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List of Acronyms

AIVD	Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheids Dienst – General Intelligence and Safety Agency
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration
EPRS	European Parliamentary Research Service
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FGD	Focus group discussion
FvD	Forum voor Democratie – Forum for Democracy
ICCT	International Centre for Counter-Terrorism
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IS	Islamic State
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
LPF	Lijst Pim Fortuyn – List Pim Fortuyn
MC	Membership categorization
PvdA	Partij voor de Arbeid – Labour Party
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid – Party for Freedom
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrede en Democratie – People's Party for Peace and Democracy

Abstract

This research investigates the challenges for the reintegration of (ex-)Jihadi women who want to return to the Netherlands by examining how the debate around this issue is shaped by polarization. This debate is characterized by strong binaries: there is a group who is in favour of allowing the (ex-)Jihadi women to return and reintegrate, and there is a group who is against the return and reintegration. Little research has been done to examine the return and reintegration of (ex-)Jihadis in the Dutch context and how it is influenced by polarization. Hence, this research investigates how societal polarization affects the reintegration of female (ex-)Jihadis into the Dutch society. It further analyses how Dutch citizens relate to the decision of the women to join IS and their desire to come back. Additionally, it questions the role of the media in the debate and how it is affected by polarization.

For this research, qualitative research methods have been adopted: semi-structured in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion (FGD) were conducted. To analyse the qualitative data, polarization theorizing and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) theorizing has been used.

The results revealed that the debate around the reintegration of (ex-)Jihadi women is highly polarized. There is a strong "us-versus-them" narrative in which two camps are facing each other: those in-favour of the reintegration, and those against-return of the women group. The media is an important factor and polarizing tool in this debate. It is drawn to polarizing opinions and binaries, in their coverage it enlarges these opinions thus reinforcing and strengthening polarization. Overall, nuance is lacking in the media. The high level of societal polarization is limiting social and political progress on this issue, after all there is no agreement on the issue of the returning (ex-)Jihadi women. It is highly recommended that the Dutch government attempts to lower the polarization and creates more room for political progress so that a consensus can be reached on the reintegration of the (ex-)Jihadi women.

Relevance to Development Studies

It is difficult to situate this research paper in the field of development studies because it focusses on the Netherlands, which is commonly perceived as a 'developed' country. Usually the focus within development studies lies on 'developing' countries in the so-called 'Global South', and countries in the so-called 'Global North' are left out. If they are present in research within the of development studies, it mainly examines the role of colonization, coloniality, and modernity (Escobar, 2004), or on North-South relations.

However, with this research I want to illustrate that development studies can go beyond focussing on issues in the 'Global South' and 'developing countries'. It should focus more on the "excluded, silenced and marginalised populations… [who are] victims of… racism and islamophobia" (Santos, 2016). These populations exist in the 'Global North' and the Netherlands too. These groups are considered as less-developed, sometimes even as backwards, and are connected to the dominant groups who exclude and silence their voices (Rutazibwa and Shilliam, 2018). By attempting to show how the polarized debate challenges the reintegration of people who are different from the norm, this research will be a relevant contribution to development studies.

Keywords

Polarization, Reintegration, Islamic State, (ex-)Jihadis, the Netherlands, Returnees

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1.
Introduction

1.1 Inspiration and Problem

In the fall of 2019, 23 (ex-)Jihadi women initiated a court case in which they demanded that the Dutch State to help them and their 56 children return to the Netherlands. The women were residing in the overpopulated Kurdish detention camps of Al-Roj and Al-Hol, where the situation is bad (RTL Nieuws, 2019). The Dutch government refused to help the women because they contributed to the functioning of a terrorist organisation. Moreover, the situation on the ground was unsafe, it would have created dangerous situations for those involved in helping them return (NOS Nieuws, 2019a). On the 11th of November, 2019, the Dutch court ruled that the State of the Netherlands has to actively try to help the 56 IS-children to return to the Netherlands. The women, however, are not entitled to repatriation because they made the conscious decision to join IS. Nevertheless, if the local authorities are not willing to let the children go to the Netherlands without their mothers, the Dutch government must accept the mothers and help them return (NOS Nieuws, 2019a).

However, the State of the Netherlands decided to appeal to this decision (NOS Nieuws, 2020a). In June 2020 the Dutch High Court overruled that decision and said that the Netherlands does not have to help the group of women and their children with their return. Instead, it pointed out that individual returns of women and children are still possible, for example when a child is very sick or when the mother was abducted to the Caliphate by her husband (Van Es, 2020).

The Dutch Intelligence Services (AIVD; Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheids Dienst) estimates that approximately 300 people with Jihadist intentions have travelled to Syria and Iraq, about a third of these people is female. Most of them joined IS and a few Ha'yat Tahrir al-Sham (affiliated with Al Qaida). The AIVD further estimates that at least 210 children with links to the Netherlands are residing in Turkey or Syria, this means that at least one of their parents has the Dutch nationality or has lived in the Netherlands for a longer period of time. At the time of this research, a little under 25% of the children in Syria and Iraq were taken with their parents when they decided to travel to the Caliphate, the majority of the children is born in the Caliphate and most of them are under the age of 4, about 10% is older than 9 years. Approximately 90 children are residing in refugee camps in Syria controlled by Kurdish forces (AIVD, 2020).

The court case of the (ex-)Jihadi women has been the starting point for this research. In the media there was a lot of attention on this case and other cases of returning (ex-)Jihadis. I noticed that the media and the public debate is very divided. A good example of that is a fragment of a Dutch late-night talk show – PAUW – which formed the second source of inspiration for this research. In this tv-fragment there are three guests who discuss if the Dutch government should bring back the Dutch "IS-ers" (Dutch slang for IS-member) who are in Syrian prison camps: Thomas Rueb, a journalist for the NRC newspaper and author of the book *Laura H.*[1], Omar, the cousin of Syria-goer[2] Chadia B, and Dilan Yesilgöz, a politician representing the Volkspartij voor Vrede en Democratie (VVD, People's Party for

[1] Laura H. is also known as the IS-girl, she is a Dutch citizen who joined her husband on his journey to the Caliphate. After discovering that this was not her dream, she managed to escape and come back to the Netherlands.

[2] Translation of the Dutch word Syrieganger which describes someone who decided to travel to Syria or Iraq to join IS. It is widely used in the media.

Peace and Democracy) in parliament (PAUW, 2019). Rueb and Omar are in favour of letting the (ex-)Jihadis return because they believe the chaotic situation in the camps increases the chances of escape and re-joining of IS. Furthermore, they also believe the Dutch State is better equipped to bring the (ex-)Jihadis to court than the local authorities. Yesilgöz disagrees and argues that preventing controlled or uncontrolled return of the women is necessary because the safety and security of Dutch citizens is otherwise endangered. She presses the need for the revoking of Dutch passports and bringing the (ex-)Jihadis to court in the region.

This debate between Rueb, Omar, and Yesilgöz shows two strong polarizing binaries that made me curious to see how these binaries can potentially affect the reintegration of the returning (ex-)Jihadi women. From personal experiences, I am aware this debate is not only limited to what is visible in the media. Discussions with friends and family before embarking on this research showed me the diverging opinions. Personally, I leaned towards the side of allowing the women to return to the Netherlands and enabling reintegration into their communities. I believe everyone deserves a second chance. Moreover, I am an advocate for bottom-up approaches to various issues on social justice. However, I also realized it is easier said than done and I wanted to figure out how the women in the communities felt about the return and re-integration of the (ex-)Jihadi women because their voices are underrepresented in the public debate. By starting a conversation, this research can contribute to a less polarized debate.

1.2 Research Gap and Approach

After an initial search, it became clear that very little research examining the Dutch context and the reintegration of the returning (ex-)Jihadis has been done, especially combined with an approach that analyses the polarizing aspects which shape the debate of reintegration of returning foreign fighters. From this gap one main research question emerged:

How does societal polarization affect reintegration of female (ex-)Jihadis back to the Dutch society?

This question focuses on female (ex-)Jihadis because the women who started the court case were my main source of inspiration. I use the term (ex-)Jihadis instead of simply Jihadis or ex-Jihadis without the brackets because some women have renounced IS and claim not to support them anymore, some have not. This main question is supported by the wish to know how people in the Netherlands relate to the decision of the women to join IS but also their desire to come back, and by questioning the role of the media in the debate and how this is affected by polarization. These three supporting elements are scarcely investigated in academic literature, which usually focusses on the motivations of people to join IS (Peresin and Cervone, 2015; Perešin, 2018), not what others think of that decision, or it examines the propaganda and recruitment strategies of IS (Mahood and Rane, 2017; Windsor, 2020). None examine the representation of (ex-)Jihadis in the Dutch context.

Following from these inquiries, this research examines the topic from two angles: theorizing on polarization and theorizing on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) \. The former being the main theorizing for this research and the latter being more of a supporting theorizing. The DDR theorizing examines how combatants can return to civilian life by disarming, demobilization, and reintegrating them into society. This research mainly focusses on the reintegration aspect of this approach since most returnees are already disarmed and demobilized upon return. Furthermore, the reintegration of

returning foreign fighters can be a very polarizing topic for societies, which is why this paper utilizes polarization theorizing to analyse that aspect of this research. The theorizing focusses on how societal polarization is manifested in theory and in practice by applying it to the chosen case of this research.

For this research, various sources of data have been used. The most important source being the primary data collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion (FGD) with 15 participants in total. I want to highlight that I felt very uncomfortable with the traditional distances between the researcher and the participants. I did not like using technical methodological terms to describe my methods and ways of collecting data. However, it was hard to find alternative words. An important step into defying the traditional role between researcher and participant started by self-reflection and self-criticism, therefore I kept a journal throughout my research process where I wrote down reflections on myself and my research and kept track of my progress. Besides the primary data, this research relies on secondary data from academic sources as well as (popular) media such as news articles, and tv-shows. Moreover, it uses data from reports by the Dutch government, one of its agencies, the European Union, and think tanks.

This research paper adopts the following structure; it will first start to elaborate on the Dutch socio-political background by examining how populism and anti-Muslim sentiment developed since the 1960s-1970s. After that, it will explain the theoretical framework more in-depth, followed by an explanation of the methods. In the fourth section of this research, the research findings will be presented and the research questions will be answered. This will be followed by a conclusion and future recommendations.

1.3 Assumptions and Positionality

This research assumes that the (ex-)Jihadi women are not in need of disarmament and demobilization because when they arrive in the Netherlands, they are already disarmed and demobilized. It further assumes that the women want to go back to their own communities in the Netherlands and people that they know. Moreover, this research believes that the women mentioned in section 1.1 will eventually return to the Netherlands since approximately 60 (ex-)Jihadis have already come back from Syria and Iraq (AIVD, 2020).

These assumptions are influenced by my positionality. As a young white woman who grew up in a rural part of the Netherlands, my position in society was never really challenged and I never really saw a different side of being in the Netherlands. It was my desire to encounter the other in this research, which I partially did. I wanted to learn by listening to their stories and experiences and through their stories unlearn some of the biases that I was taught. My background in liberal arts and sciences and exposure to social movements, have strongly influenced my thoughts and ideas, ultimately I think that everyone deserves a second chance.

2.
Background

This chapter presents the contextual background in which this research is positioned. The history of polarization is examined, starting with the arrival of labour migrants since the mid-1960s, followed by the rise of populism and anti-Muslim sentiment in the late 1970s-1980s. It will address some noteworthy politicians that influenced the history of polarization due to their populist sentiments. This context is important to present and contextualise the issue of returning Jihadis.

In the second part of this chapter, the theoretical framework is introduced. Here, the focus lies on theorizing on polarization which will be complemented by Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration theorizing. With the latter, the focus mainly lies on the reintegration aspect of the theorizing. These two theorizings have been chosen because when combined, they offer an useful analytical framework. This can help analysing the data because aspects of both theorizings came forth in the collected data and in the debate of the returning (ex-)Jihadi women.

