

MAPPING THE TRAJECTORY OF THE IS FOREIGN FIGHTER

ARMED GROUPS EXAM

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1. INTRODUCTION

In August 2014, Chuck Hagel, then US Secretary of Defence, labelled Islamic State (IS) a key threat to the US and presented the group as a strategically sophisticated, well-organised and ideologically motivated terrorist group (BBC News, 2014a). Additionally, IS has been determined the key threat to the stability of the Middle East (Rupar, 2015), to the various minority populations including Kurds, Christians and Shia Muslims, specifically within Iraq (BBC News, 2015), Syria and the surrounding areas; and arguably are the most brutal terrorist group of the 21st century – more so than al-Qaeda (Tran, 2014). IS conducts routine beheadings, violence towards civilians, including normalised sexual assaults on women (BBC News, 2015 and Webb, 2015) and practises an extreme form of Sharia law – a controversial, fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic teachings that is regarded as oppressive and inhumane by both the Western media (BBC News, 2014b) and various esteemed Muslim scholars who consider the behaviour of IS to be fundamentally un-Islamic (Rosch, 2014), penning an open letter to alleged IS-leader al-Baghdadi condemning the actions of IS¹. Despite this, Western foreign fighters continue to leave behind families, friends and entire lives to defend the ideology and territory of IS.

1.1 Research Puzzle

The rise of IS has attracted a startling amount of Western foreign fighters, from a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures (Yan, 2015). However, much of the Western media portrays this diverse range of people in a simplistic manner, choosing instead to focus either on the radicalisation period of the foreign fighter through IS' use of social media (Banco, 2014), the regional context (Yahya, 2014) or critiquing the prior focus on socio-economic motivating factors (Taspinar, 2015). This paper aims to provide an alternative perspective, and focus on the complex range of factors that create the IS foreign fighter. Therefore, our research puzzle is focused on investigating the role that identity, ideology and personal experience have in creating the IS foreign fighter; essentially attempting to answer the puzzle of how an IS foreign fighter comes to be, and whether a certain background predisposes an individual to become a foreign fighter.

¹ See <http://www.lettertobaghdadi.com/>

In order to fully explore this puzzle, we have formulated the following research question:

“Are there key factors that place Westerners on a trajectory to become foreign fighters, and can these be identified?”

1.2 Argument

We approach this research puzzle using Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (Jenkins, 2002) to create a theory of conflicted habitus. We argue that a large part of the process of becoming an IS foreign fighter lies in the experience of this conflicted habitus, wherein the individual cannot fully acclimatise or integrate with one particular culture, and therefore experiences internal, irresolvable conflict and a lack of social, cultural and symbolic capital as a result. This conflict then creates a vulnerability that is exploited by a catalyst, who often enacts a form of symbolic violence upon the individual that influences them towards radical Islam that connects with one aspect of the conflicted habitus. Following this, the conflict within the habitus then becomes intensified and, in the case of the IS foreign fighter, results in an increasing interest in the Islamic faith for guidance on how to reconcile the conflict. The catalyst also pushes the foreign fighter towards IS, using Islamic law to establish legitimacy and a route to reconciling the internal conflict, presenting the option of gaining the social, cultural and symbolic capital that is lacking within the Western context.

Crucially however, having a conflicted habitus and a deficit in “Western” capital is not enough to create the IS foreign fighter, and those who possess these characteristics are not necessarily ticking bombs. However, if all the factors align, and an individual becomes vulnerable enough, they then become more susceptible to the influence of a catalyst and the process of radicalisation.

1.3 Structure

We begin this paper by presenting our methodology, explaining the broad concepts, aims and limitations of this paper before moving onto establishing a theoretical foundation that uses Bourdieu’s theory of habitus as well as aspects of foreign fighter theory and a few elements from lone wolf theory to develop the concept of conflicted habitus that is central to the analysis of the IS foreign fighter and the argument presented by this paper. Following this, four case

studies of five individuals are presented, blended with analysis and woven through with theory to create an in-depth picture of the modern foreign fighter, and evidence the argument presented above in section 1.2. Finally, further analysis will be undertaken to draw out the differences and similarities between the cases, and assess the findings as a whole in order to gain a better understanding of the IS foreign fighter and the catalysts that place many individuals on the trajectory of the IS foreign fighter.

2. METHODOLOGY

In methodological terms, this paper assesses empirical case studies using a comparative qualitative lens. This approach allows a narrow scope, necessary to focus on the foreign fighter as an individual, with a wealth of personal history prior to radicalisation, and negating the 'foreignness' of the IS foreign fighter – focusing instead on their role within their country of residence or origin, leading up to and during the time of radicalisation. The case studies have been explicitly chosen for their diversity, with a mixture of converts and those raised in a Muslim household. The case studies span across age, gender and geographical differences to highlight the broad appeal of IS and the differing backgrounds of the individual foreign fighters to emphasise the complexity of the motivations and influences that place an individual on the foreign fighter trajectory.

A quantitative approach was not taken due to the fact that individuals are looked at in depth, focusing on their backgrounds and avoiding the generalisations that categorise the media (for an overview see Taspinar, 2015). We are attempting instead to specify the internal factors and thereby uncover the complexities within the pre-radicalisation period of the foreign fighter, as opposed to solely focusing on the radicalisation period. The pre-radicalisation period is focused on because it creates a fuller picture of the IS foreign fighter, and allows an investigation into whether there are any commonalities within the backgrounds, as well as the type of person attracted to the life of an IS foreign fighter. Finally, the need for a qualitative approach is mirrored in the broad concepts used in the paper in the sense that these create an in-depth, specific picture of the IS foreign fighter, which then allows for meaningful and insightful analysis.

2.1 Aims

This paper aims to offer an alternative perspective on the IS foreign fighter, which takes into account the complexity of the pre-radicalisation period that then significantly shapes both the radicalisation and identity of the IS foreign fighter. We are not attempting to prove anything definitively, basing our analysis on circumstantial evidence to begin a discussion outside of the generalisations of the media coverage that could be further investigated through an intensive research process. Additionally, we take into account the historical phenomenon of the foreign fighter, and approach IS as the latest trend in order to situate this contemporary threat within a wider context.

2.2 Limitations

Whilst dealing with a multifaceted subject within the confines of word counts, there are certain obvious limitations that are naturally imposed on the depth and breadth of this study. Chief among these is the need to use secondary data as the main source of background information, both in regards to the case studies and IS in general. Largely this is because of physical and safety restrictions in conducting primary research, alongside the fact that IS represents a contemporary phenomenon about which there is limited literature available.

To combat these limitations, we use circumstantial evidence in the form of case studies to present a theoretical explanation of the trajectory of the IS foreign fighter that, whilst limited, represents a viable alternative to conjecture and speculation, as well as a valid contribution to the emerging field of research on IS.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The foreign fighter is defined, situated within a historical context and analysed through Bourdieu's theory of habitus, in order to place the recent migration towards IS held territory within a historical trend of individuals joining external causes. Additionally aspects of lone wolf theory, notably group identification and the primacy of ideology, are utilised to further highlight the complexity of the trajectory of the IS foreign fighter.

First, we will be looking at the history of foreign fighters and general definitions that focus on the joining of the transnational cause. As a part of this, we look at the IS foreign fighter specifically as relevant to the case studies, while particularly paying attention to how this phenomenon is more complex than the general historical definition by looking at the importance of group identification and transnational identities (two aspects taken from lone wolf theory). Through the use of case studies, we look at the similarities and differences with regard to these aspects, and through this compare and contrast people's backgrounds and habitus to determine whether there is a general trend in the habitus context that creates a 'foreign fighter profile'.

3.1 Defining the Foreign Fighter

Despite being a contested and intensely political concept that tends to reflect the interests of those defining it (Spaaij; 2012:15), terrorism can be generally defined as a politically motivated act that involves "the use or threat of violence to create a wider culture of fear which can be used to advance political, religious or ideological causes" (Spaaij, 2012:19), often constituting premeditated violence against non-combatants (Moskalenko & McCauley: 2011:115). Whilst terrorism and terrorist groups form a central aspect of the foreign fighter, the distinction between a terrorist and a foreign fighter is an important one, as it narrows the focus from a broader terrorist group onto the specific individuals that decide to travel for the cause; allowing for a deeper investigation as to the motivation behind this.

