenberg, 2002; Dechesne, 2015; Hobfoll, 2018). These analyses suggest that once the world is perceived as a struggle between one's own cause vis-a-vis an opposition, a heightened vigilance emanates that fixates on threat that may come from this opposition, while (as this fixation implies) the individual loses sight of anything other than the conflictual relationship. This fixation, in turn, strengthens the sense that there is a threat out there, thus accelerating the conflictual dynamics, and making the individual, what Beck (2000) calls, a 'prisoner of hate'. [R8]:

> 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 hard. And very cold. Because I had no emotions either. And that manifested itself at that moment.

[R10] recounts how he radicalised after his encounter with the Syrian described earlier:

The Syrian man would give lessons about monotheism, the unity of god, idolatry, especially about that, the faith had to become very strong first…… Wahhabism, many books by Mohamed ibn Abd al Wahaab, the laws of god. And at one point the holy war ... against the apostate governments and all kinds of things, including the attacks in Madrid and September 11, there was also much talk about current affairs. The attacks were talked about positively. We did not make the statements ourselves, we did want to refer to scholars or to a fatwa, we wanted to arm ourselves, in case people would ask: why is it good? Those scholars thought it was a permissible action, we listened and found it strong arguments, e.g. September 11 was an eye for an eye, the war in Iraq cost thousands of lives, this was a reaction to what they [the West] have done in Muslim countries, the attacks on the WTC are legitimate.

[R13] reflects on the motivations of a relative who eventually would travel to Syria to join ISIS and to carry out a suicide attack. For him, the sense of being persecuted as a Muslim was not only based on events on the international stage, but also on personal experience.

He spoke at demonstrations and you name it. You know about him; okay, he wanted to convey a certain message. Because otherwise you will not speak at a demonstration. Or then you're not going to take that risk. Well, he's tried to travel to Syria a few times, well, it didn't work. They were going to thwart that. He was bothered and harassed every time. Home raid and your computer is gone, and your phone is gone, and stuff. And then after 3 months there appears to be nothing punishable or whatever. But then you have to buy all new things. And then continuously, this and that, and surveilled, and stopped, and so, and being searched. And then the connection with the message [at the protests]. And then you get, okay, freedom of expression is not there for me.

According to [R13], the sense of being prosecuted continued after the departure from the Netherlands, as was the case for many others:

I look at the complete picture, see people come back with the real thought of; ok, I'm going to do something in Europe. Really an attack, or whatever. And then I think of; but where does that come from? Because everyone was actually coming together in the Middle East. And if you, huh, just as simple, outside of politics or Islam or whatever, or about religion. Look, if you are uniting somewhere, you are not going to make enemies somewhere else because then you are trying to get strong together first. And then you might even make friends instead of enemies.

But why is it that people feel inclined? They actually ran away from the Netherlands or from Belgium or France, because they did not feel at home here. And to the extent that they say: okay, I have to leave now. And then they left, and then apparently there are a few among those thinking; no, I'm going back and I'm going to do something terrible there. Well, that happens to be the moment when a lot of people left Europe to go there, eh, after the coalition suddenly started. They think, OK, I fled the Netherlands, and Dutch planes are bombing me here. I thought I had left the Netherlands behind. I am closing my book on the Netherlands. And the Netherlands is now bothering me.

[R14] sums up the conflictual dynamic that lies at the heart of the mindset associated with what we call radicalism:

> 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. So we have to see it, it's a punishment. As a result, they have found an excuse by which they can fight a group where they actually have no business. And what are young people going to do, women, boys, young boys, they just want to leave, travel because they no longer feel at ease. I am arrested. Why? You look suspicious, you are suspect, you create a suspicious situation, I think to myself it is my freedom, I can do whatever I want, can't I? Apparently not.

Underlying these reflections on the radicalisation experience, one may identify a profound sense of injustice about the way Muslims in the Netherlands and around the world are being treated. The sense of injustice that is felt in local context may also serve to connect to the feelings of injustice about the treatment of Muslims globally. In the next section, we will consider in greater detail the degree to which inequality and perceived injustice impact on radicalisation.

4.2 How inequalities and perceived injustice impact upon radicalisation

An extensive review of available qualitative studies on radicalisation documented in the DARE report *Meta-ethnographic synthesis: Qualitative Studies on Inequality and Radicalisation* by Poli and Arun (2020) delineates a number of ways in which objective inequality, perceived injustices and radicalisation can be related. Many of these suggestions reflect the stories of our respondents, contributing to the classification of the varieties of ways in which inequalities, perceived injustice, and radicalisation, interrelate in the Netherlands. Poli and Arun identify four direct or indirect connections between inequality to radicalisation. First, they argue, socio-economic inequality may directly cause radicalisation; secondly, there may be a perception of being unjustly treated while preferential treatment is given to others, and this may trigger radicalisation; thirdly, there may be a vicious circle of stigmatisation and radicalisation, with stigmatisation contributing to radicalisation and radicalisation in turn contributing to further stigmatisation; and fourthly, the relationship between inequality and radicalisation may be determined by a complex set of additional variables.

4.2.1 Socio-economic inequality as possible driver of radicalisation

In the life stories of our interviewees, we found little indication that socio-economic deprivation was an important theme in their lives. As the majority of respondents came from immigrant families of Moroccan or Turkish descent, we recognised in their description of their family background the general story of labour immigration as it unfolded in the 1970s. Many of the fathers were involved in manual labour, for instance, in construction or at the greenhouses south of The Hague, while the mothers stayed at home to take care of the children and the house. For some of the fathers, conducting manual labour represented a step back in the light of their educational background in their country of origin. Yet, for them, it was possible to eventually find their way to a leadership position within the organisation.

The vast majority of respondents reported positive recollections of their childhood. There was no sense of misery among the respondents. The exception were the three interviewees who were raised in a Christian environment and eventually converted to Islam. They reported the divorce of their parents and domestic instability associated with it. One of the critical events for some of the respondents with a migrant background concerned the schooling recommendation that is given by primary school teachers in the final year before transitioning to high school. The respondents felt that the assessment had been

too negative, leading them to a schooling path that was below their intellectual capabilities. A few reported being bullied at school. We found indication that internships, which are an integral part of vocational education, and serve as a crucial first step into professional life, came with challenges that were specific to our respondents.

[R1] told us:

> When I was converted I started a new schooling programme in social services. There didn't seem to be anything wrong, I just converted but didn't do much with it. I wanted to pray at school, no problem, teachers prayed themselves, opened a room, gave a prayer rug. During my internship at a public housing corporation association, they thought it was strange, even though they would smoke a cigarette every 10 minutes. When my wife started wearing a headscarf and long dress, she also got strange reactions, neighbours' behaviour changed, they would even spit at her, that felt very unjust for my wife.

[R2], who rejected radicalism, remembers:

> During my studies, it was difficult to find an internship. In 2001, I was looking for an internship, in the period of graduation I consciously started to focus on religion, did little with it before, I got deeper into it, reading texts, books etc in order to go through life as a better Muslim, growing a beard ... that did mean that I had to redo a semester. I could not find an internship ... I was offered a nice place at a research agency, but the opportunity passed .. the teacher who offered it said: 'you are not going to ask for a place to pray'...... but I said I would do it in my free time ... afterwards, it turned out they found someone else ... 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.

[R7] mentions:

> My internship was difficult. It was very difficult to find an internship. I was called for an interview. 'Why don't you shake hands? You have to.' Yes, but 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.

[R10] directly connected the lack of internship opportunity to his eventual radicalisation:

> Interviewer: Which factors played a role in your radicalisation?
>
> [R10]: Coincidence, meeting someone, it is not only: you have lost someone or you want to deepen your knowledge, it is also a coincidence, circumstances. No internship, a lot of time left, you meet someone when you are vulnerable; If I had found an internship I would have been busy and it would have been different.

These experiences during adolescence, typically related to encounters with a societal life beyond ones' family and neighbourhood, constitute the basis for a perception of societal inequality that many of our respondents expressed; the sense of being deprived of a job, a voice, and rights, on the basis of one's social identity. This social identity was partly based on religious identification, but also on ethnic identification, and identification with one's neighbourhood, and often the three combined.