2.1 Populism and Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the Netherlands

2.1.1 The Arrival of Labour Migrants

In 2019, the Netherlands counted over 17 million inhabitants, a little over 4 million people were first or second generation migrants, of which approximately 57% has a non-Western migration[3] background (CBS StatLine, 2019). Interestingly, the National Bureau for Statistics, which is responsible for measuring data such as population composition, only started analysing and categorizing migrants as a different part of the Dutch society in 1996. Before that, no distinction was made between migrants and native Dutch citizens. The migrants who live in the Netherlands came for various reasons, one of the most noteworthy being the arrival of guest workers[4] after the Second World War. I will attempt to explain the visible and relevant social and political effects of the arrival and stay of migrants on the Dutch society.

After the Second World War, large numbers of Dutch people migrated to countries such as Australia, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa due to the was a shortage of jobs, money, food and housing in the Netherlands. Furthermore, there was a growing belief among the Dutch that the country was overpopulated and that the Soviet Union could invade the country; it was therefore better to move elsewhere (Rath, 2009). However, in the 1950s migration to the Netherlands increased: people from the (former) colonies of Surinam and Indonesia or refugees from Eastern Europe came to the

[3] According to the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS) a person with a non-Western migration background has their origins in a country in Africa, Latin-America, Asia (excluding Japan and Indonesia) or Turkey. A person with a Western migration background has their origins in a country in Europe, North-America, Oceania, Indonesia, or Japan (CBS, n.d.).

[4] Hereafter I will use the term labour migrants instead of guest workers because the latter implies a temporary duration of their stay whilst some decided to stay indefinitely and bring their families to the Netherlands.

Netherlands to live there (Schuster, 1999; van Niekerk, 2000; Rath, 2009). Additionally, due to a shortage of labour in the heavy industries, workers from Southern Europe (initially Spain and Italy, followed by Portugal, Yugoslavia, Greece, Tunisia, Turkey, and Morocco) were invited to work in the Netherlands as labour migrants to perform low educated jobs. The recruitment of labour migrants was originally organised by private companies who arranged the entire process from recruitment to the settlement. However, relatively quickly, the governments started to get involved and established recruitment agencies in the countries of origin. Trade unions became engaged and ensured that the interests of the native Dutch members were not impaired (Penninx and Roosblad,2002). In 1973, the Dutch government brought the recruitment of labour migrants to a halt but allowed those present to continue to work. Due to the first oil crisis, there was a labour surplus and migrant workers were no longer necessary (Rath, 2009). Many decided to stay and those with a tenure even brought their families to the Netherlands. However, from the mid-1970s and the 1980s, there was an economic downfall and firms had to close their doors or move their production to low-wage countries. This resulted in unemployment which hit the Turkish and Moroccan labour migrants especially hard (Wolff and Penninx, 1993; Rath, 2009).

The arrival of the non-western labour migrants and other migrants in the second half of the 20th century resulted in a concentration of groups of ethnic minorities in particular neighbourhoods or areas in the larger cities, especially in the Randstad[5] or close to manufacturing hubs elsewhere in the Netherlands (Sleutjes, De Valk and Ooijevaar, 2018). This research will only focus on the Randstad, hence no further attention will be paid to the concentration of migrants outside the region. Bolt, Hooimeijer and Van Kempen (2002) point out that different minority groups in different cities show particular patterns of segregation; people with Turkish and Moroccan roots show the strongest segregation. They further argue that the segregation is stronger in The Hague and Rotterdam compared to Utrecht and Amsterdam (ibid.). Nevertheless, in all of these cities the concentration of people with a non-western migration background usually coincides with socio-economic inequalities such as low educational opportunities, and low-income households (Hartog and Zorlu, 2009). However, the patterns of education and income are not the only elements determining the ethnic concentration; Sleutjes, De Valk, and Ooijevaar (2018) argue that it is also a deliberate decision to live amongst each other. Interestingly, the pattern of segregation and congregation largely matches instances of social unrest and riots (Markus, 2020; NU.nl, 2015; Gerling and Hoekstra, 2020), cases of violent youth, carrying of knives and stabbing incidents (Brink and Simons, 2019; Het Parool, 2020), and radicalization (OmroepWest, 2014; Kouwenhove, 2020). The radicalization of youth in the segregated neighbourhoods of the Randstad is reflected in the origin of many Jihadis who travelled to Syria. Most of them lived in such neighbourhoods (Bergema and Koudijs, 2015).

2.1.2 Populism and Anti-Muslim Sentiment

Due to the arrival of non-Western migrants as mentioned above, (see Appendix A) followed by the economic downfall, there was a growing dissatisfaction with the dominant political system, which resulted in the rise of so-called new-rightist populist parties. This did not only happen in the Netherlands; it was a movement taking place in many Northern, Western European countries since the 1980s (Ignazi, 2003). These parties were driven by discontent, scepticism, and xenophobia and were strongly vocal against the immigration politics, and the resulting ethnic diversity of those politics (De Koster, Achterberg and Van der Waal, 2013). By claiming to defend the needs and welfare of the native 'common man'

[5] The Randstad is an agglomeration of the four major cities in the Netherlands: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht

(Derks, 2006), the new-rightist populist parties share an "egalitarian economic agenda" with leftist parties (Derks, 2006; De Koster, Achterberg and Van der Waal, 2013: 5) but socio-culturally differ greatly from these parties. A popular thought among welfare populists is that the welfare state is not supporting the common man[6] but it is serving the needs of the bureaucrats and those who are undeserving the assistance of the state. The latter usually being the migrants or people with a migration background (Derks, 2006).

Besides attending to the needs of the common man and claiming that some are not worthy of the care and protection of the Dutch welfare state, the new-rightist populist parties and politicians expressed a strong anti-Muslim and anti-immigration sentiment. This populist anti-Muslim sentiment is primarily expressed through the idea that Islam is backward and has a negative impact on Dutch morals and values (Uitermark, Duyvendak and Mepschen,2011). It claims that Islamic values are intolerant, conservative, and against sexual emancipation and thus are completely the opposite of Dutch values. The populists further argue that the idea of multiculturalism is "responsible for weakening Dutch values by adopting a soft position on Muslims and Islam" (ibid. p.235), making the white working class victims of both the Islam and the Dutch progressive elite (Uitermark, 2012; Mepschen, 2012). Although the new-rightist populist parties and politicians claim that multiculturalism has failed and undermines the Dutch identity, it is argued that the Netherlands never had pursued any form of multiculturalist policies and rather it opted for assimilation and prevent minority formation through stigmatisation and forced integration (van Amersfoort, J. M. M, 1974; Penninx, 1988; Uitermark, Duyvendak and Mepschen,2011).

One of the first noteworthy expressions of anti-Islam populism comes from Frits Bolkestein, a member of the Dutch liberal party VVD (Volkspartij voor Vrede en Democratie/People's Party for Peace and Democracy). In 1991 he stated that the Dutch government has to take action to minimize and prevent the problems that arise due to migration. He further argued that Islam is backward because "it is a way of life. And … it is at odds with the liberal division between church and state. Many Islamic countries have hardly any freedom of speech" (Bolkestein, 1991). His rhetoric frames the "autochthonous"[7] Dutch working class as the victims of cultural liberalism and the accommodation of diversity (Uitermark, Duyvendak and Mepschen,2011). Besides Bolkenstein, there are several other noteworthy figures in the Dutch public sphere who express or have expressed strong anti-Islam sentiment: Pim Fortuyn, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Geert Wilders, and to a somewhat lesser extent Thierry Baudet. In selecting these five public figures, attention was paid to their role, impact, and influence on Dutch society. There are others who have expressed similar sentiments but are not as well-known.

Pim Fortuyn started his political career as a member of the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA), moved to the Liberal Party (VVD) and later established his own party called Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) to run for the election in 2002. He was dissatisfied with the multicultural society and concerned about the Islamisation of the Dutch culture (Ornstein, n.d.). He claimed that the Islamic culture was retarded (Poorthuis and Wansink, 2002) and the normal man was the victim of the multicultural society. Although his is expressions resonated with

[6] Since the 1970s-1980s politicians are referring to the "common man" whenever they try to reach the majority of the people who have a normal job and an average income (den Boon, 2017; van Weezel, 2017)

[7] In the Netherlands, a distinction is being made between autochthonous (people whose parents and grandparents were born in the Netherlands), allochthonous (people who are not from the Netherlands, but from a Western country), and non-Western allochthonous (people with a non-Western background, e.g. coming from the former Dutch colonies, Turkey, Morocco, and so on). Although these categories are being critiqued more and more, they remain persistent and commonly used. In this research I try to avoid these two terms.

many, it also created a lot of friction and controversies. This resulted in his assassination by Volkert van der G., a few days before the elections of 2002 (Ornstein, n.d.). In the election ,merely a few days after his death, the LPF won 26 out of 150 seats in parliament, making it the second largest party (Van Holsteyn, Irwin and Den Ridder, 2003). Fortuyn died but his rhetoric was carried on by others such as Rita Verdonk and later Geert Wilders.

Wilders is arguably one of the most controversial Dutch politicians now, who founded the PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid/Party for Freedom) in 2006. His party expresses strong anti-Islam sentiments, are against immigration and refugees, and conveys an anti-European Union sentiment. Already before establishing his own party, Wilders was active in the Dutch parliament since the late 1990s. He started as a member of the liberal party VVD but left the party in 2004 and found the "Vereniging Groep Wilders", a forerunner of the PVV (Forceville and van de Laar,2019). He is often regarded as one of the pupils of the aforementioned Bolkenstein, but Wilders differs from him because he has the "'nerve to break taboos' and face unpleasant facts in debates…that [were] according to him 'commonly known' among the population" (Vossen, 2011: 181). Already in the early years of his career in parliament, he warned of the dangers of extremism in the Middle East and the threat it posed to the Netherlands: through immigration Islamic extremism had arrived in the Netherlands and more would come (Lammers, 1999). After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Wilders became an even stronger critic of Islam and a supporter of the American war on terror. He advocated for radical measures against those who posed a potential threat to the Netherlands (Vossen, 2011). Examples of such measures are a Burqa-ban (NOS Nieuws, 2019b), closing the borders for migrants from Islamic countries, preventative detention of radical Muslims, closing all mosques and Islamic schools, and prohibiting the Quran (PVV, n.d.: n.d.). By combining these anti-Islam standpoints with strong anti-EU sentiments and advocating for the welfare of the "common man", Wilders finds a lot of support. However, he also manages to create more opposition in society with his strong anti-migration and anti-Islam opinions.

In the last few years of Fortuyn's life, and after that in the early years of the PVV, another interesting politician emerged on the playfield, Ayaan Hirsi Ali: a Somalian refugee and former politician with strong critiques on Islam and the Islamic community in the Netherlands (Ghorashi, 2003). Hirsi Ali came to the Netherlands as a refugee in 1992, where she started questioning her faith and became more critical of Islam, especially after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (ibid.). She renounced her faith in Allah and started expressing her radical critique on Islam and how it subjugated women. The best example of her critique is the short film *Submission*, directed by Theo Van Gogh, who also critiqued Islam (Snel and Stock,2008). Many thought Hirsi Ali was courageous for showing the failure of Dutch multiculturalism and the oppression and abuse of Islam. However, the Dutch Islamic community argued that she was stereotyping them as traditional, hostile towards women, and unfriendly. She received many threats and went into hiding for several months. Van Gogh was assassinated by Mohammed B. as a "retribution for his critique of Islam" (Blumenthal, 2012: 251). His murder and the threats to Hirsi Ali resulted in violent attacks on Islamic schools and mosques in the Netherlands and a re-focus on the immigration debate across Europe (Finseraas, Jakobsson and Kotsadam, 2011).

