

The Radical Milieu:  
A Socio-Ecological Analysis of  
*Salafist* Radicalization in Aarhus, 2007-17



Mikkel J. Hjelt

The Radical Milieu:  
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PhD Dissertation

Politica

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ISBN: 978-87-7335-265-6

Cover: Svend Siune

Print: Fællestrykkeriet, Aarhus University

Layout: Annette Bruun Andersen

Submitted July 30, 2020

The public defense takes place October 30, 2020

Published October 2020

Forlaget Politica

c/o Department of Political Science

Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University

Bartholins Allé 7

DK-8000 Aarhus C

Denmark

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# Acknowledgments

In 2017, I returned to Aarhus University after working for 6 years for Aarhus Municipality with prevention of radicalization. I was grateful and excited to be offered the opportunity to carry out a project within the scope of a larger international research project, *The Social Ecology of Radicalization: A Foundation for the Design of CVE Initiatives and Their Evaluation*. The PhD scholarship has enabled me to dig deeper into the radical milieu and its surroundings, and the prospect of being able to contribute new knowledge to the practical field of radicalization prevention was a major motivational factor.

It has been an unforgettable journey. First, it has been incredibly rewarding to be able to “nerd” a specific subject matter. Second, as much of a cliché as it may be, my journey has truly been a rollercoaster ride; the intensity that comes with the PhD life at times facilitated feelings of contentment, enjoyment and laughter—and at other times disappointment, frustration and irritation. The latter mostly due to my own inadequacies. Good old-fashioned hard work is not to be underestimated. Third, due to my background in the study of religion, the “surroundings” and culture at the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University were new and unfamiliar to me. I thank all of my colleagues there for making me feel welcome and part of the fellowship and for the time we spent together. Especially to my colleagues in the Political Sociology section: Thank you for giving of your time and sharing your thoughts and critique when commenting on my research project and chapter drafts. I look back on our annual section retreat with great fondness. I also extend my gratitude to my officemates. Throughout most of my PhD fellowship, I shared an office with Sadi Shanaah and Casper Sakstrup. Thank you, guys, for enduring and tolerating many hours of listening to my stories and anecdotes—and my bad jokes. I hope you enjoyed our time together as much as I did. I wish you and your respective families a happy and interesting future. In the final phase of my scholarship, I shared an office with Rasmus Schjødt—thanks for our time together. I’m sorry I was not around the office much during the intense writing phase. I wish you, your project and your family the best in the future.

I have many others to thank for supporting and inspiring me to make this dissertation a reality. I am grateful to the many people I interviewed, without whom this project would not have been possible. Thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedules and informing my research project. The many interviews provided interesting, kind and unforgettable encounters. Likewise, I am grateful to the gatekeepers and others who so generously allowed me to benefit from their networks and contacts. Your efforts and hours spent helping

me have been indispensable. Many thanks also to my student assistants—Jesper Rasmussen, Emil Jensen, Martin Krogsgaard, Marlene Lauridsen, Henriette Diernisse, Tobias Johansen, Julie Henneberg and Niclas Clemensen who found time between classes and other work to help transcribe the interviews. You did a great job and I really appreciate your dedication and flexibility. I wish you all good luck with your future plans.

Throughout my PhD project, I expanded my network, which provided inspiration and new inputs. I am grateful for the comments and questions I received from panel discussants, lecturers and participants in various courses, conferences and workshops. I was fortunate to spend 1½ months at the Department of Security and Crime Science at University College London, where I owe special thanks to Noémie Bouhana and Sandy Schumann, collaborators within the larger international research project, for an enriching and pleasant stay. Thanks for your comments and ideas on my project. I also thank Peter Gudge for helping with the practical details concerning the research stay. I was also privileged to enjoy 1½ months at The Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism in Copenhagen. My gratitude goes to Karin Ingemann, Stine Strohbach, Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen and Henriette Kjærsgaard-Bindner for making this stay possible, together with the other Centre employees for their warm reception. Special thanks to Ann-Sophie Hemmingsen for commenting and discussing the preliminary analysis and a later chapter draft. Among other things, I also look back on the fruitful discussions of my project and the prevention of radicalization with Aya Mortag Freund, Bo Christensen and Katrina Gillman.

I am also grateful to my boss, Christoffer Green-Pedersen, and Head of Department Peter Munk Christiansen. I value your management and accessibility when needed. You have been responsive and accommodating to my inquiries and proposals as I put together an alternative PhD program. In that vein, I extend my gratitude to Toke Agerschou, Rasmus B. Lauridsen and Casper Husted from Aarhus Municipality for our cooperation and the opportunity to maintain and further improve my project development skills. Thank you for believing in my idea and setup of how to engage in conversations about religion with young people in secondary school.

My daily work routine at the Department of Political Science benefitted from crystal-clear, non-academic insight; the technical and administrative staff is indispensable! You were always willing to help me and answer all my questions and inquiries. Ruth Ramm was a tremendous support in helping me with the necessary accounting (courses, conferences, payments to student assistants etc.), saving me so many hours of bookkeeping work. Other notable assistance came from Helle Bundgaard, who helped me produce teaching materials; from Susanne Vang, who assisted with exams, and Birgit Kanstrup,

who provided the vital everyday necessities such as office space, keys and the like. Jon Jay Neufeld edited the text and contributed to the readability of the dissertation—I am grateful for your flexibility during this process. It has been a pleasure working with you, and your work and professionalism is truly appreciated. In a similar vein, I am thankful to Annette B. Andersen, who assisted in arranging the language editing for the dissertation and helped me with language editing and layout throughout the course of my project, including the final phase. Steffen Gjedde from the Aarhus University Library was indispensable throughout the process; whenever I had difficulties figuring out the library system, you did your magic and saved me. Thank you.

My main supervisor, Lasse Lindekilde, and co-supervisor, Morten Brænder, deserve special thanks. Throughout my PhD, you have been a great team. I am so grateful for your time, guidance, critical comments, suggestions and inspiration. You were great motivators, pushing me with the right balance to progress and improve, and your supervision has been treasured immensely. I have learned so much from you. You always had time to talk about life outside academia and other interests, which was important to me. To put it in simple words: Thank you very much!

I owe a great deal to my family and friends. To my friends: I am very sorry for the cancelled arrangements during the intense writing process. I will make up for it. My parents have supported me throughout my life, and this PhD project was no exception. COVID-19 closed all public institutions in Denmark (including childcare) for weeks at the most critical point in my project. You stepped up and cared for Samuel over a two-month period. And when Samuel—only a month after he had returned to his kindergarten—fractured his foot, you stepped up again and helped care for him. For lack of “bigger” words, this was a tremendous help at a critical time. Last but definitely not least, my wife Maiken and our son Samuel are the two greatest single pillars in my life. Thank you for your patience and support. I have tried to balance my working and family lives, but I am aware that you had to put up with a great deal of absent-mindedness on top of the physical absence in various different stages, especially in the intense writing phase. At times, Maiken, you took care of Samuel single-handed, providing me with peace and quiet to concentrate on my research project. At other times, you both also provided a needed break, as in our journeys into the woods to search for all kinds of insects and small animals. Or playing with Samuel and his *Ben 10* figures and Lego. Or when just the two of us would go out for dinner and talk about anything other than my project. I owe you big time!

Mikkel J. Hjelt  
Aarhus, July 2020



# Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout most of Ali's childhood, he lived in a neighborhood in Aarhus, Denmark, in which the majority of the residents were ethnic Danes. At some point, he and his family moved to another neighborhood in the city, as they felt a need to live closer to other families with ethnic minority backgrounds—people with social and religious backgrounds similar to their own. Ali struggled to adapt to his new surroundings, experiencing problems in school together with some other life-changing experiences. He found himself with a new group of friends and reconnecting to preexisting ties. He also intensified his religiosity, becoming part of a *Salafi*-inspired radical group. Here, Ali discovered a sense of companionship and engaged in various social activities that triggered positive emotions. These activities unfolded face-to-face or through virtual platforms or in combination, thus demonstrating a complex mobility across settings. He expanded his social ties to likeminded peers in Denmark and abroad and participated in religious training in the mosque and at friends' homes, which contributed to internalizing a specific religious interpretation of Islam. These activities allowed for discussions about resentment towards Western foreign policy, which ultimately almost led him to leave for a conflict zone. But he met a couple of individuals outside the group, which shed new light on things. He started to withdraw from his group and found the strength he needed in his new social ties to leave the radical group.

Ali's story emphasizes the importance of the setting and the radical milieu in facilitating high-risk activism. The story is about understanding a certain form of radicalization, namely a certain *Salafist*-inspired radical milieu in Aarhus in 2007-17 based on an interplay of individual- and context-level factors. Such an approach contributes to understanding the pathways to and away from the radical milieu as well as participation within the milieu. More specifically, Ali's story underlines a need to understand the "where" of radicalization. The focus on how the immediate surroundings furnish a complex set of activities as well as how the members demonstrate a fluid and dynamic spatial mobility in a combination of offline and online settings will help us strengthen our understanding of the radical milieu. However, such research is under-investigated. With a few exceptions (see, e.g., Sageman, 2004, 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005; Malthaner & Waldmann; 2014; Malthaner 2018, and Bouhana, 2019b), the research investigating radicalization has predominantly focused on individual-level characteristics and explanations, such as socio-de-

mographic and psychological characteristics, grievances and religious and political beliefs (see, e.g., Bandura, 1990; Borum, 2004; Bakker, 2006; Post 2007; Silke, 2008; Veldhuis & Staun 2009; Egerton 2011; Awan, 2017; Borum & Fein, 2017; Bos, 2020). This contributes to there being much less conceptualization and understanding of the role of the immediate and broader surroundings of radicalization. Thus, there is a need to know more about the “where” of radicalization, specifically focusing on with whom individuals socialize, in what kinds of activities likeminded peers engage, and where the activities unfold. I am not disqualifying the individual-level perspective; my point is merely that we can benefit from expanding the individual-level perspective to also encompass contextual perspectives in a systematic manner. Thus, my ambition is to investigate the connection between individuals and their immediate surroundings in producing radicalization by studying individual pathways and the radical milieu with a focus on a specific radical *Salafi*-inspired milieu in the city of Aarhus in the years 2007-17. Consequently, I address the following research question: *What characterizes the interplay between the radical milieu and individual pathways to radicalization?* In so doing, I seek to answer the following four sub-questions:

1. *Through which processes are individuals exposed to the radical milieu?*
2. *What are the affordances of the radical milieu—physical and virtual—in which homegrown radicalization occurs?*
3. *What is the role of the interaction between exposure to material in offline and online settings for socialization in the radical milieu?*
4. *Through which processes do individuals exit the radical milieu?*

To answer these research questions, I conducted an empirically driven investigation with a hermeneutic-interpretive analysis focusing on an interrelated analysis of the individual pathways to the radical milieu, the dynamics characterizing the participation in it, and the paths that lead away from the milieu. The dissertation builds on Noémie Bouhana’s (2019b) social-ecological framework “S<sup>5</sup>,” which offers new theoretical perspectives that integrate and relate individual life situations and the immediate and broader surroundings in the understanding of radicalization. S<sup>5</sup> entails five categories of factors: individual *susceptibility to moral change*, exposure through *selection* processes, *settings* within the radical milieu, the *social ecology* of neighborhoods and larger *systems*. I attempt to develop Bouhana’s S<sup>5</sup> framework by combining concepts and theoretical perspectives, such as the *radical milieu* (see, e.g., Waldman, 2005; Malthaner & Waldman, 2014; Malthaner, 2018) and *socio-spatial settings* (see, e.g., Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Lindekilde et al., 2019) in order

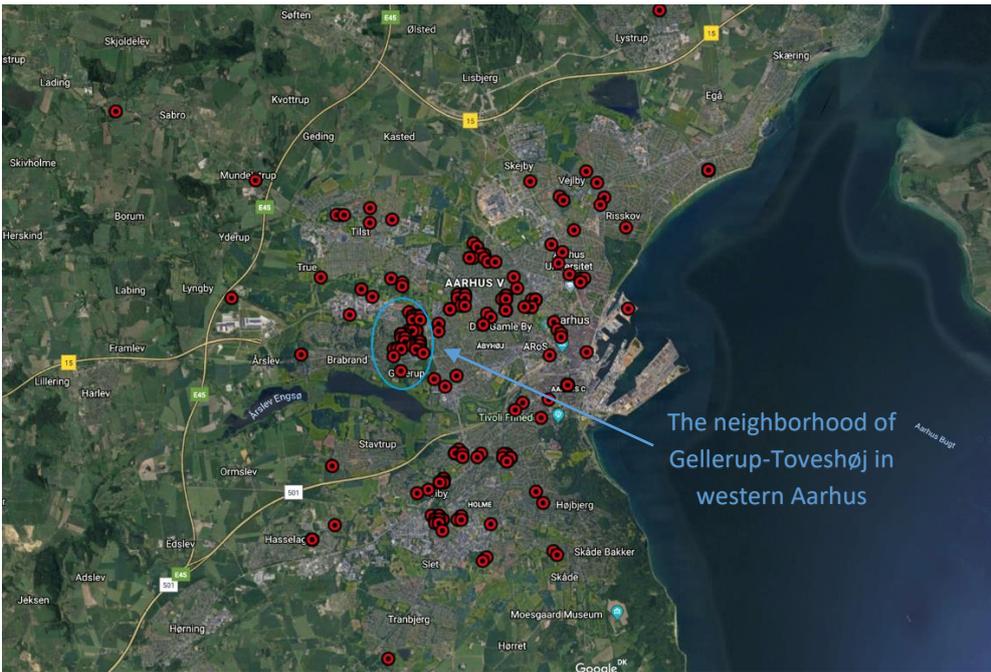
to make the theory more applicable to my empirical data. That said, the social ecology perspective contributes to an understanding of radicalization by capturing micro-, meso- and macro-level aspects. For my use, the social-ecological framework combines personal experiences with different group dynamics and more structural influences, such as large-scale political conflicts, social media or encrypted platforms, as well as the broader surroundings of the neighborhood. Contextual factors on the systemic and neighborhood levels contribute to the emergence and maintenance of the radical milieu and influence certain developments, such as the willingness to partake in the Syrian war and the ultimate disintegration of the milieu. In that sense, the socio-ecological perspective constitutes a paradigm shift in the field of radicalization research, providing new insights, where the dissertation in hand represents a first attempt at applying the social-ecological theory to detailed qualitative data.

Qualitative data interview sources constitute the basis for this investigation of a specific radical milieu and its broader surroundings. The data collection was carried out in Aarhus, wherefrom 35-40 young individuals have left for the Syrian conflict zone to perform humanitarian relief work and/or to fight. A mixed methods approach was applied in the data collection, combining semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interviews involving multiple types of respondents, which helps us to better understand radicalization through in-depth, multi-level analysis. First and foremost, this investigation consisted of 22 individual, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews (including follow-up interviews) with nine young men who participated in a radical *Salafist*-inspired milieu in Aarhus. The investigation also included 56 semi-structured individual and focus group interviews with police officers, social workers, schoolteachers and leaders from Aarhus Municipality and the East Jutland Police, who are working with radicalization prevention in Aarhus as well as with “non-radical” (i.e., ordinary) residents in Gellerup-Toveshøj, a neighborhood in Aarhus with approximately 7,000 residents representing some 80 different nationalities. The radical milieu in focus consisted of participants who were adolescents or young adults with various different national backgrounds. The engagement varied from core to peripheral members and, at its highest, the milieu consisted of approximately 110 members. The respondents I interviewed were core members from three groups and—similar to other members—performed high-risk activism in the Syrian war.

Furthermore, as radical milieus are not detached from broader political and social surroundings (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014), another dimension is added to the “where” of radicalization. In that sense, I examined why the radical milieu in focus emerged and was sustained in Gellerup-Toveshøj and

not in some other neighborhood. The individuals from countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and Great Britain who have left for Syria and the perpetrators of the most recent terror attacks share a number of characteristics: They come from and are shaped by the same milieu in which radical milieus are concentrated in and around certain cities, and, more specifically, they generally come from socio-economically challenged neighborhoods. Aarhus is no exception. I draw on restricted police data<sup>1</sup> of the distribution of individual-level residential data on 226 unique cases of concerns involving radicalization referred to the East Jutland Police in the years 2010-17 in Aarhus. Figure 1 below shows how radicalization problems exist throughout the city. However, it also reveals an uneven geographical distribution of radicalization in western Aarhus and, more specifically, within my case area around the disadvantaged Gellerup-Toveshøj neighborhood as a so-called hotspot. This reflects how the geographical distribution of radicalization can be concentrated locally (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020).

