The radicalization phenomenon in the Helsinki metropolitan area

Muslim opinion-leaders comment the debate on radicalization

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Master’s Degree Programme in Intercultural Encounters
Master’s Thesis
October 2015
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The present study examines radicalization phenomenon from the perspectives of the Muslim communities residing in Helsinki metropolitan area. The focus is on shedding light on the complex nature of the phenomenon by providing the aspects and elements present in defining its essence within the Finnish Islamic context. The research problem of this study is concentrated on the fact that several Finnish Muslims have left Finland to the conflict zones of Syria and Iraq. The aim of this study is to contribute to the assessment of this problem by providing Muslim authority viewpoints concerning this matter, and to enhance understanding of the radicalization phenomenon within the context of Islam.

The key research questions of this Thesis are 1. Which elements are present when defining the radicalization phenomenon within an Islamic context? 2. How is the radicalization phenomenon perceived in the Muslim communities of the Helsinki metropolitan area? 3. How should the radicalization phenomenon be dealt with from the perspectives of the Muslim communities residing in the Helsinki metropolitan area?

The empirical part of this thesis is built on 6 semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in Helsinki and Espoo during March, April, May and August 2015. I use the method of thematic content analysis to interpret the research respondents impressions of the radicalization phenomenon.

According to the analysis of the research interviews, it can be concluded that there are several factors present when defining the phenomenon of radicalization in a Muslim context in the Helsinki metropolitan area. These factors are, respectively: Political grievances, the Youth, the Media, Social exclusion, and Polarization of the society. These elements in their various forms are interconnected and intertwined in shaping and sustaining the phenomenon.

This thesis contributes in the overall field of radicalization studies by providing the Finnish Muslim opinion-leaders’, the imams’ and other influential Muslims’, impressions about the current debate on radicalization. For the first time these issues have been addressed from the points of view of the Muslims themselves within the Finnish societal context by conducting a thematic research interview. Because similar studies have not been conducted within the Finnish scope of radicalization research, it is impossible to compare the results with any contextually relevant study.
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1 INTRODUCTION

On January 7th 2015, two Muslim men attacked the office of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris, France. This weekly newspaper is known for its satirical cartoons, saving no one – especially not religions – from its sharp irony and snide jokes. Over the years, it has published several cartoons presenting the Prophet Muhammad or other important Muslim figures in a rather compromising way. There can be many opinions about the tastefulness or discretion of these cartoons, and obviously they have not been that welcomed within the Muslim community where the sublime status of the Prophet Muhammad cannot be denied.

Nevertheless, these cartoons might have been the trigger for the two young men to commit the terrorist attack in the office of Charlie Hebdo and taking lives of 12 people. This incident has raised similar attention and debates as the cartoons portraying the Prophet Muhammad published in the Danish Jyllands-Posten newspaper in 2005 – Once again Islam is depicted as an opposing power to the European Western culture and its values, in this case specifically as a threat to the highly valued freedom of speech. One comment strongly highlighting this point of view was stated by the Chairman for the Council for Mass Media in Finland, Risto Uimonen, arguing that this terrorist attack is a clear indicator of “how hard it is to combine the Western and Islamic understanding of freedom of speech and democracy”. ¹

The media coverage on the subject has mostly highlighted these above-mentioned matters, but some have had the courage to question this interpretation of the attack and argued for instance, how imperative it is to “resist the clash-of-civilizations narrative”. ² Others have

claimed that Muslim leaders around the world should condemn the attack,\(^3\) while still others have emphasized that Muslims definitely have no obligation to condemn it\(^4\) and, in fact, this consideration can even be suggested as being Islamophobic.\(^5\) In addition, there have been worried questions of the possible negative outcome of the attack for the Muslim communities and the public discussion around it – will the polarized situation between Islam and the West continue to worsen\(^6\) and will these events, in fact, only enhance the power of extremist ideologies of both sides of the arguments.\(^7\)

For the past year or so there has been an ongoing public discussion not only in Finland, but also in the worldwide media, concerning the issues of the radicalization of youth, Islam and Muslims, Islamist movements, jihadi terrorism and the flow of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. The media coverage on the subject has been intense and it has raised many worried questions in newspapers, blogs, social media and Internet discussion forums. This media visibility has on the one hand given valuable information on the subject and thus forced the authorities to act upon it, but on the other hand it seems that it might have created a more hostile atmosphere towards Islam and Muslims. If this is the case, there is a danger that the situation can worsen and feed populist, xenophobic and oversimplified opinions, hence ultimately maintaining and enhancing the perspective of Islam as the other.

As I have been following this media hype, I realized that it is quite difficult to find a Muslim authority point of view to this subject, especially in Finland. There are plenty of articles on the flux of foreign fighters to Syria or the problematic issue of radicalization academics as being a dangerous oversimplification because it contributes to the division between “us” and “them” (Goerzig and Al-Hashimi 2015, 112; 118).


and its prevention, most of them written by journalists, researchers and experts. Several of these comments highlight the importance of the local Muslim community to work on this issue. However at the same time, we are missing out on the insights, initiatives and ideas of local Muslims authorities themselves: How do they feel about this phenomenon of radicalization? Does it worry them, or do they feel that the whole issue is exaggerated? Do they feel that the root cause of this problem lies in religion, or has it been religionized? What will they do about the situation, what should be done by the local authorities? The list of questions I would like to pose the local Muslim community authorities is extensive and the lack of Muslim perspective in media coverage suggests that the representation of the situation is not completely equal.

Coming from this perspective, I decided to focus my research on the phenomenon of radicalization within the Muslim communities in the Helsinki metropolitan area, by specifically providing the viewpoints and insights of the local Muslim community authorities, such as the imams and other Muslims who are in influential positions within their communities. The choice of study subject is supported by the fact that leaders and authorities of religious communities are generally in an influential position within their group. Thus they usually possess a large amount of valuable information concerning the uncertainties, anxieties and activities of the members of their community. In addition, religious leaders are often approached by their members with every-day issues and especially members with migrant background might turn to seek support due to the low threshold compared to distant governmental officials. (IOM 2011)

1.1 Starting the research process

The first steps of this research were made when trying to decide on the topic of the whole study and the points of view from which the issue will be studied. It all started in summer 2014 as I was scanning through the ongoing discussions about Islam in the Finnish media. I became curious and started to study the subject more intensively, finally reaching the decision to focus this study on radicalization within the Islamic context. At the same time
things were heating up in the media, and the amount of headlines and news articles I encountered started to intensify. This inevitably made me increasingly interested in researching the whole issue and I started to dig deeper.

When going through the vast written material and studies on the subject and pondering how to collect the material for this study, I already started narrowing down the main focus. The aim was to reflect on those concepts, elements and theories, which are relevant to this study and to find out more about the subject. This is when I realized that, as the resources of a Master’s thesis are limited, the most reasonable way to narrow down the research question would be to focus on Muslim communities present in the Helsinki metropolitan area (Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa).

What then followed was an extensive and thorough familiarization with the spectrum of Muslim communities present in this geographical area. This part of the study took surprisingly much time, because the number of communities is definitely not easy to grasp. There are not just a vast number of communities, but also the information about them is scattered around the Internet, and it is highly outdated.

1.2 Theoretical framework and previous research

In this study I am approaching the chosen subject and research questions from a multidisciplinary perspective. The previous research and theories are mostly from the fields of Terrorism Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Political Science, Sociology, Social Psychology, Islamic Studies and the Sociology of Religion.

This chapter presents the ways in which radicalization has been studied within the academic context. The following subchapters demonstrate the different ways of defining the terms ‘radical’ and ‘radicalization’, and expose their definitions in the context of this research.
1.2.1 Studying radicalization

These days the study of radicalization tends to focus more on understanding the phenomenon, whereas it used to concentrate on the explanatory by producing reasons why radicalization takes place in the first place. Before it was all about explaining which kind of individual characteristics or structural factors are the ones that create radicalization, when nowadays the research highlights the importance of understanding the dynamics between these two and hence the process nature of radicalization. Even if it is indispensable to study which matters eventually lead to radicalization, the findings remain limited and the situation unclarified (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 8). As sociologist, Orla Lynch (2013, 241) puts it when discussing radicalization as a term: it is “conceptually and chronologically immature”.

Magnus Ranstorp, a scholar of Terrorism Studies, highlights the fact that radicalization processes are complex and cannot be defined as a linear progression (2010, 2). It is problematic to approach these processes due to their context dependency. Even though there are common elements, the processes and circumstances facilitating radicalization can be different depending on the regional conditions and the historical and social context. Political scientist, Angel Rabasa, and sociologist, Cheryl Benard, continue by stating that, in fact, extremism and radicalism are built-in elements of all societies (2014, 3).

The interest in studying radicalization has been ever-increasing after the 9/11. This hype has produced several different kinds of studies approaching the phenomenon from many different angles (Ranstrop 2010, Lynch 2013). Some academic studies have focused, for example on researching the patterns and processes of extremist recruitment in Europe as an effort to understand the extremist setting and the socio-psychological recruit profiles (Taarnby 2005). When others, such as Peter Nesser (2006, 31–49), a scholar of Terrorism Studies, have studied terrorist cells and sought to categorize the distinct roles within them.
Some scholars have made studies in content analysis and on the religious components of
the phenomenon (Larson 2006, 197–215), while others have sought to offer a more
theoretically oriented research on the radicalization recruitment and processes by
employing a social movement theory (Wiktorowitcz 2005). Moreover, the academic
studies of Jeff Victoroff and John Horgan have focused on the group dynamics and
engagement within the terrorist groups as well as on the psychological approaches (Horgan

There are also studies focused on the role of prisons as a radicalization milieu (Ranstorp
2010, 3) or of the Internet in the radicalization processes and recruitment. For example,
Ranstorp’s (2007) research, shedding light on the relationship between the operational
playground of Internet and the ideology as a means of “psychological warfare”. In
addition, the research of Brynjar (2006) emphasizes on the role of Internet for extremists as
a new forum to build relationships and share discussions. This same notion has been
emphasized by Rabasa and Benard (2014, 117; 120) who argue that, in fact, the Internet
can be seen nowadays as enabling terrorism in the first place. It serves as a platform for the
practice of extremist activities, for example in the form of jihadist blogs and websites. The
Internet has even offered the opportunity for female activists to engage in extremist
activities and socialize with their male counterparts without breaking any religious or
cultural moral codes.

According to Carolin Goerzig, a scholar of Terrorism Studies, and Khaled Al-Hashimi, an
expert on conflict prone regions of Africa and the Middle East, even if there is a common
assumption that strong religiosity is the determining factor behind radicalization; the facts
speak of the contrary. Instead they claim that, in fact, genuine dedication to religion does
not automatically signify radical mindset and as a matter of fact, the real problem lies in
the lack of knowledge about the true nature and teachings of their religion. Another
argument referring to why radicalization of Muslims takes place is blaming the racism,
discrimination and stigmatization Muslims encounter in the Western societies. However,
this raises the question why others who face the same prejudices do not radicalize?
(Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 44–47)
1.2.2 Finnish studies on radicalization

Even though Finland has so far been able to avoid all large-scale terrorist attacks, there is still a significant interest to study terrorism and political violence within the Finnish academia. However, the research efforts tackling radicalization as a phenomenon in the Finnish context remain relatively intact (for exceptions, see e.g; Kullberg 2011, 250–295; and the studies of Juha Saarinen, see footnote on p.62). Therefore, this thesis will hopefully contribute in providing viewpoints on domestic radicalization and inspiring further research on the subject.

1.2.3 The trouble of definitions

There are several challenges when it comes to defining the terms radical and radicalization. It is imperative to consider carefully the definition of the terms as they can get various meanings and connotations in the minds of different people (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010, 797–814). In addition, what some consider as radical behavior or thoughts is probably not considered radical at all by the proponents of this cause (Mandel 2009, 105). Thus, in the words of a scholar of Terrorism Studies and Political Violence, Peter Neumann (2003, 878): “For many, in other words, radicalization, like terrorism, is in the eye of the beholder: one man’s radical (or terrorist) is another man’s freedom fighter.”

The difficulties in understanding the terms and the lack of a global consensus in their definition have led to the confusing situation where many labelling terms are being used in an oversimplified manner to designate an individual arrested on terrorism. In the media this

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8 If we ought to exclude the domestic school shootings of Jokela (2007) and Kauhajoki (2008), as well as the bomb incident in the shopping center of Myyrmanni (2002). Leena Malkki (2011, 207) accentuates that in terms of some of their characteristics, these events could be seen in the realm of terrorism. However, the Finnish public discussion, as well as official statistics, both maintain the idea of these incidents as non-terrorism, and hence the official amount of terrorism attacks in Finland continues to be zero.

9 See e.g. the extensive studies of Leena Malkki (e.g. 2007, 2010, 2011), Jarno Limnell (e.g. 2011, 2012), Anssi Kullberg (e.g. 2006, 2011, 2014); and the various studies conducted within the Police University College (e.g. 2009, 2010) and the National Defence University (e.g. 2014).
individual might be referred to as a Muslim fundamentalist, Islamic radical, jihadist, Islamic terrorist, extremist etc., while these terms certainly do not have the same meaning. This tendency to randomly identify a person under these labels creates confusion for not only the public but also to the researchers, security services and governments. The situation adds up to the unsettled matter of where to draw the line between only sympathizing with radical activities and radical activity per se, eventually culminating into a surveillance society where this uncertainty is used as a tool to profile a whole population. (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 29)

1.2.4 Defining radical and radicalization

Radical as a concept has developed from its original meaning: initially it was used to describe the fundamental nature of an entity, whereas nowadays it is seen as something extreme in relation to the politically or socially moderate. In fact, this antonymous relation between the terms radical and moderate is more and more accentuated in the public discourse these days, which becomes visible when thinking of the prevalent discourse around moderate vs. radical Islam. (Mandel 2009, 104)

What does it mean then to become radical? Does the process of radicalization ultimately lead to radical action or can it turn out as only radical thoughts and beliefs? Several academics have given their insights on this matter. Some want to highlight the fact that radical thoughts and radical actions are related, when others underline that violence is not automatically the outcome of a radicalization process (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 28–29; Mandel 2009, 102). Peter Neumann (2003) has sketched a clear division for radical thinking and radical action. He defines the process which leads to extremist beliefs and ideas as cognitive radicalization and process leading to extremist behavior as behavioral radicalization. Moreover, Neumann sums up the whole radicalization process as “what goes on before the bomb goes off” (2008, 4 cited in Mandel 2009, 102).
Rabasa and Benard (2014, 3–4), however, define radicalization in terms of rejection of the fundamental European values (such as human rights and democracy, freedom of worship, gender equality and respect for diversity). They continue by stating that the trajectory of radicalization inaugurate from feelings of alienation and discontent resulting in the search for a relevant identity and friendship, which radical extremist groups willingly provide.