Additionally, the distinction between the terrorist and foreign fighter contributes to the self-perceived legitimacy of various terrorist groups, and IS in particular. For the foreign fighter, it is more legitimate to go and fight for a Muslim group defending their perceived home territory, like IS and their self-proclaimed caliphate, than it is to participate in international terrorism (Malet, 2010: 97). In concrete terms, it is seen as more legitimate to fight the West through a defence of territory than to execute terrorist attacks on Western domestic soil.

The foreign fighter can be distinguished from the terrorist and the mercenary insofar that foreign fighters travel from their country of origin and/or residence to contribute to a military cause, largely on the basis of personal identification with the ideological, political or religious aspect of the cause and/or an attraction to the prospect of adventure, excitement and

opportunity. In terms of the mercenary, financial gain or professional employment is the main motivating factor behind the joining of military conflict (Caferro, 1998). Because this motivation is so explicit, mercenaries are not focused upon within this paper; which instead focuses on the research puzzle of foreign fighters to understand the latest trend in the rise and magnetic pull of IS.

The above definition of the foreign fighter is developed from Ian Bryan's more basic definition:

“Foreign fighters are not agents of foreign governments, but they leave home typically to fight for a transnational cause or identity” (Bryan, 2010: 166)

The more in-depth definition used by this paper aims to highlight the more complex factors underlying the motivation of the foreign fighter, especially within the context of the rise of IS.

Within the existing literature, the foreign fighter is often defined as a volunteer leaving home to take part in conflicts in a foreign country or territory (Mendelson, 2011). Specifically, David Malet presents the foreign fighter as being part of a shared transnational identity (Malet, 2010: 97), fighting to protect something through ‘defensive mobilization’ (ibid.). Using this as a base point, this paper delves deeper, focusing on the individual motivation in joining an external fight, alongside the transnational identity; highlighting the lone wolf dimension of the foreign fighter.

3.2 History of the Foreign Fighter

The phenomenon of foreign fighters is far from new, with local wars often being framed as threatening the transnational group (Malet, 2010: 97). During the Cold War in particular, foreign fighters tended to be motivated by ideology (ibid. 102), although arguably, religion tends to be the unifying and motivating factor for the modern foreign fighter (ibid. 109). A clear example of the dominance of ideology comes from the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939), wherein both sides used foreign fighters to a large extent, primarily motivated by strong ideologies. In the case of the nationalists, it was a fascist ideology whereas for the republicans, a communist ideology dominated (ibid. 102). The ideological trend evidenced within the Spanish Civil War continued within the Cold War, with many foreign fighters coming to the aid of the mujahedeen in the Afghanistan War (ibid. 105). Therefore, the recent rise in religious

foreign fighters can be framed within the context of a historical phenomenon, as the latest development in a centuries old practice.

3.3 Bourdieu and the impact of habitus on the modern foreign fighter

Using Bourdieu's understanding of habitus, this paper looks at the conflict that creates the Western foreign fighter, arguing that a conflicted habitus, combined with a catalyst, creates a group identification with a transnational Islamic identity that ultimately leads the foreign fighter to IS.

Following Thomsen's idea of the virtual school bag (Thomsen cited in Thomsen and Hall; 2008: 89), the example of a backpack can be used to illustrate habitus, arguing that everyone is born with an empty backpack that is continuously filled with experiences, norms and values that in turn shape an individual's actions, thought patterns and behaviour. The backpack does not contain tools or skills necessarily, but rather explains the internalised monologue, decision-making process and personality of the individual that constitutes habitus (ibid). Additionally, habitus conditions the individual's understanding of the legitimacy and morality of action, and is developed within *the field* (Jenkins; 2002: 84). Habitus is engaged in a mutuality constitutive, symbiotic relationship with the field, defined here as the social arena and physical environment wherein interactions, power struggles and negotiations take place (Ibid), capital is acquired and lost and conflicted habitus is produced. For this paper, the field is argued to be the Western societies where the individuals developed their conflicted habitus.

Alongside habitus, the individual also gains social, cultural, symbolic or financial capital throughout life. This capital, along with habitus, creates a crisis of legitimacy in those who experience a conflicted habitus. Developing Bourdieu's idea of habitus and capital, we argue that conflicted habitus is often symptomatic of the second-generation immigrant, wherein individuals experience two types of habituses and forms of capital, typically divided between the individual's public and private arena. We argue that this divide then creates a (public/private) conflict in terms of legitimacy of behaviour. Conflicting habitus is created when an individual is exposed to parallel, and often contrasting, cultures, modes of thinking, behaviours, morality and types of acceptable behaviour. Ultimately, the conflicted habitus creates an, conscious or unconscious, internal conflict within the individual, and often triggers

a search for legitimacy and a desire for full immersion into one “conflict-free” habitus to reconcile the internal conflict. To utilise the backpack metaphor, the individuals experiencing conflicted habitus build their backpack from two almost entirely separate social spheres that often are mutually exclusive with differing social, symbolic, cultural and financial capital. Through the analytical and empirical sections of this paper, we aim to examine whether the Western foreign fighter experiences conflicted habitus from the cultural, symbolic and social contrasts between Islam and the West.

3.3.1 Cultural capital

Cultural capital differs from habitus in the sense that habitus is purely internalisation, whereas cultural capital represents both the external aspects of culture – art, language, dress codes and education – (Bourdieu: 1986: 82) as well as both the implicit and explicit norms and values of a culture. Thus, cultural capital represents the assets that an individual negotiates through society – similar to money – embodied within an adherence to the cultural norms and hierarchies, and facilitated through education, intellect, wealth and style of dress. We argue that people with conflicted habituses experience dual sets of cultural capital, often demarcated in the public/private divide, which creates different internalised systems of meaning and identity.

3.3.2 Social capital

In contrast to this, social capital creates a more external conflict of capital as social capital is often expressed through the joining of networks and groups (Jenkins; 2002: 85). Because of this the conflict is further deepened, on the basis of the cultural capital and the support given to one particular aspect of the conflicted habitus over another by the acquiring of social capital and joining of certain types of networks. Social capital, in and of itself, is the social relationships and networks, and the assets gained from the membership of these (ibid.).

3.3.3 Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital is defined as the prestige, status or authority that gives an individual the leverage and ability to exert symbolic violence. For Bourdieu:

“Symbolic violence is the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. This legitimacy obscures the power relations that permit this imposition to be successful” (Jenkins; 2002:144).

In layman’s terms, symbolic violence essentially imposes certain methods of thought, behaviour and action onto another individual, altering their perception until these methods are seen as normal and valid (Cattani et. al., 2014: 260).

Within this paper, we investigate whether symbolic violence is the method used by the catalyst to influence the trajectory of the foreign fighter. Symbolic violence is exercised through a certain system of meaning, a system built out of habitus and the different forms of capital. If these are conflicting, however, then the conflict between systems of meaning, with regards to which system should be seen as the “correct” one or the legitimate one, creates a vulnerability that is often exploited by those exerting symbolic violence.

3.4 Lone Wolf Aspect of the Foreign Fighter

This paper utilises certain aspects of lone wolf theory to further develop our understanding of the motivations and mind-set of the foreign fighter. Following on from this, the lone wolf foreign fighter is defined within this paper as operating independently, outside of a command structure (Phillips, 2012: 1), embedded within a Western society (Burton and Stewart cited in Spaaij, 2012: 16) with a strong ideologically, politically or religiously motivated belief (ibid. 7). Because the literature centres on the lone wolf terrorist, this paper focuses only on certain relevant aspects, in order to present the foreign fighter as a lone wolf. These relevant aspects are group identification, the importance of ideology and operating independently from a primordial attachment, based in Western society.

To further develop these concepts, taken from Moskalkenko and McCauley (2011), positive group identification is presented here as linking one’s personal well-being to that of a wider group, with negative identification operating in reverse, where one’s personal wellbeing is linked to the suffering of others, reacting positively when the other suffers and negatively when the other is prospering (Moskalkenko and McCauley, 2011: 122). Key to our analysis is the idea that:

“Positive identification with a group, combined with the perception that this group is being victimized, produces negative identification with the group perpetrating the injustice” (Moskalenko and McCauley; 2011:122)

It is this idea that ties in with the IS foreign fighter profile, as the foreign fighter experiences a positive group identification with the Muslim world as a whole, viewing rising Islamophobia as evidence that this group is being victimised (Helbling, 2013), and therefore experiencing negative identification with the West as a result.