A new kid on the populist-block is Thierry Baudet, leader of the relatively new party FvD (Forum voor Democratie/Forum for Democracy). The FvD was initially established by Baudet as a think tank, but entered politics in 2016 and ran for the general elections in 2017. The party quickly rose to the centre stage of Dutch politics because of its anti-establishment, anti-EU, and anti-immigration rhetoric. Due to his short presence in the Dutch political sphere, there is hardly any academic material available that analyses Baudet's and the FvD's politics. Although he is not as explicitly outspoken against religious Islam as

Wilders, Baudet claims to be against "Islamism, the political Islam" (De Winther and Witteman, 2018). Furthermore, he is fearful of the "homoeopathically diluting the Dutch population with all the peoples of the world, so that there will never be a Dutchman again… [and the Dutch] can no longer take shape" (Forum voor Democratie, - FVD, 2017b: fragment starts at 13:01). He later elaborated that migrants who come to the Netherlands and fail to integrate pose a threat to Dutch morals, values, freedoms, and identity (Fikse *et al.,* 2017: fragment starts at 21:00).

These reflections on the political landscape in the Netherlands have shown that right-winged politicians and politicians with populist leniencies are contributing to the debate. They feed into socio-cultural and economic justifications that support their ideas about Islam in general and the returning (ex-)Jihadis in particular. Besides, their rhetoric is contributing to a strong sense of "us-versus-them", in which the voices of "them" are usually left out and unheard.

2.2 The Theoretical Background

2.2.1 Polarization theorizing

The debate regarding the return and reintegration of (ex-)Jihadi women is a very polarized debate, thus it is necessary to unpack polarization and understand its theorizing. It is important to recognize how societal polarization affects the reintegration, therefore I will not only examine theorizing on polarization but also disarmament, demobilization and reintegration theorizing.

Societal polarization as a phenomenon has been on the rise over the past decade and is driving societies apart by creating an "us-versus-them" narrative between different – often extremist – groups in societies and communities (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, n.d.). Esteban and Ray (1994) define polarization as the result of within-group identity that interacts with across-group alienation. Polarization can both be a process as well as a state where the attitude of (a group of) people is diverging or has diverged into an "ideological extreme" (DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson, 1996). Moreover, polarization is "the idea that the tensions within a society or states result from two simultaneous decisions: identification with other subjects within the own group of reference and distancing oneself from one or several other competing groups" (Esteban, Joan and Schneider, 2008: 6). Consequently, polarization possesses four basic elements that contribute to its workings. First of all, there needs to be a strong group identity: individuals have little influence in social polarization. Secondly, the stronger the group identity and level of homogeneity of a group, the higher the level of polarization (ibid): within-group differences are suppressed (McCoy, Rahman and Somer, 2018). Thirdly, there must be a high level of difference between groups. Lastly, if the number of different groups is high, the level of polarization is lower. Whenever polarization increases, there is also a higher risk of (armed) conflict and a lower chance of making social and political progress (Esteban, Joan and Schneider, 2008). Moreover, polarization is often the result of the formation of unity of previously disconnected groups of society that connect and mobilize over a "social, economic, cultural-ideological, or institutional" issue and have shared goals (McCoy, Rahman and Somer, 2018: 19). This usually happens when certain political players "highlight and activate underlying cleavages in a society, bringing to the fore, constructing or reinventing a dominant cleavage around which other cleavages align" (ibid. p.19). When doing so, the goal is to strengthen and further unite their own group along a single dimension whilst weakening the opponents by adopting tactical politics and polarizing

language and rhetoric. This creates and reinforces the "us-versus-them" narrative and way of thinking (ibid). Esteban and Schneider (2008) further believe that polarization lowers the willingness of citizens to contribute to common causes.

Throughout Europe, polarization on major political issues increased over the period of 2000-2018 (V-Dem, 2019). According to Down and Han (2020), societal polarization in Europe goes hand in hand with the rise of far right parties resulting in increasing "public division and scepticism over… integration" (p.2) this results in a lack of middle ground and concentration of opinions outside of the middle and closer to the extremes (ibid.). McCoy et al. (2018) argue that although polarization poses a threat to social cohesion and the governability of a country, it also stimulates and mobilizes people to participate in politics. However, this does not outweigh the negative implications of societal polarization because it creates division and undermines stability (Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008). Somer and McCoy (2018) point out that in Western Europe the value of democracies is being questioned as a result of polarization. Despite the increased political mobility of citizens, they have less faith that they can influence public policy (Foa and Mounk, 2016 in Somer and McCoy, 2018). Two divided groups are attempting to prevent each other from achieving anything by using their democratic rights. So if two polarized groups are facing each other and group A wants a certain legislation to pass but group B does not want this to happen, group B will do everything within their power to prevent this. This creates the perception that the system is not working for the people (Somer and McCoy, 2018). Thus, societal polarization as an issue has widespread consequences.

Since a part of this research will address and analyse media content on the issue and the role of the media according to the participants, it is important to examine how polarization is manifested in the media and to grasp the relation between (social) media and polarization. Social media is often blamed for the increase in political and societal polarization because social media creates 'echo chambers', which hardly show opposing views and reinforce existing ideas (Bail *et al.,* 2018; Rychwalska and Roszczyńska-Kurasińska, 2018). Media is drawn to the polarization of ideas which leads to more media attention to such opinions. This creates a reinforcement of the dichotomy between opposing sides in a society and further pushes societal polarization. This media attention benefits the extremes, they would otherwise not receive the attention but now draw in people who are moving away from the middle ground towards the extremes such as the far right (Down and Han, 2020). Moreover, media can be perceived as a polarizing tool because it distils complex political discussions to simplified explanations that can make the viewer or readers think that their political system is polarized (Yang *et al.,* 2016). Hence, the media plays an important role in the causes and effects of societal polarization. Furthermore, it interacts political agenda setting, certain issues are avoided and others are in the spotlight(van der Pas, Daphne J, van der Brug and Vliegenthart, 2017). Importantly, this relationship is shaped by political parallelism which means that the media only cover the agenda of political parties and politicians their readers associate with and political parties only respond to issues brought up by the media their voters rely on (ibid.). The reintegration of former (foreign) fighters can be very polarizing for a society. When posed with the issue of reintegrating the (ex-)Jihadis women, there is a strong binary that leads to a polarized discussion.

2.2.3 Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Theorizing

When examining the issue of radicalization, extremism, and returning foreign fighters, theorizing on social inclusion is often applied because it explains how individuals can get access to social, political, and economic institutions and can express themselves and decide for themselves freely what they want (Oxoby, 2009). In other words, social inclusion means that everyone can fully participate in society (McDonald, Spaaij and Dukic, 2019) and it operates on the basis of spatial proximity, the relational sense of belonging and acceptance, power and agency, and skills, knowledge and understanding of how society operates (Bailey, 2005). Whilst social inclusion theorizing could provide very interesting insights, this research deploys the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) theorizing with a specific focus on reintegration. This decision is based on the fact that the case of returning (ex-)Jihadis is extraordinary because they were involved in a violent conflict, hence simply looking at social inclusion seemed insufficient and therefore the DDR approach has more analytical power.

DDR theorizing informs the processes of peacebuilding in a post-conflict situation and it focusses on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants and fighters (Theidon, 2007). Often the theory is applied through various programs that aim at the "transformation of combatants into civilians" (Munive and Stepputat, 2014: 2). A commonly agreed DDR program and definition entails three elements. The first one being disarmament, which aims at the safe collection and disposal of light and heavy weapons, ammunition, and explosives of the ex-combatants and civilians. This is followed by demobilization, which tries to control the discharge of the combatants. The last element is reintegration of the ex-combatants and helping them return to civilian life (ibid.). Collectively, these programs focus on one or multiple elements that aim at transitioning from an armed conflict to a situation of peace and justice (Theidon, 2007).

The DDR theorizing has been applied widespread in post-conflict situations and the scholarly debates usually focus on concrete case studies of such programs. Many cases can be found throughout Africa – for example Angola, Sierra Leone, Uganda – but also in countries such as Colombia and Afghanistan. Especially in situations after a civil war in which large numbers of irregular militia fought, there is a need for DDR with sustainable peace as its main goal (Knight, 2008). There is a risk that these irregular ex-combatants impair "the peace process and undermine progress towards security and development… [therefore] they need special attention", here DDR is a well-suited method (Bell and Watson, 2006: 6, in Knight, 2008).

However, the DDR approach to peace building is a process that polarizes academics. Many are in favour of this approach and follow the UN-led DDR. They argue that if there are any difficulties with implementing DDR programs, it is not because of the UN-led approach but because of the conditions and environment in which it is implemented. The main critique on the DDR approach, especially the UN-led programs, is that they are not "relevant in today's international politics and the world of state-building" (Giustozzi, 2012: 1). These UN programs furthermore are often specifically targeting the demobilization of the former combatants, it is even stated that:

> *"Demobilizing combatants is the single most important factor determining the success of peace operations. Without demobilization, civil wars cannot be brought to an end and other critical goals – such as democratization, justice and development – have little chance for success" (United Nations General Assembly, 2004: 61).*

Giustozzi argues that this claim by the UN is not supported by evidence. He argues that elements of post-conflict rehabilitation, state-reconstruction and the role of leadership are often neglected. These elements are crucial in maintaining peace and allowing for the reintegration of former combatants.

Another problem with the DDR theorizing is its focus on developing countries. There are hardly any cases applied to instances in the Global North. This is mainly due to the fact that most violent conflicts take place in the so-called Global South. This focus neglects the issues of foreign fighters from the Global North who have fought in countries in the Global South but are returning to the Global North. When examining the issue of returning foreign fighters, the debate mainly focusses on the potential threat the returnees pose to the western society (Bakker, Paulussen and Entenmann, 2014; Byman and Shapiro, 2014; Holmer and Shtuni, 2017) and hardly examines the options for sustainable reintegration.

3.
Methods

3.1 Research Design

This research was designed with the intention of interviewing and engaging with participants. I wanted it to be very hands-on with a lot of in-person interactions and discussions. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a problem to this idea. The research designs and plans had to be altered in such a way that data could be gathered both online and offline.

For the primary data collection in-depth qualitative conversations were designed. This method was chosen because it offers local perspectives on a national issue. Furthermore, it enabled this research to engage with people and ideas that do not always get a platform to speak. Lastly, it matched the research questions and the research expectations.

The secondary data was obtained by conducting a thorough literature review of available academic literature on polarization, DDR theorizing, and returning foreign fighters. This literature was acquired via the online library of Erasmus University, which has subscriptions to numerous academic journals and access to various databases. The wide variety of used journals published in various field such as security, conflict, peace, and terrorism studies, criminology, sociology, political sciences, and communication and psychology. Besides academic material, secondary data also consisted of reports by the Dutch government, the European Union, and think tanks such as the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT). Lastly, media publications such as online newspaper articles, tv interviews, news broadcasts, or social media uploads were used.

3.2 Data Collection

For this research, seven in-depth interviews and one focus-group discussion with four participants were conducted. Initially I wanted to interview women from the communities from which many Jihadists originate: I contacted community houses located in neighbourhoods with known cases of Syria-goers, Islamic women's organisations, and Islamic student organisations, asking if they knew female members who were affiliated with the topic and interested in participating. Unfortunately, few people responded to my invitation. I think this was partly due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic; this research was simply not a priority. Besides, the fieldwork took place during the Dutch summer break thus many organisations or people were on leave and did not reply to the invitations. This lack of response required an alternative approach. Thus, people involved in local politics were contacted, this would allow for a more holistic perspective on the research question because there is a greater difference between the participants. Furthermore, this research engaged with people who have an opinion on the debate but are not necessarily involved; by-standers.