1.2.5 The term radicalization in this study

The definitions of the terms radical and radicalization per se, are free from all religious, political and ethnic connotations, because the essence of these terms is present in all aspects of life. The term cannot as such be labeled as being either good or bad, and hence the objective of this study is neither to stigmatize any radical intellects of any community, nor to create rough generalizations on the matter. Instead this research aims to increase understanding of the phenomenon.

Nevertheless, in academic research the use of terminology of the radicalization phenomenon needs to be placed in the context of the provided research problem. Thus within this study, the definition of the term radical in general terms, is influenced by the ideas of a scholar of Defence Research, David R. Mandel. According to his studies, the definition of the term radical is strongly dependent on the perspective. The definition depends on what it is related to and thus: “to be radical is to be extreme relative to something”. Whereas, the term radicalization can be defined as a process which leads individuals to turn radical. (Mandel 2009, 105–107)

In the Islamic context of this study, I will employ the definition of radicalization presented by Goerzig and Al-Hashimi (2015, 30–31). They define radicalization in their study as “the process of progressively adopting more radical beliefs and ideas of Islam”. In their research, they see radicalization as a process, where the person and the situation are interacting: “Understanding radicalization as a process enables an analytical focus not only
on the environment permissive to radicalization but also the individual subject to radicalization”.

1.2.6 Research questions

The purpose of this research is to study the radicalization phenomenon from the perspectives of the Muslim communities residing in Helsinki metropolitan area. Additionally, the focus is on shedding light on the complex nature of the phenomenon by providing the aspects and elements present in defining its essence within the Finnish Islamic context. The research problem of this thesis has been developing throughout the study process, starting from the extensive studying of the pervasive media sources revolving around the radicalization phenomenon, and ultimately concluding in analysing the research data. Finally the research problem of this study is concentrated on the fact that several Finnish Muslims have left Finland to the conflict zones of Syria and Iraq. The aim of this study is to contribute to the assessment of this problem by providing Muslim authority viewpoints concerning this matter.

The research questions are as follows:

a. Which factors/elements are present when defining the radicalization phenomenon within an Islamic context?

b. How is the radicalization phenomenon perceived in the Muslim communities of the Helsinki metropolitan area?

c. How should the radicalization phenomenon be dealt with from the perspectives of the Muslim communities residing in the Helsinki metropolitan area?
2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 The narrative of Islam vs. the West

The president of the United States, Barack Obama, stated that: “the notion that the West is at war with Islam is an ugly lie”\(^\text{10}\) in his speech in the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism, on February 19 2015. Nevertheless, it seems that not all Muslim communities can unconditionally agree with him.

The notion of Islam and the West as polarized and opposing each other sits tightly in the narratives and discourses of proponents from both ends. According to a Pew Global Attitudes survey from July 2011, the general opinion of Westerners and Muslims towards each other remains mainly negative. Westerners continue to hold on to the stereotypical images of Muslims as violent and fanatical, whereas Muslims see people from the West as “selfish, immoral and greedy – as well as violent and fanatical”.\(^\text{11}\)

This debate on values, attitudes and common stereotypes would be an interesting research topic already, but since it is not the main pursuit of this particular thesis it will be given less attention in this research. However, due to the nature of the research results of this study, it is necessary to shed some light on this polarized phenomenon.


2.1.1 “Islam’s encounter with the West is as old as Islam itself”\(^\text{12}\)

According to the Palestinian American literary theorist and public intellectual Edward W. Said, ever since the era of the classical antiquity the *Orient*, and especially the Middle East, became known as the counterpoint to the West. This was due to historical reasons such as the influence of the Bible and the rise of Christianity; the tales of the adventures of merchant travelers such as Marco Polo; Islam and its warlike pilgrims; and finally the Crusaders. Said proposes that the stories told and written on these events have in a way created the stereotypes and polemical writings which have most influenced the Western view of the East, i.e. the Orient. (Said 2011, 63)

Said argues that the fear of Islam, however, is deeply rooted in the European state of mind and world view. Its history can be traced all the way back to the aftermath of the victorious conquests of Muslims troops soon after the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632. The expansion of the military, cultural and religious hegemony of Islam comprised territories extending from the Mediterranean area (such as Spain, Sicily, North Africa, and Turkey) ultimately to India, Indonesia and China. (Said 2011, 63–64)

The Iberian Peninsula was eventually brought back under Christian rulers, during the so-called *Reconquista*, but Europe still became permanently traumatized by Islam. Until the end of the 1600’s, Islam, and the destruction brought by the Ottoman Empire, represented in the European minds a constant threat for Europe and the Christian world, which eventually paved the way for the image of Islam as a symbol for destruction, terror and barbarian ways. (Said 2011, 64)

The illusions, stereotypes and misunderstandings around Islam formed an unbroken entity of thoughts. Already in the early Middle Ages Islam was seen as a twisted form of Christianity, and the character of Muhammad was connected to different kinds of bad habits, such as overindulgence and lechery, because he was understood as the propagator of false revelation and heterodoxy. Consequently, by the beginning of the Middle Ages, the European civilization was ready to perceive Islam as *the other*. (Said 2011, 63; 65–66; 74)

\(^{12}\) This quote is from the French scholar of contemporary Islam, Olivier Roy. (Roy 2007, vii)
2.1.2 The Afghan mujahideens and the development of the phenomenon in the 1990s

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 prompted the transnational Islamic networks to call jihad against the Soviets. This call was answered throughout the Muslim world by sympathetic Muslims inspired by its religious dimension. The jihadists’ mission was supported by the United States since it was in-line with its own supremacy efforts, and in February 1989 the Soviets withdrew its troops. The importance of the Afghan experience in developing the overall jihadist movement is significant, because it produced a “discourse, mythology and symbolic universe” around the militant Islamist campaign, which still has its effect in the phenomenon. Those Muslims who fought the jihad in Afghanistan, the veteran mujahideens, formed close networks of professional jihadists and created organizational structures (such as the al-Qaeda), which ultimately shaped the global jihadist movements evolution. (Hegghammer 2010, 24–100)

The French scholar of contemporary Islam, Olivier Roy, argues in his book Globalized Islam – The search for a new ummah (London: Hurst, 2004) that it was not until the early 1990’s when the openly anti-Western attitudes started to appear in the sphere of the Islamic networks. He argues that this was partly due to the militant mujahideens’ vision of being able to fight both of the superpowers, the United States and the USSR, after having waged the victorious jihad supposedly causing the fall of the latter. (Roy 2004, 292–293)

However, the other part has to do with the fact that during that time, the Muslim world faced more and more US military interventions, encouraging the late leader of the global jihadi movement al-Qaeda and an Afghan veteran mujahideen, Osama Bin Laden, to harshen his anti-US rhetoric after the 1990–1991 Gulf War. Roy argues, however, that the anti-Western ideas of the mujahideen did not only appear after the Gulf War, rather they were present already. They were not only fighting the Soviets with the Western help but instead they saw themselves as opposing both ends. (Roy 2004, 293)
On the contrary, professor of Middle Eastern Politics and International Relations at the London School of Economics, Fawaz A. Gerges, argues in his book *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) that before, Bin Laden’s worldview was fixed on waging war against the Soviets, an “anti-Marxist crusade”, which was extensively supported by the United States. Then only the aftermath of the 1990–1991 Gulf War, the US military intervention and stationing of troops in Saudi-Arabia (which is the birthplace of Islam and home to Bin Laden), eventually changed his attitudes towards the United States completely. (Fawaz 2011, 48-49) Whichever the case, Bin Laden’s antipathy towards America started inevitably to flourish and influence other proponents of the jihadi cause worldwide.

2.1.3 The culturalist approach

Now if we were to pose the question whether or not Islam is compatible with the West, we would have to make some kind of presuppositions on these two elements – What is Islam? What do we mean by the West? And, most importantly, why do we raise this question? When considering these questions, it is crucial to understand that they rest heavily on the essential worldview separating Islam and the West as two different homogenous and uniform entities – otherwise the whole issue of these two opposing ends would fall in its own paradox. (Roy, 2004)

Roy calls this a “mirror construction” between the extension of US power and Islam (or better: the call for defence of an “imaginary ummah”). He claims that this mirroring position is explicitly expressed in Samuel Huntington’s ‘cliché of the decade: the clash of civilizations’. According to Roy, the problem with this concept is its culturalist approach, which regards Islam (and on the opposing side, the West) as being the issue per se. This is problematic because it reduces Islam into one discrete entity and “a coherent and closed set of beliefs, values and anthropological patterns embodied in a common society, history and territory, which allows us to use the term as an explanatory concept for almost everything

13 See footnote on p.7, in Introduction.
involving Muslims”. This view is not just common among the ordinary citizens, but also academics, journalists, politicians and even some Muslims (be it conservative, moderate or fundamentalists) hold on to this argument. Hence, the culturalist approach seems to engage both the critics and the “defenders” of Islam. (Roy 2004, 9–10; 294)

Roy emphasizes the distinction between Islam as a religion and the so-called “Muslim culture”. These terms tend to get increasingly mixed up in the contemporary discussions about Islam, when the explanations for the problems of the Muslim world are only searched within the religion of Islam. This has to do with similar state of confusion between the terms religion and culture. Roy argues that this is evident for example in the constant mixing up of Muslims and Arabs, despite the fact that there are various religious identities in the Arab societies and the majority of world’s Muslims are not Arabs. Furthermore, nowadays even the term Muslim provokes political connotations, because it inevitably refers to “some sort of neo-ethnic group” opposing the West, rather than its religious aspects. (Roy 2004, 10–13; 332) Said highlights the fact that the concepts of the Orient or the West are both man-made and fictional categories produced to validate and recognize the other. These concepts are easily used in manipulating and producing fear, anger and arrogance. He argues that the focal point of all this manifests in “us” Westerners versus Islam and the Arabs. (Said 2011, 334)

The debate on values as an explanatory argument when regarding the perceived opposition between Islam and the West is not eligible according to Roy or Said. They both emphasize the fact that there is no real universal consensus on the essence of the Western values, such as human rights, freedom of expression, democracy and the women’s rights. Instead, the issue is under constant debate between various communities within the Western society. Said points out that the US war in Iraq would never have occurred without the traditional orientalist point of view, without the strong opposition between us and them, without the idea that those nations are not like us and don’t respect our values. (Roy 2004, 14–15; Roy 2007, viii; Said 2011, 335–337)
2.1.4 Contemporary comments

Roy seeks to find several contemporary explanations for the perception of Islam serving as the main enemy and threat for the West. First of all, he states that the events of modern history have had their effect in influencing the mindset of many observers, mainly starting from the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, followed by the collapse of the USSR and the infamous attacks of 9/11 (Roy 2004, 16). Of course, after the publishing of Roy’s study in 2004, history has witnessed several other incidents which can be seen as a continuum for the building up of this phenomenon of opposition, such as the rise of the al-Dawla al-Islamiyya (better known as ISIS, ISIL, IS, Daesh) and the consequences it has had – or might have in future – to our societies.

Second of all, Roy argues that almost all of the conflicts where Western interests are somehow involved (be it oil, “war on terrorism”, etc.) have to do with Muslim countries. Hence, to be exact, the main battlefields of the West continue to be located in Muslim majority countries. Thirdly, Islamic radical organizations have been the most active ones during the past two – or now already three – decades. (Roy 2004, 16; 332)

As the fourth remark Roy points out that the issue of Muslim immigration continues to serve as an anthem of polarizing rhetoric. Since the immigration has been followed by the establishing of substantial Muslim communities in Western societies, especially in its arenas of social exclusion, it has intensified the perceived link between Islam and all immigration as such. At least in European societies, while in the US the situation can be perceived as somewhat different partly due to the fact that visible religiosity is a part of the public social and political life. (Roy 2004, 16–17; 332)
2.1.5 Western public discourse maintaining polarization

Goerzig and Al-Hashimi (2015) argue that the Western public discourse is continuously producing a polarized discourse between the West and Islam. By keeping up this dichotomy the Western public discourse in itself can, in fact, be seen radical as well. Hence public discourse and the radicalization of Europe’s Muslims are both flourishing in a symbiotic way (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 32). In their study, Goerzig and Al-Hashimi emphasize the consequences what this kind of divisive media attention might have for Europe’s social cohesion. At the same time drawing attention to the effects the polarized public discourse might have on the Muslim communities in Europe (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 32).