Tied in with group identification is the importance of ideology, wherein both the lone wolf and the foreign fighter operates from a strong ideological, political or religious conviction (Spaaij; 2012, 17), which often shapes the radicalisation process and forms a large aspect of the individual’s identity (Zúquete; 2014: 104). Additionally, it is both the wider group’s wellbeing and the larger ideological goal that is the primary objective for the lone wolf (Moskalenko and McCauley, 2011: 125 and Turchie and Puckett cited in Spaaij, 2012: 20). The combination of strong group identification and ideology moves the individual to act from a personal moral obligation (Moskalenko and McCauley, 2011: 125) that overrides the impact of the Western aspect of their habitus and capital.

4. CONTEXT OF IS

We believe it necessary to explain how IS emerged, their ideology and the scale of their rise, in order to understand the draw of IS for the foreign fighter and examine the legitimacy IS has for these disillusioned and conflicted individuals residing in the West. A useful starting point is Lister (2014), who explains in intricate detail the emergence of IS, and highlights their divorce from Al-Qaeda, previous attempts to set up an Islamic State, and presents IS as a serious threat to the Western world.

Lister traces IS back to 1999, placing its roots in Jordan and Syria within the Jama’at al-Tawid wa al-Jihad (JTJ), a group that viewed the Shia community as the key threat to Iraq (Lister, 2014: 6). From this, and evolving continuously, incorporating other extremist groups, the Islamic State in Iraq attempted to set up a fully functioning state, although this collapsed due largely to lack of Sunni support (bid. 9). From this, ISI then shifted back into being a terrorist

group, expanding into Syria post 2011 revolution, and establishing Jabhat al-Nusra. Taking advantage of the wave of unrest sweeping through the Middle East, IS captured territory in Syria that was essentially ungovernable by the official authorities (ibid. 11), whilst taking advantage of the murmuring Sunni unrest in Iraq under Shia rule, the loyalty of Sunni soldiers in the Iraqi army, and the religious divide between the Sunni and Shia population throughout the Middle East (ibid. 14). Exploiting these factors led IS on a successful recruitment drive, which allowed an unprecedented capturing of a significant swathe of territory and the subsequent declaring of a caliphate.

In terms of their legitimacy as a caliphate, there is a huge amount of disagreement within the Muslim world. In a widely read article by Wood (2015), it is explained that IS possesses the necessary qualities of a caliphate, and is essentially the only legitimate example of a caliphate in history (the Ottoman empire being illegitimate as the leaders did not descend from the tribe of the prophet Muhammad). These qualities include the control of territory, a leader descended from the tribe of Qurayshi, the enforcement of Sharia law (Wood, 2015), and adhering to the Wahhabi movement of Sunni Islam (Kirkpatrick, 2014). The caliphate, in basic terms, is seen as the highest authority on Earth because it takes its legitimacy from Allah (Wood: 2015); and ultimately overrides the legality of all other organisations, states or groups (Johnson, 2014). The caliphate, once established, requires Muslims to emigrate, and pledge allegiance, in order to satisfy the conditions for entry to an eternal realm (Wood, 2015).

In terms of their ideology, IS is based on a literalist interpretation of Islam, on prophetic methodology in the sense that all actions are taken in their exact form from the prophecy and example of Muhammad (Wood, 2015), to the extent that any person who supports a secular government, or an alternative to the caliphate, is deemed an unbeliever and subjected to gruesome punishment (Kirkpatrick, 2014). The ideology of IS has been deemed both extremist and out of context (Wood: 2015), but still represents a legitimate caliphate for certain radical Muslim individuals around the world, and therefore, especially Muslims struggling with conflicted habitus, a way to reconcile this internal struggle and gain sought-after capital.

5. CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSIS

The case studies that follow have been selected on the basis of a wide dispersion of ethnicities, geography, age, gender and social background. Additionally, two cases have been selected where the individual has been raised in a Muslim household, where another two discovered Islam outside of the family home. In terms of nationalities or countries of residence, Britain, Denmark and Austria are represented. The case studies are presented in chronological order according to the individual's age, beginning with the youngest and ending with the eldest at the time of joining IS. In all cases, each individual travelled to the Middle Eastern region, and either joined IS directly or an affiliate of IS.

5.1 Case 1: The IS Poster Girls (Samra Kesinovic + Sabina Selimovic)

Kesinovic and Selimovic first experienced Islam at a very early age, both being raised in Muslim households by refugee Bosnian parents in Austria (Hall, 2014). Both were born in Austria, and came from middle-class homes in Vienna (ibid.). Prior to being radicalised, both girls were photographed without the hijab, suggesting that they were not raised within a strict Muslim environment. They attended a secular school in Vienna, following the educational path of Austria and socialising with students from a variety of backgrounds (Independent, 2014). The fact that neither girl wore the hijab in their pictures suggests that the Western aspect of their habitus was strong and that they identified with the culture and norms of a secular Western society. At this point, there is a clear conflict between the private and public spheres, although this only grew into a conflicted habitus through the influence of the radical hate preacher Mirsod Omerovic, and arguably the socio-political conflicts within Vienna, and wider Europe.

The context of Europe during the period of radicalisation for the girls was, and is, characterised by rising levels of Islamophobia, nationalism, and fear of the Islamic identity (Goldberger, 2015). In sum, it can be argued that this caused a loss of social, symbolic and cultural capital for the majority of Muslims within Europe in general and contributed to Kesinovic and Selimovic's conflicted habitus, as well as strengthening the desire to exist within a more tolerant environment that reflected their emerging radical beliefs.

Using the theory of strong group identification, it is clear that to some degree, both girls experienced a positive association to the Muslim world, possibly as a result of the socio-

political context, which then contributed to the beginning of a negative identification with the West and a loss in social capital in Vienna. However, whilst these are clear foundations for a general disenchantment with the West, a stronger identification with the transnational Muslim identity and a retreat into Islam as a result; we believe that the desire for adventure also represents a key motivational factor and vulnerability for both girls.

Arguably, the combination of all the foundational factors created a conflicted habitus both constructed in part and exploited by Omerovic. Omerovic was incredibly influential for Kesinovic and Selimovic, representing the catalyst that propelled both down the path towards IS. Both Kesinovic and Selimovic became radicalised as a result of attending the Altun Alem mosque in Vienna in early 2014, as well as accessing the Youtube channel of the resident imam Omerovic, who also went by the Islamic name Ebu Tejma (Daily News, 2014 and Rogers, 2014). At this time, Selimovic was 15 whilst Kesinovic was 16, a fact that much of the media presents to highlight their vulnerability, continuing the narrative that both were 'victims', 'lured' or 'tricked' into joining IS (An-Nahar, 2014; Athos, 2014; Corcoran, 2014). Allegedly, Omerovic was responsible for the radicalisation of the girls, bombarding them with extremist Wahhabi ideology and focusing on the 'duty' of Muslim women to support the IS fighters (Rogers, 2014) – often approaching the fathers in his congregation to discuss potential marriage proposals to IS fighters (The Local, 2014).

Omerovic exerted a significant level of symbolic violence on both girls, using his prestige, authority and status within a cultural context that was relatively unfamiliar to the girls – in the sense that they previously had not practiced strict Islam. Both Kesinovic and Selimovic experienced two separate systems of meaning during their upbringing, the Western cultural norms in the public sphere, and Islamic values within the private. Omerovic behaved in such a way that was possibly more acceptable in the private sphere, often exploiting his status within that context to radicalise both girls, and influence their choice to join IS. Because both girls had experienced two separate systems of meaning, and therefore possessed conflicted habituses, their sense of judgement on the type of acceptable behaviour may have been confused; a fact that was then used by Omerovic to tip the scale in his favour.

During their radicalisation period in 2014, prior to their leaving for IS in April 2014, both Kesinovic daubed messages on the walls of their school inviting other Muslim students to join

IS (Rogers, 2014), as well as aggressively lecturing fellow students on Islam (Russell, 2014). This highlights the more prominent Muslim aspect of their conflicted habitus, with the aggressive behaviour in particular pointing to the growing conflict within their conflicted habituses and an emerging hostility towards the Western aspect. The radicalisation process was unusually quick, suggesting that the catalyst had unusual levels of influence, suggesting an intensity that is possibly connected to their ages and the rising conflict within themselves.