Regarding the neighbourhood of the 'Schilderswijk', [R13] remarks:

> [R13]: A lot of young people in that neighbourhood consider everything that is outside the neighbourhood, and maybe just Transvaal [an adjacent urban area] is, say, a kind of foreign experience. And, yeah, that's pretty crazy. But it comes from somewhere. It's partly because they, yes, they feel excluded or at least part of a scrapheap. So, recently I heard a young

person say; 'yes, we are just part of that mess'. So it does come from somewhere. And sometimes it is positive and sometimes it is negative. But something needs to be done with it. I think they will then exclude themselves

Interviewer: Because they feel excluded?

[R13]: Not really, because they don't feel excluded when they are together. Because they, it's always us and them or something. And if you then ask; who is we and who are they? Yes, that's just instinctively; okay, he's fine and he's not ok. Either they are good or they are not good. Yes, and I don't really know what that is based on. It is groupthink, yes. You also have that a lot. Just really on a neighbourhood level.

Inequality was also perceived to be based on ethno-national fault lines. Among our sample, awareness of ethnicity was particularly pronounced among our Moroccan respondents. In the past two decades, the Moroccan community in the Netherlands has come under considerable political and public scrutiny. At the time of the 9/11 attacks, the dancing on the streets by Moroccan youth in the Dutch town of Ede received considerable national media coverage although later the link between the young people's behaviour and the 9/11 attacks was downplayed (Van den Heuvel and Van Wijngaarden, 2002). The assassin of Theo van Gogh was of Dutch/Moroccan decent. Moroccan youth also figure prominently in debates on crime. Statistics show a considerable overrepresentation in crime involvement among Moroccans (Bovenkerk and Fokkema, 2015). During these times, Geert Wilders has consistently targeted Moroccans in his political presentations; at the time of writing this report, a court ruling has judged him guilty of 'group-based insult' for his promise during an election night speech to decrease the number of Moroccans in the Netherlands (Van der Valk, 2019). This is all to underscore that 'being Moroccan' constitutes a heavily politicised identity. A number of respondents in our sample refer to 'Moroccan identity consciousness'.

[R8]'s reflection on his identity consciousness was considered above in relation to 'radicalisation trajectories' (see Section 4.1.2). [R14] further comments on the impact of stigmatisation on Dutch-Moroccan youth:

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.

Respondents' perception that Muslims are treated unequally within society and globally was discussed above in relation to radicalisation and non-radicalisation trajectories. However, it should be further noted that the burdens of inequality were particularly felt by women. Our female respondents focussed specifically on the negative social repercussions of their choice to wear a headscarf during their adolescence.

[R7] told us:

I did not wear a headscarf until MBO [secondary vocational education], the first year. I was not at all concerned with religion, more just the cultural aspects. Then I started to deepen my understanding and that year I went... That was very difficult for me, because I started the MBO without a headscarf and then I started wearing a headscarf. That was very difficult. I wanted it so badly and my mother said, 'Are you sure? Think about it carefully, it is a choice you make for yourself and no one else.' So I think that's such a shame that it is presented like this ... That it is not a form of freedom. While I was really in doubt, because I was afraid of

the choice. 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 in it. I was 17 then.

[R9] converted to Islam at the age of 16 and recalled:

Interviewer: do you have your own experiences in terms of discrimination or violence or unjust treatment?

[R9]: Yes, of course I had, with Youth Care. I was sixteen, I became a Muslim. And at that moment I came under official Youth Care supervision. I was entitled to priority housing. But I was not assigned a house because I was wearing a head scarf. Although there was nothing wrong with me at the time, I was subjected to a psychological examination. And I just did it, of course. Whatever, nothing to worry about. But it is about how you are treated then.

Interviewer: But can you really say that, was it so clear that it was really to do with your headscarf?

[R9]: The moment I came in with my headscarf, I saw my supervisor, I saw her, she changed. Her whole attitude changed. So yes, that is, I think that was discrimination then. I was still under supervised living, and the supervision had been very positive about me until my conversion. I have never touched alcohol, I have never smoked drugs. While all the others who lived there, who did everything: smoking, drinking alcohol. I didn't do any of that. I chose the spiritual path instead. (…) And those who are not allowed to smoke there and who still did it every day, they just let them do it. That is actually typical.

In Section 4.1.3, we explored how a sense of inequality was used by recruiters to attract young people into radical organisations. This pertained to the time period immediately following the 9/11 attacks of 2001. We also conducted an interview with someone closely involved in the organisation of activism in the years following the Arab Spring leading up to the departure of many young Muslims from the Netherlands to the Islamic State. During these years, the perceived unjust treatment of Muslim prisoners formed the basis of social media activism that eventually culminated in real-world meetings that inspired a number of attendees to travel to Syria.

[R17] describes:

We got together with about 20 men. At one point we rented our own space, because such a group is too big to be received in people's homes. Free Saddik was actually a human rights campaign. Saddik was tortured in prison in Morocco and detained under very bad conditions. Because later questions arose for people from all kinds of other countries, the name has become more general, Behind Bars, but it always concerned dignified treatment and the release of Muslim prisoners. […]

At a certain point we started to conduct more and more campaigns. We decided to organise ourselves as Free Saddik-Behind Bars and later we also came up with Street Dawah. I often went along, but not always. For example, we organised an action against the burqa ban in The Hague, I was not there.

It would be too much to infer that this quote directly relays the assertation that radical organisations are exploiting perceived injustices. But the emphasis on the unjust treatment of Muslim prisoners and the focus on the right to wear a burqa do underscore that these themes have been used as a mobilising force

for a segment of young people who eventually travelled to Syria and who either died there or were convicted of terrorism related charges upon their return to the Netherlands. At the same time, we should also note that initiatives to address perceived injustices by no means automatically culminate in extremism.

Thus, we generally failed to find indications that socio-economic circumstances drove our respondents directly into a path of radicalisation. However, we did find that the transition from public schooling to professional participation, most notably in the form of an internship, came with frustration and, frequently, rejection. We also encountered a general sense among our respondents that they were discriminated against on the basis of being from particular neighbourhoods, of particular ethnicity, and for being Muslim. The reactions towards female Muslims by non-Muslims were particularly harsh. Respondents who were involved in radical milieus during two different time periods reported on the central role of inequality and unjust treatment of Muslims in the narrative of mobilisers and recruiters for the radical cause. We should hasten to stress, however, that discussing injustices should not be considered a first step that inevitably leads to radicalisation.

4.2.2 Double standards

The sense of injustice is strongly tied to the notion of double standards: the perception of being unjustly treated while preferential treatment is given to others. The perception of double standards manifests itself in the ideas that one's own group is treated as second-class citizens; or that terrorist attacks carried out in the name of Islam promote discrimination towards Muslim communities; or that conviction of terrorism leads to disproportionally harsh punishment relative to other crimes. We consider how this perception relates to radicalisation.

[R13] reflects being treated as second-class citizen, and reflects in particular on the role of the community police:

> The reason why many people in our neighbourhood, for example, do not report to the police when there is an incident, or do not even want to be in contact with a local police officer or someone from the government because they simply, yes, the hope, the trust is just so damaged that there is no more hope. But that one does, say, see their own neighbourhood deteriorate and think of; yes, 10 years ago I would have thought it would go this way. And all they think then is, 'Okay, as long as I keep my street clean', or 'as long as I have another place where I can go'.

> Interviewer: But what kind of events are you thinking about?

> Violent incidents involving police and young people mainly, often as a result of a minor disturbance. […] After something else has happened. Or after an arrest of someone who is then either suspected or has done something. And then afterwards the terrible things usually happen in police cages, in police stations and in police cars. […] let me put it this way; in the past when we sat on a square and the policeman drove past and when he 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 gonna be hit by the police'. Because you grow up in such an environment with that feeling, that already harms you in your development. And I used to think it was just normal, but afterwards you will look at that and think, 'Ok how can that be?'.

This quote emphasises the sense that terrorist attacks have escalated discrimination towards Muslim communities in the West. This idea of discrimination as a result of terrorist attacks was widespread among respondents.