The media discourse in several Western European countries presents a distinctively separate in-group and out-group. The in-group as being the private Muslim culture in family sphere, whereas the out-group as the Western culture which especially second and third generations of Muslims experience in school. These two groups are essential in framing the identity of Muslims in Europe. However, by drawing a clear line between these groups, the European discourse forces the individual to see these two as opposing groups and hence the “self-categorization as an European Muslim becomes impossible”. (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 4)

Goerzig and Al-Hashimi claim that the public discourse in Western Europe tends to group all Muslims under one Islamic identity and thus ignore the various identities a Muslim might have, such as Sunni or Shiite. This picture of all Muslims as a homogenous entity created by the public discourse is presented as opposing the European Western culture hence denying the existence of European secular Muslims. According to Goerzig and Al-Hashimi, Islam is depicted in the public discourse as being equivalent to religious extremism and yet if a Muslim would want to criticize this, it’s interpreted as terrorism sympathizing. They continue by stating that when the public discourse requires European Muslims to choose between identities, it is in fact at the same time destroying these identities and creating identity loss – hence advancing radicalization. (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 3–4; 20–21)
2.2 Islam in Finland

When discussing Islam and Muslims in Finland, we are talking about the most studied immigrant religion and a historical minority engaging diverse ethnic and religiously heterogeneous groups. By 2011, there were roughly 60,000–65,000 Muslims residing in Finland. This number makes up merely above 1% of the country’s total population. The majority of Muslims in Finland are immigrants and about two thirds have a refugee background – the rest are their children, converts or they are part of the traditional Tatar community. Most of the Muslims living in Finland are Sunni, even though they represent various traditions and schools of thought. About 10–15% of Muslims are Shi’a. The number of Muslims is estimation due to the fact that all Muslims do not register officially in religious communities. Hence the statistics based on registrations are not completely reliable. (Martikainen 2013, 237; Martikainen 2008, 71–72; Muhammed 2011, 59–61)

During the last three decades, Finland has witnessed an excess in the number of Muslims partly due to conversion, but mostly because of relatively high birth rate and immigration. The migration of Muslims to Finland is distinguishably related to asylum seeking and refugee conditions (Martikainen 2013; Muhammed 2011, 58). The first prominent Muslim settling in Finland was that of the Tatars in the late 19th century. Even if the Tatars today represent a minority among the Finnish Muslim communities, they can be seen as well integrated and established in the Finnish society (Leitzinger 1999, 25–55; Martikainen 2008, 68). The biggest national and ethnic groups are the Somalis, Arabs from several countries, the Kurds, the Turks, the Bosniaks from the former Jugoslavia, and the Albans from Kosovo. (Martikainen 2013; Muhammed 2011, 58–65)

It is hard to find relevant information about the religious identity, activities and tendencies of the Finnish Muslims. However, according to several European and Finnish studies, it can be estimated that even if a majority identify themselves as Muslims, only a minority is religiously active – with the exception of the celebration of religious holidays. The majority of Finnish Muslims live in the Helsinki metropolitan area and in some of the
biggest cities, such as Turku and Tampere. There are about 50 mosque associations in Finland, in addition to approximately 30 other Muslim associations focusing on e.g. youth or women. The most central representative community is the umbrella organization of Islamic Council of Finland (Suomen Islamilainen Neuvosto, SINE). All in all, the number of mosques in Finland is about 50, along with several prayer rooms scattered around the country. (Martikainen 2013, 239–240)

According to the research done for this study, there are at least 36 different kind of Muslim associations (including mosques and other groups gathering for religious practicing) present at the Helsinki metropolitan area. Some of them are more active than others, but detailed information about all of their activities is almost impossible to find due to the fact that some of them do not openly provide any contact information. If the contact information however is provided, it became obvious during this study that in most cases, it was not up-to-date. Nevertheless, the diversity of Muslim communities in the Helsinki metropolitan area is remarkable.

2.3 The threat of Islamist terrorism in Europe

Since 9/11 the fear of terrorism has increased and Muslims living in Western countries have been under the surveillance of the society. There has been an ongoing demand of Muslims to clearly and publicly indicate their side in the polarized debate. As stated by the former US President George W. Bush: “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” In this black and white situation claiming for an either-or-answer, according to Goerzig & Al-Hashimi, there is little room left for those who would like to stay objective and neutral in their opinions. (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 48)

Without a doubt, behind some terrorist acts there are individuals, who want to identify themselves with Islam in one way or another; and who publicly announce the motivating factor for these incidents to be jihad, their religious duty. By giving these jihadists superfluous media visibility, the public discourse nowadays associates terrorism in Europe
automatically to breed from the Islamic faith (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 48). However, according to the statistics provided by Europol, only two of the 152 terrorist acts performed in the EU in 2013 were mainly motivated by religion. Moreover, in 2011, there were altogether 174 attacks committed in EU, and yet none of them had a religious inspiration. (Europol, The EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2014)

Before the mid-1990’s there were no incidents of Islamist terrorism in Europe, as previously the terrorism scene was dominated by national and separatist organizations (such as the ETA in Spain) or professional terrorists from radical left or Arab secular organizations. After 1995, however, things changed for Europe when the first terrorism incident inspired by a radical Islamist agenda took place in Paris. Since then, the terrorist attacks with an Islamic inspiration on European soil have included for instance the Lyon synagogue attack; the Madrid train bombings in 2004 followed by the London underground attack in 2005; several failed terrorist attack plans in Sweden, Scotland, England, and Germany; and the attack in the office of Charlie Hebdo in Paris. Nevertheless, most of the terrorist attacks with an Islamist agenda are happening outside of Europe. (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 48; 68)

2.4 The evolution of violent extremism in the situation overviews of Finnish National Action Plan for Preventing Violent Extremism

Some countries have decided to produce government policy reports focusing on the processes of radicalization and its effects in the society (Ranstorop 2010, 3). For example, the one made in Finland by the Finnish Ministry of Interior is called the “National Action Plan for Preventing Violent Extremism” (Kansallinen toimenpideohjelma väkivaltaisen ekstremismin ennaltaehkäisemiseksi), which was published in Helsinki on 2012.

Since then, five situational overviews concerning violent extremism in Finland have been produced, the last one published in February 2015. When studying all five of these, there are several interesting points that stood out. Firstly, in the first situation overview
published in January 2013, none of the presented groups which might possibly radicalize into violent extremism\textsuperscript{14} were perceived as a threat to national security.\textsuperscript{15} However, when coming to the second situation overview published in August 2013, it is noteworthy that the Extreme left-wing and radical alternative movements had activated their functions due to the increase in the activities of the Right-wing extremists. This might indicate that extremist behavior usually motivates even more extremist behavior – and especially from the opposing side.

At this point however, violent Islamic extremism was not seen as a notable threat to the national security, even though it was mentioned that some individuals had left the country as foreign fighters to Syria. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that these individuals can cause problems to the society when returning to Finland from the conflict zone.\textsuperscript{16} However, in the third situation overview from March 2014, it is stated that the perceived threat of violent Islamic extremism has grown stronger as well as viewing the returning foreign fighters as a potential threat to the national security.\textsuperscript{17}

In the fourth situation overview published in September 2014, it is stated that the number of new members within the extreme right-wing Finnish Resistance Movement (Suomen Vastarintaliike, SVL) has increased. At the same time, the international phenomenon of violent Islamic extremism is more and more familiar within the Finnish society and the growing tensions between the Shi’as and the Sunnis due to the conflict in Syria are seen as particularly troubling. In addition, it is mentioned that some potential lone actors have

\textsuperscript{14} These groups are, as stated in the situation overview: Right-wing extremism, Extreme left-wing and radical alternative movements, Violent Islamic extremism and the lone actors.


already been identified and the risks they might pose to the national security have been assessed.\textsuperscript{18}

The fifth situational overview from February 2015\textsuperscript{19}, states that violent extremist thinking is increasingly noticeable in the attitudes of the students of Finnish high schools and vocational schools. The strongest signs of violent extremist thinking are demonstrated in anger and intolerance based on political or religious ideologies. Additionally, there have been some signs of the glorification of violence and attitudes causing fear. All in all, it seems that the threat of violent extremism in its various forms has increased during the past three years.

3 \hspace{1em} \textbf{RESEARCH METHOD}

3.1 \hspace{1em} \textbf{Interviewing process and the method used}

The empirical part of this thesis is built on 6 semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in Helsinki and Espoo during March, April, May and August 2015. Three interviews were conducted in English and three in Finnish, following the interviewee’s own language of choice. They were conducted in various locations: in the mosque, in the workplace of the respondent, in the library of University of Helsinki and in the lobby of Metropolia School of Applied Sciences. Despite the fact that I had scheduled around one hour for each interview, including the familiarizing moments in the beginning and


concluding discussions in the end, finally all of the interviews lasted between 1h 15 minutes to 1h 45 minutes, depending on the schedule of the informant.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured (thematic) method. In this method, the researcher seeks to understand the phenomenon by encouraging the respondent to discuss as much and as freely as possible on specifically designed themes. These themes are designed to capture the nature of the phenomenon, and to answer the research questions of the study in the best possible way, hence enhancing the understanding of the researcher. (Kananen 2014, 24)

This method was chosen by the researcher, because when properly executed, it will provide much new information on a phenomenon, which still lacks other studies. Moreover, it can contribute in producing new ideas for further studies. With this method especially, the phenomenon itself and the factors affecting the phenomenon can best be described. In this specific case, a study on the phenomenon of radicalization within the Muslim communities in the Helsinki metropolitan area, providing viewpoints from the Muslim communities themselves, is a previously uncovered subject. This is why using a thematic method when conducting the interviews was the most reasonable choice. By using this method, it is possible to touch the explanations and motivating factors for this phenomenon. (Kananen 2014, 38)

The interviews themselves were intense, versatile and rewarding. All of the interviewees found the matters discussed important and were eager to share their perceptions about them. All of the interviews were transcribed immediately after they were done, in sum a total of 96 pages. This way they were still fresh in memory, and all perceptions of the interview situation could be gathered. At this point, several notes and mind maps on the subject were created. This assisted in the analysis process, and helped to reform the interview question list to better respond to the research questions.

The rest of the research process consisted of revisiting the theoretical framework of the study and of analysing the data in the light of the research questions. This was done in order to access the data in a way which provides insights that are not as such articulated in the interviews. More details of the whole analysis process are offered in the analysis chapter.
3.2 Notes on the interviewees

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, finding interviewees willing to participate in this study ended up being a time-consuming process. Most of the enquiries never received a reply, and many potential candidates choose not to take part in a research revolving around radicalization. After a few months of persistent and systematic attempts to acquire interviewees, finally a total of 6 people were willing to participate in this study. Ultimately the data collection of this research was rescued by a snowball effect, implying the process of acquiring possible interviewee contacts through the networks of the previous interviewee. If the purpose of this study would have been to conduct a quantitative study, or a survey, it would have been necessary to keep searching for more interviewees. However, in this case, since I am conducting a qualitative research, the number of the respondents is not the most crucial part for the success of the study. (e.g. Eskola & Suoranta 1998)

Initially, I was hoping to acquire more interviews, but within the timeframe scheduled for a Master’s thesis, it was unfortunately impossible to continue the search. Moreover, the difficulties in finding interviewees for a Master’s thesis research on radicalization raise a question of how this reflects the sensitive nature of the phenomenon and the current polarized situation of the Finnish society. This nature of the phenomenon poses some challenges for the study, and acts as a clear justification for certain anonymity of the interviewees. In order to protect the interviewees’ privacy, all private data identifying them is excluded, so that all information which could be recognizable for others is left out. For the sake of the real-life-feeling of this study, all names were changed into pseudonyms, instead of merely numbering the participants. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008)

The imams were chosen as informants for this study for two reasons. First of all, they are generally in an influential position within their religious communities and thus they usually possess a large amount of valuable information concerning the concerns and activities of
the members of their community. Second of all, religious leaders are often approached by their members with every-day issues and especially members with migrant background might turn to seek support due to the low threshold compared to distant governmental officials. This makes imams interesting informants, because they have information about the whole community. Similar conditions apply for the representatives of Muslim organizations. They were contacted specifically due to their position in their surrounding Muslim community and networks. This is why they are able to reach their message to several members of their communities, and to recognize and evaluate the feelings and attitudes within their communities. Hence by conducting the research interviews with these respondents in question, it was possible to gain information about the overall viewpoints and atmosphere within the communities they represent. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 18; IOM 2011)

The group of informants gathered ended up being a heterogenic crowd, representing various ethnic backgrounds, different age groups and different approaches to the issue at stake:

- 5 of the informants are male and 1 is female
- 4 of the informants are imams and 2 are representatives of Muslim organizations
- 5 of the informants are born-Muslims and one had converted several years ago to Islam
- They are all aged between 29 and 56
- 5 of the informants are adherents of Sunni Islam, and one is a Shi’a
- They all live and work in the Helsinki metropolitan area
- In this study, the respondents are referred to by using these pseudonyms, respectively: Kareem, Ali, Amina, Abdullah, Ahmad and Caleb
3.3 Ethical questions concerning the interviews

It is necessary to reflect upon various ethical questions before conducting any interviews or even designing the interview questions and themes. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, 68), there are four fields in traditionally ethical guidelines, which need to be considered when doing an interview study. These are as follows:

- informed consent
- confidentiality
- consequences
- role of the researcher

When planning the interviews, all these areas were placed under close inspection by going through the extensive list of questions provided by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, 68–69). These questions assisted in forming an image of the ethical protocol, which needs to be revisited throughout the whole research process. It supported also in starting the interview process and in preparing for instance the actual consent form presented to the interviewee candidates at the time of research invitation.