The interviews were conducted in the months July, August and September. The participants were contacted from June onwards (see appendix A for more information about the participants, their role in the research, and way of conducting the interview), if necessary reminders were sent or new participants were invited. In total, over 35 invitations were sent. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the participants were offered the option to choose between online or in-person interviews if they followed the COVID-19 regulations of the Dutch government. The latter was preferred but if anyone felt uncomfortable conducting

the interview in-person, it was scheduled online. Before conducting in-person interviews, permission was requested from the ISS Crisis Management Team by providing a proposal which explained the COVID-19 measures applied to in-person fieldwork. With in-person interviews, I let the participants select a place for the interview where they felt comfortable. However, when they selected a public place with too much noise and distractions such as a café, I proposed a different location. Three interviewees and the participants of the focus group discussion (FGD) decided to participate in an offline setting, the other eight interviewees preferred to conduct the conversation online. Whenever the latter was the case, the participants were offered the choice between three online platforms; Skype, Google Meet, and WhatsApp voice- or videocall. Once a participant proposed to use the videocall function in Facebook Messenger, I agreed with this and it worked fine.

When planning the interviews, the "Three Phases" of interviewing were taken into account: "Before, during and after" (Beuving and de Vries, 2015). Before the interview, the participants were contacted, and a meeting was set. Furthermore, an interview guide based on the research questions was created. This guide was not fixed, during the interview questions changed and over the course of the fieldwork, some questions were altered, added, or removed. The participants were sent an information sheet and consent form, right before the start of the interview they were asked if they had filled in the consent form and if they had any questions regarding the form or information sheet. During the interview, I tried to focus mainly on my participants and take as little notes as possible because it felt like it obstructed the natural flow of a conversation. However, when there were important facial expressions or remarks made, a quick note was taken. Luckily, all participants except one agreed to record the conversation so it was not a big issue if I did not take many notes. After the interview, the recordings were transcribed as soon as possible because it was still fresh in my memory. Irrelevant content was left out, this mainly consisted of the informalities at the beginning and end of the conversation. After that, a short personal reflection in the fieldwork journal was written. Then, the interviews were analysed by using ATLAS.ti 9; a computer program that can be used to analyse qualitative data.

Besides interviews, one FGD with four participants took place. Here I paid special attention to the group dynamics and allowed everyone to speak and kept in mind that highly private topics or thoughts might not be addressed due to the lack of privacy in a group (Seal, Bogart and Ehrhardt, 1998). Literature on FGD does not fully agree on the amount of people partaking in the discussion: I decided to invite four women because it would be my first time facilitating such a discussion and I did not want it to be overwhelming. The women who participated in the discussion were not selected by myself, they were volunteers at a community centre and the volunteering coordinator arranged the discussion. According to my contact person, they shared similar experiences and backgrounds, and could all relate to the topic of my research, which is important in an FGD (Hennink, 2013). After the discussion, the recordings were transcribed and analysed it in the same way as with the individual interviews.

After the first analysis of the data collected with the 11 participants it became clear that some information was missing. To fill up these gaps, four interviews were scheduled with by-standers following the same procedures as previously. One interview was in-person, the others online. After transcribing the interviews, they were not uploaded to ATLAS.ti 9. For the analysis, only on the parts that could fill the gaps were used and highlighted. Hence, the four interviews are not included in the data of table 3.1. Thus, in total I interviewed 15 people, of which 14 conversations were in Dutch, the used materials from these interviews were translated by me.

3.3 Data Analysis

After the reading of the 11 transcripts for the first time, six main themes came forth:

- Opinion/thoughts on people who travelled to Syria and Iraq
- Opinion/thoughts on the bringing to justice and return of Syria-goers
- Opinion/thoughts on reintegration or after serving sentence
- Role of local/national government and politics
- Influence from society
- Role of the media

These six themes were then further analysed by using codes in ATLAS.ti 9. In total there were 40 codes and 334 passages were labelled with a code. The 40 codes are listed alphabetically in the table below, in brackets it shows how often the code was used in the entire document:

Attention for debate (2)	Chasm in society (1)	Children (26)	Community (16)
Control (8)	Dialogue (5)	Education (5)	Expertise (2)
Family (11)	Fear (3)	Getting in contact (6)	Government (19)
Guidance/support (23)	Innocence (4)	International organisation/cooperation (10)	Justice (39)
Knowledge of debate (7)	Local in NL (5)	Mass migration (1)	Meaning Jihad (13)
Media (21)	Motivation/reason to travel to Syria (26)	Nuance (4)	Opinion on return (44)
Opinion on Syria-goers (27)	Participating in society (8)	Perspective for a future (5)	Polarisation (5)
Politics (7)	Psychology (7)	Racism/discrimination/exclusion (21)	Regional in Syria/Iraq (8)
Regret (3)	Reintegration (28)	Responsibility (6)	Role of death penalty (10)
Role of faith (16)	Safety (19)	Society (20)	Victim (2)

Table 3.1: list of used codes

The 40 codes were grouped according to the six themes, this allowed for easy and quick views of the correlations between fragments of interviews and between interviewees.

4.
Returning (ex-)Jihadi Women; the Debate

4.1 Justifying Their Comings and Goings

4.1.1 Foreign Fighters, not a new phenomenon

Foreign fighters are not a phenomenon unique to the Syrian civil war. In the 1980s, the fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan attracted Western foreign fighters from Europe and the United States, later in the 1990s many joined the fights in Bosnia along with new Western foreign fighters (Bakker and De Roy van Zuijdewijn, Jeanine, 2014). Later in the period 2000-2011, several Dutch citizens participated in civil wars in countries such as Pakistan and Chechnya (De Bie, De Poot and Van Der Leun, Joanne P., 2015). Moreover, in that same period Al Shabaab managed to attract fighters from the Global North, mainly from the US and Canada, but also from European countries such as the Netherlands, to fight in Somalia (Bakker and De Roy van Zuijdewijn, Jeanine, 2014). Interestingly, all these conflicts attracted Islamic fighters, creating the idea that most instances of foreign fighters are related to Islam (ibid.). However, that belief is wrong; two Dutch cases show this.

The first case is relatively old: it involved approximately 700 Dutch men who fought in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s against the upcoming Fascist regime of Francisco Franco (Kruizinga, 2020). When the fighters returned to the Netherlands, they were not given a warm welcome and their citizenship was revoked. They were scrutinized by the intelligence services who were looking for connections between them, the Communist party, and the IRA (Irish Republican Army) (Kruizinga, 2018). The second case of a Dutch non-Islamic fighter is Tanja Nijmeijer, a Dutch woman who joined the Colombian FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in 2002 (Johnson and Jonsson, 2013). In the Dutch media she is often portrayed as a crazy idealist and member of a terrorist organisation responsible for many attacks (Botje, 2010; Boer, 2012). In January 2020, Nijmeijer announced that she left the FARC because she did not feel like she belonged anymore (NOS Nieuws, 2020b). Participant O mentioned in the interview that case the men fighting in the Spanish Civil War is the only historical example on which the Dutch government can rely on when considering what to do with the returning (ex-)Jihadis. He argued that although the zeitgeist of that case is different, it is the only form of jurisprudence that parallels the current debate. He thought that the case of Nijmeijer is not suited; although it is more recent it did not show any parallels because she is not expressing a desire to return to the Netherlands or asking the Dutch government for help.

4.1.2 Thoughts on Joining IS

Peresin and Cervone (Peresin and Cervone, 2015) explain that Western women who travel to Syria and Iraq identify themselves as 'Muhajirah' (singular, plural: 'Muhajirat'). The term indicates that the women are migrants and it originally means the "one who avoids or abandons bad things" (p.495). This suggests that the women who travel to the Caliphate are migrants who are abandoning the Western, pagan world. The women are not satisfied with their lives in the West and they seek to change their lives through religion (ibid.). This shows

a strong "us-versus-them" narrative (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, n.d.) from the side of the Jihadis who have committed themselves to an ideological extreme (DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson, 1996) and moved away from mainstream (Dutch) society. In another article, Peresin (2018) elaborates on who the women joining IS are. The majority is 16-24 years old, a few are younger, some are older. Most of the Muslimas travelled with their Jihadi husbands, others travelled alone to join their husbands who were already there or whom they married via the Internet. Some came with relatives, children, or friends. Bakker and De Leede (2015) argue that most of the women are either docile and naïve or dominant agitators with deep convictions. They mostly come from moderate Muslim families and some of them converted to Islam during their adult lives.

To understand the motivations of the Dutch and European Muslimas to travel to the Caliphate, it is important to understand what 'Jihad' means. It is often translated as 'holy war' but according to Cook (2015) this definition is narrow-minded and Christian, it does not fully cover the actual meaning of Jihad. He argues that Jihad is first and foremost a form of spiritual warfare in which the faithful fights against the unfaithful evil. However, it can also consist of military action used by the faithful to expand and defend Islam (ibid.). The former is a non-violent spiritual struggle in which one focusses on development of the self and tries to defy desires that are wrong in Islamic belief. The latter is a struggle against enemies of Islam and takes a physical shape (Ali, 2019). This is what IS exactly did: they used the Jihad as a 'political weapon' and waged war against its enemies (ibid.) However, it can be argued that the Jihad of IS is also a spiritual one, especially for the Western Jihadis who decided to travel to the Caliphate. They leave behind the West filled with its 'evil desires'. It is clear that the radicalization of the women is also imbued with polarization. As a group, the Jihadis show a strong group identity because they have an aversion to the West. Furthermore, they are far removed from any other group in society. Importantly, the Jihadis identify themselves as better than other groups and continuously try to distinguish themselves from the others (Hogg, 2016). These elements indicate within-group polarization.

The women from the communities – B, A, H, F and Y – pitied the (ex-)Jihadi women because they had been brainwashed by IS and by the idea that they were living by the true rules of Islam, whilst according to the community women this was not true. The fact that the (ex-)Jihadi women believed that Jihad meant killing people in the name of faith is a wrong interpretation of Islam. B pointed out to me that there even is a verse in the Quran which states that "if you murder one person… it's as if you murder humanity". Besides B, Y also mentioned that killing people is not allowed in Islam. From these conversations it is evident that Muslims, who are perceived by the media as a homogenous group, are also dealing with within-group polarization dynamics. Within their "group", some Muslims are moderates whereas others are ideological extremists. The within-group differences are suppressed and not attended to (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, 2018) which creates cleavages within the group. Some within the group are operating under radical values and often follow one or a few ideological leaders (ibid.) who try to draw in more radicalized Muslims and deepen the cleavages even further.

B continued telling me that the women who joined IS are used by men as objects; they do not have the rights that a woman normally has in Islam. The community women make a distinction between themselves and the (ex-)Jihadi women. It seems as if their social identity that they prescribe to themselves differs from the social identity they prescribe to the (ex-)Jihadi women. The community women arguably identify their group as better towards women and Islam, and also more legitimate because they do not misinterpret Islam (Hogg, 2016). The women from the FGD also pointed out that the Jihadi women are misinterpreting Islam. H said she is "angry because they use faith to go to paradise there… that is not what I have learned", A and Y said that Jihad is not about killing people, it is about

"working hard and doing something good for yourself and your children…" to which F added that "Mohammed the Prophet said… be friends with everyone, faithful and unfaithful… treat everyone well". However, F said that the words of the Prophet and the Quran are sometimes complicated and tough to understand for young people. They can easily misinterpret them and be influenced by people who tell them what it means, whereas in reality, F argues, these people are brainwashing and radicalizing their youth. The women told me that young people easily misinterpret the Quran because they do not understand the language or its difficult way of writing. When they come across a complicated passage, they are not inclined to do research themselves to understand it better. Since they do not attempt to create a better understanding themselves, the women argue that the youth is vulnerable for misinterpretations.

Participant X – a member of FvD – is strongly against the decision of these (ex-)Jihadi men and women to join IS. He argued that the actions committed by Dutch Jihadis were in sometimes "even worse" than the actions of the Nazi's during World War II. The Jihadis "knew what they choose for" because the "cruel actions" of IS were clearly visible in the propaganda videos. Later in an email he added that some of the German soldiers "thought they were fighting for their homeland, not knowing which atrocities they were supporting". He further argued that the actions of female Jihadis might have been more evil than those of male Jihadis because the women "took control during the raping… and facilitated that and the likes". Here he implies that women of IS are even worse than the men because the women deny their involvements. It seems as if X is arguing that women can only possess one femininity, which is preferably a maternal one. If they convey a militant femininity it is inherently wrong for him and even more cruel compared to a man showing militant masculinity.