By April, both girls heavily identified with the Muslim transnational identity, and saw a way to resolve their conflicted habitus, gain social, symbolic and cultural capital within their chosen sphere of meaning, whilst satisfying their desire for adventure. Acting on this, Kesinovic and Selimovic made their way to Turkey, before meeting IS recruiters who helped them on the route towards Raqqa. After this point, all that is known is that both married IS fighters, and both were thought to be pregnant (Russell; 2014). However, in October, Kesinovic expressed regret at her decision to join IS (Bacchi, 2014) suggesting that the picture painted by Omerovic was far from reality. Currently, one is presumed dead and the other missing, although there is no information that specifies which is which (Hall, 2014).

5.2 Case 2: The Depressed Dane (Victor Kristensen)

Similarly, Kristensen underwent an intense conversion process in his early teens. Kristensen was the epitome of the middle-class Dane, growing up in a stable family in a relatively affluent suburb in Aarhus and attending the ordinary Danish school Møllevangen, (BT, 2014). It was here that he met a group of boys of a similar age, from a Muslim background who were already associated with the radical mosque known as the Grimhøjvej Mosque, near Gellerupparken – a very deprived neighbourhood that is a hotbed for radical Islam, terrorist sympathisers and anti-Western sentiment (Berlingske, 2014).

Kristensen was quiet, relatively anti-social and isolated with few friends, only becoming involved with the group of Muslim boys as a result of attending the after-school football club (Stiften, 2014). The important point here is that Kristensen did not seek out the friendship of this group, suggesting that there was no evidence of a conflicted habitus motivating his behaviour at this point. What is apparent is that Kristensen was lonely, often experiencing a lack of social capital due to his crippling shyness and struggle with ADD (Berlingske, 2014 and

BT, 2014). It is this that created a vulnerability exploited by extremist members of the Grimhøjvej Mosque, which he began attending shortly after becoming friendly with the group of boys at football. At this point, Kristensen was 14, and over the course of a year was taught Sharia law in the mosque by older members. Arguably, these members represent the catalyst for Kristensen as they preyed on his isolation to create a new identity and sense of belonging within the mosque.

The unique thing about Kristensen is that he was not born into, or raised within, a conflicted habitus, rather he experiences a challenge to his habitus through his association with the mosque, that then further exacerbates his internal conflict and identity crisis that plagued him before this association. This identity crisis emerged as a result of Kristensen's social isolation, and was so severe that his parents were supportive of his decision to attend the mosque, viewing it as an important step towards socialisation (Stiften, 2014 and BT, 2014). Kristensen's identity crisis created a lack of social capital that then made him susceptible to the social confirmation offered by the mosque in the form of a brotherhood. It was this idea of brotherhood that drew Kristensen further into the community, and resulted in him leaving education at 15 and travelling to Egypt with the explicit purpose of becoming educated in Islam. At this point, his family and friends say that he had completely changed – from being shy, anti-social and nervous, to being self-confident, outspoken and freely admitting his radical ideological convictions (BT, 2014). At 21, he travelled to Syria to fight for IS (Berlingske, 2014) taking the name Fateh al-Denmarki before dying as a suicide bomber in an attack against the Iraqi Army in 2013 (ibid.).

Both the boys in the football club and the members of the mosque exerted a level of symbolic violence over Kristensen, preying on his vulnerability as a relative newcomer to their world to normalise the radicalisation process, and create a sense of brotherhood that Kristensen lacked. The boys were empowered as a collective, possessing social and cultural capital through their interactions with each other and education within the mosque. The boys and the mosque had a great deal of cultural capital, which translated into symbolic authority partially because Kristensen had very little experience of the culture that he then engaged in. This cultural authority was then used in a symbolically violent way, to draw Kristensen into their particular system of meaning that Kristensen was inexperienced and uneducated in. The mosque then presented Kristensen with a clear route to gaining social and cultural capital that was

recognised within the community; namely in the form of education, which then normalised the radicalisation process and became an influencing factor in Kristensen's decision to join IS.

Additionally, as a result of the elevated status of the mosque within the community and his experiences as a newcomer, Kristensen experienced strong group identification with the Grimhøjvej Mosque specifically, and the transnational Muslim identity in general; positively associating radical Islamists with brotherhood, community and belonging. It was this strong positive group identification combined with the internal identity conflict he experienced that placed him on the trajectory of the foreign fighter as a method to resolve this internal conflict by becoming a member of the 'brotherhood' and earning social capital in the process.

5.3 Case 3: Jihadi John (Mohammed Emwazi)

Jihadi John is the well-known frontman for the prominent IS cell known as the Beatles; a homage to Emwazi's British background. Born in 1988 in Kuwait, Emwazi's family emigrated to the UK in 1994, living in a mixed socio-economic area (Taylor, 2015), and participating in the British education system. During his teens, he socialized with a group in west London that followed the radical preacher Hani al-Sibai (Topping and Ismail, 2015), a long-time supporter of Al-Qaeda. Many members of this group were suspected terrorists, with some taking part in jihadi training camps and others contacting Hussain Osman, a known terrorist (Topping and Ismail, 2015 and BBC, 2007). The group that Emwazi socialised in was led by Bilal el-Berjawi, a Al-Qaeda member who travelled to Somalia to fight in 2009 (Topping and Ismail, 2015).

For Emwazi, his social circle represents the first of two catalysts. At this point, he attended the same mosques as his friends, and was clearly influenced by al-Sibai. He then attended the University of Westminster in London, and continued to associate with the West-London group. Upon graduation, he tried to visit Tanzania, and it was here that two narratives emerge. What is clear is that he was deported from Tanzania, flown to the Netherlands and interrogated by Mi5 (Casciani, 2015). The first narrative presents Emwazi as the victim, an innocent graduate falsely accused of terrorism and abused by the Tanzanian, Dutch and British governments during the process of deportation (CAGE, 2015). The second narrative highlights the fact that el-Berjawi travelled to Somalia in 2009, and there was a significant suspicion that Emwazi, and

his two friends, would follow suit; a suspicion that led to the deportation and interrogation of all three (Casciani, 2015).

However, regardless of the narrative, we believe the deportation from Tanzania represents a key event in the trajectory towards becoming Jihadi John, with the British government effectively becoming the second catalyst in the years following. During this time, Emwazi believed that British security services were targeting him, harassing his family and monitoring him intensively (Topping and Ismail, 2015 and CAGE, 2015). To escape from the unwanted attention, he travelled to Kuwait in September 2009 and began working there at an IT company whilst arranging a marriage (ibid.). In the summer of 2010, Emwazi returned to the UK for an eight-day visit. On attempting to fly back to Kuwait, Emwazi's visa was denied and Emwazi remained in the UK until he disappeared in 2013 after changing his name to Mohammed al-Ayan, and resurfacing in Syria some months later (Casciani, 2015).

It is clear that Emwazi experienced strong group identification, firstly positively towards the west London group in his teens and a second negative identification with the British government, which intensified after 2009, and still further after his re-entry to Kuwait was denied. We argue, it is this strong group identification that led Emwazi to become Jihadi John, alongside an underlying conflicted habitus. Emwazi struggled to reconcile the tension between radical Islamic and Western values, often taking refuge within his circle of friends. However, it is clear that there was an internal conflict that created the vulnerability that then allowed both catalysts to propel Emwazi towards IS and a life as a foreign fighter.

In terms of capital, Emwazi appears to possess a reasonable amount of social capital, in that he has a close group of friends, as well Western cultural capital, in that he attended and graduated from university, having previously partaken in the secular education system in the UK. The fact that he attended university in the UK suggests that he bought into that particular system of meaning, yet he still maintained his close links with radical individuals with distinct anti-Western ideals. This then created a conflict between the different systems of meaning, wherein his radical ideals jarred with his reality.