3.3.1 Consequences

Before entering the interview stage of this research, it was essential to carefully consider what kind of beneficial consequences could this study have and hence, is it really worthwhile. As the driving ambition behind this research project is to offer new knowledge about a specific angle of the radicalization phenomenon, and hopefully contribute in
improving the circumstances of the research participants, the usefulness of this study is justified. (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 68)

According to the research results of this study, the research participants all experienced the situation of the Muslim communities in Finland as currently being difficult to some extent and for different reasons. This study will hopefully contribute in improving the situation by providing first of all, a platform for the thoughts and insights of the interviewees, and secondly, some suggestions for lessons-learned and developing of best practices, as well as ideas for further research. (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 68)

The possible negative consequences of this study were considered not only for the participating subjects but also for the groups they represent. As the main objective of this study is to provide new information and hopefully improve the current situation, the goal to minimize all the risk of harm to the participants served as a guideline throughout the research. Since the hypothetical harm would mainly be involved with the exposing of the participants identities, anonymity is a priority in this study. (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 73–74)

3.3.2 Informed consent

In the process of planning the research interviews, I designed an informed consent (see Appendix) for the purpose of this study with the help of Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, 70–72). The purpose of this consent form is to provide the possible interviewee candidates all the relevant information, which they need in order to be able to make the decision of whether they want to participate or not. This informed consent was attached to the ‘call for research participants’ and sent via e-mail to all the participant candidates of this study. In addition, it was printed and handed out to all of the research participants in the beginning of every interview. All of the interviewees read it through and signed an informed consent form, in which they agreed to the terms and conditions of this research.
3.3.3 Confidentiality

In this study, the confidentiality of the interview subjects has been carefully considered. This means that all the private data, or any other kind of data, which could potentially be recognizable to others, has not been disclosed. The confidentiality of the participants is important due to the notably sensitive nature of the research topic. The participants were informed on confidentiality issues in the written informed consent and before every interview. (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 72–73)

How to then ensure these matters of confidentiality in practice? In this research, this is first of all a matter of anonymity. All interviewees were guaranteed that their names or any other identifying elements would not be visible in the published research, due to the sensitivity of the subject. This is why eventually I decided to change the names into pseudonyms. That way the humanity of the interviewees could be preserved at the same time protecting their real identities. In addition, in order to fully secure the anonymity of the study participants, their exact age, hometown or other identifying information is not provided. (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 72–73)

Any access to the interviews besides that of the researcher is denied, in order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. This was arranged by destroying all the interview data, both the recordings and the transcriptions, after the analysis phase of the study. (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 71–73)

3.3.4 The role of the researcher

When conducting interviews as the primary data of the research, the researcher’s role will always affect the study somehow. This is due to the high subjectivity that is present when
doing interviews; the researcher her- or himself is, in fact, the main instrument for obtaining knowledge. As the whole study is designed by the researcher, as well as the execution of the project, it is inevitable that the role of the researcher is omnipresent in the study. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, 74–75)

In this study, the role of the researcher was reflected upon in many ways. Firstly, it was reflected upon whether the fact that the researcher does not belong to the same religious in-group as the participants might affect the study? This could, however, act as both positive and negative matter, depending on the participant’s point of view. In this study, considering the sensitivity of the research topic, would the participants have felt more at ease talking to another Muslim? Or on the contrary, was it an advantage that the interviewer was not a Muslim, and only present as part of the academia?

In the course of the interview process, I was not directly confronted by these questions – apart from occasional enquiries about my personal religious views. However, as accentuated by René Gothóni (1997; 2000), when conducting fieldwork among religious communities in order to gain information of the religiosity and experiences of people, a certain amount of compassionate communication is needed. This requires from the researcher genuine competence in interchanging the elements of involvement and detachment towards the researched topic, for the sake of relevant academic perspective.

This kind of compassionate competence in conducting research interviews is similarly emphasized by a Theologian specialized on pastoral counselling, Irja Kilpeläinen (1973). She accentuates the importance of active listening, in which the listener is completely present and shows natural and real interest on the research respondent. This kind of emphatic way to conduct interviews focuses on creating an atmosphere of reliability and respect into the interview situation. Therefore, the question of whether or not the research process is somehow effected by the fact that the researcher herself does not belong to the same religious in-group as the study respondents, is not completely applicable in this study. Under these circumstances, more emphasis has been placed on the self-positioning and reflection of the researcher.
4 ANALYSING THE DATA

4.1 The qualitative analysis in this study

I am employing a qualitative research method in this thesis and thus the aim is not to focus in the number of interviewees, or the quantity of the data, but rather on the quality. This study is not seeking to generalize the findings or to find a causal determination, because it would hardly serve the study purpose which is rather to gain a deeper understanding of this context-specific phenomenon. The goal is in giving a description of the phenomenon and finally be able to interpret it in the context of Islam. This description is not presumed to represent universal regularities, but rather the interest lies in the local, context specific, explanation of the phenomenon. (Alasuutari 2011, 38–39, 55; Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 18; Kananen 2014, 18; Kiviniemi 2001, 68)

The aim of qualitative research is to work with one unit of observation as much as possible. Hence each case will be comprehensively dealt with in depth making the need for generalizations irrelevant, as all findings will in the end only be accurate with the case in question. Qualitative research encourages the researcher to go to the actual field of the phenomenon to interview and observe. The aim is to get a direct contact with the research subject, the interviewee, and find out how they see and experience the real world. The study should be made in its own context. (Kananen 2014, 19; Kiviniemi 2001, 68)

In this study, the analysis has been a long process shadowing all of its parts and elements, following all the steps that I have taken throughout this research. In fact, as stated by Eskola and Suoranta in their guide book for qualitative research (1998, 249–251), it is important for the researcher to understand the subjectivity of all studies – including the one in process. All steps and decisions along the way of the study have somehow been based on the researcher’s own expectations and perspectives. This makes the researcher him- or herself as the key instrument of data collecting and analysis, with the aim of filtering the real world as actual research findings. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 21; Flick 2002, 276; Kananen 2014, 19; Kiviniemi 2001, 68–69, 72).
The analysis aims to follow the instructions provided by Kvale and Brinkmann in their book about qualitative research interviewing (2009, 192–193). One of their arguments is that interviews should not be examined as only pure transcripts; rather they should be understood as living conversations. Furthermore, the interview statements are created as a cooperative process including both the interviewer and the respondent, who acts as a co-author. Hence, the point is to open up the meaning of the respondents’ arguments and figure out a way to continue the dialogue with the co-authored transcription. The original story told by the respondent needs to be respected, but also reconstructed into another story, which is meaningful to this study.

4.2 The analysis process

The interviews are analysed with an inductive reasoning method, starting within the data itself. Instead of searching some variables which have been determined already before starting the analysis, I am trying to find the themes appearing as most significant for interpreting the phenomenon. The main focus is placed on the examination of the interview corpus, rather than seeking to test a specific theory within this contextual framework. This kind of analysis is especially useful when basic knowledge of a phenomenon is needed from a previously unstudied perspective – such as in this case, the radicalization phenomenon within the Muslim communities in the Helsinki metropolitan area. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 19; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008; Kiviniemi 2001, 68–69, 72)

After having conducted the interviews and read through several times the transcribed data corpus, I started to carefully examine it in the light of the research questions. This is when I soon realized that there were some recurring themes emerging from the discussions spontaneously from the initiative of the respondents themselves. In addition, the key discussion themes which were designed beforehand to guide the interviews, provoked often as much thoughts and proved to be helpful in structuring the whole interview data corpus. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008)
Consequently, the key categories for this analysis are both those which were initially designed by the researcher (four main categories), and those which appeared deliberately by the respondents themselves (two subcategories). Thus, the main categories are as follows: Radicalization – general level and in the context of Islam; Radicalization, society and community level; Radicalization and media; and the future of the phenomenon. And the subcategories are: Injustice suffered by the Muslims; and the Underlying reasons for radicalization.

4.3 Reporting the findings of the analysis: The main categories

4.3.1 Radicalization – general level and in the context of Islam

I have a feeling, that we still didn’t realize how serious the case is.

Kareem

This first category is dedicated to introducing the findings of the discussions on radicalization in general terms and in the context of Islam. It starts with a quote from Kareem, who insisted several times that the radicalization problem is a very serious one. Almost all of the others agreed with him except for Caleb, who felt that the whole issue is somewhat exaggerated:

This whole question about radicalization is very frustrating. In my opinion, it has been put in a scale which it does not deserve in the Finnish context. The resources and man-hours that are put in this problem are not in any way correlating with the scale of this problem. I feel that this problem is much smaller than the resources it has got.
When talking about radicalization on a general level, Kareem wants to accentuate that it can be found in all parts of life, the element of radicalism can be traced in everything you do because it can be looked through various perspectives – in the thinking, in the approach and finally, in the actions.

However, in terms of Islam, Kareem emphasizes that Islam does not encourage people to radicalize. Nevertheless, he highlights the fact that the harmony of Islam comprises everything; Islam embraces all parts of life. Thus, if a person claims that he has the right to dictate on them, according to Kareem, then this person might be seen as becoming radical in his approach. Kareem accentuates that all Muslims should behave according to the limit set of Islam. If then a person exceeds the limits of that area, according to Kareem, then he can be seen in the realm of radicalism.

Abdullah, on the other hand, emphasizes that the understanding of the phenomenon is different for a non-Muslim and a Muslim. In his opinion, a Muslim finds it hard to understand what non-Muslims mean by radicalization:

Is it a Muslim who is too connected to his religion and practices the religion a way a Muslim is supposed to live his religion?

Abdullah

On the other hand, he states that he can understand the Western point of view, which in his words means by radicalization a situation when people result in leaving for conflict zone to fight. He wants to emphasize, however, that this confuses Muslims, because you cannot generalize all Muslims to have this ideology:

Not every Muslim accepts this ideology; it doesn’t mean that it is what Islam is doing today.

Abdullah
When discussing radicalization Amina wants to point out that it used to be a positive matter, but lately it has been perceived as negative:

So it has maybe in a way changed company. It used to be sometimes positive to be radical in some things because then you usually take many things very seriously. But now it has been connected mainly to Islam, even though this diverse radicalism can for sure be found in all religions and all groups of people.

Amina

Amina states that the term radicalization is now only linked to Islamic religion:

Even if they would not say it out loud, when hearing the word ‘radical’, they will link it to Islam and Muslims. Like nothing else or no one else could be radical. Radical as a word and as a term are taken as prisoners, and then said that this is now a bad thing, and now you are all radical!

Amina

She continues by stating that things are not being put in their right context, but rather what is only being discussed is the radicalization of Muslims:

It’s very interesting that all Muslims are assumed to be oriented towards radicalism from birth. Like the surrounding circumstances would not affect us in any way?

Amina

Caleb points out similarly that it is problematic and frustrating that term is often immediately linked with religion and ideology, when they are never the sole reasons for radicalization. He draws an example of the Internet and states that if you google the term
radicalization you will directly be suggested links to the radicalization within Muslim communities.

Abdullah emphasizes that those who have left are only a group of people, and what they are fighting for might not have anything to do with Islam. He explains that once they get there, they don’t see real Islam in people:

> It is only about people who are fighting for their own interests – – And they need interests to get me fight for you. So they use Islam to get Muslims to fight. And that’s all.

Abdullah

Kareem concludes that radicalization may not only lie in Muslims, but still Muslims are called to defend themselves for radicalization because of the fact that some Muslim youth have left to conflict zones. However, he admits that some of the Muslim youth have been seen participating in conflict and being willing to kill themselves. Kareem argues that this raises a lot of questions not only to Muslims, but to the whole society – “what is happening?”

The terminology and outlook of radicalization

When discussing the terminology of radicalization, Caleb emphasizes that even if there are groups and religious authorities who want to justify certain acts by using religious terminology, the term *radical Islam* still stigmatizes Islam in a certain way. He points out also that he is not sure whether this can at all be seen as part of this religious tradition. In fact, he wants to accentuate that by naming something radical Islam, we are at the same time increasing the legitimacy of these groups. In that sense, the term might also have a “backfire”-effect and that’s why it’s not useful.
When starting to find definitions for the term, Ali points out that it is, in fact, an amoeba term – meaning that it means whatever you want it to mean. There is always an agenda behind its use, and it is being used to label people as being radical. He compares it with the use of the term terrorism, and in his opinion both definitions depend much on who is using the term and what they want to mean by it. In his opinion, it is all about creating a certain image.

Caleb claims that this term is used inaccurately as a synonym for extremism and violent extremism. He sees the term as problematic, because it has not been defined well, especially not in the media. He argues that the definitions are lacking mainly because when we start to talk about the nuances of the term it stops to interest the public. Caleb states that people rely on simple arguments and categories, because it is then easy for them to label issues which they do not understand.

These points of view are partly echoed by Ahmad, who has the most critical approach towards the phenomenon of radicalization from all of the respondents. He claims that even the term ‘radical’ is just “junk created by the media”. He explains his resentment towards this issue by stating that he finds it unacceptable that ordinary practicing Muslims are called radical because of their clothing and outlook. However, he states that of course there are bad Muslims, who misinterpret the concept of the Koran – just like there are bad Christians. But the outlook of a practicing Muslim should never be the defining character of radicalism.

This notion of the outlook defining the person’s state of radicalization was also criticized by Kareem, who points out that it is not visible on the features – you cannot see extremism or radicalism from a person’s outlook. He argues that radicalism is only visible in the actions, and the hidden; in the mind of a person. He continues to state that this is not a method the radicals will use. They will not approach those who are strong in their belief, and this is why they usually don’t go to mosques but rather to for example night clubs.

The radicals don’t go near those who are strong in their belief. They usually don’t go to mosques, because the argument of Islam will question them. We can use the same text to proof that what they are claiming and doing is wrong.

Kareem
4.3.2 Radicalization, society and community level

The societal dimension of the radicalization phenomenon proved to be one of the key notions in understanding the essence of the phenomenon. The respondents all spent much time in elevating this issue from different perspectives in their statements. Most of them saw it as a problem facing the whole society, as a societal phenomenon.

The role of the religious leaders and key influencers

We should touch the issue from the grassroots-level.

Kareem

Most of the respondents emphasize the importance of religious leaders in dealing with this issue. Kareem, for example, states that they have the ability of smelling or tracing the element of radicalism within their own communities. They can sense the issue religiously and socially, or by looking at the atmosphere and the neglect the youth feel.

In our role as imams, preachers, individuals, we have the ability to sense something. To smell something. Notice something. Even though it might be difficult for us to talk, but we have the ability to sense that something is wrong.