**Figure 1. Distribution of preventive talks with East Jutland Police force regarding concerns for radicalization based on residence in Aarhus, 2010-17**



Note: Each red circle (100 × 100 meter cell) may contain more than one case. Individual cases were only included if the police found essential grounds for concern regarding radicalization, which triggered actions such as preventive talks with the individuals. However, as the filing of cases concerning radicalization lacked proper systematization in the first part of the period under study, the number may be underreported.

<sup>1</sup> This police data is produced in collaboration with my supervisor, Lasse Lindekilde, and the East Jutland Police.

The uneven concentration of radicalization begs the question why the radical milieu emerged and was sustained in Gellerup-Toveshøj in western Aarhus and not in another neighborhood. My study is part of a larger international research project, *The Social Ecology of Radicalization: A Foundation for the Design of CVE Initiatives and Their Evaluation* (SER Project), which also involves several sub-projects. The Danish part of this project consists of two sub-projects: my qualitative investigation and a quantitative investigation via community surveys (the Danish SER Community Surveys), conducted by Lasse Lindekilde and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov, which focuses on the emergence of radical milieus in particular neighborhoods. For this purpose, I draw on some of the survey results, which I supplement with my qualitative data. The Danish SER Community Surveys and my focus group and individual interviews supplement each other in taking the “Why there?” question seriously. I discuss the role of the neighborhood surrounding the radical milieu in focus here with a focus on what characterizes the neighborhood in which the radical milieu emerge, thus emphasizing neighborhood-level factors such as social cohesion, institutional trust, informal social control and moral context.

The collected data was analyzed in different stages, including transcription and three rounds of coding. The coding strategy combined inductive and deductive approaches via open, axis and closed coding in order to condense and categorize while simultaneously discovering patterns, nuances, similarities and differences in the analysis process. Moreover, I interpreted my empirical data in the light of my theoretical socio-ecological starting point.

In addition to applying the social-ecological theory on new data and a certain case, my aim has been to contribute with new insights via unique data and “thick descriptions” of the radical milieu that can inform broad and more targeted interventions to prevent radicalization. Those in the radical milieu, including teenagers and young adults, cannot only do potential harm to others via their dedication and engagement, they can also harm themselves, as participation in such a milieu may involve certain actions, such as leaving for the war in Syria or other conflict zones. Participation in armed conflict—as either a militant, humanitarian relief worker or a combination of the two—may include physical or psychological injuries or death. Moreover, in late 2019, most of the members of the Danish parliament voted for legislation enabling the Minister of Immigration and Integration to administratively revoke (i.e., without a trial or other legal proceedings) the Danish citizenship of so-called foreign fighters with dual citizenship. Another current discussion in both Denmark and Europe concerns the children of parents who fought under the banner of the Islamic State and are currently in captivity in Syrian refugee camps. In late 2019, the Danish Government authorized that a couple of children with dire medical needs be brought to Denmark from Syrian refugee camps. In

2020, however, the Danish Government stated that it would abstain from repatriating the approximately 30 remaining children, because doing so would likely bring the children's parents home as well, which builds on the argument that children of certain ages, together with their parents, would pose a security threat to Danish society (Moestrup & Mikkelsen, 2020).<sup>2</sup> Regardless of whether we agree or disagree with such legislation, it is applied. Several young individuals of both genders, including individuals from the radical milieu in focus here, have been sentenced under the Danish terrorism legislation, some being sentenced for up to 12 years of imprisonment. In that sense, young people can end up in prison for many years, often leading to massive and long-term human, social and economic consequences. Thus, prevention of radicalization is important.

This empirically oriented dissertation is structured as follows: In Chapter 2, I elaborate on the state of the art in relation to my research project and my theoretical framework, followed by a presentation of and considerations regarding my data and research method in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I shed light on how the pathways to the radical milieu in focus are formed when susceptible individuals are exposed to immediate social influences, such as particular activities, individuals and settings, through selection processes. Chapters 5-7 consist of a three-fold analysis in which I analyze the socializing affordances of the radical milieu. In other words, I analyze what the radical milieu provided the participants via numerous social activities and/or what rendered the milieu attractive. In Chapter 5, I elaborate on the cognitive affordances, unfolding complex emotions that distinguish between positive and negative emotions via different activities. Chapter 6 extends perspectives on the moral affordances that focus on how group dynamics and the socialization in certain settings work to connect beliefs and actions. The participants construct a moral context based on a specific religious interpretation that furnishes a particular worldview, values, principles of right or wrong conduct and clear-cut boundaries. This context facilitates clear instructions for action. The subsequent chapter offers perspectives concerning attachment and social control affordances. The attachment affordances provide insight into how the radical milieu furnishes opportunities to establish new social ties and networks to other likeminded radical Salafists in Denmark and abroad. The social control

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<sup>2</sup> Since 2015, at least 15 laws have been passed as part of the Danish terrorism legislation, which focuses on sectioning in prisons, the revocation of passports, entry- and residence bans for certain areas in Syria and Iraq, treason, recruitment, funding, surveillance and a contact ban for individuals convicted of violating these laws. These laws are intended to prevent radicalization and to stop the traffic to the war in Syria and other conflict zones (for more information, see [www.retsinformation.dk](http://www.retsinformation.dk)).

affordances offer insight into how the participants cultivate sophisticated coping strategies to preserve free spaces and conceal their more political activities from family, school and the police. Moreover, I also describe how informal social control is used to regulate behavior among the members internally to stay under the radar while also satisfying God and achieving salvation. Chapter 8 focuses on how individuals exit the radical milieu and the ultimate disintegration of the milieu. The individual exit processes and the disintegration of the radical milieu are to some degree the result of a combination of different individual-, group- and system-level factors. The final empirical chapter examines the question of why the radical milieu emerged and was sustained in a specific neighborhood in western Aarhus, the focus of which is on how certain neighborhood characteristics may be conducive to the development of radical milieus. In conclusion, I summarize my findings and elaborate on my empirical and theoretical contributions together with reflections on the potential policy implications of my findings.



**PART I:  
THEORY, DATA AND  
RESEARCH METHOD**



## Chapter 2: State of the Art, Conceptualization and Theoretical Framework

Researchers in the field of radicalization have pointed out the need to integrate individual and contextual perspectives in the study of radicalization (Crenshaw, 1981; Sageman, 2008: 13, 23-5; Bouhana & Wikström, 2008; 2010; 2011; Sedgwick, 2010; Della Porta & LaFree, 2012; Schmidt, 2013: 4; Crone, 2016; Malthaner, 2017; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2018: 273; Bouhana, 2019a). Max Taylor and John Horgan (2006: 587) have recommended that the study of radicalization and terrorism should unfold “within a broader ecological framework,” whereas Noémie Bouhana (2019b: 9) has emphasized that radicalization “emerges from the interaction between individual and context” and that individual involvement “depends in a large part on their environment—where they are, as much as who they are.” As previously mentioned, this dissertation explores the connection between individuals and their immediate and broader surroundings in producing radicalization in the city of Aarhus, Denmark. Such an investigation requires a theoretical framework that encapsulate a multidimensional approach to the study of radicalization, expanding beyond individual explanations. Thus, I position the research project within the evolving paradigm of a *social ecology* of radicalization, such as “the study of the social and behavioral outcomes of the interaction between man and his environment” (Wikström, 2007: 333). The socio-ecological perspective offers opportunity for new insights contributing to further developments within the field of radicalization. Hence, the dissertation represents an initial attempt at applying a social-ecological perspective on radicalization to detailed qualitative empirical data.

In this chapter, I first provide a brief state of the art, elaborating on the knowledge we already possess regarding the focus of my research questions for the purpose of positioning the dissertation. Second, I specify my theoretical framework for analyzing my empirical data. Before turning to the state of the art, I elaborate briefly on the radicalization concept, which is a contested concept with no agreed-upon definition. Researchers generally seem to agree that radicalization involves a process whereby the individual internalizes a specific moral context of beliefs and ideas and that a cognitive and/or behavioral change occurs toward the acceptance—and in some cases use—of violence for political and/or religious ends (Wilner & Dubouloz 2011; Bos, 2020). For my purpose, however, radicalization refers to the “processes by which people come to adopt beliefs that not only justify violence but compel it, and how

they progress—or not—from thinking to action” (Borum, 2011a: 8). In line with previous research (see, e.g., Sageman, 2008a; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Lindekilde et al., 2019), I distinguish between non-violent and violent radicalization, where the “radicalization of opinions” and “radicalization of actions” are not the same, indicating that attitudes do not necessarily transform into action and that activism does not necessarily require the prior radicalization of ideas (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 266-71). I use this definition for two reasons. First, the radical milieu I study encompassed members who took part in the Syrian war as humanitarian relief workers or militants or transitioned from relief work to armed struggle, such as fighting for the Islamic State. Despite these differences between non-violent and violent members, I focus on the radical milieu in its entirety. The militants and relief workers were part of the same radical milieu and participated in the same religious training and social activities, and they shared the same viewpoints and looked up to the same charismatic figures in Denmark and abroad who fought in battle in Syria and Iraq. Regardless of whether the members engaged in relief work or armed struggle, they engaged in the same activities, subscribed to the same religious ideas that directed desired actions and had different roles that contributed to maintaining the milieu. In that sense, I study processes of socialization that precede different forms of high-risk activism. Second, the distinction between the radicalization of beliefs and actions is relevant concerning the willingness to act. The participants in the radical milieu developed their own set of moral guidelines that provided clear instructions for actions; nevertheless, additional opportunities, pressures or expectations are required before acting on one’s beliefs. In that sense, ideal actions become easier to imitate via concrete, real and tangible encouragements, such as historic holy fighters, martyrs, contemporary participants who joined the Syrian war, as well as appeals to emotions and reason, which helped to bridge beliefs and high-risk activism. I elaborate on these aspects in Chapter 6.

## 2.1. State of the Art—and beyond

In this section, I introduce the research landscape relating to my themes of analysis, including the pathways to and away from the radical milieu, participation within the milieu and the emergence of the radical milieu in a specific neighborhood (and not in others). I elaborate on existing knowledge and identify research gaps. Hence, I position myself in relation to previous research and a further research agenda. The field of *Salafi*-inspired radicalization consists of a relatively large corpus of existing “state of the art” literature (see, e.g., Bartlett et al., 2010; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Borum, 2011a; 2011b; Schmid, 2013; McGilloway et al., 2015; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017b; Gøtzsche-

Astrup, 2018; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2020). These studies provide relevant insights into my themes of analysis and function as a point of departure for this brief state of the art, especially concerning the pathways to the radical milieu.

### 2.1.1. Pathways to the Radical Milieu

Traditional theories of radicalization emphasize linear progressive stages or singular processes, typically stressing one pathway (see, e.g., Borum, 2003; Stahelski, 2005; Moghaddam, 2005; Silber & Bhatt, 2007; Precht, 2007). In contrast, other studies argue that no single pathway or explanation applies to all cases of radicalization. They suggest diverse and multiple pathways into radical milieus in which individual and contextual levels interact in time and space (see, e.g., McCormick, 2003; Sageman, 2004; 2008a; Linden & Klandermans, 2006; Horgan, 2007; 2008; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Borum, 2011; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2020: 8-10).

Existing research has identified different individual-level factors as contributing to the pathways to radical milieus, such as personal background characteristics (Sageman, 2004: 69-77; Bakker, 2006; Gambetta & Hertog, 2009, 2016: 1-33) and personal experiences, such as identity crisis and identity-seeking (Borum, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 87-92; Smith, 2018a) and life-changing events (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009; Post, 2011: 16f; Trip et al., 2019). These personal conditions seem to instigate a state of *unfreezing* (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a) or *cognitive opening* in which people become receptive to new ideas and beliefs (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 20-4) or a *quest for significance*, which is a desire to be someone, to belong, and to make one's life matter (Dugas & Kruglanski, 2014). Other researchers emphasize how existential concerns related to identity crises or identity-seeking influence *self-uncertainty* about one's position in life and belonging. Who am I? Where do I belong? How should I behave (in comparison to others)? And what does my future look like? This is an uncomfortable state of mind. Individuals therefore strive to reduce their uncertainty in clearly defined groups with well-structured boundaries and clear prescriptions for behavior. Such groups (i.e., high-entitativity groups) are effective at reducing self-uncertainty (Hogg et al., 2007; Hogg et al., 2010; Hogg, 2014). Other studies have focused on how experiences such as experienced or felt discrimination, exclusion and injustice (Borum, 2004; Egerton, 2011: 26-43; McGilloway, 2015) instill *personal* and/or *group grievances* that are a direct experience of suffering or an indirect experience of suffering through empathy for likeminded (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2020: 36-40) or *humiliation by proxy*, which entails, for example, that young Muslims

in the West experience feelings of humiliation on behalf of other Muslims, specifically those in conflict zones (Khosrokhavar, 2005: 152-3). In addition to these perspectives, other investigations have focused on how individuals engage in religious “seeking” (Lofland & Stark, 1965; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 99-101, 205-10), some people returning to their religious roots or strengthening an existing religious position, replacing one former worldview and way of life for another (Lofland & Stark, 1965; Rambo, 1993: 2; Roy, 2004). For example, some young diasporic Muslims absorb a transnational religio-political interpretation of Islam which is in stark contrast to the Islam of their parents. This form of religious *acculturation* represents a version of Islam detached from any particular culture or ethnicity (Roy, 2004: 23-5).

I build on these insights and integrate individual-level factors in my social ecological analysis. As mentioned, however, there is a need to integrate individual and contextual perspectives. I therefore turn to the meso level and relate individual experiences to selection processes; that is, how certain individuals are exposed to ideas and attitudes favorable to radicalization. Existing research has analyzed the exposure to radical material with respect to lone-actor terrorism. Lone-actor terrorists are not typically as isolated as the designation indicates, as they seek out radical milieus and are introduced to them offline and online. In that sense, lone-actor terrorists are to some extent exposed to likeminded individuals, radical groups and radical material (Gill et al., 2014; Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Schuurman et al., 2019). However, there is a need for more research focusing on the selection processes in the radical milieu. Accordingly, I focus on selection processes related to strong social ties and group dynamics to obtain more detailed and nuanced insights. It is well-documented that social networks play a significant role in social movement theory. First, they are often crucial for recruitment; individuals tend to join social movements through preexisting ties to people who are already involved in collective action. Second, participation in social movements also reinforces preexisting ties and creates new social networks through participation in various forms of activities and associations. Third, social networks possibly also influence and maintain participation toward the cause of the social movement while at the same time leaving through “collective exit” or external social relationships (e.g., Snow et al., 1980, McAdam, 1986; McAdam & Paulsen 1993; Tindall, 2004; Della Porta & Diani, 2006: 114, 134; Della Porta, 2013: 280-1). In a similar vein, previous radicalization research highlights how social networks play a prominent role when individuals join radical milieus (e.g., Della Porta, 1995: 138-44; Sageman, 2004: 107-13; 2008a: 66-70; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 15; Hegghammer, 2006; Bosi & della Porta, 2012; Hafez, 2016; Reinares, 2017; Malthaner, 2018). For example,

Sageman's (2008a: 66) theory of a preexisting "bunch of guys" who collectively end up in a radical milieu is relevant. However, we need more knowledge of how such preexisting social ties function and how they develop and change during exposure to radical milieus. My dissertation investigates exactly how preexisting social ties transform and contribute to shaping the pathways to the radical milieu.

The pathways to a radical milieu run through different kinds of settings, such as mosques, prisons, schools, asylum centers, schools and universities as well as internet cafés, social media, chat rooms, surface websites and encrypted platforms. Different locations are usually designated as potential platforms for recruitment (see, e.g., Taarnby, 2005; Bakker, 2006; Neumann & Rogers, 2007; Vidino et al., 2017: 83) The knowledge about these settings is sparse, however, lacking in context and in-depth analysis of how they are related to individuals and specific activities. The dissertation provides "thick descriptions" of how the participants frequent different settings and how these encounters contribute to radicalization. My study focuses on the immediate physical and virtual surroundings by linking space and socialization processes, hence emphasizing the "where" of radicalization.