In the long run you will get… you cannot change the media, which is now above the *trias politica* [the triad of, independent, legislative, executive and judicial branches of government], above it is a fourth force .. politics follows the media, you cannot change it, change that image, say: guys we are very different from what is portrayed. Many Muslims eventually just accept it as it is .. If you have rented a house in Friesland, people think 'Oh, scary', you accept that. [R6]

Relatedly, [R16] reflects on his conviction for sedition:

I always worked for the rule of law. I studied public administration, I wanted to do something with that too, […] I was actually active, in my criticism, in my condemnation of ISIS, in attacks. In the end, because you are a Muslim, you will still be persecuted for certain things. That's too bad. But I might not have said certain things or should have said differently, that is also, I may also have made it easier for them, those enemies and haters. Yes that is a pity. Now I found out, but yes, now it is too late. Perhaps, now it is becoming difficult, for example, to pursue a political career or, with your academic studies, to actually play a role in policy and governance. But maybe that was also a reason, because they know, if you are convicted, it doesn't really matter how you are convicted, the punishment you had, security clearance becomes difficult. They have really thwarted and thwarted you. Maybe that was their plan. But yes, luckily I am free. I am satisfied, yes.

Parents and respondents we interviewed persistently voiced grievances regarding the way they were treated by authorities.

Parent [R21] recalled his dealings with the police:

It was almost traumatic for a few parents: [The police,] they did not assist you, it was the other way around. 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.

[R13] shared his discontent regarding his treatment after being suspected of radicalisation:

And that debt I had, that is what am I talking about - 2014, November, to this day still no one has solved it. And when you talk about that because you are assigned as a personal case then everyone is silent and then they dismiss you as 'Oh, but you were radical'. And, 'Oh, and he's dangerous. So we'll be careful with that gentleman.' And we'll just this and we'll just that. But on the other hand, it is those people where you then, yes, under supervision or something like that, make use of that financing that the government then gives to those municipalities by saying, 'Oh, but we're looking after this boy. We are helping him to get back on track Or we look for a new home for him where he can integrate into society more easily.' Or 'we will see if he can have a conversation with a theologian'. But at the time I was in school and my teacher was very in touch with the safety house. And the police and the judiciary were there too, well, they disappeared very quickly after two weeks because they saw that there was nothing, because I had not done anything criminal. But then there remains a fairly vague case that they cannot do anything with and therefore nothing has actually been done with it. But on the other hand, you have to deal with people who follow you, police officers who bother

you. I found a job, by myself, and I told them that, that I found it independent of help, and then the next day there was a raid by the tax authorities, police, at my work.

4.3 Young people's own understandings of 'radicalisation'

What are our respondents' own understandings of radicalisation? Virtually all of the respondents were asked this question, and many came up with a similar argument. First, radicalisation is not to be equated with a change in outward appearance. Secondly, many of the respondents described radicalisation as a disconnection from society and community. Thirdly, in Islam, some of the respondents told us, there is a conception of radicalisation that casts the phenomenon in a negative light. Fourthly, subjects of radicalisation were often considered to be misguided by recruiters and Internet information. Some distinguished the concept of radicalisation from extremism, and in so doing, allowed for a positive interpretation of radicalism to be contrasted with extremism, which is universally perceived as negative. As a final note on this topic, some of our respondents remarked that radicalisation is also an exogeneous concept used in public administration that has created its own reality independent of the realities on the ground.

4.3.1 Radicalisation and outward appearance

In response to our questions about radicalism and extremism, many of our respondents mentioned a common mistake to infer radicalism and extremism from outward appearance.

[R6] for instance comments:

> When is something extreme? Define! If I have a beard, don't shake hands, am I extreme? Ten years ago it was a peculiar habit, now it is seen as extreme. One quickly comes to judge Salafism.

[R13] recalls of his high school years:

> When I was in the [name of high school], the freshman year, then after my freshman year I was voted best student in the school. And a year later when at one point I grew my beard and because you are constantly confronted with your own identity, you are actually going on a quest, your own quest (…) I point out that everyone thinks, 'Oh, that's a Salafist'. Or, 'Oh, he's radicalising'. The one who just started shooting in the tram in Utrecht: how did it come to that? He had problems with his girlfriend, had been in prison, crime, drugs. All those factors played a role. It's not a thing. You cannot say, 'Well, he grew a beard and wore a *jalaba*, that's the reason for that act'.

[R7] relate radicalism to outward appearance, but in a particular way. According to her, radicalism is to a certain extent a performance; it is about 'showing off'.

> Someone may call me radical in my belief, how I practice, or by my appearance. If you sometimes look at descriptions, from studies, we have seen that looks are sometimes described as radical already. So a beard, or a long robe. I don't see that as radical. I see radical as people who really want to travel to go to war. I always say, 'You don't even know who you are at war against and why do you have to go to war? Have you been attacked here yourself? You have a good life.' So, by the way, as I just said, I find excessive overt expressiveness an indication of a radical. I like to show that, here I am and you can't hurt me. I don't like that kind of behaviour.

4.3.2 Radicalisation as a deviation from the norm

Others primarily conceived of radicalisation as a deviation from the norm. Radicalisation is about being different. [R1] mentions this:

> By radicalisation I mean that you are different from the rest, for example if you pray five times a day. So if you deviate from the norm.

[R17] further clarifies:

> Radical literally means 'back to the roots'. For me it actually means that you fall outside the mainstream, have exceptional opinions and do not want to argue about it with others.

4.3.3 Radicalisation in Islamic theology according to our respondents

In our discussions on the definition of radicalisation, some of our respondents referred to the position of radicalisation within Islam. As they noted, the Quran contains references to the phenomenon of radicalisation and casts it in a negative light. According to [R6], this is one of the reasons why there is a tension between religious orthodoxy on the one hand and the contemporary radicals on the other. [R6]:

> Within Islam, radicalisation was literally used by the prophet. It says in the tradition: they destroy the radicals, their case will come to naught. He is talking about extremists, they take Islam too extreme, for example, fasting every day, no more normal food, or other traditions, all ordinary Muslims are not good enough. Thus Islam itself defines what is extreme. When media pays attention to the phenomenon of Islam, Salafism is given its own interpretation, not the same as the Islamic interpretation, or as is known among Islamic scholars. AD and Nu.nl [two news sources] have their own definitions, agree on certain points, that this is radicalisation; they correspond on certain points with Islamic interpretations but not on others. Wearing a beard and not shaking hands is seen as radically orthodox by the mainstream. If someone goes further, for example, wants to use violence or disbelieve other Muslims, this is seen by both as radical, as extremist. [...] These are young people, they come to us in the mosque, go with the wrong group and become extremists.

And then he continues on extremism:

> If you look at extremists. Never an older man over 50 among them, it is one of the characteristics that the Prophet gave, they are young in age, young in mind, quick to act but look pious on the outside, much has already been indicated by prophet himself about extreme groups that correspond to what is now ... the companions of the prophet, one of the scholars, there was a group of extremists who had fought against mainstream Muslims ... the prophet's cousin went to them after the death of the prophet, to start a conversation: tell me your doubts that make you think this is just ... none of the companions you will ever see among you, the old guard, the learned guard. But the misfits can be found in extremist groups .. those that have yet to be introduced to Islam.

4.3.4 Extremism is about being misguided

In these quotes, the idea that extremists are misguided permeates accounts of radicalisation. [R6] elaborates:

> Young people who become more extreme do not investigate whether something is true, there are strict standards for taking something as true. Just go by what people say or on the Internet. [...] Extremist young people rely on an intermediary, not from a recognised foundation but from living room teachers. The link to sources is unclear or distorted. Extremists haven't been around since 9/11. The Prophet already warned that there would be groups of extremists within Islamic ranks. Their origins date back to the death of the Prophet

and they have caused much destruction. I know someone who acted as an imam, he was later arrested, he twists, for example, that you can kill unbelievers. A scholar said that in times of war, but that imam now cites the source, but in the current context, that's where things go wrong. So, wrong intermediaries. You have to rely on theologically founded lectures, recognised books, extremism is wrong from an Islamic point of view.