Kareem

When describing other methods the imams can use in tracing the radical element, Kareem accentuates that it is important to go to the source of things and try to verify the
truthfulness of these radicalization accusations. He continues to state that many times the
imams, they don’t find it. Hence they find themselves in a position, where they need to
defend themselves for something that they are not part of.

Kareem argues that it’s not only about what the imams can do, instead there are also
influential people within the Muslim communities, whose impact can make changes
happen. So, in his opinion, imams and those alike have the potential of making things
different.

In mosque, we have the tact to understand that this family, community or group of
people have a problem.

Kareem

According to Abdullah, what the religious leaders can do about the situation is that they
can try to discourage people from going to the conflict zones in their Friday sermon. He
continues that it is not self-evident that the people will agree with you, because every
Muslim has his own understanding of Islam. And if they have a different opinion, they
usually will not contact you. But he states that enlightening Muslims is still important.

Because it doesn’t look Islamic at all — People go to fight jihad out of ignorance.
If they would understand the true Islam, they would realize that it is wrong for
them to make that decision.

Abdullah

Abdullah points out that after cooperative meetings with the authorities, he gives this news
to the congregation in the Friday sermon and everyone wants to listen. Then they will
discuss it with other Muslims in their networks and in that way, the message can reach a lot
of people through the Friday sermon. That’s why, in Abdullah’s opinion, the cooperation
between the religious leaders and the authorities could mean a success for the whole.
Ahmad states that the way religious leaders can act in this issue is to give speeches at the mosque. He adds that the imams don’t encourage or invite to these kinds of actions, rather their focus is in teaching the Muslims how to be a good Muslim.

He gives an example of the sermon he gave right after the Charlie Hebdo attack:

They have insulted our messenger. They make pictures of our messenger. Like he is a terrorist, they call him names. And then they say that this is the freedom of speech. After this incident, I gave a speech in the mosque and spoke about the virtues of our messenger – – So then I said to the people after I had shown the virtues of the messenger: “What the West they want from us? They want us that we revolt. That we become angry. That we go and demonstrate, and break and kill. No no! It won’t work. Because we know who supports us is God. Who support our Prophet Muhammad is God!”

Ahmad

The role of the Muslim communities, families and youth organizations

According to Ali, the Muslim community could take a clearer stand on this issue of radicalization and think carefully what kind of rhetoric is being used and what kind of consequences this might have. He feels that the community should give more support to the youth. They should work on the youth activities and organize religious teaching for the youth, by doing that the youth could get meaningful things to do and socialize with other Muslim youth, get new friends and boost their confidence and sense of being accepted as they are. The Muslim communities should assist the youth especially in developing a strong and clear Muslim identity. At the moment, the communities have not succeeded in providing a strong enough Islamic identity for the youth or tools for self-confidence.

Ali continues to state that this is important because a weak Muslim identity can lead into a crisis situation, which might escalate to an extreme point. At this point, the youth might want to make a complete separation from the so-called Western way of living, because it is seen as something entirely unmatchable with the Islamic way of living. At this point, the only path to mend one’s ways seems to be found in the extreme rhetoric.
Amina argues that the Muslim communities should themselves be more active in dealing with this issue. In her opinion, one of the most important factors is that the Muslims feel as a part of this society, and that’s why Muslims should start more projects where they can give other Muslims a chance to be part of this society. She feels that this is a key issue in preventing radicalization, because alienated and segregated Muslims are more prone to turn to radical groups.

Amina gives an example that there could be a service provided for new immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers where they could get help and services from other Muslims. This way they would feel that they are in a safe environment. She feels that now we are in a situation where the society is pushing Muslims further away from itself. Amina points out that more projects engaging Muslims are needed and that it might be the only way to get people to accept the Muslims as a part of this society.

Now I feel that we have been outsourced as the foreign creatures, the whole Islam and Muslims. People are always discussing Muslims together with immigrants, as if it was a synonym. And that way we have also outsourced what it causes in people’s minds, like “they are not from here; they are not part of us”. I think about this quite a lot, because as a Finnish Muslim, I know the Finnish ways and the Finnish habits and I can make conversations with Finnish people. But still, I sometimes get the feeling that this is not my country anymore, or I feel that I am anyway not accepted just the way I am. Then what about an immigrant, who might not even know the language?

Amina points out that the greatest problem in the Muslim communities facing this problem is the lack of resources, as all positions (even most of the imams) are volunteers – and volunteers are not motivated in volunteering forever. This is something Muslims contemplate in their communities, and as long as they won’t receive any funding, the situation will never change.

You cannot do things when you would like to, rather you have to serve in your position all the time, you have no choice. It’s like obligatory volunteering. And this will drive the situation towards not succeeding in doing anything.
Caleb agrees with the other respondents emphasizing the role of Muslim communities in dealing with this issue. He wants to see open discussions about these matters. Now he has seen only religious leaders and Islamic community leaders talking about these violent organizations and why their actions are far from being Islamic. However, Caleb continues that because this is a matter of individual cases and not of a community-level-problem as such, it deserves a different kind of approach.

If it was about the community having a problem — that a significant part of the community feels that this is a problem or that verifiably a significant part of the community has this problem. Then we should start to think about what is the community’s solution for this problem.

Caleb

Caleb points out that it is difficult to know what one or two people are thinking or planning. Instead, he accentuates the importance of tight family relations. He feels that in dealing with this problem it is important that the parents know what their children are doing and support them. In a tight family unit, it might be possible to identify these kinds of anxieties.

Kareem, however, argues that the families are usually helpless when their children leave to conflict zones. He states that it seems that they don’t know their children. They think that their children are good Muslims, but they are ignorant of what is happening outside. According to Kareem, the Muslim families could have a lot of power in dealing with radicalization. He states that they should be taken in to the cooperative action between the authorities, the society and the school. Kareem states that if the school organizes something, the Muslim families might come or not – but if the school would organize something involving their religion, the family feels that it touches them and that they have to react. In this sense, the power of religion is significant.
Families, schools, youth – they all live in different worlds. Can we combine these three elements together?

Kareem

When discussing the role of the youth organizations in the radicalization phenomenon and its prevention, Caleb mentions that there are many things they can do. First, one of the key issues is to tackle social alienation. This can be done by spending time with the youth and organizing meaningful activities for them.

Second matter is that it is important to promote discussions on the feelings of injustice and other matters which interest the youth. If they are concerned about some population’s distress in particular, it must be discussed and considered whether something could be done to improve their situation, for instance, to collect charity, or so on. Caleb argues that this has an empowering effect which can prevent the feeling of powerlessness caused by the injustice. Thirdly, it is important to work with the authorities, in order to give a common content and perspective on matters, so that the excess of the actions which might worsen the situation can be prevented.

There is still that danger that the communities feel that these actions are directed only on our community. This gives a wrong signal to the Muslim youth, who might feel that these actions need to be targeted at you specifically, because otherwise there is the danger that you will radicalize or join these kind of organizations (such as ISIS). I feel that this is alarming and it needs to be taken into consideration.

Caleb

All in all, Caleb emphasizes that it is important also within the youth organizations to give this matter those resources that it actually requires, and not more. Because at least in the organization he represents the issue of radicalization has not been brought up much. He reminds that the youth usually deal with problems which have nothing to do with radicalization.
The importance of cooperation

Abdullah underlines the importance of the cooperation between the authorities and the religious communities – including the youth. He points out that so far, the youth have not been present in the meetings.

Religious leaders can make a change – if they are able to make youth part of them. It’s not easy.

Abdullah

Kareem agrees and argues that the best solution can only be acquired through cooperation between the authorities, the government, the schools, the specialists, the society, the Muslim communities, the families and the imams – or those, who are active in the society and who feel ready to work with the authorities. All of these key players need to feel that they are truly part of the cooperation process. Kareem points out that nothing will happen from the side of the religious leaders, before the trust is earned.

Until the imams feel that they can work with the authorities. Because you can make calls, but none of them will feel that I can trust this: ‘how can I trust the authorities? How can I trust the society?’ Until they feel that they are part of this society – believe me, changes can happen. Until they are able to see that now something serious is coming from the society – believe me, they can do a lot.

Kareem

Kareem criticizes the way the cooperation meetings are executed. He feels that the issue has not been touched as it is, from the grassroots level.

Now we only call a meeting and make a decision. This is your decision. It doesn’t have an effect on anybody.
According to Kareem, the cooperation is needed, because in a society like the one we are living in, it is not helpful to stay one-sided. He feels that Muslims have a lot to give. Kareem points out that the specialists’ point of view is important, and he respects their approach. However, he feels that their approach should be channeled through other non-methodological and non-specialist area, where these two could cooperate and develop something new altogether.

How can we do anything if the whole society is looking at Muslims and pointing a finger at us: “You are the problem! Handle it!” I think we need to be heard, when we suggest something. And not depend so much only on specialists.

Kareem

The role of the society and authorities

When discussing the role of society in dealing with this issue, Ali feels that there is no one solution for this phenomenon; rather it should be approached from many different angles and viewpoints, by different organizations. Emphasis needs to be placed on the preventive matters. However, he feels that there is much the society could do. First of all, he emphasizes the fact that this issue should be dealt already at the grassroots level, it should be for instance discussed in schools, where they should work for creating an open and trustworthy atmosphere.

He continues to emphasize the responsibility of the media, and that the politicians should take this polarization of the society seriously. More funding should be granted for the preventing matters of the police and more emphasis should be given to the preventing matters. He argues that we need to be ready to accept everyone as a part of this society.
Caleb, on the other hand, mentions that it would be important to try to affect the Western foreign politics which is oppressing the Muslims. However, he understands that even if this matter is highly important in the whole issue of radicalization, there is little a small country like Finland can do about it.

Kareem accentuates that approaching the issues of extremism and radicalism should be a long process. It cannot be solved with one meeting in a one month process immediately after the incident. Instead, he suggests that well-planned actions need to be taken on the educational side, on organizational level, such as the mosque or the civil society.

He gives an example of the possibilities of a group of organizations and individuals who could study the matter with concrete analysis from the initiative of for example Vantaa or Helsinki. These studies should not be academic, but instead they should involve people from various backgrounds talking from their heart. They could give the authorities and police information on what they practically see. Kareem argues that with this kind of cooperation with the society, communities and authorities, many things can happen. And even if something small could be done, it could be considered as a starting point.

Furthermore, Abdullah emphasizes that the authorities should focus on preventing measures by trying to work with those who are not gone. He argues that this can only be done by contacting the Muslims or the imams to use the pulpit as a means of sending information. According to Abdullah, the authorities can do nothing alone – they can achieve things only with religious leaders.

If we want to succeed in this country, we need to work with the authorities and they need to assist us.

Abdullah
4.3.3 Radicalization and media

All of the interviewees emphasized the role of the media in this issue. Caleb argues that the media has given the phenomenon of radicalization a much larger role than it deserves. In his opinion, the style in which it has been reported in the media is problematic, and that the terminology, such as the foreign fighters has not been properly defined. According to Caleb, all who have left to the conflict zones have been demonized. He argues that this is not done all out explicitly, but the way in which it is reported is problematic.

For example, that “number game” stating how many people have left (to fight at conflict zones) when we don’t know what they are doing there. If I put myself in the position of a regular Finnish person, I might think that all 60 have left to fight and kill innocent civilians. One can easily take this as truth by only reading the news. It is at the least poorly articulated if not just badly reported, when you don’t bring up the nuances of the situation.

Caleb

Caleb emphasizes that even if in the media it has been reported that there has been systematic recruiting (for ISIS e.g.) in Finnish Muslim communities, he still has not seen any signs of this. He states that he has never met anyone who wants to leave to conflict zone in the mosque. He worries about the image this kind of reporting might give to the Finnish audience.

What this causes for the reader is that they might start to think that “okay now in the mosques they do nothing else but recruit people for these (terrorist) organizations”. And this has a polarizing effect for the Finnish society. Especially among those kind of people who have never even been in contact with a Muslim. This is very unfortunate.

Caleb

Amina feels that the attitudes towards Islam have lately changed into more hostile. She feels that this is partly to blame on media, because it never gives news about positive
things. Amina points out that the responsibility of the media in how they create an image of this phenomenon is tremendous. She emphasizes that everything the journalists write and say will affect the future, and it’s their responsibility to think closely what kind of image they create for people in mixing things and terminology. Their responsibility in her opinion is also to bring up different sides of the story. She states that this is especially important because people don’t have the time to think what actually is behind the issues, and what causes them.

According to Amina, one of the problematic issues created by the media is the public commenting written at the bottom of every news article in the Internet media. She states that these comments can get nasty and outrageous and then many who read them might think that this is actually the general opinion of Finnish people. Caleb, on the other hand, argues that it is visible in the Internet discussions that the attitudes towards Islam and Muslims have hardened. He states that the rhetoric and style of commenting under news headlines is grim to read.

In my opinion, these extremists who write their hate comments in the news have in a way taken over Finnishness, the same way as ISIS has abducted Islam.

Amina

Kareem argues that in Finland, when media talks about Islam it has a certain agenda, because the media works for money and thus is never completely free. When covering Islam, According to Kareem, they want to dig up something, send a message or show that this is how the Muslims are. However, their intention is never in purely helping the society and Muslims in Finland. He feels that this should be changed.

Kareem continues that for an innocent street person or for the youth in general, it is difficult to understand what is happening, because they don’t have the ability to see the true nature of the media. Kareem feels that they sensationalize the issue and concentrate on showing people what they want to see, instead of trying to find solutions to the problems. In addition, according to Kareem, the Finnish media lye too much on academic opinions, which are confusing for the regular media consumer.
Abdullah puts emphasis on the responsibility of the media, because according to him, the media is presently doing a lot of harm. However, he feels that sometimes the media does good things also, but the information is not always correct. This is problematic, because the wrong information is taken in by those who are planning to go, and then they will base their thinking on incorrect information.