### 2.1.2. Participation in the Radical Milieu

Existing research has theorized on the radical milieu, focusing on its characteristics and traits, unfolding a specific and dynamic focus on the relationship between a violent group, the radical milieu and the wider social and political surroundings (see, e.g., Waldman, 2005; Waldman et al., 2010; Malthaner & Waldman, 2014; Malthaner, 2015a; Malthaner, 2018). More specifically, previous research has also inquired further into the participation within radical *Salafist*-inspired milieus and what the members do together via different group processes. Some researchers have provided insights into everyday recreational activities (Hegghammer, 2017) and religious cultivation and training through which members construe and absorb a certain religio-political orientation (Wiktorovicz, 2005: 167-204; Malthaner, 2014; Kenney, 2018: 99-131). Other researchers have emphasized exposure to radical teachings and material through face-to-face encounters or virtual settings (Sageman, 2008a: 109-16; Conway, 2012; Archetti, 2015; Valentini et al., 2020) that produce a sense of *moral outrage*; that is, a reaction to perceived wrongs against Muslims, such as Western government military interventions, actions by local Muslim leaders and the killing of civilians (Jasper, 1998). These group dynamics, regardless of whether the interaction sparks positive or negative emotions, are examples of the phenomenon researchers refer to as *group polarization*,

where processes involving information cascades, ambiguity reduction and social comparison are at play (Sunstein, 2009: 22-30; Schkade et al., 2010; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 117-19). In addition, existing research has focused on social activities that allow the discussion of potential actions as well as actually conducting *low-risk* and *high-risk activism* aimed at creating social or political change (McAdams, 1986; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 45-51; Lindkilde & Olesen, 2015: 31, 37-9), such as leaving for the Syrian war as humanitarian relief workers and/or militants (Meines et al., 2017: 20; Speckhard et al., 2018; Greenwood, 2018: 194-201). Such socializing features contribute to identity fusion, where personal and group identities merge into a unique identity producing a shared sense of unity. Strong ties to other participants increase the fusion within the group (Swann et al., 2009; Atran et al., 2014; Swann et al., 2015). Moreover, previous research within social movement theory has emphasized how radical activists, via a set of behavioral rules, norms and practices, develop sophisticated coping strategies or a security culture to preserve the *free spaces* against state surveillance and interventions (see, e.g., Evans & Boyte, 1986; Polletta, 1999; Cross & Snow, 2011; Polletta & Kretschmer, 2013). Other studies have investigated radical milieus as “connection-making” settings that facilitate possibilities to form new social ties such as friendships and networks through numerous social activities (Malthaner, 2018; Bouhana, 2019b). Other researchers have investigated radical milieus related to politically motivated radicalization and terrorism (see, e.g., Della Porta, 1995; Sprinzak, 1995; 1998; Futrell & Simi, 2004; Simi & Futrell, 2010; Valk, 2013; Pilkington, 2016).

Although these research outputs provide solid and useful contributions, which I build on, we still lack detailed descriptions of what radical milieus can offer participants and what happens inside, and, thus, an understanding of why some individuals are attracted to radical milieus. For example, more research is needed on the dynamic relationship between ordinary leisure activities and discussions about conflict zones, Western foreign policy and potential actions. More knowledge of the interplay between offline and online domains in the socialization unfolding within the radical milieu is also required. The dissertation provides insights into these aspects by analyzing the socializing *affordances* of the radical milieu; that is, what the members offer each other through the various social activities in which they engage and how this socialization sets the stage for specific actions (Wortley, 2012). The socialization within the radical milieu provides a range of opportunities and activities that direct certain behavior and actions, such as leaving for the conflict in Syria to take part in humanitarian relief work or to take up arms. More specifically, my research project studies how the members of the radical milieu seem to experience meaning, direction and satisfaction, perceiving the milieu as offering

attractive fellowship full of enjoyment that contributes to maintaining an interest in the radical milieu. In that sense, the perspective of socializing affordances helps us to understand how the social context of the radical milieu contributes to certain possibilities and finding certain behavior as viable action alternatives.

Existing research has also pointed to the role of *socio-spatial settings* in providing opportunities to develop social ties as well as demonstrating how radicalization occurs in various settings. Building on previous research (see e.g. Passy, 2001; Genkin & Gutfraind, 2008), Malthaner and colleagues have identified four types of socio-spatial settings, both physical and virtual—*neutral settings*, *open settings*, *radicalizing magnets* and *radical micro-settings*—in which socializing activities and events take place (Malthaner & Lindekilde 2017; Malthaner, 2018; Lindekilde et al., 2019). *Neutral settings* unfold on an everyday basis and typically do not entail radical content but possibly facilitate encounters with other likeminded people; it is not uncommon for radical recruiters to choose such settings for targeting potential recruits. *Open settings* do not necessarily promote radical teachings but are settings with a religious and/or political agenda. The specific interpretations offered by open settings may then stimulate interest in more radical ideology. In that sense, encounters with radical individuals seem to take place on the fringe of such settings marked by ineffective social controls. This may occur, since these group settings are characterized by a high member turnover and are normally accessible to a wide range of individuals, making it difficult to monitor all of the participants. Conversely, the lack of monitoring may be explained by a silent accept or support of a radical position—or that the connections between radical individuals go unnoticed because of precautions and developed coping skills. *Radicalizing magnets* entail organized groups of people who interact regularly in settings such as mosques or worship centers or gather around radical charismatic preachers. The members are exposed to radical teachings through seminars, presentations and study circles, which also provide opportunities to develop ties to influential figures within the radical milieu. Lastly, smaller groups or cliques tend to withdraw from the mainstream radical milieu. In such *radical micro-settings*, intensive forms of socialization, bonding and deliberation occur in an ongoing exposure to radical teachings. The commitment is reinforced and relationships are strengthened. Outsiders only gain access if introduced by a group member. These physical settings can also unfold in virtual spaces, such as surface websites, chatrooms, social media and more restricted online services (Malthaner, 2018). While these perspectives provide relevant insights, more in-depth knowledge is required of how the different settings and socialization are connected within more established ties. Moreover, the social-spatial settings construct can help us understand the

“where” of radicalization by focusing on the activity patterns in the members’ their social lives: What do the participants do, together with whom, where do the activities takes place, and for how long (Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012: 67-70, 252)? These insights shed light on the members’ *activity field*; that is, “the constellation of settings, and their characteristics, which a person encounters during a particular period of time” (Wikström et al., 2012: 69). The dissertation focuses on how the members within the radical milieu socialize, together with whom, and where various social activities take place in “open” and “closed” settings. Such dynamic mobility and interaction contribute to both an interest in continuing to participate in the radical milieu as well as to discuss potential actions related to, for example, leaving for the Syrian war. Further along these lines, the combination of offline and online dimensions is at play. With a few exceptions (Brachman-Levine, 2011; Conway, 2012; von Behr, 2013; Ducol, 2015; Valentini et al., 2020), however, there has been a predominant focus on the role of the internet in radicalization and terrorism, emphasizing aspects such as fundraising, propaganda dissemination, recruitment, information sharing and planning through open, accessible online platforms or on the so-called dark web (see, e.g., Sachan, 2012; Nouri & Whitting, 2014; Weimann, 2015: 23-35; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2016; Aly et al., 2017; Frissen et al., 2018; Macdonald & Lorenzo-Dus, 2019; Gross, 2020). In contrast, more nuance is needed regarding the actual interplay of offline and online domains in the interactions between the members of the radical milieu. The dissertation unpacks how the members engage in social activities within “hybrid onlife spaces,” indicating that radicalization unfolds through an interplay between online and offline spheres (Valentini et al., 2020: 2).

Religious interpretations and ideology, including its content and use, have been identified as part of radicalization (see, e.g., Rapoport, 1984; Hoffman, 1995; Juergensmeyer, 2003: 5-10; Brachmann, 2009; Hemmingsen, 2010; Cottee, 2017). In addition to such detailed analysis, previous research has emphasized the doctrinal content related to religious training and lecturing and communication in specific radical milieus (see, e.g., Sageman, 2004; 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005; Malthaner, 2014; Sheikh, 2016: 122-63). Nevertheless, knowledge of how a specific religio-political interpretation is shaped through socialization, using an interaction of physical and virtual arenas, remains sparse. The dissertation elaborates on this gap by highlighting how a combination of offline and online activities contribute to a certain interpretation of Islam that furnishes a specific moral context and promotes certain actions. Such a focus will provide pivotal nuance regarding both content and socialization.

### 2.1.3. Pathways Away from the Radical Milieu

For decades, researchers have provided insight into individual exit processes from radical milieus and groups. I build on previous studies within radicalization research, as my investigation suggests that certain “push” and “pull” factors influence the exit of the individual interviewee. Exit is conceptualized as involving de-radicalization and disengagement (Hansen & Lid, 2020). *De-radicalization* encompasses a change in beliefs and ideas away from embracing a radical and/or violent ideology, whereas *disengagement* refers to a change in behavior by breaking off participation in radical and/or violent groups (Bjørge & Horgan, 2009: 3-4). The two processes do not necessarily occur simultaneously. Moreover, disengagement may unfold without de-radicalization, and reengagement may occur despite disengagement having happened (Bjørge & Horgan, 2009). Existing research has pointed to individual “push” factors, such as disillusionment with group members or leaders and the use of violence that for some has gone too far, unmet expectations, loss of faith in the underlying ideology and exhaustion, as well as “pull” factors that include new priorities, positive interactions with moderate “outsiders,” education and employment opportunities, and future family life (Jacobson, 2008; Della Porta, 2009; Bjørge, 2009, 2011; Rabasa et al., 2010; Horgan, 2009b; Della Porta & LaFree, 2012; Altier et al., 2014; Windisch, 2017). Other researchers have pointed out several contextual factors in the disintegration of the radical milieu, including dwindling numbers, the failure to recruit the “next generation” and increased monitoring from authorities (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 213; Horgan, 2009b; Bjørge, 2009; Della Porta, 2009; Della Porta & LaFree, 2012; Doosje et al., 2016). Yet previous research (Bjørge, 2009; Horgan et al., 2014; Altier et al., 2016) has also tapped into factors that may discourage individuals from leaving radical milieus (or at least makes leaving such milieus difficult). For example, some individuals consider the “positives” of the group or milieu (e.g., friendships, sense of belonging, and security and protection) too costly to leave. The high investments or “sunk costs,” such as time, energy and dedication, sometimes also obstruct exit; especially if there is a lack of alternatives, as when ties to “outsiders” such as family or friends are non-existing and there is a fear of isolation or a social vacuum. Other individuals fear reprisals from the milieu after exit in the form of threats and/or violent attacks and in extreme cases even death—either inflicted on the defector or their family. And in other cases, some individuals may choose to remain within radical milieus for fear that former members will inform the police about past criminal activities, or fear punitive measures from the criminal court system, or fear pressure from the police to disclose information about

former friends. Some may fear that they will never be able to pursue an ordinary job and career, as their past will always haunt them.

Existing knowledge (Bjørge, 2009) also mentions different types of exit strategies, including declarative exit and quiet withdrawal. *Declarative exit* entails a clean and open break, often performed by high-profile members who renounce their former beliefs and worldview. Some members go public to prevent others from engaging in the radical milieu and/or to provide full disclosure about the secrets of the group or the milieu via media platforms. Such members often receive social and political support and enjoy protection from public institutions. However, this may not prevent retaliation in the form of threats, violence or even death. Alternatively, *quiet withdrawal* implies a gradual, nondramatic withdrawal without any public break. This strategy typically unfolds over a lengthy and fluid process whereby the individual becomes less visible and less involved in social activities and low-risk activism. This renders the individual marginal to the radical group or milieu, and their involvement simply fades away at some point. While a quiet exit carries less risk of reprisals from the group or milieu or negative sanctions from society, there is a risk of the secrets of one's past being exposed later in life.

Finally, exit processes possibly also entail *re-integration* into mainstream society after imprisonment or when there is no evidence to support the prosecution of returnees who have volunteered in the Syrian war or similar conflict zones. Government actors and local multi-agencies provide re-integration interventions and assistance with employment, housing and education together with psychological treatment (Hemmingsen, 2015b; Horgan, 2015; Meines et al., 2017). In addition to these perspectives, we need more detailed knowledge of how radical milieus disintegrate based on social ecological theory. Thus, the dissertation describes how a combination of micro-, meso- and macro-level factors contributes to the disintegration of the radical milieu.

#### 2.1.4. The Emergence of Radical Milieus in Certain Neighborhoods

In the previous chapter, we saw how Aarhus and other European cities experience an uneven distribution of problems with radicalization. Radical milieus are concentrated in and around certain cities and in certain socioeconomically deprived neighborhoods (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020). Previous research has focused on neighborhoods with high prevalence rates of radicalization. For example, Coolsaet (2017) investigated a neighborhood in Molenbeek, Brussels, with an uneven concentration of radicalization, including and volunteers who left for Syria. Coolsaet's case study combines individual and focus group inter-

views with survey data, tapping into both individual perspectives and the community level. More specifically, the study focuses on the neighborhood social structures and patterns, including socio-economic background factors, religious practices, prospects for the future, neighborhood interactions and ties, networks outside the neighborhood, crime and safety, and institutional trust. The investigation provides nuanced insights into the positive and negative realities and sensitivities of the community. However, the study design fails to identify factors that can help answer why the concentration of radicalization emerged in Molenbeek rather than another Brussels suburb, as the study does not include a similar area with less experience with radicalization as a control group. Another recent qualitative study includes the local context from which 20 young people from the same radical milieu in the same socioeconomically deprived neighborhood in an anonymized Dutch city left for Syria to engage in the armed struggle. The researchers interviewed professionals working in that particular neighborhood to tap into the neighborhood interaction as well as individual risk factors of the young people living in that neighborhood. The neighborhood characteristics include low levels of social control together with social isolation and a sense of unsafety. Moreover, the neighborhood is also marked by additional social problems, such as unemployment, low education levels and tensions between ethnic minority groups. Many of the youth growing up in this neighborhood suffer from a lack of future prospects, addictions and other personal or psychological problems (Neve et al., 2020). Although the study provides useful characterizations of a specific neighborhood experiencing radicalization, it neglects the question of why the radical milieu emerged there and not elsewhere. Similar research has been conducted in other neighborhoods aimed at investigating the individual life situations in neighborhoods that have had radicalization problems (Fishman, 2010; Weine, 2012), but these investigations also neglect to tap into the “Why there?” question. In contrast, Lorenzo Vidino and colleagues (2017) do investigate the uneven geographic distribution of radicalization taking place in some neighborhoods and not others. They conclude that “the presence of radicalization agents is often what turns a specific area into a radicalization hub ... an analysis of radicalization dynamics shows that clusters form wherever effective radicalizing agents operate, in underprivileged neighborhoods and prison blocks, but also on university campuses or small towns” (Vidino et al., 2017: 83-4). However, the study does not go beyond these immediate conclusions and ask the question of why radical milieus or the radical agents emerge in one neighborhood rather than another. Bouhana and Wikström (see, e.g., 2008; 2010; 2011) and Bouhana (2019a; 2019b) have provide useful theoretical insights to shed light on neighborhood interactions and the emergence of radical milieus

in particular neighborhoods, considering other research domains in so doing, such as criminology.

Criminology has conducted social-ecological research for decades on neighborhoods and crime and risk behavior, emphasizing how the interplay between individuals and their surroundings produces particular (potential) criminal actions (see, e.g., Stark, 1987; Vila, 1994; Triplett et al., 2003; Sampson, 2006; Wikström, 2006; Bottoms, 2007; Wikström et al., 2012; Weisburd et al., 2012: 48-68; Graif et al., 2014; Badiora et al., 2014; Weerman et al., 2018; Rotger & Galster, 2019; Sampson & Levy, 2020).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, criminology has developed theories about the significance of neighborhood-level characteristics for the crime rate in specific neighborhoods. For example, Sampson and others (Raudenbush & Sampson, 1999; Sampson, 2003; 2017) have emphasized that neighborhood investigations must be studied through so-called “ecometrics” that is, a distinct collection of methods for the study of people and their surroundings. In addition to databases, government statistics and police data, Sampson and colleagues propose that community surveys, observations of streets via video surveillance, the network analysis of community organizations, newspaper analysis of local events, “lost letter” field experiments and in-depth interviews are relevant when tapping into the social dynamics of neighborhood interaction). Moreover, the pioneer longitudinal study *Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study* (PADS+) carried out by Per-Olof H. Wikström and colleagues investigated the social life and criminal activity of young people in Peterborough, England. In addition to using police and criminal justice data, community surveys, an interviewer-led questionnaire and qualitative individual interviews, the researchers took advantage of the innovative “space-time budget” method, which is a self-completed diary form in which, during the week prior to a follow-up one-on-one interview, the participants entered information about the

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<sup>3</sup> The modern social-ecological perspective links existing individual and ecological theoretical traditions with the purpose of advancing criminology in terms of a better understanding and explanation of crime (Reiss, 1986; Farrington, 1993; Loeber & Wikström, 1993; Wikström & Sampson, 2003). For example, researchers from the so-called Chicago School of criminology in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are notable for their focus on geographical and social surroundings in understanding certain influences and criminal behaviors. They were interested in how certain urban developments and the population growth in Chicago influenced the emergence of new local communities in certain neighborhoods. They found that neighborhoods characterized as uninhabited and in decay or destitute with a frequent resident turnover and ethnic heterogeneity experienced different types of petty and organized crimes and competing street gangs (see, e.g., Park & Burgees, 1925; Thrasher, 1942 [1927]; Shaw & McKay, 1942).

time they spent in certain settings over a 4-day period, together with whom, the kind of activities they did together and where they took place, all of which provided opportunity to analyze their dynamic *activity field* (Wikström et al., 2012: 44-82). The idea was to investigate the participants' exposure to different kinds of settings. Overall, the collection of "ecometrics" and space-time budgets has been used to investigate different neighborhood-level factors, such as the levels of informal social control, social cohesion, social trust and interaction, institutional trust, moral context or neighborhood values, connections outside the neighborhood, and parent-child relationships (see, e.g., Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson et al., 1999; Narayan & Cassidy, 2001; Morenoff et al., 2001; Rankin & Quane, 2002; Warner et al., 2003; Warner, 2007; Wikström et al., 2010; Hampton, 2010; Wikström et al., 2012; Volker et al., 2016). Such investigations are intended to study the outcome of a particular kind of interaction between individuals with specific characteristics and propensities and their surroundings, including criminogenic settings; that is, settings that encourage criminal activities (Wikström et al., 2012: 15-16).