Participant O considered the act of joining IS "an example of treason, they renounce the Netherlands and swear allegiance to another state". He further described it as a criminal act because the women were "an integral part of the organisation [known as] Islamic State". Participants S and L agreed with O and said they did not understand why the women decided to join IS. L said, they could "have known that the Netherlands condemns IS because it stands for everything that the Netherlands does not". She admitted that some women did not know what they signed up for, but they still could have known that their decision to travel to Syria or Iraq was bad if they had followed the Dutch news. For her, the women were morally wrong and did not behave according to unwritten rules for Dutch citizens.

Generally, compared to L, O, S, and X the other participants were less harsh on the women. Here already the first signs of the dichotomy between the participants become visible. There is a disparity in how the two groups perceive the (ex-)Jihadi women and their actions, indicating polarization (Esteban and Schneider, 2008). Importantly, many were also interested in trying to explain and understand why women decided to join IS and which underlying issues caused such radical thinking:

> *"On the one hand… it is a morally bad decision, not only for them but also for the region they decide to go to because they decide to join a movement that is in my opinion morally reprehensible and operates highly destructive and inhumane, barbarian… On the other hand you have to envision their motivation in a certain daylight. You always have to consider what drives someone to do such a thing."* – G

According to G, underlying socio-economic issues had to be considered when looking at the motivations of young people who radicalized and joined IS. He said that issues such as inequality and a lack of perspective for your future in the Netherlands can lead to radicalization. It is necessary to try to understand how their societal position influenced their decision. Often this is blamed on failed integration, however, this cannot be the only reason the radicalized youth do not see a future in the Netherlands since approximately 17% of 207 Dutch Jihadis are converts (Groen, 2017). Some of the participants acknowledged that socio-economic factors play a role in the motivation of women to join IS but they found it difficult to fully understand why the women made that decision. V argued that for him it is very challenging to place oneself in the shoes of these women and understand what internal and external factors contributed to their decision. By saying this, he implicitly acknowledged his position of privilege and therefore his inability to fully understand the (ex-)Jihadi women.

The argument for the need to understand the socio-economic factors was confirmed by four women – A, F, H and Y – who participated in the FGD. These women all volunteered at a community centre in their neighbourhood, the Schilderswijk[8] in The Hague. Some of them knew cases of families whose son(s) or daughter(s) travelled to Syria. They told me that they were afraid that their children would not feel welcomed or at home in the Netherlands and would thus turn to extremism. H said that "fortunately [my daughters] come to me when they cry, are sad" whenever they have experienced racism or exclusion because H said that she "can share stories and give advice, but some adults… use you in such a way… that you lose yourself". In other words, her daughters could have gone to another person, fall into the wrong hands and radicalize. The other three women confirmed H's feelings; they all want their children and those in the neighbourhood to feel welcomed and respected in the Netherlands. Interestingly, the women constantly reflected on their fears because they saw cases in their neighbourhood were young people and their children shared similar experience of racism and discrimination often due to polarization. However, some children dealt with it differently, resulting in radicalization.

Exclusion and belonging also played an important role in the thoughts of R: she argued that youth radicalized and joined IS because they felt they did not belong in the society in which they grew up. Since they were searching a sense of belonging, R claimed that they were easy victims for manipulation. She further argued that the space in which you belong does not really matter. According to her, social belonging is more important. This lack of social belonging in the Netherlands comes forth out of the ethnic segregation and concentration of marginalized (ethnic) groups in specific neighbourhoods (van der Laan Bouma-Doff, W., 2007). Due to the segregation, the inhabitants of a certain neighbourhood are removed from the more mainstream and privileged groups in the Dutch society thus creating a sense of isolation and lack of belonging (ibid.). Additionally, in the past the Dutch government was a strong advocate of multiculturalism, but over the last 15 years they have distanced themselves from it and emphasized assimilation and integration. The policies of multiculturalism have only increased the feeling of cultural distance, prejudice and perception of threats (Mahfud *et al.,* 2018), leading to a lack of social belonging among marginalized groups in the Netherlands.

[8] The Schilderswijk is a neighbourhood in The Hague mainly populated by people with a migration background. In 2020, 91,4% of the inhabitants of the Schilderswijk had a migration background, compared to 55,7% in the entire municipality of The Hague (Gemeente Den Haag, 2020). The neighbourhood is poor compared to the rest of the city and struggles with "socio-economic, linguistic and occupational inequalities" compared to native Dutch citizens (Bruijn, 2012 in:; Verloo, 2018: 2359). Furthermore, in 2014 there was a pro-IS manifestation in the neighbourhood where the participants protested for the release of Muslim men who were suspected of participating in terrorism (OmroepWest, 2014).

4.1.3 The Desire to Come Back

As mentioned in section 1.1, 23 women expressed their desire to return to the Netherlands. However, the opinions regarding the wish of the (ex-)Jihadi women to return are highly divided. There is a group who wants to allow the women and children to return to the Netherlands and reintegrate in society. Another group thinks the women should stay in Syria and Iraq. Besides these two major camps, there are some who want only the children to return. Clearly, there are two main groups who possess very strong binary opinions. Especially the group that is against the return of the (ex-)Jihadis is supported by outspoken political players (McCoy *et al.*, 2018) like Thierry Baudet and Geert Wilders who are activating the underlying social cleavages of anti-Muslim sentiment, failed multiculturalism and threats to Dutch traditions, morals and values and project this onto the debate.

One of the main motivations against the return of Jihadis is the fear that they will plan and commit terrorist attacks in Europe. This idea is not only prevalent among citizens, but it also informs policy making on a national and European level (Scherrer *et al.,* 2018). The fear for the (ex-)Jihadis comes forth from anger with terrorist attacks in Europe that are linked to Islamic extremism. On social media, it is often argued that all Muslims are bad and responsible for terrorist attacks: this is a cause and effect of Islamophobia (Magdy, Darwish and Abokhodair, 2015). After the Paris terrorist attacks in 2015[9], it appeared that a negative, anti-Muslim sentiment was expressed on Twitter by controversial persons (e.g. Donald Trump, Ayaan Hirsi Ali) who have a large support-base, are right-winged, and expressed similar sentiments earlier (ibid.). These negative anti-Muslim posts serve as a cleavage and they feed into the fear and polarization which is visible amongst the thoughts of some of the interviewees.

Participant X expressed that under no circumstances whatsoever he wanted the (ex-)Jihadis to return, as he is afraid it will impede the safety of Dutch citizens because the (ex-)Jihadis hold values and beliefs that go completely against Western morals and values. He continued that even the children of the (ex-)Jihadis are not allowed to come back because they are "rooted there… [and] have been raised with a weapon in their hands", so they can pose a danger to Dutch children. Overall, he stressed that the (ex-)Jihadis were not allowed to return to Europe in general and the Netherlands in particular. They should be brought to justice in Syria or Iraq, and their passports should be revoked because they are a threat to the safety of the Netherlands. The chances that the returnees commit an attack are small because state that the returnees are under strict surveillance (Scherrer et al. 2018). However, when an attack happens, the consequences will be big. The European debate around the return of (ex-)Jihadis is therefore highly securitized which results in further securitizing the EU border and migration policies under the argument of preventing returning foreign fighters from entering the EU uncontrolled (Baker-Beall, 2019). Interestingly, the people who fear for their own safety and the safety of the country, only care about the safety of the native population. The fact that the (ex-)Jihadis are Dutch citizens too does not matter to them. The safety of "our people and our country" is more important as demonstrated by populist news outlets (GeenStijl, 2019; Willemsen, 2019; Forum voor Democratie, - FVD, 2017a; Van Damme, 2019). In other words, the native Dutch is the referent object for the populist. The rhetoric in the populist news outlets strengthen their position and attempt to undermine that of the opposite parties. Via that language and their actions, the against-group clearly distinguishes themselves from the others. They attempt to make the people who are in favour of the return

[9] On November 13 2015, six attacks at different locations throughout the city by gunmen and suicide bombers happened almost simultaneously between 21:20 and 21:40. The attackers were members of IS and killed 130 people and many more victims were wounded (BBC, 2015)

look weak by stating that they are against the safety of the Dutch people (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, 2018).

When I asked X about the state of the legal system in Syria and Iraq and the fact that they still sentence the death penalty, he replied that it was a consequence the (ex-)Jihadis could have foreseen when they decided to leave the Netherlands and go there. S agreed with him, she said that although it sounds harsh, the women could have known that this could happen to them. Moreover, they were both strong advocates of revoking the Dutch passports of the (ex-)Jihadis, because it disables them from travelling back to the Netherlands. X reasoned that we should not be afraid that the (ex-)Jihadis will arrive under the cover of being a migrant or refugee without a passport because he said that we also have to stop the mass-migration to Europe anyways, thus making it impossible for them to travel disguised as refugees. For S there is no harm in revoking the passports because the (ex-)Jihadis "will still be registered in some sort of surveillance system so when they disguise themselves as refugees, the system will recognize them". Ultimately, they would both rather see the women stay in Syria and Iraq than allowing them to come back. The revocation of citizenship comes from the idea that "people love their people and their country, they hate the enemy and they fear invasion and pollution of their 'culture and tradition'" (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 564). In this case, the (ex-)Jihadis are not perceived as "their people" but as the enemy who pose a threat to the Dutch culture and tradition and thus do not belong in the Netherlands.

Other responses to the desire of some of the women and children were milder. Two participants – IN and T – described a situation in which bringing the (ex-)Jihadis to justice in Syria or Iraq would be a good solution but the courts should live up to western standards, and death penalties were not an option for them. IN argued that Syria and Iraq "have a right to sentence the people" because the crimes were committed in their countries and not in Europe or the Netherlands. She thought international organisations such as the United Nations or Amnesty International should aid the (ex-)Jihadis as well as Syria and Iraq if they expressed a desire to bring the (ex-)Jihadis to court there. Her opinion is shared by others in the general debate who argue that the Iraqi and Syrian people have the right to see foreign IS members brought to justice by an Iraqi or Syrian court (tweedekamer.nl, 2019b). However, the European parliamentary research service (EPRS) (Scherrer *et al.,* 2018) questions the ability of the Iraqi and Syrian courts to provide a fair trial for the European Jihadis. They argue that in areas controlled by the Syrian government, the courts do not meet international standards of impartiality and independence. However, most European Jihadis are currently in areas not controlled by the Syrian government where the courts are of a different standard. The Netherlands in particular are compromising the "right to a fair trial" (ibid. p.56) of the Dutch Jihadis, because they are not offering aid to those who want to return and some politicians even demand the stripping of Dutch nationality (tweedekamer.nl, 2019a).

T argued that ideally the (ex-)Jihadi women would be brought to court in Syria and Iraq, but under standards set by the international community: while awaiting their trial they would be looked after while staying in reasonable camps. However, T realized that this was an ideal situation and nearly impossible to achieve. O pointed out that it is impossible to bring the (ex-)Jihadis to court in the region because the legal system is uncapable of that, it is severely damaged due to the war. He is more in favour of the approaches of the United Kingdom and France; they actively tried to eliminate their "Jihadi-population" in Syria and Iraq by performing airstrikes. However, he understood that for the Netherlands that is impossible right now and suggested that the Dutch government follows the example of the United States who actively bring back its (ex-)Jihadis and charge them for acts of terrorism in the US. According to him, that option can have a wider public support than the alternative of bringing the (ex-)Jihadi back and allowing them to return to their "normal lives". O was

not the only one who stressed the need for justice and the impossibility of serving that in Syria or Iraq. R argued that despite the crimes the Jihadis committed, they have the right to a fair trial just like any other criminal. Although she understood the desire of some to treat the Jihadis differently and to bring them to court in Syria and Iraq, she said it cannot be justified, either morally or legally. Everyone has the right to a fair trial, even (ex-)Jihadis. Furthermore, the court system in Syria and Iraq is heavily damaged due to the war and therefore is not capable of offering a fair trial.