This view is further corroborated by a parent [R23] whose son travelled to Syria and died there:

> [R23]: He's just an impressionable boy, so easy. And the rest, well. Many people think that it may be the parents, but it is not at all. In the beginning everyone thought so. But they are real extremists, they are still in Syria. Well, now no longer because ISIS is now gone, but they were at the front until the last moment. And they do not want to return to the Netherlands either. Sometimes I see images of those women in those camps who also say: 'We are not going back'. They are extremists.
>
> Interviewer: Yes, of course your son hit the wrong people at the wrong time.
>
> [R23]: Sure! Because an extremist goes there to die, he will not come back. He wants to go to heaven, he wants eleven brides or women, I know a lot what they all say. People who think differently will of course leave, they will not die for it.

[R10] concurs:

> I think radicalism is mainly a misinterpretation of Islam. Many guys have a good intention, guys who went to Syria to fight Assad, that was a noble act that you want to stand up for the oppressed but unfortunately some have gone astray and sought affiliation with completely different groups.

4.3.5 Radicalisation as an administrative contrivance

Some of our respondents doubted the conceptual legitimacy of 'radicalism' or 'extremism.' Some mentioned that public views on radicalisation and extremism have at least partially been construed by authorities who are thought to have perhaps projected a threat that may not actually be there.

[R15] explains this viewpoint:

> [R15]: I may be a bit too cynical, but I just know it is. I've talked to people who do it. I see. And when you talk about the case histories of some guys, I think: yes, radicalisation, is that true? A 16-year-old who shouts such things. I don't know. I don't think so. I also do not think that we should approach them as radicals. Just as youth work in itself, that's their job, I think. To give young people more a place, to help them in their social progress. I teach here at the secondary school. Those children sometimes say very strange things. But you have to understand that it is all a bit of banter. They don't hate Jews, for example, but they say very stupid things. I've talked to them about it too. I did it with four classes that we talked about it, about Jews. Then they say things like fucking Jew or whatever, those guys even have Jewish friends themselves, you know? So that antisemitism story is just nonsense, it doesn't go that deep. But it is used that way. There have been teachers [who say] 'I only have anti-Semites in my class'. Then I think, well guys, that's just not true. And there are probably boys among them who really mean that, who pretend to have real hatred, that is anyway from the parents and too much Al Jazeera watching. But you have to take that with a pinch of salt. It's just getting exaggerated. As a municipality, we should also take a good look at: who do you have in your city?
>
> Interviewer: Making a radical expression is of course different from radicalisation, as an overall all-encompassing process.

[R15]: Exactly, and that difference just isn't being made. That also has to do with the budgeting and targets of those institutions, et cetera. 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 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.

4.4 The role of in-person or virtual social relationships in radicalisation

We have observed a number of times that Islamist radicalisation cannot be understood without taking into account the role of social media and the Internet. In a separate study conducted within the DARE framework on drivers of self-radicalisation and digital sociability in the Netherlands, it was found that Islamist communication via Twitter is conducted within very loosely connected networks (Dechesne and Paton, 2020).

Some of our respondents were also active on the Internet and social media and virtually all of our respondents assigned the Internet a pivotal role in the radicalisation process. As noted before, for our respondents, often socially isolated, the Internet provided a wealth of information on Islam, Islamism and Jihadism, which in turn provided the ingredients for the development of a worldview that pits Muslims against unbelievers and highlights the injustices committed to Muslims in the Netherlands and globally.

The emergence of homegrown radicalisation in the first years of the twenty-first century coincided with the increasing availability of Internet and chat forums. [R8] told us for instance how, through his involvement in the Internet forum Marokko.nl, he was introduced to content depicting footage of war:

> At 'Morocco.nl' I actually met people who were going to teach me, by the way. And he would send me links. They thought it was very important that I would know exactly how the Prophet had lived and that I would really take over his actions. But these were very radical sites […] Because in our faith you have Hadiths. And some are strong and some are weak. For example, you may not use those weak Hadiths. […] But yes, those others who get all those Hadiths that fit their own views and interest, they use them too. I was very quickly convinced that they were right. Because I believed all that they said. That there was a war against Islam. And it was also very much in my awareness, that there was a war in Iraq that was of course unjustified later on. That has of course also been proven. But at that point I saw it as a war against my Islamic brothers. So I kind of felt like it's time to do something. And that was the intention. Travel [to join a Jihadist group] was ultimately the intention.

This phenomenon of radicalisation based on exposure to Internet footage became even more widespread as the Internet gained in influence. From 2012 on, the Internet played a significant role in conveying the increasingly violent political situation in many countries in the MENA region, and the role of the West in these conflicts. More so than before, the Internet not only served as a source of information, but also as a platform for individual participation and as an avenue to like others' views, respond, and share one's own viewpoint. [R14] told us:

> I wanted to do something about injustice. Yes, exactly over the Internet, I am currently indicted for spreading radical messages. (…) You get more strongly involved, the more videos you watch, the more you talk to people, the more, you become rock hard, you become an animal. […] You become a beast. I'm gonna kill you, but more of a beast at school, before school, you get angry, ready. You can't take it anymore, you just wanna go. Eventually, I got

caught up in the scene and was arrested for it […] I shared videos of what life is like there. Because there are fights there. I have not only sent IS films, I generally have all the rebels.

For some, the online involvement eventually culminated in their participation in protest meetings. The in-person participation was often a direct consequence of online participation. [R15] tells us about his experience:

And then of course that stuff came in Syria. The Arab Spring. Then I started to investigate what is happening there. In any case, 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.

From a distance [R4] recalls about the in-person meetings of the groups of radicals:

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.

[R1] joined the group and participated in the activities of group. He told us about the in-person activities:

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.

 [R14] 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.

[R14] continues:

Interviewer: Were there people who thought the same way?

[R14]: 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 doing living a bubble of niceness, all the children live in happiness, in peace. But injustice is happening on the other side of the world.

In summary, we found that the Internet played a critical role in priming young Muslims in search of identity about the injustices committed towards Muslims and translating international and societal conflict into the individual's everyday life. Social media also facilitated in-person interactions that brought together like-minded youngsters and established social bonds between them. In particular they gathered to address the various perceived injustices committed against Muslims locally and globally.

4.5 Ideological factors in radicalisation

In the previous sections, we have addressed how radicalisation is at least in part driven by social and psychological factors. We have underscored the importance of identity formation, the underlying uncertainties and anger and the relational nature of radicalisation. In this section, we elaborate on the nature of Islamist extremist ideology as it has manifested in the past years and consider how our respondents viewed some of the characteristics of this ideology.

A conversation with an imam provided some useful perspectives on how to conceptualise these ideological characteristics (see also section 4.1.2). He told us that around 2012, his mosque was increasingly confronted with young people with an interest in travelling to Syria. At that point, the mosque's administration and the imam were forced to make a decision. On the one hand, the imam strongly believed that continuing the conversation with the youngsters would contribute to non-radicalisation. At the same time, external pressures from media and public administration frustrated this inclusive approach to continue the conversation, although, as the imam told us, this approach had been advocated for by the mayor of The Hague a few years earlier. The mosque was at risk of being forced to close by the municipality, especially after the arrest of some of the youngsters.

Before the mosque told the youngsters they were no longer welcome, the Imam had intensive conversations with them. The imam recalled there were about 20 to 25 youngsters, mostly males but sometimes also a few females. In our conversations, the imam highlighted the fierceness and competitiveness of the debates he had with the youngsters. The conversations were a 'cat and mouse game' he mentioned. He liked theological debate, and oftentimes he could effectively address the

youngsters' arguments. The imam's summation of the issues that were discussed during the meetings is helpful in highlighting the key themes regarding the role of ideology in radicalisation:

1. Is jihad a collective or an individual duty? The latter implies an individual duty to join the fight in Syria.

2. Should Muslims hate or love for the sake of Allah? Must we hate, reject, fight against, and withdraw from anything that is not Islamic?

3. Is living in the West/the Netherlands allowed? Is the West *Dar el Harb*? Can you steal and rob as if it were war zone in a fight against the Muslims?