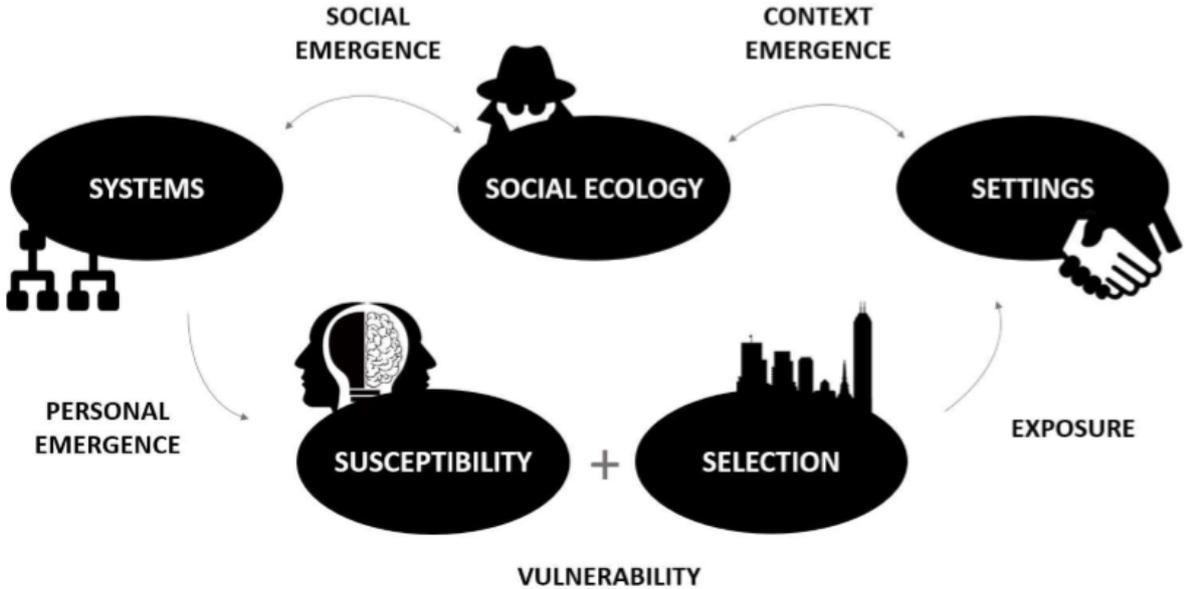
I import these insights from criminology into radicalization in my study of the "where" of radicalization and the significance of the setting of the radical milieu. Moreover, the dissertation also studies the "where" of radicalization on a broader level by drawing on the Danish SER Community Surveys conducted by Lasse Lindekilde and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov (see Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020), which focus on the emergence of radical milieus in particular neighborhoods. More specifically, I draw on some of the survey results and supplement them with my qualitative individual and focus group data. I use these data to discuss the role of the neighborhood surrounding the radical milieu with a focus on what characterizes the neighborhood in which the radical milieu emerges.

## 2.2. Theoretical Framework

Social ecology provides an ambitious perspective that integrates and relates micro, meso, and macro perspectives in the analysis of radicalization. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the interplay between certain likeminded individuals who meet and socialize in certain offline and online settings. This socialization entails specific activities that enable certain opportunities and actions. Moreover, the radical milieu is embedded in broader surroundings. Bouhana's (2019a; 2019b) recently developed theory suggests how the social-

ecological paradigm can be applied as a theoretical perspective in radicalization research, proposing the so-called S<sup>5</sup>-framework.<sup>4</sup> S<sup>5</sup> entails five components or categories of factors: *susceptibility to moral change, selection, settings, social ecology* and *systems* (figure 2).

**Figure 2. Noémie Bouhana’s S<sup>5</sup> inference framework**



Source: Bouhana (2019b).

S<sup>5</sup> is a multilevel approach to analyzing radicalization, integrating individual and contextual perspectives (Bouhana, 2019a). Briefly, the perspective does so by connecting individual vulnerability—understood as the combination of individual susceptibility to moral change and selection processes—to radical settings via exposure. The framework then offers a take on the emergence of settings that promote radicalization by focusing attention on the social ecology of settings and how this ecology is partly the product of larger system-level factors.

I draw on Noémie Bouhana’s S<sup>5</sup>-framework as the main theoretical model of investigation for the construction of my own theoretical framework, which I further develop by introducing related and specifying constructs (figure 2). Based on this perspective, S<sup>5</sup> and the additional constructs provide opportunity to conduct a hermeneutic-interpretive analysis of my qualitative data

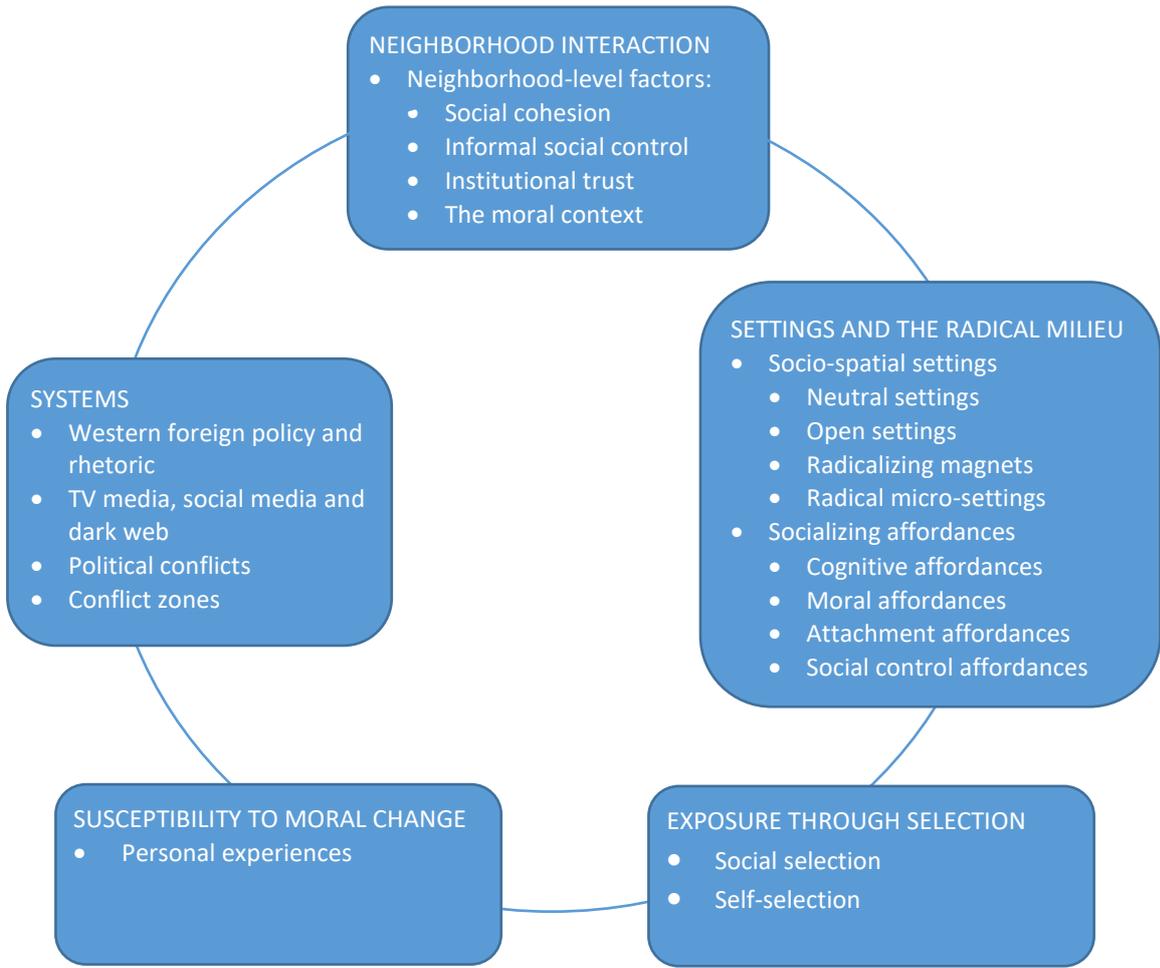
<sup>4</sup> Bouhana’s S<sup>5</sup>-framework is a further development of Bouhana and Wikström’s *Individual Vulnerability, Exposure, and Emergence* perspective (IVEE-model) (Bouhana & Wikström, 2011; Wikström & Bouhana, 2017) and Wikström’s *Situational Action Theory* (SAT) (see, e.g., Wikström, 2004; Wikström, 2007).

material. I present a more thorough accounting of my data and research method in the following chapter. Bouhana uses “social ecology” in S<sup>5</sup> as a category to encompass the broader surrounding of the radical milieu, such as neighborhoods. In contrast, I use “neighborhood interaction” to denote this category, as I consider social ecology as an umbrella concept for encompassing the entire theoretical framework of the dissertation. Throughout the dissertation, I apply a socio-ecological paradigm. First, I investigate the connection between individuals and their immediate surroundings in producing radicalization, focusing on how socialization between likeminded individuals across settings and in a given time produces situations, opportunities and actions. Second, I continue to apply a social-ecological approach and turn to the question “Why there?” by focusing on the characteristics of the neighborhood. Certain neighborhood characteristics may contribute to the emergence and maintenance of radical milieus in particular neighborhoods rather than others.

I elaborate on each category and related terms below. I begin with the micro level and theorize on the *susceptibility to moral change*. However, where many theories do not advance beyond this, I continue to the meso-level, including *selection* processes, and elaborate on the nature of *settings and the radical milieu*. Finally, I elaborate on the macro-level, including the *neighborhood interaction* and the larger *systems*. The levels of explanation do not constitute a stage model or linear process. To the contrary, the model is circular, with no given starting or endpoint, presenting a framework that integrates and relates individual and contextual perspectives in analyzing radicalization. Thus, the conceptual framework is not proposed as a mode of causality on radicalization.

Figure 3 has been developed through an iterative process combining deductive and inductive elements. As already mentioned, the constructs originate from previous research, and some elements, including the specific neighborhood-level factors within the *neighborhood interaction* category and examples of larger *systems*, originate from my data. Moreover, the existing construct, *social-spatial settings*, was integrated when I identified a combination of in-depth space and socialization processes in my data. In a nutshell, the development of the theoretical framework has been an active process, going back and forth between the theory and my empirical data, thus continuously revising the theoretical framework.

**Figure 3. The theoretical framework of the dissertation**



**2.2.1. Susceptibility to Moral Change**

In S<sup>5</sup>, Bouhana sets out five factors that interact to produce or suppress the risk of radicalization. *Susceptibility to moral change* refers to the cognitive state of being liable to environmental moral influence (Bouhana, 2019b). Personal experiences, such as life-changing events and identity-related issues, including the death of loved ones, changing schools and perceived discrimination inflicted by authorities seem to influence this susceptibility, identifying a differential susceptibility (Kruglanski, 2014; Bouhana et al., 2016; Bouhana, 2019b). As previously mentioned, *self-uncertainty*, *personality traits* and lack of *life skills and life-attachment* also seem to influence the susceptibility to moral change (Hogg, 2014; Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2019; Ozer & Bertelsen, 2019). However, susceptibility is neither equal to vulnerability nor the sole basis of vulnerability. Vulnerability is dynamic and context-dependent, and it results from a combination of susceptibility and selection factors, implying that “meaningful” vulnerability to certain settings requires the risk of exposure to these settings and activities (Bouhana, 2019b). Individual susceptibility is suitable for analyzing personal motivations that contribute to the pathways to

a radical milieu. I use this concept extensively in the subsequent chapter when focusing on the individual pathways to the radical milieu.

### 2.2.2. Exposure through Selection

Selection refers to the ecological processes responsible for introducing certain kinds of people to certain kinds of settings (Wikström, 2014: 84). The selection processes maintain two overall types. *Social selection*, such as living in a particular neighborhood or belonging to a certain social group (e.g., family and upbringing, friendships, ethnic and religious network, economy), sets the stage for coming into contact with particular settings and activities. In other words, social selection influences “the chance of exposure to certain places and the participation in certain activities” (Bouhana 2019b: 14). Further along these lines, exposure also unfolds as *self-selection* in which the individual chooses to frequent certain settings based on personal characteristics and preferences (desires, aspirations and needs) acquired over time (Wright et al., 1999; Wikström & Bouhana, 2017: 180f). In that context, selection processes are dynamic and can contribute to the understanding “of how people come into contact with particular moral contexts, such as moral contexts that, through their moral education, promote ‘radicalization’” (Wikström & Bouhana, 2017: 181). Social selection and self-selection can be perceived as theoretical ideal types of selection for analytical purposes. However, in applying selection processes to my empirical data, social selection and self-selection seem to combine and overlap, thus intertwining and forming a dual, dynamic relationship. This perspective needs balance. On the one hand, I argue that Bouhana’s S<sup>5</sup> tends to understate individual agency. My respondents contribute to the shaping of their own experiences in their pathways to radicalization, including re-shaping and establishing new social ties, facilitating and engaging in different activities (physical and virtual) across settings, thus being architects of their own trajectories (Sageman, 2011; McDonald, 2018: 10, 189; Malthaner, 2018). The respondents try to make sense of their lives and the world in which they are embedded, through which “the ability to feel certain things makes it possible to think certain things” (McDonald, 2018: 15) and “making choices accordingly” (Sageman, 2011: 127). In that sense, respondents are not exposed through a typical, unilateral or passive process. Instead, they are seeking and creating their own trajectories, albeit not in a vacuum or detached from other influences in their lives (Bottoms, 2007; Wikström et al., 2012). The proceeding analytical chapters will also reveal how the respondents are neither passive nor isolated individuals; for example, the interviewees proactively engage in different kinds of preexisting and new social relations that impact and influence choices and potential actions (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 54;

Pilkington, 2016: 179-80; Khosrokhavar, 2017: 14; McDonald, 2018: 10-11; Malthaner, 2018). While the participants are indeed proactive in their trajectories, these developments do not happen overnight; the transitions are slow and fluid.

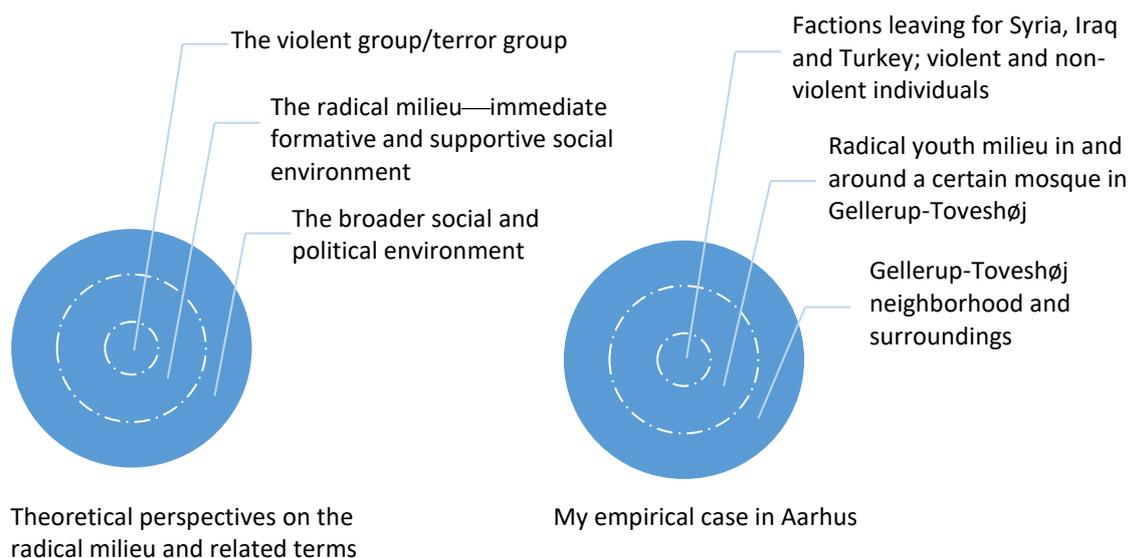
Keeping that in mind, selection is useful for analyzing how individuals end up in a radical milieu. Selection processes unfold the exposure to activities, social ties and settings. In this matter, the selection processes associate with the *pathways* approach, which explains how the combination of different levels of explanation and various factors contribute to individual pathways to radical milieus. Within this developmental logic, individual and contextual levels interact in time and space (see, e.g., McCormick, 2003; Horgan, 2008; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2020: 8-10). In this context, I use the concept of selection as a tool for my analysis, trying to unfold how exposure to a radical milieu happens through religious activities, preexisting and new social ties and settings. I apply the selection concept in the subsequent chapter in the analysis of individual pathways to the radical milieu on which I am focusing.