5.4 Case 4: The Rogue Viking (Kenneth Sørensen)

Kenneth Sørensen grew up in a relatively deprived neighbourhood of Ishøj, on the outskirts of Copenhagen, in a non-Muslim family, and experienced a turbulent childhood (Politiken, 2013 and Berlingske, 2014). Partially as a result of his difficult family life, Sørensen sought solace within his local community, which happened to be a heavily dominated Muslim immigrant area (Berlingske, 2013), known for the small amount of extremist Muslims that reside there. During his formative years, Sørensen was heavily influenced by this culture, converting to Islam at age 19 (Esktra Bladet, 2013), taking the name Abdul Malik and travelling to Yemen in 2007 to fight for Al-Qaeda. Viewing this influence from a theoretical perspective, it is clear that Sørensen identified heavily with the extremists in Ishøj, so much so that his habitus emerged within this context, then becoming highly conflicted following his conversion due to the increased expectation of him to adhere to Islamic law. Arguably, the catalyst in Sørensen's case wasn't a particular person, but rather a combination of events, experiences and identification with this extremist group. It is clear that Sørensen struggled between his Danish identity, and the cultural identity that he identified with. This struggle became more apparent after his conversion, which acted as a catalyst in which the radicalisation process increased the gap between these habituses, and pushed Sørensen towards the foreign fighter trajectory in an attempt to legitimate his Islamic identity.

Sørensen's attachment and integration into the Muslim community, as well as the lack of a stable home, meant that his social and cultural capital primarily resulted from within this community. In Sørensen's case, the catalyst and the capital blurs together, as Sørensen naturally grew within the community to accumulate social and cultural capital. This community appears to be the only option for Sørensen in terms of gaining capital which then led to his conversion and the continued seeking of capital that became the catalyst, pushing him towards the trajectory of the IS foreign fighter.

One of the key events for Sørensen was the 2005 Terror Case from Glostrup (Da: Terrorsagen fra Glostrup) trial, where two young men, a Swedish Bosnian and a Danish-Turk were caught with 20 kilograms of explosives, a prepared suicide belt and a loaded pistol in the suburbs of Copenhagen (BT, 2013). During the trial, Sørensen was seated with known radical Islamists and was seen assisting the defendants, and other radical Islamists, making it clear that his allegiance lay with this group. During a second trial in Denmark, this time for four young

Muslim men accused of associating with the two convicted terrorists of the Glostrup case, Sørensen was eventually held in contempt and was removed for shouting radical statements and threats towards the court (BT, 2013 and Berlingske, 2013).

Arguably, both trials sparked strong group identification as it cemented Sørensen's position within the radical Islamic community in Denmark, and being that Sørensen at this point was a similar age, it is likely that he identified heavily with both defendants. Therefore, Sørensen, through this positive group identification with the radical Islamic culture, experienced a negative group identification towards the persecutors of this group – namely the Danish, or Western, culture (Ekstra Bladet, 2013). It was this that then led Sørensen to Yemen in 2007, officially to attend the radical Imam university in Sana'a but with the intention of joining Al-Qaeda as a foreign fighter (ibid.).

However, during his time in Yemen he was captured by the Yemeni security forces and allegedly subjected to torture by the Yemeni authorities (Roggio, 2013). Before he was captured, he intended to meet Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born terrorist leader of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (CNN, 2013) – a meeting that then cancelled by his fellow Al-Qaeda members due to his “boisterous nature” (Roggio, 2013). In late 2007, the Danish authorities negotiated Sørensen's release (Avisen.dk, 2006) at which point he returned to Denmark where he resided relatively anonymously for the next few years, travelling to Lebanon and Egypt during this time (Roggio, 2013), ostensibly to help other Muslim insurgent and terrorist groups (ibid.). In 2011, Sørensen and his Faroese-born wife, who also converted to Islam, moved to Libya, where his activities are shrouded in mystery. He resurfaced in 2013, fighting for the Muhajireen Brigade, a division of the al-Nusra front allied to IS, and though the two later split, many members deserted to IS (Al Jazeera, 2013). At this point, Sørensen was known as Abu Aisha al-Dinmarki (“Abu Aisha the Dane”), fighting in the mounts in the Latakia province in Syria, where he died (Roggio, 2013).

The evidence suggests that Sørensen, as a result of his emerging conflicted habitus, experienced both a catalyst in the form of his conversion to Islam and strong group identification with a radical subsection of Islamic culture, the combination of which ultimately led to career as a foreign fighter and radical extremist, and his death in 2013.

5.5 Differences between the case-study individuals (pre-radicalisation)

Despite the eventual path of each individual in the case studies, there were a number of differences outside of the general gender, age and socio-economic divides. In this section we briefly sum up these differences in order to underline the diversity between the cases, and the ways in which this diversity adds to the overall complexity of the foreign fighters' trajectory towards radicalisation and IS.

5.5.1 Religiousness

The intensity of the each individual's religious beliefs varies, as far as this can be assessed through their documented religiousness – for example, wearing traditional Muslim dress, attending the Mosque much more frequently and attempting to convert contemporaries. The case studies showed that those who converted to Islam, Kristensen and Sørensen, were much more zealous in their displays of religiosity, often observing religious law to a noticeably greater degree than their contemporaries. Those that were born into Islam, Selimovic, Kesinovic and Emwazi, experienced a lesser degree of religious intensity prior to meeting their respective catalysts, but after this point they too became more overtly religious.

We argue that many Muslims experience a strong divide within the public/private spheres in terms of how they experience their religion (Gallup, 2011) and, consequently how it influences their habitus. Considering the evidence from the case studies, we believe that this sharp divide may create a strong conflict within each individual's habitus. Where Selimovic, Kesinovic and Emwazi experienced religion in the private sphere, it was often repressed in the public realm due to the non-Muslim nature of their surroundings. This then created a conflict between the two spheres, eventually resulting in them abandoning the Westernised aspects of their respective lifestyles, such as Emwazi growing a full beard and publicly preaching strict sharia-law, and Selimovic, Kesinovic donning the traditional niqab. Kristensen and Sørensen experienced the reverse of this, having to repress their chosen religion in the private realm but experiencing a freedom within the public. This divide between the acceptability of religious expression in the public and private spheres created a conflicted habitus for all the case studies, and the vulnerability exploited by the catalyst.

5.5.2 Social affiliations

Bourdieu clearly states that social affiliations are key to influencing and continually shaping habitus (Jenkins; 2002: 76). With this in mind, the social life of the individuals differed widely, but still impacted on the construction of the conflicted habitus and ultimately the decision to become foreign fighters. Within the media, there is a tendency to portray foreign fighters as either isolated or within a group of like-minded friends. Whilst this is clearly true for some of the individuals, notably Emwazi, Kristensen and Sørensen, this does not work for Selimovic and Kesinovic who enjoyed full integration in the Western society in which they lived (Vienna, Austria) and socialised with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, including many native Austrians.

5.5.3 Upbringing

Another key difference between the case studies is their upbringing. Where Sørensen had a particularly tumultuous experience, Emwazi, Kristensen, Selimovic and Kesinovic all experienced a relatively stable, affluent upbringing. However, all experienced a conflicted habitus despite their socio-economic background and stability of their childhood, which would indicate that despite Bourdieu's insistence that upbringing is a key aspect in shaping habitus (Jenkins; 2002: 76), this is not a decisive aspect in terms of whether an individual becomes a foreign fighter. Therefore our case studies indicate that a foreign fighter is not more likely to have experienced a tumultuous upbringing than a stable upbringing, and the latter is not a guarantee against an individual experiencing a conflicted habitus.

5.6 Common denominators

Despite the range of differences, there are several commonalities between each case study that fits with both a lack of capital and a conflicted habitus, factors that arguably override the differences.

5.6.1 The Catalyst

Each individual experienced a catalyst in the form of a mosque community or a radical preacher, accessed in person and online through various social media outlets. For Emwazi, the catalyst emerged during his teens in the form of radical hate preacher Hani al-Sibai whom he met through his group of friends. Sørensen grew up in an area known for radical Islamism, but

his catalyst came in the form of his conversion to Islam, and subsequently his identification with radical Islam. Mirsod Omerovic embodied the catalyst for Kesinovic and Selimovic who experienced the hate preacher first via his YouTube channel, before attending the Altun Alem mosque. Finally, for Kristensen the Grimhøjvej mosque represented the catalyst that placed him on the foreign fighter trajectory.