They see it from the media that the Muslims are being oppressed – maybe it’s not so? It’s above our control. We can do nothing.

Abdullah

Ali agrees with the other respondents in emphasizing the responsibility of the media. He points out that we need more responsible, neutral and objective journalism. According to Ali, this kind of more responsible media is disappearing from Finland as the situation has gotten worse after the year 2000 - these days, the media is always looking to sensationalize things; it produces aggravating and overemphasizing journalism.

Ali argues that in the media, there are more and more of unnecessary headlines labelling a whole religion, race, or community negatively because of the actions of one person. According to Ali, terms like *jihadist or radical Islam* only create more confrontations. Ali emphasizes that the media has caused confrontations towards Islam and Muslims. He states that the overgeneralizing way to produce news has raised questions and discussion in his community, and that this generalizing rhetoric only makes things worse.

If a Muslim does a crime, why is it mentioned that this person is a Muslim?!  

Ali

According to Ahmad, the media gives a wrong image of Islam. In his opinion, the media is trying to make the image dark, so that people would start hating Islam. He gives an example stating that there is never a program on television about the true teachings of Islam or the Messenger, and that there is only news about what someone has done, even if
this person is not even a true Muslim. Ahmad argues that these people who commit crimes in the name of Islam are not true Muslims, and thus they should not be taken as an example of Islam.

When a Muslim commits a crime, he is a terrorist for the media. And when a non-Muslim commits a crime, you will either say that he is a drunk or he is a psycho.

Ahmad

Ahmad argues that this negative image of Islam might create hatred among some Muslims, and some will want to revenge and eventually join terrorist groups. At this point of the discussion, I sense that Ahmad is frustrated.

Show me a Muslim who is not frustrated! Any Muslim! All of us we are frustrated. But this frustration, we don’t bring it up with terror. We keep it to ourselves. We know that we are supported by God.

Ahmad

4.3.4 The future of the phenomenon

We hope that we will be able to bypass this challenge, and my worry is that every day the world is changing. My fear is that the world is taking us by surprise.

Kareem

Some of the respondents were more pessimistic about the future of this issue than others. Caleb, for example, states that as long as we are not discussing the real problems, it will be hard to interfere with this issue. He sees that this phenomenon is tightly connected to
global politics and because we are talking about strategic and geopolitically significant zones, things will turn into much worse before they start to get better.

Kareem argues that it is time to believe that things are not like they used to be, and that the future will depend on the way we take over our current challenges. He emphasizes that Finland should have its own thinking in dealing with these issues and not copy from other countries, because in order to deal with our own problem, we need to dig deeper and develop our own system.

According to Amina, one of the most important things to reflect upon in the future is, how to engage Muslims in this society, how to make them feel that they belong into this society. Amina argues that when the immigrants move here they will feel that everything is different, and start to think about ways to protect themselves and ways to operate in this society. She accentuates the importance of a succeeding social integration plan.

We people are in the end very similar in our basic needs. We work on the same reflexes and patterns. This is something the general public should also understand – those other people are not that different from us, things just appear in different ways, depending on your culture of origin.

Amina

Amina argues that she is worried about the spinelessness of our politicians when they continue to ignore their responsibilities. Her opinion is that all extremist movements should be placed on same line and talked about out loud. It should be made perfectly clear that these kinds of ideologies and movements are not acceptable in Finland.

In a way I am very frightened about the future. I hope we can make a change and people would understand that we should not in Finland follow the same road as other countries have taken – It all really depends on what goes on around the world and the media has a huge influence in how they want to promote some things or not. They have much more influence than do the politicians. This is how I see it.

Amina
Amina argues that the capitalization and the growing inequalities will have an effect. Her prognosis is that Finland will witness a growing number of extremist groups due to the fact that some people feel that they are victims of unjust treatment and that they don’t have same kind of opportunities than others. She continues to state that probably the radicalization of Muslims will not pose such a big threat to Finland, because here Muslims are such a small minority. However, she finds the growth of other extremist movements as a possible and more probable threat for the peace of the society.

Ahmad and Abdullah both argue that the future for Muslims in Finland is good. Abdullah states that if religious leaders are given a chance to do more by being put in a good position with the authorities; this would make the Muslims know that the authorities are doing something good with the leaders. And then they would listen to the leaders.

But if we are only left to sit and watch, then we think that there is nothing we can do.

Abdullah

4.4 Reporting the findings of the analysis: The subcategories

4.4.1 Injustice suffered by Muslims

The West plays a big role in the whole issue.

Abdullah
The idea of the injustice suffered by the Muslims is significantly connected to the notion of the *umma*, the unity of all Muslims around the world. This same idea is elevated by one of the interviewees, Caleb, who argues that the concept of the *umma* is tightly related to the mutual feeling of injustice shared by all Muslims. He explains the *umma* as being something that belongs to the Islamic tradition. It is about the connection and cohesion of the Islamic community, the Muslims, all around the world. He mentions that this connection is strong in the psyche of a Muslim.

According to Ali, one of the key elements behind radicalization is the Western foreign politics, which in his opinion has contrasting principles. He justifies this by pointing out that those who have left to the conflict zone always cite issues about Western foreign politics in their postings in social media or in the videos they have made (similar remarks have been by Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 114). He continues on the issue by stating that in the Muslim communities, there can be detected a negative image of Western politics towards Muslims. From his perception, it seems that this really is the overall attitude within the Muslim communities. The marginal position of Finland in the Western foreign politics is acknowledged, but it still has an effect on the general Finnish Muslim audience.

Abdullah argues that the role of the West in the issue of Muslim radicalization is significant. He states that if the West would be concerned of what is happening with the war in Syria, it would finish fast. According to Abdullah, the West is the one who is providing the weapons, and hence it is in their interest to see the fighting going on.

So you cannot ask a Muslim: “why do you go to fight?” when what is happening over there. They see what is happening there, the killing day and night. The issue of people going there (to conflict zones to fight) is being caused by – – the influence of the Western world.

Abdullah

Abdullah claims that Muslims join the battles worldwide, because they want to help their Muslim brothers and because they have the feeling that they need help. People see the wars
in the media, and connect them with Islam. Abdullah claims that this affects the Muslims in general, and they feel the need to help their brothers and sisters, because they are being oppressed.

But most of the wars have nothing to do with Islam; they only have to do with people who are Muslims. That's all.

Abdullah

He argues that a Muslim who has a good knowledge about Islam might also go to fight, precisely due to his far understanding of the religion. He understands that Muslims are being oppressed and he wants to help his Muslim brothers and sisters.

We all see what is happening in the television – we see how people are dying in Syria, everywhere. So when someone who has a true understanding of Islam sees this and understands that Muslims are suffering, it will make him wonder: “Why am I here when my brothers are suffering?”

Abdullah

Ahmad, on the other hand, elevates the issue by arguing that Muslims will react when they hear about what is happening in the Muslim world, with Muslims being killed everywhere. He states that this will make some people angry and they will get a sense of revenge and anger towards the non-Muslims.

The Muslims feel like, I am innocent, we are innocent, they are killing us, but still we are the bad guys.

Ahmad

Ahmad brings up three interconnecting themes affecting behind the phenomenon of radicalization: the media, the Western foreign politics and the notion of Islam as the enemy. On the notion of Islam as the enemy, Ahmad states that it is all about history
repeating itself. He justifies this by explaining that first the enemies of the West were the Koreans, then the Russians and after the Cold War a new enemy had to be created. This new enemy became Islam. He points out that in the global politics there is a constant need for an enemy, because it maintains the arm trade. Now why was Islam chosen as the enemy? Ahmad’s opinion about this is clear:

It’s because Islam is increasing in the whole world, and the West don’t want that. “We have to stop it and start giving a bad image of Muslims!”

Ahmad

Caleb mentions Western foreign politics, oppression, terror images and the feelings of injustice as reasons why the Muslims want to react and as one of the reasons for radicalization. Caleb wants to emphasize that this is how the Muslims truly feel. The feelings of unjust treatment, for example, that they are being oppressed, that innocent Muslim civilians are killed in drone strikes, and that Muslim prisoners are being tortured in Western prisons, are prominent within the Muslim communities. Caleb continues on stating that Western countries have double-standards – because at the same time when they are demonizing some organizations, they seem to forget about their own violations of human rights. He argues, however, that it is dangerous to try to suppress these feelings of injustice. Rather they should be taken seriously.

Because if you study and follow what kind of reasons for their actions these people who have left to, let’s say Syria and Iraq, have given. Or when they do their videos where they say what they are doing and why, for example a suicide bombing. Then Western foreign policy is very often mentioned as a motive. As long as all this is will not be taken into account, I think the whole issue of preventing violent extremism is just about empty rhetoric. This feeling is very strong and creates this so-called radicalization. It is completely understandable, in my opinion. Not acceptable, but understandable.

Caleb
Caleb and Ali both put emphasis on the young generations, who want to see a change, and are thus especially vulnerable for religious rhetoric. This rhetoric is influential, because by using it, it is possible to win people on one’s side even though the arguments would not make that much sense or be logical. Especially vulnerable for this kind of rhetoric are those who are already in that state of mind where they want to see changes – in a state where one feels that he or his Muslim brothers or sisters have suffered from injustice.

Caleb wants to emphasize that the reality is that most Muslims are aware of this injustice, but they also understand that one injustice cannot be defeated with another. And this understanding will protect many from joining violent political activities. And thus Caleb feels that, in fact, we are finally talking about a marginal problem or phenomenon.

Amina agrees with Caleb and points out that it is a small part of Muslims who radicalize. But sometimes she wonders why the radicalizing part can be so small, when there is so much poverty and unjust living conditions in all Muslim countries. Amina points out that here in Finland, and in other Western countries, it is easier to think about these things, when we have that much time in our hands. Amina points out that all these things affect the person and might in the end drive this person into radical action.

Kareem argues that when thinking about what has been happening in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, or Chechnya. And when pointing out all the actions carried out in major Islamic societies:

It seems that Islam has become the enemy of the West. Because how do you explain that not one, not two, but the majority of Islamic countries are being targeted – Either politically or economically.

Kareem

However, Kareem points out that this argument is a challenge for our society. Mainly because the Muslim youth and families here don’t understand that what they see happening around the world should not be linked in the way they grew up to be Muslims in the Finnish society.
Maybe in Iraq, Israel or Palestine – but what about people living in a society where they have free education? And yet they don’t respect it.

Kareem

4.4.2 Underlying reasons for radicalization

Even though it was never the main goal of this study to search for specific reasons for radicalization, in order to get a coherent picture of the whole study, it is essential to provide here some of the respondents’ thoughts on the matter.

**Western foreign policy**

When discussing the possible reasons behind the radicalization process, Ali wants to point out that there are several factors which might be seen as affecting on this process, and that it is always case-specific. However, he argues that one of the key elements behind radicalization is the Western foreign politics, which is explicitly expressed in the propaganda of the Islamist extremist movements (see more in 5.4.1. Injustice suffered by the Muslims).

Caleb finds similarly the Western foreign politics, oppression, terror images and the feelings of injustice as some of the reasons for radicalization. Abdullah agrees and claims that Muslims join the battles worldwide, because they want to help their Muslim brothers and because they have the feeling that they need help.

**Social bonds and like-minded groups**
Kareem and Abdullah both see the importance of like-minded groups as one of the enabling factors behind radicalization. Abdullah argues that the one who is planning to go might not express his feelings to his friends and family, but he might have found new peers, other Muslims who share the same ideology. Kareem takes this argument further by stating that radicalization hasn’t got much to do with the family or school of the person, but rather the youth get the radical information from their networks, a specific person, or a preacher. Kareem highlights the fact that the flow of information when it comes to Islam is impossible to organize and the youth are always eager for anything new.

It has something to do with some inside hidden circle, that only a few individuals can have the eye to penetrate and understand.

Kareem

Insufficient or good knowledge about Islam?

Abdullah emphasizes the fact that making the decision of leaving to fight at a conflict zone might not necessarily mean that the person hasn’t got sufficient knowledge about Islam; rather it can mean the opposite.

They may even understand it better than the one who doesn’t go. Let me put it that way.

Abdullah

He argues that a Muslim who has a good knowledge about Islam might also go to fight, precisely due to his far understanding of the religion. He understands that Muslims are

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20 The importance of like-minded networks and social bonds in the radicalization phenomenon and in recruiting for radical groups has been demonstrated e.g. by Marc Sageman, a Senior Fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute and a scholar of Terrorism Studies, in his book *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Similar conclusion can be found in the studies of Juha Saarinen, a researcher on Violent Islamism and Political Violence (http://ulkopolitist.fi/2015/03/10/vakivaltainen-islamismi-ja-sosiaaliset-verkostot/).
being oppressed and he wants to help his Muslim brothers and sisters. Abdullah compares this with a Muslim who is ignorant in his religion, and sees the jihad only as a physical fight with weapons. According to Abdullah, this person has the wrong understanding. But yet they both go to the conflict zone to fight, depending on the information they receive from the battleground. Ahmed, on the contrary, claims that those who have left to the conflict zone to fight might have lost the true meaning of Islam.

This is not Islam, it’s evil. I don’t call this Islam.

Ahmad

As Abdullah pointed out, radicalization in the Islamic context and leaving to fight at a conflict zone might not be due to the insufficient knowledge of Islam. He claims that rather it’s about the personal needs of all conflicting parties involved. He explains it by stating that the need and the aim are usually not the same for those who are calling for help, and those who are coming for help. The first one fights because of his own interest and position, whereas the second will fight because of his own religion and conscience.

So the Muslim who has good knowledge about Islam, going to Iraq or Syria — to fight for Islam, is going to realize that he is not fighting for Muslims, but for the interests of someone else.

Abdullah

Who is radicalizing?