### 2.2.3. Settings and the Radical Milieu

Following exposure through selection, individuals socialize, develop and act in particular settings. A *setting* refers to “the part of the environment (the configuration of objects, people and events) a person can access with his or her senses (e.g., see, hear, feel) at a particular moment in time, including any media present (e.g., internet)” (Wikström & Treiber, 2016: 20). Bouhana uses the concept *extremism-enabling settings* to describe how these settings afford socializing features that increase the risk of radicalization. In other words, the extremism-enabling settings offer socializing dimensions to the individuals that bring about certain cognitive states, allow for exposure to a moral context that proposes radical ideas and material, foster relations to likeminded people, and exercise their own social control as an alternative to the conventional norms and law-relevant monitoring. These socializing features influence radicalization (Bouhana, 2019b: 15ff). In my investigation, however, I have studied a so-called extremism-enabling setting that unfolds within socio-spatial dimensions and, additionally, is connected to violent and non-violent factions, on the one hand, and broader surroundings on the other. Although the extremism-enabling settings concept generally relates to wider surroundings through the categories of neighborhood interaction and larger systems, there is a lack of nuance and characteristics regarding the substantial part of the extremism-enabling settings. Moreover, the concept focuses mainly on the social aspect without considering the spatial dimension of settings. Thus, there is a need for a more nuanced setting and placed-based concept, providing

more detailed characteristics and elaborated conceptualization for analyzing such settings. As introduced earlier, existing research provides guidance. Peter Waldmann (2005; 2008) introduced the concept of a *radical milieu*,<sup>5</sup> while Stefan Malthaner and Waldmann have done extensive research on this topic (see, e.g., Waldman et al., 2010; Malthaner & Waldman, 2014; Malthaner, 2015a; Malthaner, 2015b; Malthaner, 2018). I apply their in-depth conceptualization to my empirical case with some modifications (figure 4).

**Figure 4. Contextualizing the radical milieu**



Note: The figure draws on the conceptual work of Malthaner and Waldmann (2014).

In Malthaner and Waldmann’s (2014: 979) conceptualization, terrorist and violent groups are not “completely isolated, socially ‘free-floating’ entities.” The violent groups emerge from and are embedded in the radical milieu—the “immediate formative and supportive social environment” (Malthaner, 2014: 641). In that sense, the radical milieu and violent groups remain socially and symbolically connected, sharing ideologies, morals, narratives and experiences. The radical milieu is by no means a static entity, as it exemplifies a dynamic and evolving field of individuals who develop shared perspectives and a sense of belonging and shared identity.<sup>6</sup> Although the radical milieu and the violent group interact and sometimes cooperate, the radical milieu, which includes groups and individuals with certain interests, can also at times criticize

<sup>5</sup> Waldmann is building on the concept *gemeinschaft* (community) and works of Ferdinand Tönnies (see, e.g., 1955) and Frank Burton (1978).

<sup>6</sup> Previous research has also identified these characteristics in an investigation of radicalization in Aarhus, albeit using the concept of a “cultic milieu” (Kühle & Lindkilde, 2010).

or confront the militant activists. Moreover, the radical milieu is also connected to the broader social and political surroundings from which the radical milieu emerges and is sustained (Malthaner & Waldman, 2014: 983, 989). In this perspective, the radical milieu relates in concentric circles to the violent group and to the wider social and political environment, contextualizing the radical milieu as a relational and dynamic concept. Consistent with my data, the concentric circles are marked by permeable and fluent barriers, although the engagement and attitudes of the individuals involved marked distinct boundaries (Malthaner & Waldman, 2014). Furthermore, the radical milieu on which I focused exemplified a fluid and evolving field. As such, participation in the radical milieu encompasses a fellowship that is healthy, enriching, pleasant and amusing on an everyday basis. At least for some time. Conversely, participation in the milieu also develops into engaging in certain actions, such as leaving for the conflict in Syria to take up arms or engage in humanitarian relief work.

Additionally, I draw on the further conceptualization, in which the radical milieu manifests itself in different ideal types depending on the context (Waldmann et al., 2010; Malthaner & Waldman, 2014). One of these ideal types is the *radical network* (Waldmann et al., 2010; Malthaner & Waldman, 2014),<sup>7</sup> which is the formative and supportive environment of violent and non-violent groups that performs on a transnational level and may form within certain local settings and openly mobilize in a certain country. The radical network consists of individuals and smaller groups but does not mobilize a certain group of people in terms of territorial belonging. This flexibility and fluidness may also unfold in a different manner, whereby the radical network transfers some of its activities from one neighborhood to another or from mosques to private apartments (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014: 988). Although my data is consistent with the radical network ideal type, I use the term “radical milieu” in this dissertation for consistency. The radical milieu in focus here consists of at least three independently operating groups, although they participate in various shared activities, such as communal meals, lectures, worship and discussions about Western foreign policy and perceived Muslim apostates. Throughout the dissertation, I use “radical milieu” in the sense that it covers the overall concept of the radical milieu and the further detailed characteristics of the radical network. Occasionally, when the respondents refer to their specific group in the quotes, I refer to these groups in my analysis.

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<sup>7</sup> The others being the *radical subculture* and *radical community* (Waldmann et al., 2010; Malthaner & Waldman, 2014).

#### 2.2.4. Socio-Spatial Settings

The radical milieu also contains specific *socio-spatial settings* in which the respondents and their group members frequent and operate. As previously introduced, existing research has distinguished between interaction within more “open” and “closed” settings, ranging from *neutral settings* and *open settings* to *radicalizing magnets* and *radical micro-settings* in which socializing activities and events take place (Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Malthaner, 2018; Lindekilde et al., 2019). Consistent with my data, the *neutral settings* are on display in specific settings, such as schools, youth clubs, sports clubs, restaurants, beaches and malls. Here, the members of the radical milieu meet and socialize: hanging out, talking, joking, eating together, playing sports, going on camping trips and proselytizing. My study shows how the *open settings* unfold in specific sites, such as mosques, facilitating for example shared lectures, dinners and worship services. Moreover, in accordance with my data, *radicalizing magnets* entail organized groups of people who interact regularly in settings such as mosques and apartments through which they internalize a scripturalist and literalist interpretation of religious texts. These activities unfold in study groups, lessons and/or around radical charismatic preachers. The members are exposed to radical teachings and nurtured through a combination of activities, including religious training, lessons, debating western foreign policy and political conflicts and conflict zones. The *radicalizing magnets* provide opportunities to develop friendships and establish ties to role models and father figures within the radical milieu. In my study, *radical micro-settings* consist of smaller groups or cliques that met out of the way, in apartments or secluded places, for shared activities, allowing the individuals to discuss politics and conflict zones and potential actions, such as travelling to Syria or neighboring countries. The virtual domain also varies in terms of open and restricted access in my data. The members used surface websites and mainstream social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Skype and Facebook) for open, everyday use, whereas social media encryption services (Telegram, PallTalk, Whatsapp and dark-web platforms) provided opportunity to hide activities from authorities and families (Malthaner, 2018). Although YouTube is an open access source, the platform was used by cliques to consume and discuss radical material, such as videos glorifying “holy warriors” and martyrdom and videos from conflict zones throughout the Muslim world. I also use the concept of *activity field*, which refers to an individual’s exposure to certain settings, persons and activities during a given period of time (Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012: 67-70, 252). The combination of social and spatial dimensions across different settings can help us understand the “where” of radicalization. By analyzing the substantial and

spatial dimensions of the radical milieu and studying how physical and virtual spheres interact and overlap in fluid transitions across settings, we are able to investigate the immediate surroundings of radicalization. The “activity field” concept originates in criminology, where it is used to shed light on people’s exposure to criminogenic settings and their actual crime patterns. I adopt and expand its meaning for my purposes, as the participants’ activities in different settings involve both legal and illegal activities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Danish MPs have tightened the penal code by criminalizing certain types of behavior, including the revocation of citizenship, bans on entering and residing in certain parts of Syria and Iraq, recruiting and funding radicalization recruitment, and trying to stop the traffic to the Syrian war and other conflict zones. In the radical milieu on which I focus, some members conducted burglaries and left for the Syrian war in specific geographic areas both before and after the ban on entry- and residence was passed.

### 2.2.5. Socializing Affordances

Establishing the socio-spatial dimensions, the radical milieu also provides certain *socializing affordances*. Broadly speaking, affordances refer to “that which is offered or provided to an individual by the environment ... An affordance may be thought of as an opportunity for action” (Wortley, 2012: 18). Within my scope of interest, the members of the radical milieu actively facilitate different forms of socialization. The interaction between participants provides a range of opportunities and activities that enable the acquisition of a certain moral context sympathetic to particular actions, such as leaving for the conflict in Syria, engaging in relief work or in militant campaigns. Affordances are dynamic; they develop and relate to both the immediate surroundings and the individual at a particular point in time (Williams, 2012; Bouhana, 2019b). Based on ecological psychology, James Gibson (see, e.g., 1977; 1979) introduced the concept *affordances*, which can be understood as encapsulating an environment-person-action triad. Within this logic, an object or environment has certain features that it “offers” or “furnishes” to the individuals; for example, a chair affords sitting on, reading or relaxing, while a park affords opportunity to go for a walk or for sunbathing in the summer (Hoffman, 2017). The radical milieu also provides certain socializing affordances, such as *cognitive affordances*, *moral affordances*, *attachment affordances* and *social control affordances*. In this manner, the radical milieu provides certain socializing affordances through which interaction between individuals and settings promotes perceived possibilities for action (Bouhana, 2019b). The radical milieu has certain features and activities that can foster *cognitive affordances* (different positive and negative emotions) that makes individuals more likely to

absorb new moral beliefs (Bouhana, 2019b: 16). As such, the radical milieu arouses a “cognitive opening in which [individuals] become more receptive to the possibility of new ideas and worldviews” (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 85). Some individuals experience a cognitive opening as an outcome of individual experiences, such as identity crisis, discrimination or life-changing events, while others are targeted by outreach or recruitment. In the latter instance, methods such as *dawah* stalls (proselytizing) and shared lecturers are applied to promote certain views and distribute information. In addition, individual outreach is exercised with the purpose of directing *dawah* to individuals within one’s social network (Wiktorowicz, 2005). In short, the cognitive affordances of the radical milieu are the cognitive openings for moral change inherent to and fostered by the particular emotion-driven activities in the milieu.

The radical milieu also provides *moral affordances*. The moral context, consisting of ideology, worldview, rules, norms, boundaries and action-oriented encouragements, is promoted through various activities (Bouhana, 2019b: 16). On the one hand, the moral teachings and nurturing of the radical milieu may be “poured” for a passive individual. On the other hand, and relevant to my study, the process seems to include an active engagement in absorbing the moral teachings in terms of seeking and exploring various kinds of content and engaging in different activities, such as social events and religious training. Existing research has shown how the radical milieu is characterized by the production and distribution of specific radical teachings, but at the same time also a sense of moral flexibility and acceptance of exploration and development (Kühle & Lindekilde, 2012). This resonates with my data, in which the members construe a specific, shared interpretation of Islam, albeit allowing for individual nuances within the overall interpretation.

The radical milieu also furnishes *attachment affordances* through which it provides opportunities to the members to establish new social ties, including friendships, networks in Denmark and abroad and attachments to influential figures, such as role models and father figures, through various social activities (Bouhana, 2019b: 17). Thus, the radical milieu can be designated as a connection-making setting (Malthaner, 2018). In such cases, some participants do not consider their parents as role models, but instead turn to older, like-minded members for guidance and advice, to whom they look up and aspire to be like.

Lastly, the radical milieu offers or exercises *social control affordances*. The members of the radical milieu reject mainstream norms and law-relevant rules and (Bouhana, 2019b). In many ways, the radical milieu emerges as a kind of opposition to the mainstream moral context. On the one hand, the participants proclaimed their own informal social control internally concerning,

for example, a dress code and rules for using social media to avoid unnecessary attention that could potentially jeopardize their safe spaces. On the other hand, the participants develop coping strategies, such as lying to parents, turning off one's phone when discussing sensitive matters (e.g., taking part in the war in Syria), behaving in school and getting good grades, and using encryption services and dark-web platforms to hide their activities from the authorities, teachers and parents. In that sense, the social control affordances are separated from the pro-legal norms of mainstream society. The perspective of socializing affordances is applicable to analyzing the composition and nature of the radical milieu. More specifically, I use this aspect in Chapter 7 concerning the inner composition and affordances of the milieu.

### 2.2.6. Neighborhood Interaction

Problems with radicalization also seem to be highly geographically concentrated in disadvantaged neighborhoods in European cities, as seen in Sparkbrook in Birmingham, Angered and Bergsjön in Gothenburg, and Molenbeek in Brussels (Weine & Ahmed, 2012; Gudmundson, 2013; Varvelli (ed.), 2016; Coolsaet, 2016; 2017; Vidino et al., 2017: 82-92; Klausen, 2019; Bouhana, 2019b). As we saw in the preceding chapter, Aarhus is no exception. Apart from the typical explanation that radical “hotspots” center around prisons, schools or mosques as well as certain “radicalizing agents” (see, e.g., Taarnby, 2005; Neumann & Rogers, 2007; Vidino et al., 2017: 77-100), the concentration of radicalization suggests a focus on the broader surroundings in which radical milieus emerge and are sustained. In other words, why do radical milieus surface in some neighborhoods and not others? For my purpose, *neighborhood* refers to “a geographic and, hence, ecological section of a larger community or region that usually contains residents and institutions and that has socially distinctive characteristics” (Sampson, 2013: 8). Based on these conditions within criminology, the neighborhood-level factors unfold the structures and neighbor interaction and behavior within neighborhoods (Sampson 2003) that may or may not be conducive to radicalization (Bouhana, 2019b). More concretely, neighborhood-level factors such as levels of informal social control, social cohesion, institutional trust and the moral context have proven important in explaining differences in crime levels among neighborhoods (see, e.g., Sampson et al., 1997; Wilcox et al., 2004; Wikström, 2006; Wickes & Hipp, 2018). Consistent with my investigation, these neighborhood-level patterns of interaction may explain the emergence and sustenance of the radical milieu in a particular neighborhood rather than others (Bouhana & Wikström, 2011; Bouhana et al., 2016; Bouhana, 2019b; Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020). First, *informal social control* refers to certain types of influence that provide

control through the forms of direct supervision or surveillance or indirect interventions by contacting public institutions, such as the police or municipality, with the purpose of influencing another individual's behavior. For example, Family, peers, neighbors or bystanders may exercise informal social control, such as collectively monitoring public settings or enforcing pro-legal norms and rules among local residents (Drakulich & Crutchfield, 2013: 384; Britt & Rocque, 2017: 185-7). Second, *social cohesion* refers to different social characteristics that contribute to "connectedness" via a community's ability to generate moral and social integration and loyalty (Sampson 1993; Barolsky 2016: 3-5). Third, *institutional trust* can be referred to law enforcement agencies, including the police (both the central and local police units within a city). Residents may or may not have confidence in the police (Bornstein & Tomkins, 2015: 1-11). The perception of or attitudes toward the police may be the outcome of past experiences (good and bad) with police enforcement, such as the police successfully investigating a break-in in one's home, perceived discrimination and unfair treatment, existing problems in the neighborhood and police presence, and negative experiences with the police force in one's country of origin (Sampson et al., 1997; Boateng, 2016; Berg et al., 2016). Finally, *moral context* can be referred to as the specific norms and rules applied in neighborhood communities "and their levels of enforcement and sanctioning" via certain behavior (Wikström, 2006: 90). The social ecology is relevant for analyzing the concentration of problems of radicalization, focusing on the emergence and consolidation of radical milieus in some neighborhoods rather than others. I particularly apply this perspective in Chapter 9 when discussing the distribution of problems with radicalization in Aarhus, where I focus on certain neighborhood-level factors and describe how certain neighborhood characteristics possibly contribute to the emergence and maintenance of a radical milieu in a particular neighborhood rather than others.