Those who want to allow the returnees to come back to the Netherlands argue that here the returnees can receive a fair trial and they can go through a trajectory of deradicalization. Especially the women and their children should be granted the right to return since they show remorse and the situation in the camps is dangerous. Furthermore, it is not a mentally and physically healthy environment for children to grow up in. It is more likely that these children will also radicalise if they stay in the camps and hence will form a new generation of extremist Muslims with anger and resentments against the West (tweedekamer.nl, 2019b).

G and M argued that starting a trial against the women in Syria or Iraq will result in death penalty. Morally the Netherlands cannot let that happen, thus they believe the women should be brought back to the Netherlands and appear in court here. The women of the FGD supported this idea: Y said that the Netherlands "is responsible for its people, [t]hus the government should … help them to return to the society… [and let] those people come back", the other three women participating in the FGD agreed. R argued that not only the Netherlands, but all European countries need "to step up their game" because they carry a responsibility in the war in Syria. Their citizens decided to go there and fight for IS, so the EU needs to act responsibly and ensure that it takes care of its citizens, even if they are (ex-)Jihadis.

However, X expressed his concerns regarding the Dutch legal system and the idea of allowing the (ex-)Jihadi women and their children to return. He feared that the (ex-)Jihadis would be free within a matter of just a few years due to a lack of evidence and biased judges. In an email he added that the courts and other important institutions are occupied by people with a "leftist activist" agenda. This is visible in the way the Dutch courts deal with criminal illegal migrants who receive "light punishments" for their crimes and are rarely sent back to where they came from after they have committed a crime. X called it a "strange form of the Stockholm Syndrome". The Dutch institutions are held captive by the leftist activists and the institutions sympathize with the migrants and (ex-)Jihadis, therefore he preferred to see the (ex-)Jihadis remain in Syria and Iraq and be brought to court there. The other participants expressed to have more faith in the Dutch legal system. They believed that the returnees should be brought to justice here, even if it is to avoid death penalty. They stressed the need for appropriate and strict penalties, however, as T said they cannot be punished forever, one day they need to be able to live a normal life in society.

The diverging opinions regarding the desires to return are defined by a strong polarization. The characteristics of the issues around the reintegration are social and cultural-ideological in nature and unites people with the same morals, values and beliefs regarding it (McCoy *et al.*, 2018). When examining the formation of groups and the basic elements that contribute to the working of polarization (Esteban, Joan, and Schneider, 2008), it becomes clear that there is a small number of groups participating in the debate. There are is a group who condemn the decision to join IS and is against the return of the (ex-)Jihadis, participants X, O, S, and L identify with this group. Furthermore, there is the group who also condemns the decision to join IS but wants to put in in perspective and allows the (ex-)Jihadis to return, which the remainder of the participants associate with. The differences between these two groups are stark, indicating a high level of polarization (ibid.). Moreover, there is a level of homogeneity within the groups since they all hold similar beliefs and opinions (ibid.) However, it is difficult to judge the level of group identity. Typically when there is a high

level of polarization, the group identity is strong but especially the group who allows the (ex-)Jihadi women to return is so diverse that it is hard to tell if they possess a strong group identity.

4.2 The Role of the Media and Polarization

4.2.1 The Media

Most of the participants told me that the media played an important role in the national debate revolving around the return and reintegration of the (ex-)Jihadi women. S and L stated that the media usually only focussed on the negative side of the story. L said that the media "does not look at the motivation of the women and children to return… which can offer a very interesting perspective [to the debate] but the media hardly pays any attention to those [perspectives]". Going hand in hand with this lack of multiple perspectives is the idea of absence of nuance as described by G, M, and T. They pointed out that the nuance is often lacking in media coverage on this topic, and the messages can be very polarizing. This was also visible in the beforementioned video fragment of PAUW. The guests argued that either the (ex-)Jihadis and the children could return or they should remain in Syria and Iraq, there was no in-between, nuance was lacking as the "against-side" portrayed all women as equally bad and equally responsible for crimes they may or may not have committed. The absence of nuance in media is, according to Yang et al. (2016), the result of the simplification of complex issues. The media attempts to distil complicated topics into accessible and understandable explanations. However, it can easily lead to oversimplifications and an absence of nuances, which can then result in people perceiving an issue or debate as polarized.

The desire for more nuance in the media was also visible in the replies of participants such as B and the women of the FGD. According to B, the media places the concept and idea of "Jihad in a wrong context": she said that the media associates it with "violence, bloodbath, terrorism, [and] attack[s]", this is not what Jihad is about for her and many other Muslims. They associate Jihad with living a virtuous life and fighting the evil in yourself. The misrepresentation of Jihad by the media results, according to B, in a fear for the other. Polizzi (2019) argues that images of war and violence are often used to manipulate "a specific ideological point [of] view that becomes recognizable to a specific viewing 'subject'" (p.51). In this case the media portrays Jihad as the enemy of Western ideology and identity. These two elements influence how the images and news of the Syrian conflict and violence by Islamic extremists are viewed and perceived (ibid.). When viewers constantly see someone who looks different from themselves kill, hurt, or torture people they identify with, they construct an identity and "ideology that will encourage a specific type of action against the identified guilty party" (Polizzi, 2019: p.51, paraphrasing; Ahmed, 2015; Agnew, 2010; Griffin, 2012). In this case, viewers in the Netherlands see Jihadis committing violent attacks in Europe, beheadings of Western journalists in the Caliphate, all in the name of Allah and Islam. This results in labelling people who visibly identify as Muslims or look like them as guilty, and anti-Muslim sentiments imbued with fear. This is confirmed by the four FDG women. H stated that after terrorist attacks in Belgium (time and location were not specified) she experienced harassment on the street. A man (his appearance was not specified) approached her and started to blame immigrants and Muslims, they caused the attacks. On another occasion at work, a client started complaining to her about her hijab and background, H replied by saying "… you have only seen negative things about the hijab on the television"

implying that the clients perspective was influenced by the negative portrayal of migrants and Muslims in the media, which again refers back to Polizzi's (2019) argument on the portrayal of the one who is clashes with your identity and ideology and is perceived guilty. F and Y said that on numerous occasions people screamed "go back to your own country" or "cancer-headscarf[10] piss off" to them and over the past few years such comments have become more frequent. Since they look different from the Dutch norm, and their appearances have commonalities with Islamic extremists such as IS, they are perceived as the enemy and experience harassment.

The misrepresentation and discrimination as highlighted by B, H, F and Y can be interpreted as attempts of a united group wanting to emphasize the differences between themselves and another group (Esteban, Joan, and Schneider, 2008; McCoy et al., 2018). By deploying means of misrepresentation and discrimination, it is easier to portray your opponents as weak, bad, and different, hence strengthening the polarizing "us-versus-them" narrative (ibid.). When this misrepresentation is constantly repeated in the media, and it is not corrected, it only reinforces the cleavages between two groups in a society. Furthermore, the misrepresentation of Jihad and the "us-versus-them" narrative is also influenced by membership categorization (MC), which is based on common-sense knowledge about people and things, which categorizes them into a group and reproduces the common-sense knowledges about this group (Leudar, Marsland and Nekvapil, 2004). In this case, the common-sense knowledge about Jihad consists of the idea that it equates violence. It further assumes that all Muslims believe in this form of Jihad, hence they are all categorized in this negative group and the stereotypes about them are reproduced. The reproduction usually takes the shape of discrimination. However, as the women indicated, there is not one single version of Jihad and they do not identify with the violent interpretation of Jihad, therefore making the category of Muslims as bad people who support a violent Jihad invalid, yet very persistent.

O believed that the media had hollowed out the public support base for the return of (ex-)Jihadi's. According to him, the continuous repetition of the same messages – they can come back, or they should stay in Syria and Iraq – have caused the debate to die out a little and make the messages less convincing. Moreover, he argued that the media does not allow the (ex-)Jihadis to reintegrate "peacefully" because they "immediately become celebrities…[or] show objects representing Islamic State". This is in line with Down and Han's (2020) argument that media is drawn to polarizing topics, thus only increasing the attention and reinforcing the level of polarization. The fact that a (ex-)Jihadi returns to the Netherlands is a highly controversial issue, as is illustrated by the amount of media coverage on Laura H., the IS-girl who returned to the Netherlands. She was invited to talk shows, opinion pieces were written on her, she was on the news, and even a book about her story was published which is now converted into a play.

X deviated from the idea that the media negatively portrays migrants and Muslims, although it could be argued that he thinks the media impacts the debate negatively too. He stated that the media and other parts of society such as education are predominantly shaped by people with extreme leftist ideas. He calls this "cultural Marxism"[11], the important

[10] In the Netherlands, severe diseases are often used as a swearword.

[11] X believed the debate is largely shaped by people who have taken the idea of "doing good" and human rights too far. He claimed that this is driven by a group of extreme leftist people who want to give them a second chance. He called the domination of extreme left "cultural Marxism" and explained this the following way: "the labourers have emancipated themselves thus they are not suited for the role of the victims anymore… and have moved to the PVV, [hence] the PvdA is very busy with protecting the allochthonous population instead of the labourers… whilst the labourers are irritated by the allochthonous population".

positions in society are occupied by the extreme left and thus do not reflect the ideas and opinions of the majority of the Dutch citizens because he believes that the majority of the people lean towards the right. Although a small number of people occupy these positions, it does influence the debate. The cultural Marxists want to give the (ex-)Jihadi women and their children a second chance, something many people disagree with according to X. He claimed that giving the (ex-)Jihadis a second chance and pitying them is a form of "oikophobia"[12], which is visible in various media outlets. From his ideas and opinions about the media and the debate, it becomes clear that X has diverged towards a so-called "ideological extreme" (DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson, 1996). As a member of FvD, he identifies with a group of people who are anti-establishment and are sceptical about integration, which are clear signs of being far-right[13] (Down and Han, 2020). The movement towards ideological extremes and the establishment and maintenance uphold and strengthen societal polarization.

4.2.2 Polarization

In the previous section it was concluded that the debate in the media lacks nuance; therefore it is very polarized. However, only three participants explicitly spoke about polarization as a phenomenon being a part of the debate. The others implied and described it but did not use the word explicitly. Nevertheless, it is still worth looking into polarization as a part of this issue, because at the beginning of the research I assumed that polarization would play a role, and have an impact on the women in the communities.

G, O, and V were the only ones who mentioned the word polarization in itself. G argued that:

> *"the polarized debate and extreme statements do not benefit the reintegration and societal guidance [of the (ex-)Jihadi women]. So, national politics carries a certain responsibility to not stigmatise and… turn people against each other… The media contributes to the polarization of the debate too. On the other hand… it is the role of the media to reflect [on what keeps a society occupied]."*

[12] Oikophobia is a concept that is adopted by conservative politicians and philosophers such as Roger Scruton and Thierry Baudet of FvD. Baudet defines it as the "renunciation of one's home" which along with an identity crisis in western Europe is a result of multiculturalism and mass-migration that threatens the Dutch Christian values (Kešić and Duyvendak, 2019: 449). For Scruton oikophobia is the hatred and fear of home due to multiculturalism (Suissa, 2020). Both refer to the nation as home.

[13] In a later conversation, X disagreed with the label "far-right". He thought it was unreasonable to be called that since "conventional right-winged parties like VVD had a very leftist approach". Furthermore, in other countries like Australia or Denmark certain measures to prevent migration had been installed and the FvD finds those measure exemplary, X finds it "weird to call those countries extreme-right". However, the FvD shows clear signs of being far-right populist political party because it presents an anti-establishment discourse in which it sees the elite as one of its enemies. Besides that, insecurities are projected onto another enemy namely "the Other" or "the Muslim" (Vieten and Poynting, 2016). The FvD argues that the mass-migration and the arrival of (Islamic) migrants is putting too much pressure on the Dutch society and identity (Forum voor Democratie, n.d.). Furthermore, far-right populist parties are often driven by nativism which claims that the nation and its territory is exclusively for its native population (Vieten, 2016). FvD wants to protect Dutch traditions and values and make it "our" country again. Moreover, the European Union impedes on the Dutch sovereignty and damages the Dutch economy (Forum voor Democratie, 2020).