Abdullah claims that usually it is the young people who decide to leave, because others have responsibilities. According to Abdullah, this is especially true for the immigrant Muslims, who generally still have close ties to their countries of origin and might be supporting their families there financially. Hence they are not interested in leaving their position in Finland to go to fight in another country.

21 Abdullah explains that the true meaning of the jihad is to strive, to make something bad to become good in you. See glossary for more information.
Amina, on the contrary, claims that it is more probable that the people who move from Islamic countries to Finland to radicalize in their religion. She argues that first of all, Muslim immigrants moving to Finland sense a longing for safety, when they “notice that maybe not all people like having you here, and maybe all is not so well as you thought it would be”. Second of all, problems might arise if they encounter racism. Since according to Amina, racism is clearly one of the most important factors why people choose to go further away and separate themselves from the society. And in Amina’s opinion, these things might explain why some Muslims then choose to join some movements or groups where all are already alike. These groups stay in their own circles and appear as attractive for Muslims who feel alienated from the society.

Amina wants to still emphasize that there are as many stories as there are people. And in her opinion, this reality should be expressed more out in the open. Finnish young people radicalize just as well as Muslim ones.

We have quite a big lot of radical Finnish youngsters, they are not going anywhere, but instead they choose to drink themselves dead. For those who have left (to fight in the conflict zone), it’s their way to express themselves when they leave.

Amina

The state of abnormality

Amina argues that the Muslim communities have a feeling of living constantly in a state of abnormality. According to her, for a Muslim this is visible in everyday life’s normal matters. Especially with children, because then it is necessary to constantly think of places where you can visit with children and whether they serve halal-food. She states that it is a stress factor for the children as well.

Me as a Finnish Muslim, maybe I am in a slightly easier position, but if you think about an immigrant Muslim — many things can come as a surprise. This person might not understand that the stores are not fully equipped with some halal
products and wonder why something happened to their child. Like: “Why my child has been eating pork for one year in school without me knowing about it!” It’s about these little things.

Amina

Amina continues by reminiscing her family holiday in a Muslim country where even the children feel at ease and have a sense of belonging to the surrounding society because everyone understands them, they are not seen as freaks anymore, even though they are wearing headscarves. She continues by pointing out that here in Finland people want Muslims to be separated from the society, to be placed in their own box:

You are Muslim women with your scarves, stay put right where you are!

Amina

Amina argues that the society doesn’t always think about that part, but she continues by saying that she understands it, because Muslims are such a small minority in Finland. But still she states that this has an effect on Muslims in general, because they have to live under these circumstances. And in Amina’s opinion, these things might explain why some Muslims then choose to join some movements or groups where all are already alike.
5 KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Radicalization phenomenon within the Muslim communities in the Helsinki metropolitan area

According to the analysis of the research interviews, it can be concluded that there are several factors present when defining the phenomenon of radicalization in a Muslim context in the Helsinki metropolitan area. These factors are, respectively: Political grievances, the Youth, the Media, Social exclusion, and Polarization of the society. These elements in their various forms are interconnected and intertwined in shaping and sustaining the phenomenon.
1. Diagram 1, demonstrates the factors present in defining the phenomenon of radicalization in the context of Muslim communities residing in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

When analysing the elements which are present when defining the radicalization phenomenon within an Islamic context – and more specifically, the context of Muslims living in the Helsinki metropolitan area – it becomes evident that these elements are varying and numerous. Therefore, this diagram does not exclude other possible factors, and its intention is not to act as a general explanation of the radicalization phenomenon. Rather, it attempts to enhance the understanding of the complex nature of the phenomenon in this specific context.

Since the phenomenon of radicalization is indeed complex and case-specific, it has provoked several analytical attempts to grasp the nature of the underlying contributing factors. Magnus Ranstorp (2010, 4) divides these contributing elements into two separate dimensions: the internal and the external. In his division the internal factors relate mainly to: “a prevailing lack of public Muslim debate about the justification of violence; polarizing public rhetoric and stigmatization and political polarization; identity crisis; alienation from society; the presence of radical imams; glorification of jihad and martyrdom; youths trapped in a downward spiral of discrimination, stigmatization and criminalization – making them susceptible to recruitment efforts”.

Whereas, the external dimension refers to the perception of shared injustice suffered by Muslims globally and locally, which is result of the perceived double-standards of Western foreign policy and Western military interventions, as a radicalizing factor. According to Ranstorp (2010, 4), these two dimensions, the internal and the external, both put emphasis on grievances and discontent. However, they are interchangeable in nature; the global and personal grievances intertwine and blur their fine borderline, which can possibly result in perceiving the personal grievance as causal product of the external factor.

Both of these dimensions are distinguishably demonstrable in the interview material analysed for this study. Even though some of the factors presented by Ranstorp (2010) are
not explicitly pronounced in the interviews as contributing elements for radicalization, most of them are included in the discussions. In this next section of the Analysis chapter, I introduce the factors which contribute in the radicalization phenomenon within an Islamic context. Additionally, this section will provide points of view on how this phenomenon is perceived in the Muslim communities residing in the Helsinki metropolitan area.

5.1.1 Political grievances

You have to be blind if you don’t see that this has a big effect.

Caleb

The element of political grievances is present in all of the interview discussions with the respondents. It was not initially designed as a discussion topic, but it proved to be a substantial factor in this study because all of the respondents referred to it freely and spontaneously when discussing their feelings of injustice and the role of ‘the West’ in it. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the importance of political grievances as a contributing factor in the radicalization phenomenon, and to present a summary of the respondents’ viewpoints on this matter.

The notion of political grievances has been introduced in several studies concerning radicalization. In this research, it refers to the perceived feeling of unjust treatment suffered by fellow Muslims globally and locally. The grievances invoke a persisting sense for the Muslim observer that the West is oppressing the Muslim world by conducting “crusades” against its culture and beliefs. This crusade discourse is seen to be explicitly demonstrated in for instance the invasion of Iraq, US support for Israel and the French and Danish cartoons. This suffering is seen as the result of Western neo-imperialism and veiled colonialism in the form of Western foreign policy in Muslim countries. These grievances have mostly a symbolic importance to those Muslims, who live in the Western world. Yet,
it is still a prominent and pervasive discourse, and a source of anger and frustration within the Muslim communities and it acts as a contributing element in the radicalization phenomenon. (Gerges, 2007; Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 114–118; Nesser 2010, 93; Ranstorp 2010, 11)

Interestingly enough, even if Huntington’s infamous idea of the clash of civilizations has been widely contested within the academia and some politicians as baseless, oversimplified and prophetic (see Introduction, p.7 and chapter on Islam vs. the West, p.17), it still serves as a prominent argument to some Muslims and indeed to some non-Muslims, as well. This notion of a perceived polarization between ‘the West’ and the Muslims is symbiotic in relation to political grievances: they reinforce each other. (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 118)

In this study, all of the interview respondents emphasized the role of the feelings of injustice and unequal treatment of Muslims as crucial factors in the radicalization phenomenon. These feelings combined with the negative and critical image of Western foreign policy towards Muslims seem to be a common perception, even an overall attitude, in some Muslim communities. The respondents often referred to the notion of Muslims being oppressed around the world, and according to some of the respondents, this creates frustration, hatred, anger, and even a sense of revenge towards the non-Muslims.

5.1.2 The Youth

Is something missing? Are we losing in the way we deal with our youth?

Kareem

Some academics argue that radicalization is a process of the adoption of radical behavior and ideas leading to terrorist activities especially common for the youth, and hence
radicalization can be viewed as characteristic for youth development (Jackson 2005; Kullberg 2011, 290; Sageman 2004). Some of the interview respondents agree with this notion in the sense that, according to them, the youth play a significant role as an element in defining the radicalization phenomenon. Even though the respondents approach this issue from different angles, they all agree that the youth are in different ways involved with this issue. The most common argument made about the youth is that they are most likely to radicalize due to several different reasons. These reasons are introduced below.

One of the interviewees argues that the youth usually feel as being part of this society, and thus it is difficult to understand what prompts these young people to leave and to betray their families by going to another country to fight. However, this idea is challenged by another respondent who argues that the Muslim youth feel more socially excluded from the society than their non-Muslim peers. Nevertheless, most argue that the youth are living in their own world totally and that they are anxious to try new things. This might partly explain their eagerness to leave their comfort zones and go seek for adventures. Another explanation is their lack of responsibilities. One respondent refers to this as the enabling factor, because young people don’t have as much responsibilities, like spouses or children, to take care of and hence they can more freely leave. However, according to the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO), it has been reported that whole families have left Finland to the conflict zones.22 Thus even people with responsibilities, in that sense, might be ready to leave.

Some of the respondents emphasize the role of the intergenerational conflict, or the generational change, in this issue. The notion of intergenerational conflict relies on the idea that the second and third generations of Muslim youth living in the West are in a different position compared to their parents, because they need to face the demands of two parallel cultures; the traditional culture maintained by their parents’ generation, i.e. the culture they are living at home, and the culture outside their homes, such as in school. This creates an identity crisis for the young Muslims, who need to constantly define, alter and switch identities in their lives. (Buijs, Hamdy & Demant 2006; Goerzig and Al-Hashimi, 2015; Roy, 2004)

22 http://yle.fi/uutiset/supo_isis-alueelle_lahtenyt_suomesta_yli_60__mukana_kokonaisia_perheitaa/7827731
According to one respondent, this identity crisis should be mended by offering guidance in constructing a stronger Muslim identity. He states that the Muslim youth are more vulnerable for example to the propaganda of the Islamist extremist movements, because their Muslim identity is not strong enough. Another interviewee puts emphasis on the fact that some of the Muslim families don’t even know their children, because they are living in an illusion that their children behave similarly at home and outside it. He gives an example stating that even if they would dress in appropriate Islamic clothing at home, they will surely change into a more Westernized outfit the minute they leave outside.

This notion is similarly emphasized by some scholars, such as Goerzig and Al-Hashimi (2015), who seek to understand for example why the second and third generations of European Muslims are more probable to radicalize than their parents. Some scholars, on the other hand, have focused on offering intergenerational conflict as a causal factor behind radicalization. For example Olivier Roy (2004) argues that extremist Salafi ideologies offer the abstract global Muslim community, the Umma, as a point of identification for those second-generation Muslims who are experiencing an intergenerational conflict and thus have difficulties in finding their place between the traditional culture offered by their parents and the Western culture surrounding them outside their homes.

When discussing the ways in which it could be possible to affect the minds of the youth, the role of the Muslim youth organizations is accentuated. They have an important role in both providing the youth with meaningful activities with their Muslim peers, and giving them a sense of belonging and empowering them. One of the respondents emphasizes the fact that there are not enough Finnish speaking imams in the Muslim communities. This creates a problematic situation for those young people, who would be keen to receive guidance and religious teaching but who are comfortable with only Finnish language.

Additionally, one of the respondents argues that because young people are usually interested in new things, something current is needed to convince them. It is necessary to make reasonable conversations with the youth about the realities of life – on education, their own parents, children, and their role in this. Because telling the youth not to kill or not to do something will only make them say they know this better. The respondent states that a lot of interaction with the youth is needed, and that they should be present in all cooperative initiatives with the authorities. But he admits that it is difficult to control the
young Muslims, because according to him, they don’t do anything open and that’s why it is difficult to see it in them.

You don’t know what they think and they won’t openly challenge you, because they have their own understanding in their minds, and they will not expose it to you. They say they are the new generation and anything I know is from the past. They’re thinking is quite different and we need to work much to make them understand.

Abdullah

5.1.3 The Media

Finland is a neutral country. But when you ask the people in the streets what they think of Islam – – they will let you know that Islam is a religion of terror. And who give you this kind of message: it’s the media. And who makes us terrorists: it’s the media.

Ahmad

All of the interview respondents highlighted the fact that the media has a significant role in defining the radicalization phenomenon within an Islamic context. They all put emphasis on the responsibility the media has when producing news about Islam and radicalization. They criticize the media for sensationalizing headlines and overemphasizing issues, which are questionable in importance. Some even argue that it has given a totally wrong, and mostly negative, image about Islam. According to the respondents, there are never positive news about Islam in the media, only images of terror, incorrect information and unclear terminology.

These impressions are not only a matter of subjective perception, as demonstrated by many studies over the years. In fact, Tuomas Martikainen argues that the image of Islam in the media is revolving around violence, conflicts and its supposedly aggressive nature.
Nevertheless, Islam continues to be a prominent part of the Finnish public debate. Consequently, the public opinion in Finland concerning the Muslims and Islam is generally negative, as expressed by the latest opinion poll from 2008, stating that those Finns who view Islam negatively represented 52% of the population, whereas a positive stance was taken only by 6%. (Martikainen 2013, 245-246)

Some of the interviewees argue that this affects both the Muslim and the non-Muslim public. According to a respondent, it makes some of the Muslims angry and frustrated; when at the same time the non-Muslims might base their information about Muslims on a misrepresented picture of Islam. Some respondents see this situation as an underlying reason for the negative and aggressive commenting in the public Internet discussions and under Internet news articles. Some argued that the change in attitudes towards Islam and Muslims has become more visible in these public Internet comments as they appear to be increasingly hostile. One of the interviewees even stated that these Internet discussions can be seen as an example of the polarization of the society.

Similar acknowledgments have been made by Goerzig and Al-Hashimi (2015), who argue that the perceived cultural differences between Islam and the West, especially with issues related to practicing religion, are overemphasized in the media. This ultimately contributes to the misinterpretations and misunderstandings about Islam as a religion. According to Goerzig and Al-Hashimi, Islam is depicted in the discourses created by the media as being equivalent to religious extremism and yet if a Muslim would want to criticize this, it’s interpreted as terrorism sympathizing. Moreover, the media continues to give jihadists extensive attention, which has resulted in a situation where the public opinion associates terrorism in Europe automatically to breed from the Islamic faith. (Goerzig & Al-Hashimi 2015, 3–4; 48; 56)
5.1.4 Social exclusion

Some of the respondents argue that unemployment and the feeling of alienation that follows can be seen as defining factors for radicalization for some people. When some turn to alcohol and drugs, others might seek for religion as something to fill the feeling of emptiness in their lives. One interviewee finds it difficult to understand why it is not considered that the common feelings of injustice and unequal treatment among the Muslims really affect the way Muslims think about life and their ability to handle things. Moreover these feelings can provoke Muslims to separate themselves from the society.