4. Is it permissible by Islam to carry out attacks in Europe, in retaliation?

5. Are the current Muslim leaders true Muslims or not?

6. Is it a religious duty to redress the injustice done Muslims everywhere?

Below, each of these six points of ideological debate with the young radicals are considered in relation to the views articulated by respondents during the interviews.

4.5.1 Jihad - individual or collective duty?

In our conversations with our respondents, the meaning of Jihad was frequently discussed. Several of the respondents mentioned that jihad should be broadly understood and certainly not only in terms of a militant response in the name of Islam.

[R1] had been inspired to commit to Jihad. However, when he encountered the violent interpretation of jihad in Syria, it led him to doubt the central mission of ISIS.

> I was convinced that jihad is a good thing, although I did not see myself participating in an armed struggle. Fighting is not in my nature. I wanted to, help to distribute clothes for a month and then go home. But when I arrived, I was immediately sent to a training camp. As I understand jihad, there are different forms. The highest form is to fight with weapons for Allah, to let the word of Allah be the highest. Jihad against your inner desires is also important. To cleanse your heart from bad influences and from wrong tendencies. It is a broad concept. It is complicated. There are many rules. If you lack knowledge about praying as a Muslim, you cannot properly pray. It is the same with jihad. There is a defensive jihad, that is allowed under some circumstances. If you are attacked in the house you can defend yourself. […]

> I did not stay long in Syria. I stayed for 11 weeks. Then my visa for Turkey expired. I was stressed about my visa expiration. I already regretted my plans when I was on the way to Syria. Still, I thought, that is an inner struggle. You have to accept honour and loyalty for a higher purpose, that is jihad.

[R1] does recognise that a defensive Jihad may entail a justification of violence:

> Interviewer: 'Winning hearts without shedding blood,' you said and you mentioned the jihad concept, would you like to go into that again?

> [R1]: It is struggle, inner struggle and struggle with weapons to expel the oppressor, but also to let Islam be the highest, in the past also in conquests, or they surrender and become Muslim. It is part of Islam, but my focus is not there now, I live here and stand for another jihad.

> Interviewer: Does this apply to most Muslims?

[R1]: It does matter what is going on in Islamic countries. There is jihad there, a man whose family has been murdered and raped, who wants to stand up for himself, that is jihad… there are many rules around it, there must be an Islamic leader… much is not possible today.

4.5.2 Hate as a religious duty?

[R1] also pointed to the importance of the concept of *Al-Wala' wal-Bara'* that not only concerns loyalty and love for the sake of Allah, but also disavowal for the sake of Allah. In practical terms, this concept translates into avoidance, disdain and hostility towards anything that is different from a purist interpretation of Islam.

[R8] explained to us the phenomenology of the concept:

> I was really convinced of that ideology. I was ready to use violence. But I still didn't feel… it was a bit too difficult for me to do something to people here when I've lived with them. We also had a lot of Dutch friends who came over, where the grandpa and grandma, like neighbours who lived below us were very old people and they were always very sweet to me. It did go all the way back. Because I also say hate is a thief of your humanity, of all those real human qualities that you get as a young boy. When hate enters your system it changes. […] But they dehumanise those other people, so they stop seeing them as human beings. And that is... So I saw... That's how I started to see the unbelievers too. Not as humans anymore. Those are the enemies. But for me it was hard to do an act anyway.

Overall, however, we did not observe a widespread appeal of this concept. Few made reference to it, and from how our respondents expressed themselves, we were also unable to infer any sentiment that corresponded to *Al-Wala' wal-Bara'*, although some said they had witnessed it in others.

4.5.3 Can a Muslim live in the Netherlands?

We also found no indication of a sentiment that, for religious reasons, one should not live in the Netherlands. In the interviews we found little indication that our respondents felt it was impossible for them to live in the Netherlands, despite concern about being scrutinised, and a sense among some that the Netherlands was becoming increasingly hostile towards Muslims. The discussion concerning the question of whether the respondents felt at home in the Netherlands particularly focused on the relationship between democracy and Islam. Some of our respondents saw no issue with voting, whereas for others, from their religious standpoint, it was more problematic.

[R16] was an outspoken proponent of voting:

> I am in favour of voting, I am quite pragmatic in that respect. I don't understand those people who are really totally against elections, against democracy, against the rule of law. So I think, you live here, you work here or you receive benefits here, then I don't understand, because why couldn't you have a little influence? That little bit of influence you can have on government or politics, why not use it? But they have their own black and white ideas, which is difficult.

In contrast, while outspoken against radicalisation, another respondent [anonymously] emphasised the tension between the democratic system and the protection of religious freedom.

> Interviewer: Freedom of religion, role of religion, democracy, state and societal institutions. What do you think?

I will answer that one at a time. Difficult question - difficult because in a secular state there is actually no role for religion, there is none. The Netherlands has chosen to pillorise[2], it created its own legislation that is not based on Christian legislation. Efforts are now being made to ban faith. I see no role for religion in the Netherlands. The role of Islam is to bring peace and balance to Muslims. *Trias politica*, I can't stand it. I don't believe in democracy. It says, the people have to rule. But ask a Dutch person, do you have the feeling you rule? 80% would say 'no'. I have nothing to do with it.

Interviewer: Do you think it is important that people have influence?

My ideal way is that there is a state with an Islamic leader and Islamic law that is enforced. It does not exist in the world today. Benefits here are the freedoms; I make use of that. I wear a beard, I can profess my faith. Those are benefits of democracy; how it was once conceived. But the result is not what they claim. It is a sham to me. The disadvantage of freedoms is also: where does my freedom of speech end? If I start offending, is that still freedom of speech? I do not think so […] Perhaps freedoms are the problem sometimes, I also think that they often do not apply to Muslims, are restricted for Muslims… for example freedom of faith. If I apply to a prestigious accountancy firm, I should be hired ... if I am turned down because I profess my faith ... that's not right. In politics there are also people who want to limit that freedom, Wilders. […] I can well understand that there is a lot of commotion and negative reports about Islam ... but in a democratic constitutional state there should be no prejudices ... look what is being said about us.

[R6] also described the ambiguities of being a Muslim in a democratic system:

To give your opinion, in democracy everyone thinks and contributes. What the Romans used to do, not the women, not the foreigners and slaves, this variant would be more in line with the Islamic system. Some don't support democracy at all, some say don't vote, others do. In the interest of minorities it is necessary to vote and establish a party to better protect the position of Muslims. Just like when you're thirsty in the desert - then it is allowed to drink a glass of wine. Some go so far as to declare voters as 'unbelievers'. It is correct when you say: I do not vote. But others say: we actually should vote to guarantee rights. I am in the middle, I voted last time. It did not feel right, like a glass of wine. Ultimately, my ideal form of government takes Islamic society as a starting point, and Islamic law as guiding law… it is guiding for court and government.

4.5.4 Is it legitimate to carry out an attack?

[R17] emphasised that under particular circumstances, the use of arms may be justified. He particularly referred to the Middle-East.

Interviewer: Are you against violence on principle or is the use of violence sometimes justified?

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[2] Pillarisation ('*verzuiling*' in Dutch) is a term that is typically used to describe the social order in the Netherlands. The pillarised Dutch society was comprised of four ideological social groups (Protestant, Catholic, Socialist and Liberal), which primarily organise and communicate among each other, with only the group's political representatives communicating across group boundaries. In a 'pillarised' society, a religious 'pillar' may have a stronger influence than it would have in countries where there is no pillarization. We should also note that with the decline of institutionalised religion, the pillars that have for long constitutes the fabric of Dutch society have been losing their political influence.

[R17]: In some cases it is justified, for example if there is an ideal Islamic state and it is under attack, then it is legal to defend yourself. But that was not the case in the Middle East. There were already criminal regimes there. Jihad is ultimately also an armed struggle.