### 2.2.7. Systems

Finally, the larger *systems* or *systemic factors* are also relevant. Systems refer to political, historical and technological structures, processes and developments (Bouhana et al., 2016: 63-4). In that sense, systemic factors have an impact on different levels. Recent policies in Denmark, such as the much-debated strategy for fighting parallel societies (Holst, 2018; Schultz Larsen et al., 2018), has influenced both the individual-, group- and neighborhood levels. In Aarhus, for example, individuals throughout the city have participated in different protests (Meyer, 2018; *Dagbladet Arbejderen*, 2018), and the residents in neighborhoods in Aarhus, who are affected by the aforementioned policy have taken different initiatives, such as the *Move yourselves!* protest

group (in Danish: *Flyt jer selv!*) and demonstrations (Paulsen, 2018; Meyer, 2018). The example indicates how the systemic level—in this specific instance, relating to political initiatives—propels *personal* and/or *political grievances* (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017b) on the individual level through which perceived injustices, resentment and anger may trigger protest. The example also shows how the systemic-level influences certain group dynamics, such as socialization, networks and support, as well as influencing certain neighbor interaction and neighborhood characteristics, such as social trust and social cohesion within a certain neighborhood (Bouhana et al., 2016; Kearns et al., 2018). In line with this perspective, my data material indicates similar trends concerning the influence of the systemic level. Danish foreign and domestic policies—such as engagement in the international military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya after the 9/11 terror attacks in 2001, the Danish Muhammed cartoon controversy in 2005, as well as political rhetoric concerning Muslims and Islam in general—seem to be a source of *individual* and *group grievances* (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017b). These grievances feed into both the individual vulnerability of radicalization and group processes, and they also seem to influence certain neighborhood characteristics that in turn may contribute to the emergence of radical milieus. Moreover, historical and present conflict zones around the world, including the conflict in Syria since 2011, appear to play a role within the radical milieu under investigation here, spawning susceptibility to moral change and activism. The systemic level also includes media-technological developments; for example, media technology developments seem to provide platforms that entail low levels of formal and informal surveillance, easily facilitating contact and connections throughout the world as well as the spreading of and, thus, exposure to certain moral norms, messages and teachings (Bouhana et al., 2016; Bouhana, 2019b).

Moreover, the online and offline interactions seem to unfold across the three levels of explanation (Bouhana et al., 2016). The hybrid interaction provides access to knowledge and material, networks and the mobilization of members and supporters. At the macro level, for example, the social media platforms can be perceived as a societal structure providing opportunities for individuals and groups of individuals, such as accessing and sharing different kinds of material throughout the world. At the meso level, the members within the radical milieu—often in smaller groups—use these structural opportunities for exposure to and discussions of radical material (sharing and accessing video, text and images via open source or encrypted platforms) relating to martyrdom, *mujahidun* (holy fighters) and conflict zones. The participants exercise *group polarization* and deliberation, thus discussing the legitimacy of different types of actions (Sunstein, 2009: 22-30; Schkade et al., 2010; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 119). At the individual level, the consumption

of such radical material in combination with individual factors such as identity crisis, identity seeking and life-changing events that seem to have produced a susceptibility to moral change (Bouhana, 2019b) arouse grievances such as resentment, hatred, despair and revenge. In that sense, the participants access online material, share views and develop ideas and their willingness to act upon the generated negative feelings. In other words, the systemic level contains structures and processes—both historical and current—that appear to influence the susceptibility of the individual to moral change, their exposure to radical material within the radical milieu and neighborhood interaction, all of which contributes to radicalization. With this in mind, I integrate this analytical level throughout most of the following analytical chapters.

### 2.3. Concluding Remarks

In contrast to research with a predominant focus on individual-level perspectives in the analysis of radicalization, the S<sup>5</sup>-framework suggests an integrative perspective, since people are not isolated from contextual influences; individuals live, socialize, develop, and act in physical and virtual surroundings. For my purposes, I use the S<sup>5</sup>-framework as an analytical frame to shed light on the pathways toward and away from a specific radical milieu as well participation within the milieu. The theory is useful to disentangle analytically how exposure relates to individual susceptibility, selection processes and settings. For example, social and self-selection can be perceived as theoretical ideal types for analytical purposes. In practice, however, via the application of selection processes on my empirical data, social selection and self-selection seem to intertwine, forming a dual and dynamic relationship. In contrast to a passive agent, balancing individual agency and contextual processes and factors seem to be important in contributing to a better understanding of radicalization. Within my theoretical framework, the respondents create and shape their own radical pathways with influences from their immediate surroundings, seeking and participating in certain activities, social relationships and settings.

The theory also provides a framework for analyzing participation within the radical milieu, unfolding the features or compositions of the radical milieu by conceptualizing its socializing affordances. The theoretical framework of S<sup>5</sup> focuses both on the immediate surroundings related to the radical milieu and the broader surroundings related to the radical milieu. The essence of the theory is the focus on the interaction between micro, meso, and macro levels of explanation. I incorporate the radical milieu concept using a nuanced construct for contextualizing a relational and dynamic setting with certain socio-spatial and placed-based characteristics. Critics might object to my choice of

theoretical framework as being excessively ambitious, extending a complex and multi-level theoretical approach that may result in a lack of analytical depth at every level. However, my purpose is to get a more comprehensive understanding of (the risk of) radicalization and to enable the progression of the research field by studying the interaction of individuals and their immediate and broader contexts at the same time. In my view, the socio-ecological perspective constitutes a paradigm shift in the field of radicalization research, proposing a new theoretical understanding of radicalization.

I draw on Noémie Bouhana's S<sup>5</sup>-framework as the main theoretical model of investigation. I go beyond the theoretical framework, however, as I—based on my empirical data—refine the theoretical framework by introducing related and specifying constructs with the intention of making it more applicable. I use the applied theory and concepts as a frame for conducting an interpretive and in-depth analysis of a complex phenomenon. Thus, the dissertation represents a first attempt at applying a social-ecological perspective on radicalization on detailed qualitative empirical data. I elaborate on my research design in the next chapter. In that sense, I bring a refined perspective to the radicalization debate about the “where” of radicalization and enrich in detail the interplay between individuals and their immediate and broader surroundings.

## Chapter 3: Data and Research Method

The overall aim of this dissertation is to explore the connection between individuals and their immediate surroundings in producing radicalization by investigating individual pathways and a radical *Salafist* milieu in the city of Aarhus in the period 2007-17. More specifically, the study constitutes an interrelated analysis, elaborating on individual pathways to the radical milieu, participation within the milieu, and individual and collective exit from it. Even though the use of primary data in the research on radicalization and terrorism has increased over the last 10 years, the field has generally been dominated by secondary sources such as historical and archival records or open source data (Silke, 2008; Schuurman, 2018b). Contrary to this overall trend, I contribute with original and new empirical data. Qualitative data sources constitute the basis of the dissertation. I collected this data in Aarhus, the second-largest city in Denmark, with approximately 350,000 inhabitants, wherefrom 35-40<sup>8</sup> young individuals travelled to participate in the Syrian conflict primarily in the period 2012-15—to fight or take part in humanitarian relief work; or in some cases to begin as relief workers but later transition to a military force fighting against the Assad regime. The traffic peaked in 2013. Of these individuals, 25-30 frequented a particular mosque in western Aarhus. Since the 1990s, several controversial figures have frequented this mosque, which has been involved in multiple terrorism-related legal proceedings (Sheikh, 2015: 287-97). The radical milieu associated with this mosque and the surrounding neighborhood have been chosen as the focus of my fieldwork and data collection. I elaborate on this below. As part of this fieldwork, I interviewed different groups of respondents, including former members of the radical milieu, police officers, social workers, mentors and schoolteachers, and leaders from Aarhus Municipality and the East Jutland Police Force, which is working with radicalization prevention throughout Aarhus, as well as non-radical residents from western Aarhus. I also draw on quantitative data, such as restricted police data from the East Jutland Police and selected findings from *The Danish SER Community Surveys*, conducted by Lasse Lindekilde and Kim Mannemar

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<sup>8</sup> These are the official statistics from the East Jutland Police. It cannot be ruled out that more individuals have left for Syria and the neighboring countries to participate in the Syrian war. Moreover, the Danish *Police Intelligence Service* (PET) estimates that since the summer of 2012, at least 159 individuals in total (out of a population of 5.8 million) have left Denmark to participate in the conflict in Syria (Danish Police Intelligence Service, 2020).

Sønderskov, which focus on the emergence of radical milieus in particular neighborhoods, emphasizing how particular neighborhood characteristics may be conducive to radicalization. I introduce and present the survey data in Chapter 9, where I discuss why the radical milieu emerged in this part of Aarhus and not some other neighborhood. Thus, the data collection employs a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured individual interviews with focus group interviews and combining qualitative and quantitative data. In the following, I will first describe and argue for my methodological positioning. Second, I will argue for my case selection. The following sections present my qualitative data sources and groups of respondents. More specifically, I first elaborate on the respondents who were part of the radical milieu, including sampling strategies and recruitment, a presentation of these respondents and their motivation for talking to me, while others declined my interview offer. Fourth, I introduce other groups of respondents, including professionals and ordinary residents, followed by reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of using individual and focus group interviews. Sixth, I reflect on my own role as a research tool throughout my research project. Hereafter, I elaborate on the interview guide templates for my individual and focus group interviews followed by my analytical strategy. Finally, I present my ethical considerations concerning the dissertation.

### 3.1. Methodological Positioning

My dissertation aspires to provide a better understanding of a radical milieu “from within” based on qualitative interview data. I elaborate on this with the former members of the radical milieu in mind. I focus on detailed or “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973: 3-32), which provide opportunity to gain insight into the respondents’ thoughts, feelings and past actions in an attempt at understanding what they did and why they did so. In that sense, my dissertation employs a multi-level hermeneutic-interpretive analysis aimed at understanding the individual pathways toward and away from the radical milieu as well as participation within the milieu (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 271-5). The interpretive approach allows me to understand my respondents’ “human meaning making” (Schwartz-Shea, 2006). More specifically, the intention is to obtain the detailed accounts from an insider perspective through qualitative interviews. I exercised an open approach to their way of reproducing and interpreting their past experiences. I tried to step into the respondents’ lived world and to view the world from their perspective—from within or from an *emic* perspective—in order to understand their world and experiences. Conversely, it is also worth pointing out that I did not meet the former members of the

radical milieu entirely without prerequisites or any background. My preexisting knowledge, including my formal education in the Study of Religions together with six years of work experience employed as a consultant for Aarhus Municipality working with radicalization prevent, influenced my role and perspective, thus emphasizing an *etic* perspective. However, I tried to maintain a sense of openness and to balance the emic-etic relationship via, for example, an ongoing ecological validity. On the one hand, I introduced the term “radical milieu” prior to the first interview question and elaborated on how such a milieu may have resembled that which the respondents used to be a part. On the other hand, I also asked the respondents what they would call the milieu. Some provided direct answers, whereas others began to describe it. Most respondents used concepts such as “companionship,” “brotherhood,” “safe haven” and “religious group or milieu.” In the course of the interview, we agreed that I could use the term “radical milieu” together with the concepts that resonated with them. Another example unfolds a similar approach. In my analysis strategy, I did not code single words, but full quotes (between 3-7 lines) in order to get the respondents’ accounts and descriptions as “thick” as possible in an attempt at obtaining a better understanding of the content and context. The reader is therefore able to assess whether I overanalyze or under-interpret these statements. The following sections focus on Peregrine Schwartz-Shea’s (2006) four research criteria, *trustworthiness*, *thick description*, *reflexivity* and *triangulation*, as guiding parameters for my qualitative and interpretive analysis, including my methodological choices and opt-outs. *Trustworthiness* provides a framework for reporting the many steps I have taken in this research process, including my case selection, sampling and the ethical considerations ensuring that my procedures are “self-consciously deliberate, transparent, and ethical” (Schwartz-Shea, 2006: 101-2). *Thick description* refers to reporting about my data collection, including the interview settings and interactions with my respondents, whereas *reflexivity* centers on my own role and how I myself was a research tool throughout the research process. *Triangulation* indicates the use of different methods for accessing and generating data in my dissertation, such as including multiple groups of interviewees, different types of qualitative interviews (e.g., individual and focus groups interviews), as well as drawing on quantitative survey data (Schwartz-Shea, 2006: 101-3).

### 3.2. Case Selection

My case selection has followed a pragmatic approach, as the opportunities to “select” a radical milieu and its broader surroundings were limited, as there is no abundance of such milieus nor are they easily accessible. My past experi-

ence, including a substantial and extensive network and knowledge of the radical milieu in Aarhus, were therefore beneficial and made the case selection obvious. Moreover, since I was familiar with the milieu, its broader surroundings, the geographical landscape (the city neighborhoods) and settings as well as how to reach potential interviewees, the case selection was convenient with respect to saving time, money and effort. In a nutshell, from the day I signed my employment contract with Aarhus University to my first day at work, I was in contact with potential interviewees, whom I later interviewed. The selection process has thus provided me with an in-depth, detailed case (Patton, 1990: 182-3). The downside of this case selection is that it may have generated blind spots resulting from my in-depth knowledge of the radical milieu in focus, thus overlooking different aspects. My focus may have been locked by my past experience. Conversely, exploring another radical milieu in another part of Denmark or abroad may have resulted in a more open investigation. While I have contacts in other parts of Denmark who might have been able to assist with such data collection, obtaining access to a similar radical milieu and generating a comparable amount of data would have been very time consuming and had been very expensive due to the extensive travel, food and lodging that had been necessary. Moreover, there would be no guarantees regarding the respondents. I am also certain that I would not have gathered the same amount and information-rich data. In the following, I elaborate on the specific radical milieu I investigated for this dissertation together with the broader surroundings of Gellerup-Toveshøj in western Aarhus.

### 3.2.1. A Radical Salafi-Inspired Milieu

I retrospectively studied a radical *Salafi*-inspired milieu in Aarhus in the years 2007-17. As more and more individuals joined the milieu, different radical youth groups were formed. My study includes interviews with members from three different groups. The respondents could inform about other smaller groups. Although members of different groups, they knew each other, helped each other, frequented the same mosque in western Aarhus for shared activities and engaged in shared discussions. They saw each other on a weekly basis, and some members were part of more than one group. They all perceived each other as “brothers.” The various groups integrated the same particular moral context, including belief system, worldview, values, principles of right or wrong conduct and boundaries, and they engage in similar discussions about low-risk and high-risk actions. In Chapter 6, I elaborate on the specific religio-political interpretation of Islam at the basis of the milieu. I consider the groups to be part of the same milieu, constituting a specific radical milieu. Not surprisingly, the biggest group was the most visible and dominant in their offline

and online activities. At its peak, the core of this group consisted of 40-50 members, alongside which there were 50-60 individuals who supported the group. Those on the periphery participated irregularly in activities but supported financially, for example. The core members participated on an everyday basis, performing various tasks and filling different roles, such as conducting *dawah*, lectures or arranging social activities, and some of the hard-core members were willing and dedicated to engage in high-risk activism, such as travelling to Syria as a relief worker or militant—or a combination of the two. While the groups in the radical milieu had recognized leaders and coordinators, the organizational structure suggested by my data is more “silent” and loose, with a “flat” apparatus with leaders of a more symbolic nature. Moreover, the division of labor was based on competences and interests.

As it developed, increasing numbers of people became involved in the radical milieu, mainly young Muslims aged 13-28. The milieu also included a smaller group of older men in their late 30s or early 40s. All told, the radical milieu in Aarhus consisted of approximately 110 participants.<sup>9</sup> Most of the participants in the milieu spanned from their late teens until early adulthood. Members of criminal gangs also transitioned to the radical milieu; the so-called “crossover” phenomenon (Bjørge et al., 2005; Basra et al., 2016: 7-10). Some of these members had criminal backgrounds and knew people in local gangs. They recruited gang members through low-risk activities, such as *dawah* or proselytizing. Multiple national backgrounds were represented in the milieu, including Bosnians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Danes, Turks, Somalis, Moroccans, Brits, Afghans, Indians and Albanians. The members did not adopt the ethnic or national version of Islam of their parents; instead, the respondents and their peers were searching for a transnational interpretation of Islam. In this search, they constructed a particular *Salafi*-inspired interpretation of Islam in which Islam—and not their nationality—became the common denominator. Instead of creating conflicts, the different nationalities helped them to learn from one another, and they respected their differences as long as they were in accordance with the religious interpretation that tied them together. The multi-national composition provided greater opportunities to leave for different conflict zones in order to blend in with surrounding populations. Most of the “brothers” in the radical milieu were still studying or in training. The educations they were pursuing included secondary school, upper secondary school, technical/vocational training and university studies.

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<sup>9</sup> The number is not definite and may include more or fewer than 110 participants in Aarhus.