These catalysts are, in other words, centred on religious figures who more or less purposefully inspired the case-study individuals to pursue more radical religious beliefs. However, in spite of this, we are cautious in declaring this a definite “trend” as far as catalysts go, as even though all of our case studies contain similar catalysts who have actively approached and sought to convert our case-individuals, we have also gathered evidence that a very different type of catalyst exists. We will be discussing this other type of catalyst in section 5.7, and demonstrate how it adds an additional layer of complexity to the potential trajectory of the foreign fighter. For now, it is suffice to say that the catalyst plays a definitive role in mobilising what would otherwise be fairly harmless background-factors and turn an individual with a conflicted habitus into an IS foreign fighter.

5.6.2 Jihadis or Thrill Seekers?

The role of adventure is occasionally emphasised by the Western media during their coverage of foreign fighters (Wall Street Journal, 2015), but we believe it actually represents an under-theorised aspect of the foreign fighter. This is despite the fact that the prospect of going to war has always been heavily linked with a sense of adventure and excitement, regardless if the individual being a Danish soldier heading to Afghanistan (Information, 2015) or a young Muslim joining the Mujahedeen to fight foreign invaders in that same country (Singh, 2014). Within our case studies, it is clear that Selimovic, Kesinovic, Emwazi, Sørensen and Kristensen all experienced the pull of an alternative lifestyle that promised excitement and fulfilment. Kristensen travelled extensively across the Middle East and North Africa following his conversion, often with his close friends, suggesting that part of the draw of IS was a chance for adventure within a close-knit community he had lacked in Denmark. Likewise, after becoming radicalised Sørensen was able to travel all over Africa and the Middle East, journeys that appear to have been indirectly funded by terror-linked entities (Politiken, 2012).

Interestingly, only Selimovic and Kesinovic didn't travel prior to them joining IS, arguably making the pull of IS greater, in the sense that they may have felt constricted in Austria – partially due to their emerging conflicted habituses and their inability to leave – which then led them to romanticise the Middle East and crave the excitement of IS. This is supported by accounts of the girls' statements prior to leaving Austria (New York Post, 2014). Emwazi also felt constricted and constrained within the West, specifically due to the fact that he was not allowed outside of the UK for a significant period of time. This arguably presented IS as the only way out, with people to help orchestrate his escape from the UK and offer an alternative life that was more in touch with the values that he held.

All in all, while the draw of adventure is unlikely to be the sole reason for any of these individuals becoming foreign fighters, it greatly contributes to the appeal of IS. This is especially interesting because the appeal is founded in something profoundly human, namely the need for excitement and self-fulfilment, which has little to do with the other reasons for becoming radicalised. It does however fit within the overall pattern of IS, in the sense that it is well established that the religious aspects of the organisation is just one of many different ways they try to appeal to would-be followers, with the chance for an adventurous life being almost equally important (The Guardian, 2014), speaking to common human urges found within the case individuals.

5.6.3 Alternative Sources of (non-Western) Capital

Each individual gained more social capital from their interactions within the radical Muslim community, often to the point that social capital from a non-Muslim Western community eventually became irrelevant and unwanted. This is most demonstrated in the case of Kristensen, who rejected his traditional Danish heritage, his previous best (and only) friend and, due to the increase in both cultural and social capital from the Muslim community, became more outgoing, opinionated and confident. Kesinovic and Selimovic did hold "Western" social capital, seemingly well integrated into a Western social sphere and experiencing people of diverse backgrounds primarily through their education. However, this Western social capital declined considerably as their involvement in radical Islam grew, suggesting that increased social capital within the Islamic community came at the price of Western social capital.

This may have been the case for Emwazi and Sørensen, in the sense that both isolated themselves within the Muslim community, and subsequently failed to develop Western social capital, which, when combined with the conflicted habitus, created the vulnerabilities exploited by the catalysts. The draw of community also impacted on the social capital of each case, specifically for Kristensen, in the form of brotherhood, which motivated a large amount of his actions (including his ultimate death). For Kristensen, much of the pull of IS revolved around his group of friends, his brotherhood, who he would sacrifice himself for and they would for him. Emwazi and Sørensen also experienced the community aspect of social capital, both existing within a brotherhood of similarly minded peers that ultimately shared the same goals and ideals.

By combining the theoretical aspects of Bourdieu's different capitals and the theory of group identification, we believe that our case-studies clearly indicated that group-identification is woven into all forms of capital, in the sense that strong group identification often creates capital, be it social, cultural or symbolic. An individual feels accepted, supported and valuable within a group, gains social, cultural and symbolic capital and therefore bonds with the group as a result. Arguably for each of the case studies, group identification, in the form of community, played a key role in their radicalization, influenced their motivations and legitimized their actions.

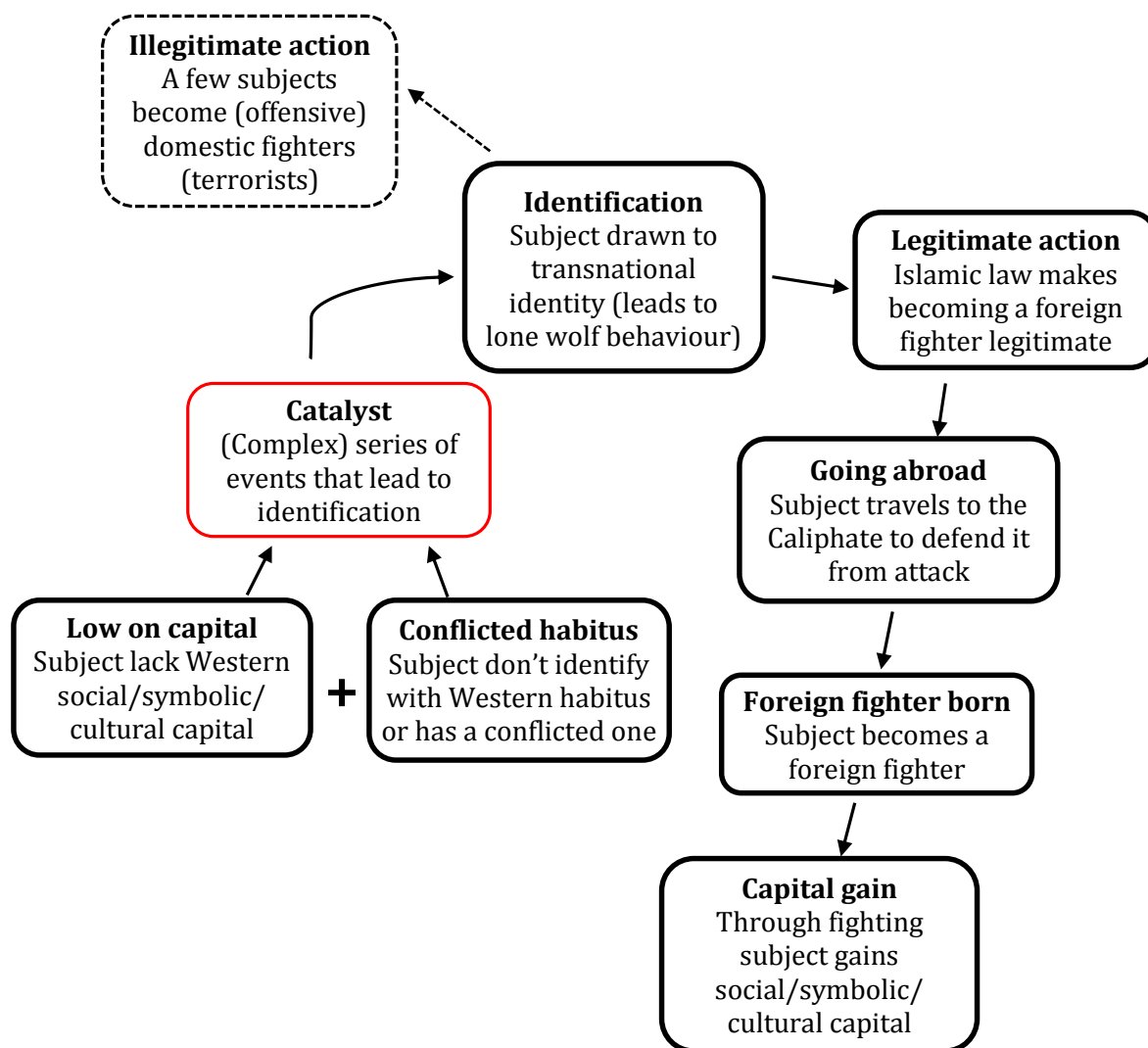
5.7 Drawing the threads together: navigating the foreign fighter trajectory

Despite the complexity of the motivations, influencing factors and backgrounds, this section sketches a rough pattern of the foreign fighter trajectory based on the most prominent commonalities between the case studies, in line with the theoretical framework presented earlier in this paper.