Yet, we found few indications of a widespread willingness to commit religiously motivated violence nor an approval of the attacks as they have been taking place across Europe in the past years. Several of our respondents remarked that the sympathy for and appeal of jihadism has been on the decline in the recent past, with the decreasing influence of ISIS and a decrease in appeal of its narrative. It may also be that we failed to connect to the hard core of the jihadist social scene in the Netherlands; [R1] told us about a core group that is still active. During the time of our research, there was also a high profile arrest of a group who were planning to carry out an attack on the basis of distinctly jihadist motives (Stoffelen, 2020). The arrested leader of the group argued, in their defence, that the security services had brought him to his intent to stage an attack, while others in the group stated that the primary reason for acquiring weapons was the willingness to defend themselves and family from the increasing threats and insults from the extreme right and to go abroad and join the jihadi cause in the MENA region.

4.5.5 The legitimacy of Muslim leadership

None of the respondents discussed the authority and legitimacy of current Muslim leadership in the Middle East. Some expressed positivity about the emergence of the political party DENK ('Think' in Dutch and 'Equal' in Turkish). This party has split from the Labour Party following a feud relating to the Labour Party's leader's expression of concern about the state of Turkish youngsters in the Netherlands which, in turn, was a response to a report claiming that 90% of interviewed Turkish youngers supported ISIS (Trouw, 2014). The DENK faction rejected the findings as tendentious and subsequently denounced the Labour Party's leadership. Ever since, DENK has run on an anti-discrimination political agenda that has particularly focused on the protection of Muslims (Siegal, 2016). According to critics, the party is said to be heavily influenced by Turkish president Erdogan and a number of members of parliament have objected to DENK's attempt to single out MPs with a Turkish background and to critically point to their support for the recognition of the Armenian genocide (Özdil, 2020). Some of our respondents sympathised with DENK as a voice for the Muslims in the Netherlands. However, we did not find any pervasive support for this political party, nor for any other.

4.5.6 Injustice and humiliation

In Section 4.1 concerning radicalisation and Section 4.2 on inequalities, we have already discussed the sentiment that Muslims worldwide, and locally, are often being humiliated and threatened. Beyond experiences of injustice and humiliation in one's own life, we also found reference to injustice, humiliation and threat towards Muslims globally and to the hypocrisy of Western countries and the Netherlands in particular towards Muslims.

[R14] mentions for instance:

Money is spent to make more planes and to send them to Syria rather 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 that 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 in 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.

4.5.7 Conclusion on ideological factors

The foregoing analysis suggests that for some, being Muslim is different from not being Muslim, and that being a Muslim comes with norms and practices that may make life in a non-Islamic country such as the Netherlands complicated at times. Living in a democracy is not necessarily consistent with an idealised Islamic form of governance. Many of our respondents fully accepted the governance structure of the Netherlands, and those who expressed tension certainly did not go as far as to hate and express hostility towards those who failed to abide by Islamic standards and practices as the respondents perceived them, although this sentiment was encouraged in the radical scene according to the accounts of respondents who had been involved in it. The idea that injustices are committed against Muslims, both locally and globally, help to further create a rift between Muslims and non-Muslims. Few in our sample embraced Jihad as the commitment to violence to redress these injustices, although a broader interpretation of Jihad as an action to redress imbalances and injustices in oneself, and in the world, through a committed effort, was strongly endorsed.

4.6 Gender

Our sample included a few women, none of whom espoused radical viewpoints, although all had in one way or another been in contact with the phenomenon of radicalisation. Although we discussed the topic of gender with many of our respondents, these discussions yielded few insights regarding the differential interpretations of gender and roles for women and men in the Muslim community in general or on the radical scene in particular. This is quite remarkable: Separation between men and women is a salient aspect of a large part of Muslim community life, whereas for a large part of non-Muslim Netherlands, gender equality and mixing constitute the norm. Some of the male respondents were quite outspoken in their wish of a strict separation between men and women. It was often emphasized that they prefer women to stay at home and take care of their children and the household. One respondent said he could accept his wife to work but only at his office, and separated from other men. The respondents did not consider such view points as an expression of unequal relationships. They expressed respect for the roles women fulfil.

[R7], a female respondent, coveted the separation between boys and girls at an early stage extracurricular Islamic school at a mosque:

> Interviewer: But you have separate children's education. Is that boys and girls together?
>
> [R7]: No, girls are special. Girls are different and they like that a lot more. In the past, the small classes, so youngsters, were together, but girls just don't like that. Boys are wilder, especially in the mosque they have an outlet. At school they are very quiet, in the mosque it is a real party. But girls think the boys are wild, so we did it that way. And they can really focus on education.

[R7] fully accepts and observes the strict separation between men and women. She also observes strict rules concerning attire. She expressed her ease with the way her viewpoints were represented in the mosque, although women were not allowed on the board of the mosque. She told us:

> Interviewer: Are there also women on the board?
>
> [R7]: We have our own ... not a board, it has always been the case, men have certain tasks. We absolutely do not want to interfere with that. I don't have time for that. You are a mother

and you sometimes work out here. They do consult us sometimes. Everything that is decided, we are included in the decision making. We have our opinion. We have a say in many matters and things are also being changed, because there are also highly competent women who have a lot of experience in certain matters. We really have our own core team.

According to [R7] women do congregate and participate via their own meeting groups:

[R7]: We are constantly working on that with friends. Also to keep each other positive, instead of just dealing with negativity.

Interviewer: With friends, but also with the women who come to classes here?

[R7]: Absolutely. That is one of our themes anyway - Dutch society, being a Muslim, how do you combine that? Then we try to share the positive experiences. That is also very nice. My job, my manager, you know how nice ..? And who understands ..? Then you think - we are fortunate. We also try to give those women a bit of a say, so that other girls get a little help.

The positive portrayal of the position of women in the Muslim community was not shared by the other two female respondents in our study. A key difference between [R7], on the one hand, and [R9] and [R18], on the other, is that the latter two were brought up in a Christian environment and only during adolescence had converted to Islam. [R18] told us she was well received initially, as a highly respected newcomer to the community. But she also discovered that being a woman within a Muslim community means something quite different than being a woman in a Dutch Christian community.

In the beginning I was very much celebrated as a powerful emancipated woman. But at that time, her husband started to lose control over a lot of things, including over me, so suddenly it became important that I would be home at 9pm, and I was an idiot if I took off my headscarf, et cetera. So a very negative image of women came to the fore. He decided I would no longer be the mother of his children. That was very clear to me, also because theologically speaking, that is really a very… that is one of the highest things for women, motherhood. I do not think so, but that is a cherished belief. While in the theological tradition there are also many women who have not had children, who stand on an enormous pedestal. But the cliché is: paradise is under your mother's feet. So when the prophet is asked, who do you owe the most honour? Then it is: your mother, your mother, your mother. So that was very clear to me - I will not be a mother, I am dismissed. So why are you staying with me then? It was a big question mark. I think that was also a justification for him to visit other women. I mean you live with one woman, and you get another woman pregnant. That is only possible if you cannot experience dissonance in your head. While, we have never talked about polygamy in the sense of a second or third wife, for example, we have never talked about that in our marriage arrangement.

Several male respondents also pointed to the respect they had for women as mothers, in particular their own mothers and wives. They emphasized women's powerful position in the household. They rejected the notion of the existence of power inequality between man and women in the Islamic world.

[R9] also pointed to the disparities between Muslim men and Muslim women as she argued that:

Women are more connected to their faith through an 'experience of the soul' than men. Men just do it because they should do so. And they are busy with their work. So yes, they do whatever they think is best.

Her comments pertained to the way her mosque (not in The Hague) was run. She explains:

You were also forced to pay that money. Because otherwise you would be put under psychological pressure. So if you were in the mosque, and I've actually only been there a few times, after that I didn't go. Because, I just felt a lot of negativity. And it would be like, 'So, you bought new shoes for yourself, but you gave nothing to us.' To that extent. That you were actually talked into a feeling of guilt. And yes, you know, especially the men who seem to be very sensitive to that. Especially among women there is much more dissatisfaction with such mosques than among men.