He continues by saying that if the politicians or the media ignore a certain perspective, it strengthens the feeling of being unheard, and it increases polarization even more. Ultimately, he said it is the responsibility of politicians to listen to every perspective in the country, and the media has to accurately report on it, so politics[14] is mainly to blame for the phenomenon of polarization. V supported this claim: polarization in the media creates division in a society where two camps contradict each other. He further mentions that not all news outlets equally contribute to polarization, some more than others, and that they "sow hatred and fear". Interestingly, V only considered media that reflected an opinion completely the opposite of his opinions as polarizing. O argued that most of the media outlets stimulate polarization and support the tendency to not allow the (ex-)Jihadis to return, only a few – more intellectual but not very influential – outlets can conduce to increasing the public support for the returnees. The rest of the outlets that are popular among "average Joe will not create empathy or sympathy". Furthermore, O said:

> *"[the polarizing role of the media] is a breeding ground for extreme-right… because [the story of the left] about human rights and integration… has been heard too often. We get to hear it with the stream of refugees… juvenile delinquents… and immigration problems in general… if you repeatedly hear that we as Dutch citizens have to do the good thing and in juxtaposition to that [you hear] 'no we are not gonna do that, it is not safe, those people chose to do that…' I think the emotional argument of the right is much more convincing… or satisfying… it is more satisfying to say as a part of society we rebel against this"*

It seems as if the media is one of the major causes of polarization, Yang et al. (2016) point out that the way people perceive polarization is highly influenced by their exposure to media and the types of media they engage with. When a person is exposed to a certain media source that takes on a specific political issue reflecting their opinion, it influences how they perceive other perspectives. If the perspectives are very different from their own and exaggerated or mocked with by their preferred source of media, they might perceive the debate as more polarized (ibid.). This is reflected in the opinions of G, O, and V. They all indicated that they engage with different sources of media and they have certain preferences, because they found other sources to be too polarizing. G, for example, makes the distinction between "quality newspapers", "terrible newspapers" and social media, O separates "news for the average Joe" from less polarized sources which are of a higher standard. The other participants who did not mention the word polarization also did not mention that they engaged with the media a lot. Thus, it is possible that the participants G, O, and V were exposed more to different kinds of media in which opposing views were portrayed, thus they have a better perception of polarization in the Netherlands. However, one simply cannot argue the media influences these participants and society, or vice versa. The relationship between the two is negotiated through social relations of power and the two cannot exist separately. Thus, polarization is also not the result of only the media, or only societal factors. It is constituted through social relations of power.

Throughout some of the interviews, I noticed that media and politics are not the only ones to blame for polarization. B argued there was a chasm between certain groups of people in the Dutch society, in this case Muslims and non-Muslims, that was caused by a fear of the

[14] The Netherlands has a multiparty system that operates on the basis of consensus, political participation is correlated to the size of the municipality. During local and national elections, larger municipalities generally have lower voter turnouts compared to small municipalities (van Houwelingen, 2017). In the weeks leading up to the completion of this research, political parties realised their election manifestos for the upcoming national election in March 2021, these manifestos have not been included in this research.

other. She believed that due to misrepresentation in the media, non-Muslims were hesitant to meet the other. However, not only the media played a role in her argument since she also pointed out that education plays an important role. In many cases, children at school go and visit a church or a synagogue but do not visit a mosque. Already from a young age, it is made clear that Muslims are different from the rest. This idea is reinforced by T's story of her 16-year-old daughter whose school hires small organisations to give workshops about radicalisation several times a year. She said that during such a workshop they talk about issues such as identity and belonging, but they avoid the word (de)radicalisation, however, all the children in her daughter's class are aware that the workshop is about (de)radicalisation. T finds this very problematic: it creates the idea that "the Islamic classmates are weird and have a problem… they radicalise". According to her, it damages her daughter and fellow students because it emphasizes that they are different from the rest. T's example shows how at school, a difference is created between the children and how they are divided into groups: the Muslim children who have a problem, and the others. The situation in the classroom unites "the Muslims with a problem", and "the others" who were previously disconnected, and it creates a binary between the two. The underlying cleavages of radicalization and identity are activated and creates an "us-versus-them" narrative in the classroom (Esteban, Joan and Schneider, 2008; McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, 2018). Furthermore, it is important to illustrate that workshops like this play an important role in the socialization of young people which means that children or teens internalize social ideas, norms, or ideologies that society prescribes them (Neundorf and Smets,2017). Internalizing polarizing ideas – with or without consciously knowing or realising it – can have damaging consequences. These consequences are felt most by the victims of the polarizing thoughts, in this case the Muslim children who are perceived as different. Internalized polarizing ideas remain persistent and are challenging to overcome.

4.3 The Challenges for Reintegration

The Dutch government has published little information on how they deal with returning (ex-)Jihadis. They have indicated that upon arrival in the Netherlands, the returnees are arrested and are prosecuted based on the outcomes of criminal investigations. Moreover, the potential threat is estimated. Based on those two elements, case consultants determine which measures are needed to decrease the level of threat and danger to society. These measures and interventions differ per returnee and can take the shape of prosecution, mandatory deradicalization training, or restraining orders (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, n.d.b). Furthermore, national and local authorities attempt to minimalize or eliminate the access to financial means that will enable returnees to perform acts of terrorism and they try to prevent the spread of extremist propaganda both online and offline (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid, n.d.a). However, there is no mention of attempts and possibilities for reintegration.

Reintegration is an important step in helping the returnees part with their past because, if done correctly, it can help enhance the human and economic development and promote peace, political stability, and security (Nübler, 2000). It is necessary to re-establish social ties between the returnees and the community if we want reintegration to be successful. There has to be a focus on the specific needs of the returnee "in the re-entry process and the potential impact of the re-entry on community life" (Özerdem, 2012: 55) Furthermore, the involvement of family and taking responsibility for one contributes to the development of citizen identity (ibid). However, families need guidance in helping the returnees, as there can

be too much pressure on the level of support families must give, and returnees cannot always live up to the expectations (Breese, Ra'el and Grant, 2000). Another step towards reintegration is employment (Uggen, Manza and Behrens,2004). To find paid employment or on a voluntary basis, the returnees should be offered trainings to develop skills required for employment. All these steps are important to build post-conflict security for returnees (Özerdem, 2012). However, simply addressing these elements is not enough; Özerdem argues societal factors that caused people to turn towards violent extremism have to be addressed too, because they are usually the roots of the conflict. Furthermore, the DDR theorizing is very program-oriented meaning that the larger societal, economic and political issues are overlooked. Thus, it is necessary to move towards a process-oriented approach towards reintegration in which the underlying issues are addressed (Torjesen, 2013). Most important in the reintegration process is that the reliance and way of sourcing a livelihood moves away from the war-context, and towards a civilian way of sourcing a livelihood (ibid.). Thus, the returnees need to be socially and economically independent from radicalized sources.

When examining the responses, the participants never mentioned the need for disarmament and demobilization. Most of them assumed that the women who wanted to return were not active as fighters anymore. One of the most important elements mentioned by many of the participants is that the returnees should be enabled and helped with picking up a normal life and creating a feeling of belonging. V told me:

> *"I believe in second chances, that's what we do in the Netherlands. Whenever someone was punished and served their sentence, they re-enter society as a Dutch citizens, I don't see why it would not be possible for such women and men who travelled to Syria".*

V on the role of the communities:

> *"You are part of such a community… and it is extremely useful and good [source of] support to have [such a community]… when returning former jihadis want to integrate [and feel like they belong]… [Furthermore,] due to the intensive contact within the community, they are the first who can see when things possibly… go wrong and signal about this"*

According to Özerdem (2012), communities are vital in noticing and regulating irregular behaviour of returnees and they can play an important role in the prevention of repetition of past mistakes. V argued that too, however he also pointed out that:

> *"If the community excludes [returnees] than it only leads to radicalization and polarization, which is completely counterproductive"*

Here V points at the "us-versus-them" idea which can pose a threat to the reintegration of the returnees. When the communities specifically and the society in general turn themselves against the reintegration of the (ex-)Jihadi women, it will negatively impact their sense of belonging and possibility of reintegration. The returnees will be forced to adopt a certain social identity that is shaped by the polarization in which it is the "returnees-versus-the other". Thus, lack of acceptance and threat of exclusion can pose a challenge to the reintegration. The bond of the against-group is strengthened over that notion, which is weakening the position of the returnees (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer, 2018).

However, most of the participants do not acknowledge or notice the challenges for reintegration and are looking at possibilities. IN suggested for example that the returnees would help out in their neighbourhoods via volunteering, this could take different forms but

she beliefs it is important that the returnees can build and maintain new relationships and that they receive guidance and support from people with experience or expertise:

> *"I think it is very important to keep these people occupied after they served their sentence, so if they cannot directly find a job, it is a good idea to involve them in the community… do things such as volunteering and see if they can establish and maintain contacts that way… to become a part of society… and have one or two people who offer guidance… who can keep these people occupied and enthusiastic"*

By involving the returnees actively in the community through employment or volunteering they can increase their social capital and feel attached to their community (Uggen, Manza and Behrens,2004).

The women of the FGD all said the returnee women were welcome in their community centre. However, they acknowledged that patience from both sides was needed. The (ex-)Jihadi women need time to process their trauma and the people in the neighbourhood need time to adjust and accept. Furthermore, Y and A thought it was important to build trust between the community members, the returnees but also institutions such as the police:

> *"If those people return and you say 'yeah come to our community house, come to us we have activities', no those women are too afraid to come because they have been through so much… they don't trust anybody… they have a trauma"* – Y

Trust between the returnees, their families, their community but also institutions like the police or municipality had to be rebuilt, but A and Y did not tell me how this could be achieved. Dealing with the traumas and a lack of trust can impair the reintegration of the returnees because it prohibits them from engagement with the community and developing social capital (Putnam, 2001), which further stigmatizes the returnees and creates more polarization. A and Y further said that once trust was re-established and the (ex-)Jihadists felt welcomed and at home again, they could participate in informational projects for youth about their experiences with a focus on (de)radicalization.

The women of the FGD, G, and M all agreed that the communities could play an important role in the reintegration of the (ex-)Jihadis. The women said they could welcome them in their community house and host activities for them. M and G mentioned that the mosques in the community, but also community members could give the returnees some theological guidance by showing what Islam meant for them and that it does not have to be violent. T on the other hand, was more sceptical. She argued that the communities were unable to prevent the people from radicalizing and travelling to Syria or Iraq in the first place so she questioned whether they would be capable of helping them with successfully integrating:

> *"I think, they come from the communities and they could not prevent that they radicalized, so I would not go for that, I am more in favour of professional help and examining why people radicalize… You have to offer very good… trajectories… and I do not believe that if we have a nice Moroccan women with a headscarf who helps, all will be well… we have to examine per individual what is going on and not continuously confirm that where they came from is good, or bad"*

T's opinion is prevalent in the media as well, as people do not trust the abilities of the communities to help with reintegration. There is strong group formation in which those against reintegration and the role of the communities in it distance themselves from those in favour of the communities having a role in reintegration. The against-group is relatively homogenous and is characterized by visible leadership from politicians such as Wilders and

Baudet but also Yesilgöz. These politicians manage to pinpoint and enlarge the differences between themselves, the returnees, and the in favour-group and from that, they construct a narrative among which the against-group aligns.