Throughout the four case studies we have confirmed that a number of factors that are usually associated with radicalisation were present, especially the isolation from the dominating Western culture, an exposure to radical preachers or ideals and the presentation of an alternative lifestyle that promised fulfilment and adventure. This, when combined with the general political context of the West specifically in the form of Islamophobia and the increasing attacks on Islamic countries, increased the hostility and alienation from the West for the radical communities in general and the foreign fighters in particular.

We believe these factors contributed to the radicalisation of the individuals, but that the key influencing factor is the conflicted habitus that each individual experienced, which, when combined with the lack of social and cultural capital of the individuals, and the influence of the catalysts, led to the joining of IS. We believe that each individual follows a similar trajectory, taking the same steps in different forms, but the motivations and other interacting factors that guide them on this path vary drastically. The trajectory itself is presented in a single model below.

Model 1: The typical trajectory of the Foreign Fighter



Before delving into each step in greater detail, we will briefly sum up the entirety of the model, which captures the lessons learned from the four case-studies, and presents them as coherent process that leads the individual towards identifying with the transnational identity of the

Islamic State, and eventually going abroad to become a foreign fighter for the group. The seven phases explains how an individual goes from living in a Western country to becoming a foreign fighter (as well as explaining how the fighters can view this transformation as legitimate within the religious law of Islam).

The model shows that all of the individuals experienced a conflicted habitus and deficit in social, symbolic and cultural capital when living in the West. This, in and of itself, is harmless until a catalyst enters the picture. The catalyst exploits the vulnerabilities of the conflicted habitus and the deficit of capital to create an opportunity to gain more social capital within an alternative community, which then leads to strong group identification. This group identification explicitly means that through the catalyst, the individual is made to relate and sympathise with a transnational identity (see section 3.1), in this case the Islamic caliphate declared by IS.

5.7.1 Step 1: Low on Capital + Conflicting Habitus

Going back to the first step of the model, wherein the individual suffers from a lack of Western social, cultural and symbolic capital, or has experienced a conflicted habitus – or in many of our cases, both – this functions as the fertile soil from which a foreign fighter is born. However, we believe it is important to note that having a conflicted habitus and a deficit in capital is not enough to create the foreign fighter, and those who possess these characteristics are not necessarily “ticking bombs”. Yet, if all the factors align, and an individual become vulnerable enough, they then become more susceptible to the influence of a catalyst and the process of radicalisation. During the process of investigating the case studies, we have found that it is difficult to ascertain the exact point of radicalisation or the level of vulnerability of a given individual. All that can be said is that at some point, the factors align to create an environment wherein the catalyst can exploit all the factors, vulnerabilities and conflicts to place the individuals on the foreign fighter trajectory. The impact of the catalyst is therefore key within this process.

5.7.2 Step 2: The Catalyst

Many people, particularly those residing in cultures different to their own, possess a conflicted habitus and a deficit of social capital yet do not become radicalised. This is largely due to the role of the catalyst, without which, it is unlikely that these vulnerabilities will ever be exploited.

The catalyst utilises the confusion surrounding the divide within public and private spheres, often exerting symbolic violence over the individual that exploits the vulnerabilities of the individual to create the strong group identification with the transnational Islamic identity of IS. The catalyst also legitimises the path towards becoming a foreign fighter, by presenting complex religious arguments that legitimise the caliphate of IS, and normalising the radicalisation process through involving the individual within a community of people who hold the same views, and are tied into the transnational identity.

5.7.3 Step 3: Identification and Step 4: Legitimate Action

Following the involvement of the catalyst, the group identification is created, or intensified, both negatively and positively. For all of the case studies, each individual experienced positive group identification with the transnational identity of the IS caliphate, and subsequently experienced negative group identity towards the West as a result. This meant that each individual was inspired to defend IS and the identity it represented. IS represented a unique pull for the radicalised individual because the concept of the caliphate is presented by IS as a legal Islamic entity that calls the Muslim to join and defend its territory and people from the non-believers (BBC News, 2014b). IS uses this concept to call individuals to join, legitimate its actions and create the transnational identity of the foreign fighter. Therefore any action taken to preserve the caliphate is a legitimate action according to the interpretation of Islam that IS presents to its followers (ibid.). This also applies even if the foreign fighter partakes in territorial conquest against nations like Iraq and Syria, as this can be explained by those countries “encroaching” on the historical caliphate, as this is perceived by IS and its followers. Finally the legitimate action of joining IS as a foreign fighter stands in stark contrast to those individuals who become radicalised and then join terrorist cells operating within the Western-world. This would constitute an illegitimate action insofar as it being considered an offensive move rather than a defensive one.

5.7.4 Step 5: Going Abroad and Step 6: A Foreign Fighter is Born

Once the legality of joining IS’s caliphate has been established as a legitimate way of aiding the people of the same transnational identity that the individual feels he or she belongs to, the individual then proceeds to travel to territory held by IS. Naturally, there were some variation to the exact role in IS. While all the men did indeed end up becoming what is traditionally regarded as a IS foreign fighter (i.e. carrying arms and participating in an armed conflict as

members of IS or its affiliates), the two girls, Selimovic and Kesinovic, instead travelled to the Middle East with the intent of marrying IS-fighters. Whilst Selimovic and Kesinovic are not traditional IS foreign fighters, they still contributed to the mission of IS, particularly in terms of recruitment, partaking in the conflict to some extent, and therefore still fall into the category of IS foreign fighter.

5.7.5 Step 7: Capital Gain

The final step in the model is the interactions with fellow members of the transnational identity that grant the social, cultural and symbolic capital that they either lacked or rejected in the West. Furthermore, it is where they are able to free themselves from the difficulties of having a conflicted habitus, by fully embracing the non-Western aspects of their habitus. The divide between the public/private spheres disappears, as the private and public religious and political values should theoretically be the same for people living within IS-controlled territory (BBC News, 2014b). Naturally, the above description represents an ideal scenario which, by all accounts, is rarely completely fulfilled in reality. Besides the fact that more than half of the case-study individuals have died relatively shortly after their arrival, other evidence points towards the fact that many IS foreign fighters experience a disillusionment upon their arrival at the caliphate (Washington Post, 2015), with some eventually returning to the West, expressing regret over ever having gone in the first place (New York Post, 2014).

5.7.6 Summing up the model:

The model may be seen as general or simplistic. However, its aim is simply to categorise the complexity and map the path of the IS foreign fighter. It does not necessarily speculate on exactly how the individual came to be on this path. For each necessary step, there is an almost infinite amount of reasons behind an individual possessing conflicted habitus or a lack of capital. The media generalises, focusing on a few sensational characteristics of the IS foreign fighter rather than appreciating the complexity of the picture, the diversity of the IS foreign fighter or the multitude of contributing factors. Therefore the model is not a check-list for the IS foreign fighter, it simply maps the trajectory once various factors align to place an individual on this path.

In this vein, we find that rather than focusing on people who have undergone the process of radicalisation, an interesting avenue to pursue would be to look at people with similar, or near identical, experiences, with several of the factors that we have found within one or more of the

case studies, who have not been radicalised. This would then deepen our understanding of the complexity and highlight the role of the catalyst further, prompting a discussion on deterrence factors and vulnerabilities; potentially altering the model altogether.

5.8 The Reverse Catalyst: The Case of Andre Poulin

Despite finding commonalities within the various case studies that support our main argument and evidence the importance of an external catalyst in the form of a religious, we have studied a case that does not fit neatly into this model. The subject of this case-study is Andre Poulin, a Caucasian native Canadian who found Islam at the age of 19 (La Presse, 2014). Having dropped out of education, Poulin experimented in building explosives, doing drugs and petty crime, earning himself a criminal record in the process (New York Times, 2014).