Accounts and interpretations of male-female relationships and the difference in conceptions of gender between those within and those outside of Islam constitute a source of continual misunderstanding. This is also expressed by the previously noted insults that Muslim women with headscarves receive when on the street or at work (Section 4.2.1.). The 'burqa ban' that focuses on the prohibition of the wearing of face-covering clothes in public spaces including public transportation represents another issue of contention. The burqa ban is considered by some of the Muslim activists in our sample as a threat to the freedom of women to express themselves. There is also advocacy against the alleged mistreatment of women in Islam. We have already covered Ayaan Hirsi Ali's concern about this issue and how the film 'Submission' led to the killing of Theo van Gogh in 2004. During our research, the practice of female genital cutting (which is illegal in Dutch law) was raised in the Nieuwsuur TV coverage of the practices in the As Soennah mosque (discussed above, see page 2.3.1), which led to a public initiative to file criminal charges against the mosque, and the conviction of the person who had claimed on the website of the mosque that women's genital cutting is 'recommended'. All these occurrences suggest that the position of women in the Muslim communities in the Netherlands constitutes a continual topic of contention between different groups of Muslims as well as those inside and outside of Islam, suggesting that the 'Muslim woman' is and will likely continue to be a politicised identity. It would be of interest to further consider the ways in which this politicisation of Muslim female identity plays a role in radicalisation (Groen and Kranenberg, 2010).

5. Conclusions

This study was conducted in order to answer a number of research questions that directly relate to the core of the phenomenon of Islamist radicalisation as it has emerged in Europe in the past decades. Our focus for this report was on the situation in the Netherlands.

At the point of commencing the study, concerns about Islamist radicalisation related to increasing disaffection among young Muslims, who were thought to increasingly shy away from civic participation in Western European democratic society, to fall into the hands of recruiters and online propaganda, and to develop alternative religiously inspired lifestyles, a willingness to leave the Western world in search of a utopian alternative, and a readiness to pick up arms to advance their ideals. We engaged with a number of individuals who provided us with first hand insight regarding this phenomenon. Specifically, these insights have been used to address the following research questions:

- What has pushed individuals beyond a certain threshold to join a group such as ISIS and fight on its behalf (RQ1a)? Are there sympathisers who never joined or who decided against the use of violence (RQ1b)? Why do people who are exposed to recruitment efforts or information reject the radical path (RQ1c)?

- How do sustained inequalities (objective inequality) and perceived injustice (subjective inequality) impact upon radicalisation (RQ2)?

- What are understandings of 'radicalisation', 'extremism' and 'jihadism' among those encountering agents of radicalisation in their daily lives (RQ3a)? Is there dissonance between

public discourse and self-understandings of these concepts (RQ3b)? And, if there is, what is the impact of this on radicalisation trajectories (RQ3c)?

- What role do social relationships (in-person or virtual) have in facilitating radicalisation of ideas and behaviour (RQ4a)? What is the role of social media and Internet e.g., to what extent do individuals 'self'-radicalise on the basis of online activity (RQ4b)? How do emotional experiences, sense of identity and 'coolness' of radical milieus, shape radicalisation trajectories (RQ4c)?

- How do attitudes differ by gender? And what is the role of gender in radicalization (or extremism) more generally? (RQ5)

The research questions were asked against the backdrop of a broader consideration of the extent and nature of the relationship between inequality and radicalisation. As we also observed in the research, radical Islamist narratives contain many references to inequalities between Muslims and non-Muslims, while these narratives use these inequalities as a justification for a call to arms to redress the inequalities. Simultaneously, those who espouse or support these narratives are thought to come from impoverished backgrounds, are sometimes thought to have undergone a troubled upbringing, and are thought to have experience with discrimination. An important overarching question to ask, then, concerns the predisposing factors and dynamics of the identification process of the individual with the jihadist narrative, which culminates in the individually held belief that it is justified to pick up arms to forcefully redress injustices committed towards Muslims, globally and locally.

A public health metaphor on radicalisation (Butler *et al.*, 2003; Stares and Yacoubian, 2006; Kruglanski *et al.*, 2007) was considered instrumental in outlining the key elements for understanding this identification process: 1) the agent, i.e. the calling that justifies the use of violence to redress injustices; 2) the host, i.e. the individual that is infected by the agent; 3) the vectors, i.e. the channels through which this identification/infection takes place; 4) the environment, i.e. the neighbourhoods in which the identification processes primarily occur. During the research, we investigated the key elements through literature review, media analysis, expert interviews, in-depth interview, and observation. We conducted the in-depth interviews with 18 people in their teens, twenties and thirties who had either been involved in a radical Islamist scene or who had had close encounters with this radical scene.

We found Erik Erikson's classic analysis of identity crisis relevant for understanding the dynamic at play in radicalisation (RQ1a-RQ1c). Virtually all of our respondents, radical and non-radical, reported the experience of an identity crisis during adolescence, often triggered by an event that shattered assumptions about life. Moreover, virtually all of our respondents, radical and non-radical, found an answer in Islam and used Islam to give shape to a newly found identity in response to the identity crisis. There was, however, a striking difference in the reception to the newly found identity. Those who eventually radicalised, encountered considerable opposition to the newly found identity, whereas this was not the case for those who found solace in their new religious identity but did not radicalise. For those who would eventually radicalise, the experienced opposition and rejection set in motion a social process of isolation and, fueled by the Internet or social media and sometimes recruiters and negativity in the immediate social environment, also set in motion the development of a hostile, Manichean worldview that pits the pure and the true against the *kufir* (the unbeliever), the hypocrite, and the impure. Our respondents who underwent a radicalisation process reported this dynamic of positioning and opposing in a number of relationships, with parents and family, at school with teachers, at mosques with imams, with community police and other authorities, and with the state. As this dynamic further escalated, the Islamist extremist narrative that Muslims worldwide are under threat and denied their rights to exercise their faith, combined with vivid imagery to that effect available on the Internet, contributed to the increasing appeal of the 'calling', i.e. that it is an individual duty to fight on behalf of Islam to pick up arms to redress the threats and injustices.

We found that extremist identity and perspectives primarily developed in a situation of isolation and lack of social context. The Internet was in virtually all cases a critical provider of extremist content, infusing the idea that there is a global war between Muslims and non-Muslims and suggesting the option to participate in it (RQ4a-RQ4c). In contrast, as many of our respondents argued, extremism was mitigated through the presence of a social and theological context that facilitated the attribution of events and adaptive regulation of a response to these events. This finding has important implications for the understanding of radicalisation. A socio-ecological perspective on radicalisation (Dawson, 2017), for instance, puts primacy on place and social context – on 'milieu' – as center of gravity for the emergence of radical beliefs. In contrast, we observe that the absence of place and social context that contributes to the emergence of radicalisation. Our perspective also has important implications for policy. The tendency for counterradicalisation agencies to increasingly shy away from collaboration with local communities, on the grounds that local communities spread anti-democratic and polarising sentiments, may, in our opinion, underestimate the role of such communities in providing social structures and resources for regulating emotion and behaviour and thus in providing roots and belonging, essential elements, as we have seen, to reject radical messaging. This tendency of counterradicalisation agencies may, in the long run, fan rather than undermine radicalisation.

Regarding the relation between inequality and radicalisation (RQ2), we found no evidence that socio-economic disparities directly contributed to radicalisation, although among our sample there was a widespread experience that the transition from schooling to professional life, in the form of an internship or first job, was more difficult than average for them. Some of our respondents shied away from participating in politics for example through voting, but this seemed to be more out of their own choice and often related to their adherence to a Salafist interpretation of Islam, rather than as a result of structural socio-political deprivation. Nonetheless, the stories told to us, especially the ones by those who chose the radical path, were suffused with the sense of unequal treatment, by family and friends, by religious authorities, by society, by the court, by politics and by the state. On the basis of our observations, we advance the hypothesis that these perceived inequalities play a role in radicalisation to the extent that these inequalities are enacted in relational context. Radicalisation is characterised by an increasing social distancing, characterised by individuals and communities increasingly separating from one another. In this relational context of social distancing, inequalities come to the fore and subsequently become a focus of further contention. Accordingly, inequalities play a role in radicalisation to the extent that these inequalities are brought up as an indication and justification for the maintenance and escalation of relational contention. This viewpoint is consistent with what Donatella della Porta (2018) has recently coined a relational perspective on radicalisation as she argues that 'Radicalisation is a process of escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time' (p. 462). Within this perspective, it would be of interest to consider the co-evolution of inequality discourse with these 'increasingly violent repertoires of action'.