Muslims may have been through more than some other people —— Some might seek for religiosity and think that through this when I am very strong in my religion; I don’t have to bother with the society anymore.

Amina

One of the respondents claims that other catalysts for radicalization are for instance, alienation from the society and lack of education and jobs. Contradicting to these statements, another respondent is not convinced about the direct causal link between marginalization and radicalization:

Marginalization is often mentioned as a reason for radicalization. However, it cannot be generalized, because many, who have experienced this social exclusion, have not radicalized.

Ali

This argument is shared Rabasa and Benard (2014, 1–2; 4). They claim that one of the persisting arguments continues to be that marginalization and lack of integration of European Muslims could be seen as a causal mobilizing factor for Islamic radicalization and even for the increase of Islamist terrorism. Yet, they contest this by arguing that according to their studies on the backgrounds of those involved in plotting terrorist attacks
in Europe, they have reached the conclusion that even though most of these individuals could be seen as well integrated, they still committed violent attacks in the societies they belonged to. And furthermore, the researchers emphasize that most of the European Muslims are “neither well integrated nor radicalized”. However, according to Peter Waldmann, a Professor Emeritus of Sociology and an expert on Terrorism; Matenia Sirseloudi, a Terrorism studies researcher; and Stefan Malthaner, a researcher on Political Violence: social marginalization (as well as discrimination, and identity and orientation problems) can be seen as a common issue for young Muslims living in the West, and thus possibly contributing to the radicalization phenomenon. (Waldmann, Sirseloudi & Malthaner 2010, 63–64)

Corresponding arguments have been made by Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt, Senior Intelligence Analysts for NYPD Intelligence Division, who claim that e.g. social alienation, discrimination or economic marginalization, are part of the self-identification phase of their model for radicalization process. Heikki Kerkkänen, a sociologist and an expert in multiculturalism, however partly questions this by introducing the notion of “discourse of social exclusion”, which maintains the social ideal of an active citizen. Hence, if a person is not able to fulfill these requirements, he is automatically seen as potential threat and thus needs to be governed by “soft actions” (Kerkkänen 2013, 45).

5.1.5 Polarization of the society

Many of the respondents expressed their worries about the polarization of the society. According to them, polarization of the society and the excess in extreme thinking are prominent drivers for the radicalization phenomenon, because they juxtapose and create hatred between communities. Categorizing individuals and producing discourses enhance the development of a radicalization process. One of the interviewees even pointed out that the first thing that comes to his mind when addressing radicalization is the polarized

23 Silber and Bhatt, Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat, p. 6–7 (http://www.nypdshield.org/public/SiteFiles/documents/NYPD_Report-Radicalization_in_the_West.pdf)
society we are living in. He states that extremist thinking is becoming increasingly popular, and that it is a real threat to the society and to multiculturalism.

Two of the respondents emphasize the responsibility of the media in creating polarizing discourses and hence feeding to the excess of extremist thinking. They stress, for example, that the recent media coverage on radicalization has constructed a false impression for the general public, implying that mosques serve only as recruiting arenas for terrorist organizations. Furthermore, most of the interviewees place the blame on media for connecting Islam and Muslims particularly to terrorism and radicalization, and thus building a gap between Muslims and the rest of the society.

Moreover, the informants accentuated the responsibility of the politicians in creating and sustaining the polarization of the society. They advise the leaders of societies to take the polarization of the society more seriously. In addition, the politicians should be more careful with their rhetoric in order to avoid encouraging extremist discourses. This view is shared by Frank Buijs, Atef Hamdy and Froukje Demant in their study (2006) exploring the young Dutch Muslims’ political views. In their research it is demonstrated that the negative image of Islam in the Netherlands reinforce the radicalization phenomenon within the Dutch Muslim youth. They argue that both of the juxtaposed opposing ends of extremism, Islamic extremism and right-wing populists, are closely connected in maintaining each other. Consequently, there is a constant need for balancing in policy-making in order to ensure that neither one of the opposing poles is not unintentionally favored. The research ultimately stresses the power of the politicians in contributing to the division of the society by stating stigmatizing comments concerning religious or ethnic minorities. The polarizing contribution is particularly obvious when these comments are stated by politicians in the wake of a violent incident.
5.2 Dealing with the radicalization phenomenon

Before we didn’t face these challenges. Now the challenges are coming all the time. We should stop only to think about making money and start to focus on solving problems. Now, and not tomorrow. Tomorrow might be too late.

Kareem

During the time of writing this thesis, many new initiatives tackling the issue of radicalization have started across the country, such as the Young Muslim’s Forum in Finland’s efforts in preventing radicalization and crime. Furthermore, Finn Church Aid has started a campaign called Tekoja Väkivaltaista Radikalisoitumista Vastaan (Acts against violent radicalization) to address these issues on a high national level. This campaign addresses the matter of violent extremism and radicalization, and it is being undertaken by the Finn Church Aid in cooperation with the Finnish Ministry of Internal affairs. Similarly, according to the findings of this research, the study of radicalization as well as relevant counter-radicalization initiatives would benefit of more cooperation between the authorities and the local communities — considering that common understanding and trust are the most important points in building a collective ground for discussion and openings for future research.

Fortunately, the police and city of Helsinki have made significant contributions in enhancing the cooperation efforts between the Muslim communities and the authorities. According to the informants of this study, these initiatives are welcomed within the Muslim communities. However, some of the respondents questioned the effects of these

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cooperative meetings, and especially the lack of Muslim youth present in them. This research has demonstrated that the aspect of youth in the radicalization phenomenon should not be neglected. Hence, the youth should be more inclusively incorporated in all of the preventive measures and activities designed.

The role of the youth in the radicalization phenomenon is emphasized by many researchers (see p.74 in this study). According to the research results of this thesis, it can be concluded that the youth also hold a potential of contributing to the preventive matters of this phenomenon. As it is contemplated in the chapter of Political grievances in this study (p.72), the perceived injustice suffered by fellow Muslims is a prominent and prevailing discourse within the Muslim communities. Similar acknowledgements have been made by the sociologist, Marion Van San, whose recently published journal article demonstrates that young Dutch and Belgian Muslims maintain the discourse of political grievances in their social media discussions (Van San 2015). This idea of grievances discourse manifesting in a prominent way in the context of young Muslims is echoed, for example, by the Muslim life coordinator and Chaplain at Princeton University, Imam Sohaib Sultan. He claims in his article that responding to the challenge posed by violent extremist groups, college campuses need to engage in a variety of efforts including counseling and mentoring, in addition to addressing the social and political problems in the most effective way.\footnote{How to speak with young Muslims about ISIS, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/imam-sohaib-sultan/post_9915_b_7979594.html (accessed 25 Oct, 2015)}

In the light of the research results of this study, the development of best practices in radicalization prevention should engage youth in a broad manner. This could include for instance different kind of non-governmental initiatives providing platforms for the youth to advance the issues (be it political or social) which they find the most meaningful.

When addressing the notion of Political grievances, some academics have argued that there aren’t too many studies focusing on the interplay between these grievances and domestic radicalization (Wilkinson & Gregory; Ranstorp 2010, 3). However, the exception in the Finnish context is the study of Anssi Kullberg (2011, 289–290). He argues that the jihadist propaganda, which opposes Islam with the West, creates whole new discourses of grievances in the context of Finland. Moreover, the polarizing situation will only worsen by stigmatizing, demonizing and generalizing the messengers of this kind of propaganda.
Kullberg argues that preventive measures over radicalization in the society need to be carefully considered. Overreactions, such as increasing surveillance, collective punishments and security hysteria will only endanger the functionality of an open society and enhance the mainstreaming of radical approaches. Instead the focus needs to be placed on preventive matters and on encouraging open discussion. Kullberg stresses the importance of a sense of proportion which will develop by fostering the diversity of opinions (Kullberg 2011, 290; 294–295). Similar acknowledgements have been made by the research participants of this study. They argue that a comprehensive emphasis needs to be focused on preventive actions engaging the society as a whole, including the youth, their parents and families, the authorities, the schools, the religious leaders, the Muslim communities, and the police.

5.3 Discussing the findings and further research

This thesis has contributed in the overall field of radicalization studies by providing the Finnish Muslim opinion-leaders’, the imams’ and other influential Muslims’, impressions about the current debate on radicalization. For the first time these issues have been addressed from the points of view of the Muslims themselves within the Finnish societal context by conducting a thematic research interview. Because similar studies have not been conducted within the Finnish scope of radicalization research, it is impossible to compare the results with any contextually relevant study.

However, when compared to the global radicalization research, the findings of this thesis especially are noteworthy, because they provide new knowledge on a context-specific group of people previously unstudied from this point of view. When examined in contrast with previous radicalization studies, it is exceptionally noticeable how two elements in particular stand out in this research compared to the overall research findings of the field. In the light of the research results of this study, it can be stated that both the Political grievances and the influence of the media are key elements contributing to the radicalization process within the Helsinki metropolitan area’s Muslim communities. Hence
this thesis claims that these two elements are important factors in the domestic radicalization processes, and need to be addressed when designing any preventive actions.

This study was able to assess only a relatively small amount of possible research participants, and hence it has opened up a platform for future research. More studies should be conducted within the Finnish Muslim communities in order to reach broader opinion-focused research results and thus provide insights of the actual points of view of the community. These kinds of studies are justifiable for many reasons. Firstly, according to the findings of this Master’s thesis, the influence of the media seems to be remarkably significant in maintaining the radicalization phenomenon within the Helsinki metropolitan area’s Muslim communities. If the indicative assumption based on the analysis of this research is correct, it implies that the media currently contributes in enhancing social exclusion by creating polarization within the society. It is obvious that more research needs to be focused on this issue in order to contribute to its prevention.

As the development of the radicalization phenomenon within the Finnish society is still in process and the future countering and preventive measures are currently being formed, studies on the possible consequences what these kind of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalization initiatives might have for the Muslim communities need to be undertaken. These measures can create a hostile atmosphere of suspicion towards the Muslim community; place the Muslims under the label of a Suspect Community, if not properly executed. The importance of this kind of research is justified when comparing to the broader European context. Orla Lynch argues in her article *British Muslim youth: radicalisation, terrorism and the construction of the “other”* (2013) that In Europe, ever since the 9/11, the Muslim youth have been targeted by increasing generalizations and suspicions concerning for example their perceived lack of loyalty to the country of citizenship/residence, which has made them the number one reason for new policy making and state intervention, at the same time creating an image of the Muslim youth as a national security concern. (Lynch 2013, 257)

Initially, my aim was to introduce this issue already within the research agenda of this thesis. However, even though one of the study respondents expressed his concern on the above mentioned matters, the development of the radicalization phenomenon and its Finnish counter policies is still an ongoing process and hence it is impossible to study its
effects on the Muslim community at this stage. Hopefully the preventing actions will succeed without producing any kind of Suspect Communities as a by-product.

6 REFERENCES

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7 APPENDIXES

7.1 Glossary

*Islamism (vs. Islam):* Political ideology, which is based on religion (Islam) / Collection of political ideas using a religious (Islamic) discourse and vocabulary which is used to justify the political actions and goals (Juha Saarinen)

*Jihad:* Mainstream Muslims make a distinction between the greater jihad (striving for self-improvement) and the lesser jihad (armed struggle in the path of God), whereas violent radical Salafis regard armed struggle as the only true jihad and as a personal religious obligation (Rabasa and Benard 2014, 32)
Jihadism: Political ideology / Violent form of Islamist political activism used for practicing jihad (war with religious justification) (Juha Saarinen)

Global Jihadism: A form of jihadism which is rhetorically (and usually also operationally) focused on Western countries (Juha Saarinen)

Foreign Fighter: A person who has travelled to conflict zone and takes part in an armed revolt, but who doesn’t have the citizenship of the country where the conflict takes place, and doesn’t have close ethnic relation or relatives with the conflict parties, nor does he/she belong to a military organization (Thomas Hegghammer)

Salafi: A member of a strictly orthodox Sunni Muslim sect advocating a return to the early Islam of the Koran and Sunna (Oxford Dictionaries)

Terrorism: The unofficial or unauthorized use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims (Oxford Dictionaries)

Umma: The whole community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion (Oxford Dictionaries)

7.2 Interview themes and questions

1. Radicalization – what’s it all about?

- what do you think about this phenomenon/ how do you understand it/ how would you define radicalization (in the Islamic context)?

- what causes radicalization/ why is there such a phenomenon? (from your point of view)

- how does it show in the community/how would you recognize a radicalized person?
- which kind of challenges or opportunities are involved when talking about this phenomenon?

2. **The role of society and (religious) communities in dealing with radicalization**

- how should this matter be discussed in the Muslim communities/ mosques?

- how should this matter be preached at the mosque/ have you included it in your sermon?

- how should this matter be addressed in your community?

- what has been done already?

- are there people in your networks who have left to conflict zone/Syria/Iraq?

- what is the role of imams/ religious leaders in this phenomenon?

- can you influence it somehow?

- how could particularly a religious leader contribute in dealing with this issue?

- how should the society react to this matter?

- what should be the societies role in dealing with this issue?

- what do you think about the cooperation between authorities and Muslim communities in preventing violent radicalization?
3. The role of media and public discussion

- the radicalization of young people has been discussed in the media, have you followed the discussion?

- what do you think about this discussion?

- in your opinion, has the attitude towards Islam and Muslims changed in the Finnish society?

- how does it show in your community/mosque?

- have you discussed this in your community?

- what could be done about this matter?