Five of the nine former members of the radical milieu (whom I interviewed multiple times) joined the war in Syria as humanitarian relief workers in different refugee camps. The respondents also knew members who had either engaged in militancy or transitioned from relief work to armed struggle, some fighting under the banner of the Islamic State. Although I present different purposes of engagement in the Syrian conflict, I focus on the radical milieu in its entirety. The relief workers and militants were part of the same radical milieu; they participated in the same social activities, religious training and lectures, expressed the same viewpoints and looked up to the same influential figures in Denmark and abroad, some of whom eventually fought for the Islamic State. In that sense, I analyze socialization processes that precede different forms of high-risk activism. Regardless of whether the members engaged in relief work or armed struggle, they participated in the same religious culturing and absorbed the same religious ideas that directed their actions. Both types of activists honored and paid tribute to fellow brothers who had already joined the Syrian war. Hence, the relief workers and militants contributed to establishing and maintaining the radical milieu via different roles, degrees of dedication, support and labor tasks. The members of the milieu did also argue and disagree about methods, such as in relation to the use of violence, which became the predominant way of participating in the Syrian war (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014).

### 3.2.2. The Broader Surroundings: The Gellerup-Toveshøj Neighborhood in Western Aarhus

As mentioned above, Aarhus is the second-largest city in Denmark (approx. 350,000 inhabitants), wherefrom 35-40 individuals have left for the conflict in Syria to participate in armed struggle or to provide humanitarian aid. Of these individuals, 25-30 frequented a particular mosque in the Gellerup-Toveshøj neighborhood in western Aarhus. Moreover, the previously introduced police data in Chapter 1 (figure 1) concerning the uneven distribution of 226 cases of radicalization in Aarhus, presents higher prevalence rates of radicalization in western Aarhus and, in particular, in Gellerup-Toveshøj. The police estimate is a conservative number, as the systematic case filing concerning radicalization was not properly applied in the first years of the investigated period 2010-17 (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020). Moreover, as I investigate the radical milieu in the period 2007-17, the respondents provide a similar picture concerning the uneven distribution. Although the participants in the radical milieu resided throughout Aarhus, most of the interviewees resided in neighborhoods in western Aarhus, such as Gellerup-Toveshøj, Herredsvang and Bispehaven. Here, the members were within 5-10 minutes walking distance of

one another. They unfolded a sophisticated *activity field* throughout the city (Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012: 67-70, 252). They spent most of their time together in a specific mosque in Gellerup-Toveshøj as their safe haven, as well as in apartments in western Aarhus. Gellerup-Toveshøj is thus part of my fieldwork and data collection as the social and political surroundings of the radical milieu (Malthaner & Waldman, 2014) in which the radical milieu emerged and was sustained.

Successive Danish governments have officially designated Gellerup-Toveshøj as a “ghetto” every year since the first official Danish “ghetto list” was made public in 2010. The latest such list, made public in December 2019, uses the following criteria: more than 50% of the population must have an ethnic minority background (i.e., from non-Western countries), the unemployment rate for those aged 18-64 is more than 40% on average over the last 4 years, and the number of individuals convicted of crimes must exceed 270 per 10,000 inhabitants (Danish Ministry of Transport and Housing, 2019). Gellerup-Toveshøj consists of 2,400 apartments with approximately 7,000 residents representing circa 80 different nationalities. It was originally envisioned as a neighborhood where residents could live from the “cradle to the grave.” Between 1968 and 1972, the so-called “Gellerup Plan” listed a new public housing project consisting of approximately 1800 apartments. This was a period of great prosperity in Denmark: There was great optimism and many new social housing projects across the country. The new prestige project also featured facilities aimed at providing the residents with shared activities, such as a shopping mall, restaurants, a hotel, swimming facilities, a theater, library, jazz club, school, post office, tennis courts, church, daycare center and kindergarten, playgrounds and gardens where vegetables could be grown (Smed, 2014; Gudmand-Høyer 2020). People were enthusiastic about the Gellerup-Toveshøj public housing project. However, an increasing number of families found themselves able to afford the purchase of stand-alone houses at this time, meaning that fewer than expected were interested in moving into the new apartments. Moreover, Denmark experienced the global energy crises spawned in the Middle East in the 1970s, the Arabic states reducing their oil production and increasing oil prices dramatically. This had a major impact on the Danish economy and triggered an economic recession (Farbøl et al., 2018). In turn, these political and economic developments rendered it difficult to rent out the new apartments in Gellerup-Toveshøj. Thus, Brabrand Housing Cooperative and Aarhus Municipality made an agreement that allowed for the renting out of some of the apartments to immigrants and refugees. Since the 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s, refugees and immigrants from countries such as Turkey, Palestine, Lebanon, Vietnam, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Somalia moved into Gellerup-Toveshøj (Smed, 2014; Gudmand-Høyer, 2020).

### 3.3. Former Members of the Radical Milieu

Above all, the dissertation is based 22 individual semi-structured in-depth interviews, including follow-up interviews, with nine young male former participants in the radical milieu in Aarhus. This primary and new data material provides unique insight into a normally closed milieu. All but one of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, the single exception being conducted over the telephone. I conducted 21 of these interviews from December 2017 until April 2019, the final interview (a follow-up interview) conducted in November 2019. The interviews were conducted in the informants' private homes, in public facilities and in my university office. I recorded all but two of the interviews on a dictaphone. The two exceptions were follow-up interviews. In the first, the respondent preferred to conduct the interview without the dictaphone because of sensitive information about his parents and his groups' ties to militant organizations. The other exception was due to the interview being conducted over the phone.

**Table 1. Overview of data collection among former participants in the radical milieu**

<b>Respondents (fictitious names)</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>	<b>Interview time (hours/minutes/seconds)</b>
Ali	4	5:17:54
Bassam	3	4:58:09
Coman	4	6:35:25
Dawoud	3	5:24:09
Ebi	2	3:32:45
Fawaz	2	2:54:01
Ghadi	2	2:23:47
Hakim	1	2:39:58
Imad	1	1:20:36
Total	22	Approx. 35½ hours

I suggested 1½ hours per interview in the hope that I could persuade my respondents to do follow-up interviews. From the outset, I believed 1½ hours to be too little time to complete the interview without too much hurrying. In practice, most of the interviews, including the follow-up interviews, lasted 1½-2 hours. Two of the interviews lasted more than two hours. The opportunity to conduct follow-up interviews meant that I did not need to rush the initial interviews. Instead, the questions were conducted calmly over multiple

follow-up interviews with each interviewee, providing in-depth and detailed data. In two cases, I did not conduct follow-up interviews, mostly due to a tight time schedule.

The former participants in the radical milieu shared experiences, emotions, perceptions and examples from a certain period in their lives. They allowed access into how they experienced the world as a part of their reality and unfolded their experiences, statements and perceptions, thus emphasizing what they believed—deliberately or unintentionally—as important, although their accounts were not necessarily the objective truth. Nevertheless, these in-depth, nuanced insights are retrospective accounts of near-past experiences. Since the interviews were conducted post-participation in the radical milieu, the past is looked at through current eyes and through a certain contemporary filter. This involved the respondents, via the interviews, reproducing and describing a former lived life in the radical milieu, including the selected fragments, items, episodes, situations and sentiments from past experiences and involvement. Their stories and accounts may have been different if I had interviewed them during their involvement.

In total, I was in contact with about 33-35 individuals who participated in the radical milieu, nine of whom accepted to be interviewed. The process was very time-consuming and there were no guarantees. One aspect was getting in touch with these unique individuals, and it was difficult to find individuals who were willing to participate in my project. For an “outsider” to the field of radicalization, this number may seem low. However, as these milieus are typically not easily accessible, I managed to obtain detailed descriptions and accounts from nine former members of the radical milieu and follow-up interviews with seven of them. This data material has provided unique insights into the significance of the milieu and the pathways to and from it. Those who declined to be interviewed typically provided one or more of four typical explanations. First, some were afraid of creating a conflict with the Muslim community. Second, others were not interested in revisiting the past, as they did not look back on it with pride and had since started a new life, including education, employment and family. Third, some did not trust that the anonymity could be maintained and how participating in such an interview might affect their future. And finally, some declined simply because they felt they did not have the time. While I do believe that these respondents generally would have provided more or less the same accounts and descriptions had they accepted to be interviewed, I elaborate on two examples where I think that the non-respondents might differ from the actual respondents. First, some of these respondents might have had combat experience from the conflict in Syria. One former male participant in the radical milieu initially accepted my inquiry but ultimately cancelled the interview. I am quite certain that he had fought in

Syria. Such an interview would likely have provided accounts of participation in armed struggle, including the preparation involved, the actual combat, what life was like between the bouts of fighting, and the reception he experienced upon his return to Denmark (Greenwood, 2018). At least one of my respondents was not dismissive of participating in armed struggle. Second, some of the non-respondents may have been peripheral members and probably could have told me about what life was like on the fringe of the radical milieu and how they perceived the core members, such as my respondents. Obviously, however, they generally would have provided less information than my respondents because of their peripheral role. That said, I have no reason to believe that those who declined my interview invitation engaged in more violent behavior in connection with their participation in the radical milieu or that they have not moved on or that they joined another radical milieu in Aarhus or elsewhere. I have no reason to believe that my respondents differed in meaningful ways from the respondents who declined. In that sense, the nine interviewees provide insights indicating that there is no systematic non-response bias in my data material.

### 3.3.1. Sampling and Recruitment Strategies

Prior to my enrollment as a PhD candidate, I was employed as a consultant for 6 years in Aarhus Municipality working with prevention of radicalization,<sup>10</sup> from where I developed a substantial and extensive network. I was able to draw on this past experience in numerous ways throughout my project, not least in the recruiting of my respondents. My network was indispensable in establishing contact to my respondents via a combination of convenience and purposive sampling, using my extensive network, gatekeepers and snowballing (Weiss, 1994: 25; David & Sutton, 2004: 107). Parallel to recruiting any former participants in the radical milieu myself, I contacted my former colleagues to increase my chances of being able to recruit participants via an official inquiry to the management group for the prevention of radicalization in Aarhus, asking if they could assist me in recruiting respondents from the radical milieu. After recruiting my first two respondents on my own, it had become apparent that the recruitment process would be very time-consuming.

The collaborative management group working with the prevention of radicalization in Aarhus agreed to try and help me, and one particular employee became my designated gatekeeper. I knew him from my past job, where we worked together with mentoring and he had been my sparring partner. He

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<sup>10</sup> The prevention of radicalization program is a collaboration between Aarhus Municipality and the East Jutland Police aimed at preventing radicalization in Aarhus. Foreign news media have labelled the model the “Aarhus Model.”

knew my respondents through his work with other mentors and exit programs and/or providing the mentees with advice and guidance in their mentor-mentee relationship and exit processes.<sup>11</sup> My gatekeeper helped to recruit seven former members of the radical milieu. I did not draw on any information from police registers. I used my gatekeeper, as he knew the relevant respondents and was able to provide contact information. He knew these interviewees very well, he is still in contact with some of them, and he was respected for his help. In the recruiting process, I provided my gatekeeper with brief verbal and written guidelines and information about my project, to which he could refer when reaching out to the potential respondents. The typical procedure included my gatekeeper facilitating the contact between the potential interview person and me. More specifically, my gatekeeper would contact the potential interviewee; if he was willing to be interviewed, my gatekeeper would provide me with the potential interviewee's telephone number. A couple of potential interviewees were not interested in talking to me, and I never received their contact information. In this part of my research process, I surrendered the total control and had to rely on another person. First, my research project (and I as a person) were presented; framed and articulated by my gatekeeper. In that sense, the lack of control included a shift in power, which I deposited with my gatekeeper. Another such example involves my lack of control over the sampling selection; my gatekeeper and I had initial talks about the sampling strategy. He could help facilitate contact to former members of the radical milieu but not individuals currently in mentoring or exit programs in order to protect them from potentially disrupting elements. Similarly, individuals who are currently struggling with other serious personal issues were also discarded on ethical grounds and for their protection, despite the fact that they had participated in the milieu in the past. From my previous work, I am well aware of how the mentor-mentee relationship and the exit process in general requires peace and quiet.

In addition to the assistance I received from my gatekeeper, my own network played a significant role in the sampling process, and I participated actively in the recruitment process. As stated above, if a potential interviewee was interested, I received contact information and was allowed to contact him (they were all males). Afterwards, I would phone the potential interviewee,

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<sup>11</sup> I did not interview any of my former mentees, although I was in contact with two of them. At the time of my inquiries, one of them was busy and did not have the time, while the other declined because his parents found it too risky in terms of anonymity. They might also have been uninterested in casting light on their past experiences, unwilling to relive them and/or they might find it strange to sit in an interview situation with me as their former mentor, as I already knew their story.

elaborate on my project and interest in this person and answer any possible questions they might have. I followed this procedure with all of the respondents who had been part of the radical milieu. They all accepted and participated voluntarily in my interviews. In one example, one of the respondents openly told me that he had contacted one of my former mentees prior to our telephone call to hear what I was like as a person. He accepted the interview offer. In that sense, the character of the interviewer, in this case me, is important in the light of the sensitivity of the topic. Although the use of my gatekeeper had disadvantages, I argue that it is both a necessary and useful way of recruiting interviewees, not least with respect to access and time. I also took advantage of snowballing, although this only resulted in a single additional respondent. The process was similar to that with the gatekeeper: I only received a name and contact information if the potential respondent was interested. Anyone who declined the potential interview remained anonymous to me. In my experience, snowballing and the use of a gatekeeper for the recruitment of potential interview persons involved similar strengths and weaknesses; and while they both involve a loss of control, they were necessary for a project such as this one due to the field under investigation—in this case the radical milieu—being difficult to access.

### 3.3.2. Who Are They and Why Do They Want to Talk to Me?

The nine respondents played different roles and “authority” within the radical milieu, and none of them joined or left at the same time. The time they spent in the milieu and their degree of engagement also vary. As previously mentioned, the milieu consisted of core members and peripheral members. Although my respondents were not from the same group, they were all core members and active participants on a daily basis in their groups. They were able to provide insights into central activities. In that sense, the nine interviewees elaborated on shared experiences and additional experiences based on their specific roles and authority. At the time that they were active members of the milieu, they ranged in age from early teens to early 20s. When they were members, seven of the nine interviewees resided in western Aarhus. The remaining two lived in the southern part of the city but spent much time in Aarhus Vest. Moreover, their educational backgrounds differed, as some were receiving technical training in a secondary school program while others were pursuing a more academic route in an upper secondary program (*gymnasium*). One interviewee was “between schools,” while two were employed. All of the interviewees were ethnic minorities. With a single exception (who was born in Denmark), they have all lived in Denmark since their early childhood, when the parents came to Denmark as refugees. Five of the nine interviewees joined the

war in Syria, where they were involved in humanitarian relief work in different refugee camps. One of the respondents reported having held a weapon with the purpose of protecting himself and colleagues in the refugee camp from a potential attack. Would these respondents have told me if they had taken up arms in battle for the Islamic State? Not necessarily (for understandable reasons), out of fear of self-incrimination and the Danish anti-terror legislation. However, I believe the interviewees were generally truthful and forthcoming. I have no reason to believe anything else. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that the respondents all knew friends and acquaintances who had either engaged in militancy or transitioned from relief work to armed struggle, sometimes fighting under the banner of the Islamic State. Moreover, the respondents perceived their past with ambivalence; some of them explicitly declared that they were not proud of their past and actions, which included lying to their parents, influencing or recruiting others, and/or leaving for the war in Syria. Conversely, two of the interviewees were happy about their past involvement. One of these two was happy about having partaken in humanitarian relief work, but it got to be too much for him when the milieu became mainly focused on militant participation in Syria, such as fighting for the Islamic State; the other interviewee who was happy with his past involvement praised those who had left to participate in the armed struggle. The respondents are all still practicing Muslims, albeit with a new understanding of Islam. For some of the respondents, their participation in my interviews seems rather cathartic and/or part of a redemption process. Their contribution may be a way of making sense of their past, and in some sense making good to “compensate” for their past actions on Judgement Day (Maruna, 2001). I will provide two examples: One respondent explicitly stated in a follow-up interview that he “helped recruit young people into the group. That’s why I want to do these interviews—so I can make it a little better again.” Another interviewee provides an indirect example, mentioning how he regrets lying to his parents before leaving for Syria: “So it’s one of the things that I, on a personal level, have really regretted. And when I look back, I just get really upset because I can remember how my parents responded afterwards. On top of that, it’s a great sin in Islam not to obey your parents, and lying is also a sin.” Here again, the respondent possibly regards his participation in my project as atoning for past sins. I have excluded their fictitious names for additional protection, as one of them left for the Syrian conflict. I return to the aspect of anonymity at the end of this chapter.