Another interesting aspect that comes forward in the interviews was posed by G, M, and T. They all argued that if local and national governments want the reintegration to be successful, they should aim at addressing the underlying issues. Examining what made the women radicalize and decide to travel to Syria and Iraq to join IS is a step towards addressing structural issues such as socio-economic inequality or racism. However, this tends to be difficult if a society is polarized over such issues. Here, the anti-Muslim and populist sentiments as described in section 2.1 come forward, which argue that solving the socio-economic inequalities is a step towards neglecting the welfare, the needs, and the wellbeing of the native common man (Derks, 2006). Furthermore, for the populist groups in the Netherlands it makes sense that the Islamic communities from which the (ex-)Jihadis originate are struggling with socio-economic problems because Islam is backwards and does not meet the Dutch standards (Uitermark, Duyvendak and Mepschen, 2011). However, such thoughts create friction in Dutch society, leading to polarization. Many political parties and groups that are left-winged oppose the radical statements of the right which leads to a highly polarized debate. The strong binaries between the polarized sides make it difficult to move forward. It produces a conflict of interest which limits social and political progress on this issue (Esteban, Joan and Schneider, 2008). If there is no consensus on whether these women are allowed to come back, how can we even consider reintegration? Most of the participants believe that reintegration is possible, but many do not see the underlying structural issues, including polarization, that prevent reintegration.

5.
Conclusion

5.1 Summary and Final Thoughts

This research has shown that the reintegration of (ex-)Jihadi women is a complex issue affected by many different societal factors, most importantly societal polarization and the strong binary between diverging opinions. The public debate on reintegration is mainly shaped by two groups: those who want to allow the women to return to the Netherlands and reintegrate and those who want to see the (ex-)Jihadis remain in Syria and Iraq. However, this research has attempted to show the nuances between these opinions. Some people, like IN or T, ideally want to see the women be prosecuted in Syria and Iraq since they committed crimes there, but acknowledge that this is not possible. Others, like the women from the FDG, believe that the Netherlands should aid the women if they ask for help. Participants X and S do not want to let the women return under any circumstances. Unfortunately, many of these nuances and complexities are lost in the debate in the media. According to the participants, the media often contributes to the polarization because it lacks nuance, it misrepresents topics like Islam, which results in discrimination and racism, and it hollows out the support for the topic due to overexposure. The media manages to create division by ignoring or overemphasizing certain voices, subjects, or opinions. It further manages to sow hatred and fear, thus strengthening the binaries in society. However, not only the media contributes to polarization. Some participants argued that politics or education also play a big role in reinforcing societal polarization and the fear of the other, thereby creating differences.

The reintegration of the returnees is subjected to some challenges, one of which is the strong dichotomy in the Dutch society as a result of societal polarization. This is expressed in the anti-Muslim sentiment of populist parties, the fear for the other, and the lack of trust. All these elements affect reintegration and create difficulties for it. If a predominant group in society does not believe in second chances for the returnees, it is difficult to surpass their opinions and enable the returnees to reintegrate. Fortunately, there is some hope too. Participants in this research have repeatedly said that with the right guidance and help, reintegration on a community level is possible. Community members who participated have expressed their willingness to help the (ex-)Jihadi women and their children to find a place in their communities.

The interview results and the theorizing of Esteban and Schneider (2008), and McCoy, Rahman, and Somer (2018), illustrated that the debate in the Netherlands is highly polarized. This severely affects the reintegration, because there is no consensus on what to do. There is a strong "us-versus-them" narrative in which two groups face each other: the in-favour of reintegration group, and the against-return group. The differences between the groups are significant. Especially the against-group shows homogeneity, strong group identity values and polarizing rhetoric since they argue that (ex-)Jihadis cannot come back because it poses a threat to the national safety. Moreover, this group is driven by a few political players who manage to activate and unite people over a single issue, namely the threat of the (ex-)Jihadis. The in-favour group is more fragmented and does not have strong, visible leaders.

The media is an important polarizing tool in the debate because it is drawn to polarizing opinions and enlarges these, thus reinforcing the binaries and strengthening polarization (Down and Han, 2020). This makes it difficult to find a middle ground, which was confirmed by the participants. Furthermore, they argued that the media lacks nuance and some

mentioned that the negative aspects get more attention than the good. Here, the media oversimplifies the news by distilling the complex issue of return and reintegration into simple explanations (Yang *et al.,* 2016). For readers or viewers, it creates the idea that the system is polarized. Thus, societal polarization is visible in the society and the media, it makes it difficult for the discussion to move forward. Political and social progress is limited, as there is still no agreement on the issue of the returning (ex-)Jihadis.

5.2 Recommendations

This research is only the beginning of a long journey that explores the possibilities for (ex-)Jihadis and the implications of polarization which indicates that further research is necessary. It is recommended that it examines the ways in which societal polarization can be addressed and how to build bridges that overcome the cleavages created by it. Research should also investigate approaches towards reintegration that move beyond the challenges that were discovered in this research. Besides this, more attention has to be paid to the role of social media in this debate and its connection to polarization. Lastly, it is important that future research also listens to the voices of the returnees or the people who are still in Syria and Iraq but desire to return. Unfortunately, the latter and examining social media was outside the scope of this research.

Throughout the responses of some of the participants, it became clear that the government has to address the root causes of radicalization for reintegration to be successful. Here, this research would suggest policies and programs that address the socio-economic inequalities that the communities experience. G argued that the national government has to enable local governments to act on issues which allows the local authorities to help and support the communities where necessary. He pointed out that it is important to strengthen the bonds between the local authorities and the communities. The need for more collaboration and transparency between municipalities and local actors was also expressed by M. Additionally, the government also has to start addressing issues of societal polarization, discrimination, and racism more actively. One approach in tackling these issues would be education. Participants B and T talked about the role of education which only contributes to the polarization. Instead, B suggests that schools can collaborate with the government and the Islamic community in creating a curriculum which focusses on acceptance and diversity and avoids misrepresentations of Islam or any other group.

Ultimately, it is important that societal polarization decreases and more room for social and political progress is created. If the level of societal polarization does not diminish, it is hard to reach a consensus on the return and reintegration of the (ex-)Jihadi women. The media, the government, and politicians carry a responsibility: instead of creating division they have to find ways to work on unity, respect, and solidarity and guide people towards it.

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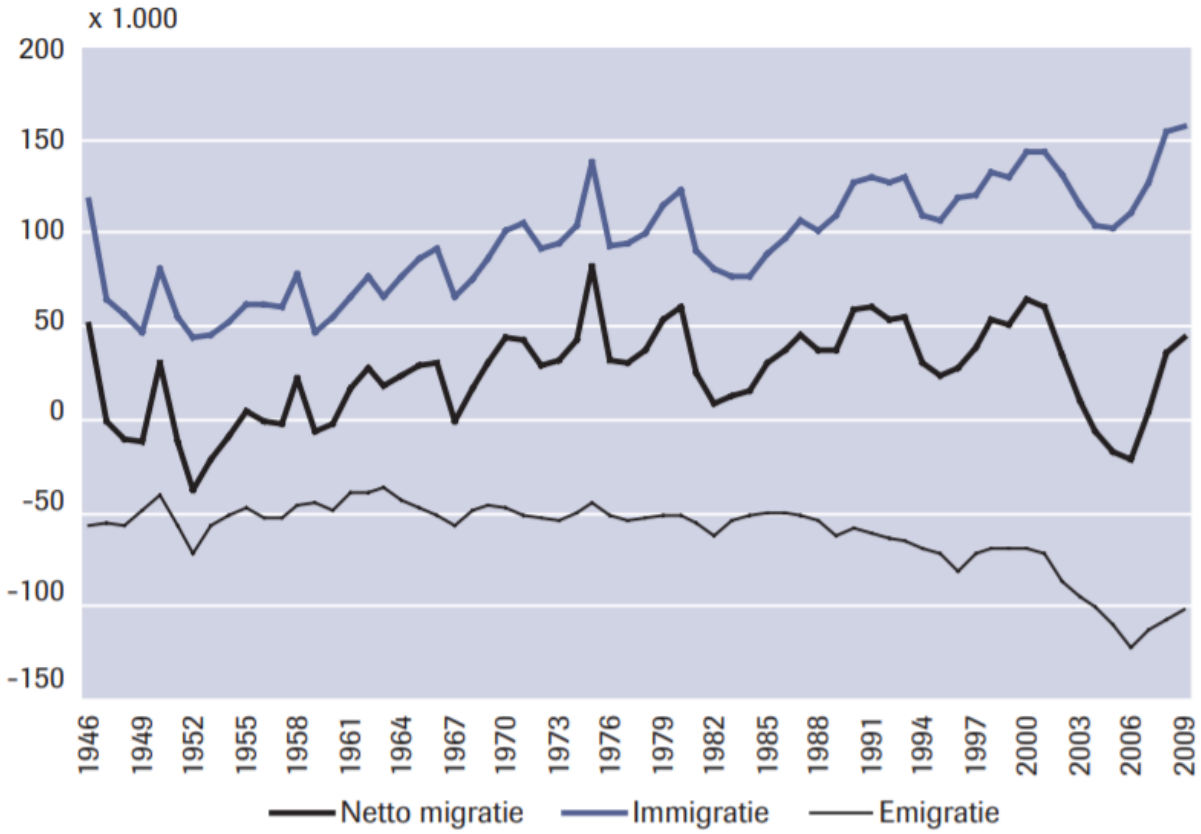
Appendix A
Overview of Migration



Graph by the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics (Jennissen, R, P, W, 2011). It shows an overview of the migration patterns in the period 1946-2009. The blue line represents immigration, the thin black line represents emigration, and the bold black line shows the net migration. The emigration line is negative in order for it to show the negative impact it has on the net migration.

Appendix B
Overview of Participants

CODE	ROLE IN THIS RESEARCH & ONLINE OR OFFLINE	GENDER	AGE GROUP	PERSONAL BACKGROUND	PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND
A*	Community member	Female	30-49 yrs	Sudanese origin, came to the Netherlands at a later age (not specified when). Visibly identifies as Muslim.	Volunteer at the community house. Participant in the FGD.
B	Community member	Female	18-29 yrs	Pakistani origin, born in the Netherlands.	Active member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.
F	Community member	Female	30-49 yrs	Moroccan origin, came to the Netherlands as a little girl. Visibly identifies as Muslim.	Volunteer at the community house. Participant in the FGD. Through her work she knows cases of young people who joined IS and travelled to Syria or Iraq. A relative of her radicalized but he received help on time and did not join IS.
G*	Active in local politics	Male	30-49 yrs	Dutch origin.	Works for a local section of the PvdA
H*	Community member	Female	30-49 yrs	Somalian origin, came to the Netherlands when she was 16. Visibly identifies as Muslim.	Volunteer at the community house. Participant in the FGD.
IN*	By-stander	Female	18-29 yrs	Dutch-Frisian origin.	Background in biomedical sciences.
L	By-stander	Female	18-29 yrs	Dutch origin.	Background in medicine

M*	Active in local politics	Female	18-29 yrs	Eritrean origin.	Works for a local section of the PvdA. Active as a volunteer in a neighbourhood in her city.
O	By-stander	Male	18-29 yrs	Dutch origin.	Background in Crisis and Security Studies. Studied in the United Kingdom
R	Community member	Female	18-29 yrs	Syrian origin.	Works for an NGO involved in peace building processes.
S	By-stander	Female	18-29 yrs	Dutch origin.	Background in animal care and welfare
T	Active in local politics	Female	50-65 yrs	Second generation migrant, has not specified where her parents are from.	Works for a local political party and is an activist. She knows a few cases of young people who joined IS and travelled to Syria or Iraq.
V*	By-stander	Male	18-29 yrs	Dutch origin.	Background in artificial intelligence.
X	Active in local politics	Male	30-49 yrs	Dutch origin.	Works for a local section of FvD. Vocal and active on social media.
Y*	Community member	Female	30-49 yrs	Turkish origin, born in the Netherlands. Visibly identifies as Muslim.	Volunteer at the community house. Participant in the FGD.

*These participants have been interviewed in-person in an offline setting of their choosing.