Following this, he converted to Islam in 2008, and, in order to exist within a more Muslim environment, moved in with a Muslim couple – Cecile Gagnon and a man known only as Tassawar (La Presse, 2014). During this time, he began a sexual relationship with Gagnon and taking issue with Tassawar on the basis that Tassawar was not behaving in a ‘religious enough’ manner, and was arrested twice for making violent threats against Tassawar in 2009 (New York Times, 2014). Between 2008 and 2009, Poulin began to exhibit other signs of strict Islamic beliefs, changing his dress, choosing harsher language and developing a separate identity as ‘Uncle Umar’ – a religious advisor (CBC News, 2014). He also took the Islamic name of Abu Muslim al-Kanadi, (‘Abu Muslim the Canadian’), and developed an Arabic signature that read “Martyrdom, if God wills it” (ibid). Poulin made the journey to IS in 2011, arriving in Syria in late 2012 and joining a unit of foreign fighters (New York Times, 2014). Upon reaching IS, Poulin made the well-known video “*The Chosen Few of Different Lands*”², an initiation video which has since been used as a key part of the IS Western-focused propaganda.

Poulin does not fit neatly into the model for two reasons. Firstly, there is limited publically available information on him or his journey towards radicalisation, but the information available points towards him being entirely self-radicalised (CBC News, 2014), rather than experiencing a conflicted habitus. Secondly, there seems to be an absence of a direct catalyst for Poulin, as much of the radicalisation process appears to have taken place online, or via self-

² Available to watch at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m923qRRu54k>

radicalisation through selective reading of radical texts and the Qur'an. However, we have been able to ascertain that Poulin was low on social, symbolic and cultural capital, evidenced by his familiarity with the justice system, employment in a low paid job and lack of education. Poulin was isolated, troubled and violent, suggesting that he was searching for an outlet for his frustration. However, it was not until after his conversion to Islam that Poulin experienced a conflicted habitus, which he attempted to solve by integrating into the Muslim community in the form of living with a Muslim couple.

We argue this action created a reverse catalyst in the sense that Poulin became radicalised via the internet, romanticised the Muslim identity and felt betrayed when the reality, in the form of Tassawar, failed to live up to Poulin's ideal. This then further pushed Poulin towards IS, which he viewed as the ultimate Muslim community, operating under Sharia law (La Presse, 2014). However, because there is limited information, there could still have been a catalyst for Poulin, possibly in the form of an online community. Arguably, Poulin experienced strong group identification with this romanticised ideal, to the extent that he began to experience negative group identification with both the West and Muslims that continued to reside in the West and failed to live up to his perception of a proper Islamic lifestyle. This, combined with a penchant for radical action is possibly what led him to join IS, but his case underlines just how complex the issue of how IS foreign fighters are created is, and why we feel that even a fairly well-developed model can only contain some, but not all potential trajectories of individuals becoming IS foreign fighters.

5.9 Lessons Learned

This section draws out the key findings of this paper, particularly in regards to the nature and importance of the catalyst and its interplay with legitimacy of IS in successful recruitment techniques. Additionally, the role of the public/private divide is emphasised, along with group identification and capital; before the overall complexity of the nature of the research question is assessed.

5.9.1 The Importance of the Catalyst

Throughout the process of analysing the case studies, it became apparent that the role of the catalyst was paramount in triggering the IS foreign fighter trajectory and exploiting the

vulnerabilities of various individuals. The catalyst is essential in the shaping of the IS foreign fighters by facilitating their travels, introducing them to other radical individuals and ultimately designing their education in such a way that normalises the radicalisation process. However, the case of Poulin demonstrates that the category of catalyst needs to be expanded to include a broad range of forms of the catalyst. For example, the reverse catalyst is not mentioned in the model, and the catalyst is instead assumed to be a radical imam, hate preacher or extremist community within this paper.

5.9.2 The Role of the Public/Private Divide

The conflicted habitus in our case studies resides in the divide between the private and public spheres, predominately represented in the form of Islamic religious beliefs. The main conflict is the presence of religious beliefs which is often found either in the public or private spheres, depending on the individual, but is often not expressed fully in both at the same time until after the radicalisation process. The key thing to note is that there are varying degrees of acceptability and differing value systems within each sphere, so for the individual experiencing a conflicted habitus, what is acceptable gets confused. This then creates a vulnerability and exposes the individual to symbolic violence, which often precedes the radicalisation process.

5.9.3 Group Identification and the Gaining of Capital

Group identification is essentially the main goal of the radicalisation process, wherein the catalyst encourages strong identification with the transnational Muslim identity as presented by IS. Group identification is presented throughout the radicalisation process, beginning with an engagement at the local level, often a radical Muslim community, before increasing to the global level and the eventual identification with IS. The identification and attractiveness of IS is due to the fact that it is seen as legitimate in terms of Islamic law, reconciles the conflicted habitus while granting the social, symbolic and cultural capital that was unavailable in the West. The gaining of capital is arguably more important than the initial lack of capital, because it creates an incentive for the individual to become a foreign fighter. Interestingly, even if the individual experienced some level of Western social, symbolic and cultural capital – Selimovic, Kesinovic and to an extent Emwazi – this tended to decline as they became more involved in the radical Islamic community and gained alternative capital within this environment.

5.9.4 Complexity

The main purpose of this paper has been to explore the previously simplified and generalised perception of the foreign fighter, as presented by much of the mass media. During this process, the complexity and uniqueness of each individual case, and the difficulty of including the vast multitude of factors has highlighted the futility of attempting to present a generalised picture of how foreign fighters come to be. We have established that it is indeed possible to identify key factors that place an individual on the trajectory to become a foreign fighter for IS, but that these can only take the form of non-exhaustive, generalised steps, and that the contents of each step differs from individual to individual.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to formulate an alternative conception of the motivating factors that lead individuals towards becoming IS foreign fighters. We identified several key factors that place Westerners on this trajectory, namely a conflicted habitus, a capital deficit and the presence of an influential catalyst.

Our theoretical basis consisted of using Bourdieu's theory on habitus and capital. Based on this, we created the theory of the "conflicted habitus", tying it to lone wolf theory's concept of group identification by Moskalenko and McCauley, as well as to foreign fighter theory by using Malet's concept of transnational identities. We then constructed the concept of the "catalyst", focusing on its use of symbolic violence and the role of cultural legitimacy in order to convince Westerners suffering from a conflicted habitus to become foreign fighters.

The theory of conflicted habitus, in conjunction with the concept of group identification and how it leads to identifying with the greater, transnational identity of radical Islamism preached by IS, was then applied to four case studies of individuals who had gone to join IS or its affiliates as foreign fighters. This led to a number of findings, both differences and common denominators between the cases, which enabled us to map the typical trajectory of the foreign fighter; arguing that the catalyst in particular was key to each case-individual's decision to become an IS foreign fighter. The catalyst could achieve this due to the conflicted habitus and capital deficiency, which meant that the case-individuals were torn between Western and Islamic identities; a vulnerability that was exploited by a catalyst, who enacted a form of

symbolic violence upon each individual, influencing them towards radical Islam. This symbolic violence can succeed because the catalyst uses Islamic law to establish legitimacy and push the individual to become a foreign fighter for IS; the promise being that this will allow the individual to reconcile his or her internal conflict and gain the social, cultural and symbolic capital that he or she is lacking within the Western context.

The case-analysis enabled us to identify the above mentioned key factors and summarise them, as well as other relevant factors from each case-study, and present them in a coherent model. While compressing and simplifying the lessons learned, the model both presents the trajectory of the case study individuals towards becoming IS foreign fighters, while also addressing the complexity of the subject by stressing the uniqueness of how individuals experience each step. However, while demonstrating the complexity of the issue was one of the most important aspects of our argumentation (as opposed to the simplified explanations presented by the media) this also imposed a number of limitations and challenges.

In terms of these limitations and challenges, it is clear that we only draw on a few empirical examples to represent a wider trend, an approach that has a number of pitfalls, especially in terms of being representable of a wider picture. The inclusion of the fifth “outsider” case of Andre Poulin was partially done to alleviate this particular issue, by showing the need to expand upon several aspects of our model, particularly in relation to the catalyst.

Finally, as mentioned in the analysis, we believe that future studies would do well to focus more on people with similar experiences to those who ended up becoming foreign fighters, but who themselves stopped short of going abroad to fight. This could increase the understanding of the complexity of the individual trajectory and highlight the role of the catalyst further, and perhaps allow authorities a new avenue of investigation and prevention rather than analysing the problem after-the-fact.

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