Concerning the respondents' own understandings of 'radicalisation', 'extremism', and 'jihadism' (RQ3a-RQ3c), most defined radicalisation as a state of deviating from the norm, both the norms of society and norms of Islam. It was remarked that radicalisation cannot be inferred from outward appearance. Furthermore, many of the respondents considered radicalisation the outcome of immaturity and misguidance. A few expressed a more cynical view, suggesting that radicalisation is at least in part contrived by media and state authorities to justify the effort and money invested in countering radicalisation and other considered radicalisation to be an indication of marginalisation. Consistent with the relational perspective on radicalisation reviewed above, our respondents tended to adopt a more relational as opposed to dispositional viewpoint on radicalisation. The way the individual and the social surroundings relate, and not characteristics of the individual, the community, nor religion, can be considered as the key constituent of the radicalisation process. This has important implications for diagnosing, interpreting and managing radicalisation. It implies an emphasis on interaction and

communication, rather than the focus on dispositions that characterise many of current approaches to addressing radicalisation.

Our observations regarding the central role of the Internet and social media in the radicalisation process corroborate the findings of others (Stern and Berger, 2015). Internet and social media are key drivers of the radicalisation process (RQ4a-RQ4c) as these platforms facilitate access to information, opinions and perspectives that appeal to individuals searching for identity building and solidifying information. Individuals come across alternative sources of information about the conflicts in the Middle East and theological messaging from the Arabic Peninsula, and use it as a lens through which to interpret and respond to their immediate social context. These encounters have the potential to culminate in social friction (see also Dechesne and Paton, 2020). Internet and social media may also guide people to like-minded individuals who have been exposed to the same information and enable them as a group to self-organise in house meetings and advocacy initiatives. These groups then serve as amplifiers of pre-existing hostility and as a potential recruiting ground for organised violent activity.

We believe that with these findings, we have been able to shed profound insight on the factors and processes that underlie radicalisation as it has unfolded over the past two decades in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, we should also note that limitations in time and other resources have prevented us to go deeper into relevant issues that deserve to be addressed in greater detail. For one, the research has focused on a respondent group that mostly consisted of males, and more generally, we have been not been able to generate in-depth insight in the role of gender in Islamist extremist radicalisation. We do believe gender is an important topic in this context of study. First, there have been a number of publications that have pointed to support for radical perspectives among women (see Groen and Kranenberg, 2010). Secondly, gender is an important issue of contention in the context of the debate on Islamist radicalisation and Islam in the Netherlands. As already mentioned, public debate on the desirability of the burqa and the topic of female genital cutting constitute two cases in point.

We were fortunate to have the input of a great variety of sources, enabling us to provide what we believe to be a comprehensive portrayal of the phenomenon of Islamist radicalisation. A critic may object however, that the present research is based on a limited sample that contains only those who were willing to participate. Given the nature of radicalisation, it can indeed be expected that those involved in a radical milieu would be less inclined to share deep personal viewpoints, especially when sharing puts them at risk of further security scrutiny by the authorities. Indeed, as noted in Section 3.2, some potential respondents expressed reluctance to participate. We also received indications that there are still clusters of highly radicalised individuals and families that are very reluctant to publicly discuss their viewpoints and way of life. Moreover, most of the respondents who were willing to participate, mostly provided their experiences on the basis of recollection of the recent and more distant past. Consequently, the present research may contain several selection and response biases. These biases could to a certain extent be overcome by greater investment in relationships in the field. At the same time the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, and the ethnographic methods deployed to build the trust required to secure engagement from milieu members, mean no claims to either reliability or generalisability are possible.

More fundamentally, we believe that the findings as presented in this report have validity. In some ways, they corroborate observations made in other contexts, for instance observations emerging during the recent trial of a number of individuals convicted of planning a high profile jihadist inspired attack in the Netherlands (Stoffelen, 2020), and an in-depth television interview with a high profile member of the Hofstad group under the noteworthy title of 'Enemy of the state number 1' (Can, 2020b). At the same time, the present findings and observations add depth and theoretical significance to these reports and others, thus yielding a comprehensive view of the state of Islamist radicalisation as it has manifested in the Netherlands over the past two decades.

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7. Appendices

Appendix 7.1: Socio-demographic data of respondents

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Country of Birth	Education	Employment	Ethnicity	Family status	Gender	Religion	Religiosity	Residential status	No. in household
[R1]	35	NL	Did not complete vocational secondary education (MBO) and left	Fulltime employment Unskilled labour	Dutch	Married, 2 children	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently with partner and children in social housing	4
[R2]	34	MOR	Completed higher vocational education (HBO)	In fulltime employment	Moroccan /Dutch	Married and children (unknown how many)	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives with his family	N/A
[R3]	31	MOR	Completed University	In full-time employment (self-employed)	Moroccan /Dutch	Married, 2 children	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently with his family	4
[R4]	36	MOR	Did not complete higher vocational education (HBO)	In full-time employment (self-employed)	Moroccan /Dutch	Married, 2 children	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently with his family	4
[R5]	31	MOR	Completed higher vocational education (HBO)	In full-time employment	Moroccan /Dutch	Married, 2 children	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently with his family	4
[R6]	29	NL	Completed university	In full-time employment	Moroccan /Dutch	Married, 3 children	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner/ children	5

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Country of Birth	Education	Employment	Ethnicity	Family status	Gender	Religion	Religiosity	Residential status	No. in household
[R7]	33	NL	Completed higher vocational education (HBO)	Not in paid employment but occupied as carer or unpaid work / housewife	Moroccan / Dutch	Married, 3 children	Female	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner/children	5
[R9]	31	NL	Did not complete vocational secondary education (MBO) and left	Not in paid employment but occupied as carer or unpaid work / housewife	Dutch	Divorced, 5 children	Female	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner	6
[R10]	34	NL	Did not complete vocational secondary education (MBO) and left	In full-time employment (self-employed)	Moroccan /Dutch	Married, 2 children	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner	4
[R11]	17	NL	Currently in higher vocational education (HBO)	In part-time employment/ unskilled labour	Turkish/ Dutch	Single	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives at home with both parents and two sisters	5
[R12]	18	NL	Currently in vocational secondary education (MBO)	In part-time employment/ unskilled labour	Moroccan /Dutch	Single	Male	Islam	Believer and practicing	Lives at home with both parents and one sister	4
[R13]	24	NL	Completed vocational secondary education (MBO)	In part-time employment	Moroccan /Dutch	Unknown	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Unknown	N/A
[R14]	16	NL	Currently in vocational secondary education (MBO)	Unemployed	Moroccan /Dutch	Single	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives at home with both parents and two sisters	5

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Country of Birth	Education	Employment	Ethnicity	Family status	Gender	Religion	Religiosity	Residential status	No. in household
[R15]	25	NL	Completed higher vocational education (HBO)	In full-time employment (self-employed)	Turkish/Dutch	Married, 1 child	Male	None	Atheist	Lives independently with own partner	3
[R16]	27	Afghanistan	Did not complete university (Bachelor)	In full-time employment (self-employed)	Afghan/Dutch	Single	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently	1
[R18]	41	NL	University	In full-time employment (self-employed)	Dutch	Single	Female	Islam	Believer and practising	N/A	N/A
[R21]	60	MOR		In full-time employment self-employed	Moroccan /Dutch	Divorced, 4 children (1 deceased)	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently alone	1
[R22]	34	NL	Completed university	In full-time employment	Turkish/Dutch	Single	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently alone	1
[R23]	53	NL	Completed vocational secondary education (MBO)	In full-time employment / skilled industrial labour	Moroccan /Dutch	Married/divorced from first spouse, 4 children	Male	None	Atheist	Lives independently with own (second) partner/children	4
[R24]	39	NL	Completed vocational secondary education (MBO)	In full-time employment	Dutch/Belgian	Married, 4 children	Male	Islam	Believer and practising	Lives independently with own partner/children	6