In the pre-interview phase, I elaborated on my project, my research questions and how the dissertation could benefit from the respondent’s unique experiences. For example, I explained how I was interested in interviewing them about their social life in the radical milieu broadly speaking and not solely

concentrating on the violent aspects. I also pitched my interest in how they combined online and offline spheres in their socializing. This interest in nuancing and trying to obtain a better understanding of the radical milieu seemed to motivate them. The respondents were happy that the interviews were used for research and not for journalistic purposes, as they considered the media as portraying the radical milieu in a simplistic manner. That did not mean that they excluded the violent aspects in the interviews, such as watching violent videos or fighting for militant organizations such as al-Qaeda affiliated groups or the Islamic State. In the interviews, they provided a fuller picture of the milieu, focusing both on the positive and negative aspects as well as being critical of their own actions, those of other members and the specific religious interpretation upon which the milieu was based. Some of the respondents explicitly stated that they would contribute with their unique information if doing so might help prevent others from making the same mistakes that they had. Although the socializing in the radical milieu facilitated strong companionship and positive memories thereof, the other side of the coin involved actions they regretted and/or disillusionment with the milieu. It is also important to consider that some of the respondents were possibly also motivated by a sense of anger toward the radical milieu in general or specific participants to the point that they might have been seeking revenge for having been exploited or treated unjustly. Conversely, however, some respondents may still sympathize with their former companions and be trying to justify or protect them.

### 3.4. Other Informants: Professionals across Aarhus and Ordinary Gellerup-Toveshøj Residents

In addition to the 22 interviews with former participants in the radical milieu, the investigation includes 56 semi-structured individual and focus group interviews with multiple categories of informants. These interviews were with professionals, such as police officers, social workers and schoolteachers, and leaders from Aarhus Municipality and the East Jutland Police, who work with radicalization prevention in Aarhus. I conducted these interviews in the period January-October 2018. The focus group and individual interviews include non-radical residents from Gellerup-Toveshøj in western Aarhus (Aarhus Vest). I conducted these interviews between October 2017 and March 2018. The interviews with the professionals were approximately one hour per interview. The focus groups with non-radical residents were 2-2½ hours per interview.

These groups of professionals provided insight and experience with radicalized individuals, contributing nuanced perspectives and adding depth to

my investigation. For example, the members of the radical milieu provided examples of their coping strategies for how to hide their activities from the parents, the police and teachers. The teachers shared their experiences with members of the milieu, which shed light on the extent to which the members actually succeeded in implementing their coping strategies. In that sense, no single group of respondents is capable of providing exhaustive accounts of all aspects. Instead, I argue that the combination of my different interview persons contributes hands on knowledge from multiple perspectives, thereby facilitating a more robust examination of my research questions and understanding of the radical milieu. With a few exceptions, I knew most of the professionals from my former job, including police officers, teachers, social workers, mentors, consultants and leaders from Aarhus Municipality and the East Jutland Police. That gave me a crucial advantage. I contacted these respondents directly, saving time and energy in scheduling interviews. Those interviewees unknown to me beforehand were referred via snowballing. Moreover, the motivation of the professionals—the police officers, social workers, mentors and schoolteachers, and leaders from Aarhus Municipality and the East Jutland Police—centered around their daily work experience. These respondents worked with the prevention of radicalization throughout Aarhus on a daily basis or experienced specific radical individuals in their working lives who might have died in the conflict zone in Syria or were subsequently convicted for having violated the Danish anti-terror legislation. The personal experiences contributed to the motivation for the interview, thus contributing with in-depth accounts of experiences and observations in the hope of helping to prevent other young individuals from joining a radical milieu and/or partaking in conflict zones. These interviews supplement my answers to research sub-questions 1-4.

I also conducted semi-structured, face-to-face focus group and individual interviews with ordinary residents from Aarhus Vest. I draw on these interviews in Chapter 9 to help answer why the radical milieu emerged and was sustained in Gellerup-Toveshøj and not another neighborhood. In recruiting respondents for the focus group interviews that tapped into neighborhood-level dynamics and neighbor interaction, I drew on my networks together with gatekeepers and snowballing in a manner similar to that described above (David & Sutton, 2004: 107; Winterbotham & Pearson, 2020). Focus groups are useful for generating data on neighbor-related issues, norms and interactions, as they produce group-level data via the exercises and discussions between the participants. I assume that my respondents share a frame of reference, being residents in the same neighborhoods, which renders them eligible to discuss their interactions, interpretations and the norms existing in Gellerup-

Toveshøj. These focus group interviews are therefore valuable for understanding neighborhood characteristics and what it was like living in this neighborhood (Kitzinger, 2005; Lloyd-Evans, 2006). These focus group interviews contribute to shedding light on the question about the “where” of radicalization, focusing on why the radical milieu emerged and was sustained in Gellerup-Toveshøj in western Aarhus, as certain neighborhood characteristics may be conducive to radicalization. Three focus group interviews consisted of five respondents, the fourth involving only two respondents. My respondents ranged in age from early adolescence to their late 30s. One focus group consisted of a mix of five young men and women, all of whom shared an ethnic majority/Danish background. The other focus groups involved respondents with ethnic minority backgrounds; one consisting of five mothers, another with five young females, and finally the focus group with two young men. I had originally recruited three men for the latter focus group, but one of the respondents had to cancel on the day of the interview. The remaining two participants tried to find a replacement for him but could not do so in so little time. We carried out the interview as a focus group nevertheless. In general, recruiting ethnic minority men in their 20s and 30s proved difficult. There might be many reasons why this is the case, including language barriers and/or an unwillingness to disclose information about what is going on in one’s neighborhood, including one’s own behavior and that of friends and family. For these interviews, I used my network together with gatekeepers and snowballing to set up the interviews. More specifically, I took advantage of a combination of convenience and purposive sampling (Liamputtong, 2011: 51-2). First, almost all of the respondents (except two) resided in Gellerup-Toveshøj. One had lived in Gellerup-Toveshøj for 6 years but had moved closer to the city center two months prior to the interview. The other interviewee lived elsewhere in western Aarhus but spent time in Gellerup-Toveshøj on an everyday basis, several hours daily, taking part in community organization work with other Gellerup-Toveshøj residents. For this community-based part of the study, I preferred groups of respondents who knew each other from the same neighborhood communities (but were not related to one another), and who possessed similar social backgrounds, such as ethnicity, gender, age, education or employment. In one of the focus groups, I mixed male and female participants with ethnic Danish backgrounds. I recruited these participants through a social gathering attended by both women and men; and since the interviewees knew each other on a daily basis and were used to engaging in mixed-gender settings, I decided on a mixed-gender composition. Based on my collected data, I argue that the homogenous group composition provided rich discussions, debate and “negotiations” about the neighborhood interactions. The respondents seemed comfortable and safe in each other’s company

and with me as moderator. If I had composed the groups with unfamiliar faces, the discussions and debates may have been difficult to start or remained more superficial. Conversely, I was attentive to how the participants in each focus group had close ties to each other, as this possibly resulted in self-censoring because of fear, anxiety or negative social control-mechanisms. I did not experience any of this in my interviews (Krueger & Casey, 2000: 11; & Bloor et al., 2001: 22-4). Second, the focus groups and individual interviews consisted of both male and female interviewees of different ages. They attended secondary school or an institution of higher learning, while others were employed. A few of the interviewees were unemployed. Some of the respondents were parents. I argue that the different ages and family roles could tap into different interactions, experiences and interests in neighborhood communities, thus providing variation (Morgan, 1997: 35-7). For example, adolescents may unfold and discuss different observations, experiences and perspectives than would their 30-something parents. Third, the selected informants were not qualified as respondents alone because of their residence in or attachment to Gellerup-Toveshøj. For example, I instructed the gatekeepers to target residents who also spoke Danish and may have a desire to speak about and discuss the neighborhood. They all spoke Danish, albeit some better than others. These informants provided in-depth, relevant information and accounts. I am aware that my interview data with Gellerup-Toveshøj residents is limited—not least in the light of the variation characterizing my respondents. In that sense, I am aware that my focus group informants do not constitute a representative sample of the Gellerup-Toveshøj residents. For example, I did not include young children or senior citizens. However, for this purposive and convenience sampling, I chose participants because they possessed unique information of relevance to my study and who at the same time were willing to share their knowledge. I also recruited one of the focus groups without assistance from my networks. With the selection criteria in mind, I searched the internet for associations in Gellerup-Toveshøj and found one that appeared relevant, looking for interviewees with ethnic majority/Danish backgrounds. I contacted the association and was allowed to participate in a shared meal, where I was allowed to present my investigation with the purpose of recruiting residents for a focus group. I succeeded in recruiting five respondents.

The motivation for participating in the focus group interviews is two-fold. In recruiting these respondents, I presented directly how I wanted to tap into both the positive and negative aspects of Gellerup-Toveshøj. I emphasized that I was interested in a nuanced picture of the neighborhood. I was honest and straightforward about also focusing on the challenges and negative communities within Gellerup-Toveshøj, such as gangs and radicalization/radical milieus. It is my impression that most of the residents found this acceptable

or even attractive. Some of them seem to have seen an opportunity to speak openly and in a nuanced manner about the ambivalence of Gellerup-Toveshøj life, the challenges in their neighborhood and highlighting the positive relationships and social activities in the area. Another aspect that seems to motivate some of the respondents was a sense of give and take. Scheduling one of the focus groups, I recruited respondents from a community organization. They indicated some measure of fatigue with pupils, students, journalist, consultants, researchers, politicians and others who are constantly trying to arrange interviews. They felt that many people were interested in their knowledge, but they rarely received anything in return, such as lectures, meetings, reports, summaries or a status concerning their participation. We therefore agreed that I could recruit five participants for a focus group and then conduct a dialogue-based workshop about neighborhood interaction for the whole organization, inspired by my focus group interview guide and related exercises. The community members felt accommodated and respected—and not just “used.”

### 3.5. Groups of Informants I Did Not Interview

As mentioned above, I interviewed numerous different groups of interviewees. However, other groups of informants could have informed my project and contributed to strengthen my dissertation. For example, I did not interview any female participants, even though the radical milieu in Aarhus included female members who also left for Syria (or neighboring countries) to participate in the Syrian conflict. Some female members died in Syria, while others were imprisoned. Other female participants have also left the milieu. Recent research (see, e.g., Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017; Cook & Vale, 2018; Nuraniyah, 2018; Shapiro & Maras, 2019) has focused on women’s experiences and roles in radicalization and in terror groups (for a Danish study, see Jacobsen, 2019). Moreover, I did not interview any young ethnic Danes who had converted to Islam and participated in the radical milieu. Their stories would also have been useful and interesting. In addition, I was in contact with a number of parents whose children were part of the radical milieu and had left for Syria, some of whom died there. They all declined to participate in interviews. Some gave reasons such as fatigue from prior media interviews and their collaboration with authorities and that they just wanted to put the experience behind them. However, I was able to interview parents who knew local families who had experienced radicalization as well parents living in the Gellerup-Toveshøj neighborhood.

Finally, my investigation lacks an obvious control group—such as friends with similar backgrounds and in similar situations to my interviewees—who

did not end up participating in the radical milieu. This would have strengthened my attempt to understand why some individuals end up in a radical milieu while others do not. It was my experience that it was difficult to arrange interviews with friends. I assume that some were frightened by the subject and/or that they might say something that could harm or incriminate others. The friends could have provided useful data in terms of learning from them and how or why they were able to avoid the radical milieu. As an alternative, non-radical residents from Gellerup-Toveshøj were represented in my focus groups. These interviews provide some measure of contextualization regarding the radicals. In sum, my dissertation would undoubtedly have gained from also including representatives from these “missed out groups” of respondents. Since time and resources were decisive factors, however, my primary focus was on the individuals who participated in the radical milieu. As previously mentioned, these interviewees are difficult to interview, since their experiences, accounts and stories involve peculiar data and insight into a milieu that is mostly inaccessible.

### 3.6. Strengths of Semi-Structured Interviews: Individual and Focus Group Interviews

The majority of my collected interviews were conducted as in-depth individual interviews. I argue that taking a nuanced and multifaceted approach to talking with individuals who have formerly been involved in a radical milieu is necessary to demonstrate that one is taking them seriously. By asking questions that go beyond an exclusively focus on pro-violence aspects, we have the opportunity to get a more nuanced, in-depth understanding of the radical milieu, including a focus on the various everyday activities that generate positive emotions as well as behavior in online and offline spheres prior to violent or non-violent high-risk activism (Post & Berko, 2009). In that sense, my data provides new knowledge that, in turn, can facilitate new insights and help strengthen the field of radicalization prevention. The interviewees invited me into their “inner world” and provided first-hand knowledge about certain processes, mechanisms and factors in the past that are difficult to achieve with more quantitative methods (Post & Berko, 2009: 147; Sheikh, 2020). Simply put, the in-depth interviews allowed me to obtain “thick descriptions” from my respondents that inform about the paths leading to the radical milieu, participation in the milieu, and how some exit the milieu, focusing both on patterns and nuances. “Thick descriptions” involve rich, detailed accounts of people’s lives and events in different settings and contexts. However, “thick descriptions” are not only about producing descriptive accounts, they also involve a method emphasizing the interpretation of respondents’ descriptions,

examples, viewpoints, feelings and respondents' own interpretations (Geertz, 1973: 3-32).<sup>12</sup> Socialization plays a pivotal role in the radical milieu in terms of the construction of a certain moral context as well as discussing and promoting certain desirable actions. In that sense, the focus on the interaction within the milieu corresponds with the use of focus group, as this method is particularly valuable for collecting data about norms, interactions and negotiations. However, certain conditions, such as confidentiality and a willingness to openly discuss interactions within the radical milieu, rendered it necessary to conduct the interviews with the former participants in the radical milieu as individual, in-depth interviews. By using this approach, I am also trying to provide the reader with the opportunity to develop a better understanding of the radical milieu in Aarhus based on my findings and conclusions (Ehn & Löfgren, 2001). However, I assume that the reader will most likely continue interpreting my findings and my conclusions—I know that I will continue to interpret my findings and work (Krause-Jensen, 2007).

The semi-structured interview format has been beneficial for my project. Individual, semi-structured interviews provide a degree of structure together with flexibility and openness. For my project, I used this semi-structured format as a way of introducing overall themes, my interview guide functioning more as a checklist of topics; otherwise, the conversation was open in order to provide the respondent with the opportunity to share what they view as important. This openness and flexibility allowed me to explore unforeseen directions that I had not anticipated beforehand as well as to probe for more detailed answers. I occasionally presented spontaneous follow-up questions to the respondents' answers, for example in instances where they opened up for unexpected and important details or if they touched on matters that I wanted to explore more in depth. For example, the in-depth stories about the interviewees' respective exit processes were generally collected via unforeseen openings (Berg, 2009: 105-15; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 49, 177-8; Bryman, 2016: 466-76). I also used the format to facilitate comparisons between the nine male former participants in the radical milieu, investigating in-depth details, complexities, contrasts and/or uniformities. Although the interview situation is fixed and I meet the interviewee for a clear and specific purpose, the format is more like a conversation. This helps to ease the atmosphere and makes the interviewee more comfortable, which is beneficial when talking about sensitive topics such as participation in radical milieus and high-risk activism (Post & Berko, 2009; Schuurman, 2018a: 30).

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<sup>12</sup> Geertz adopted the term “thick description” from Gilbert Ryle.

The semi-structured focus group interviews facilitated a similar degree of structure, flexibility and openness. This format provided space for the participants' perspectives and interactions together with discussions about neighborhood-level factors such as social cohesion, informal social control, institutional trust and the moral context of certain neighborhood communities. The interaction, discussions and comments via shared knowledge about the respondent's neighborhood captures complexities, nuances and ambiguities. The focus groups also contained specific structured exercises or activity-oriented questions regarding neighborhood interactions aimed at emphasizing my interests (Morgan, 1997: 13-16, 41-2). Moreover, the focus group interviews function as a kind of "reality check" to the Danish SER Community Surveys that taps into neighborhood-level factors and neighbor interactions (Bloor et al., 2001: 8-13). In that sense, the focus groups provide in-depth and nuanced supporting knowledge to selected findings in the surveys, which contributes to answering the question of why the radical milieu emerged and could be sustained in Gellerup-Toveshøj. I return to this question in Chapter 9.

### 3.7. Weaknesses of Qualitative Interviews: Individual and Focus Group Interviews

Qualitative interviews also pose multiple challenges; for example, data collection is time-consuming, spending many hours finding potential interviewees with no guarantees. Interviewing itself is also time-consuming, requiring coordination, preparation, transportation, catering and the actual interview and reporting afterwards. Respondents sometimes show up late or re-schedule due to illness or other conflicts. Another concern is the representativeness of the interviews. As mentioned above, most of the participants I contacted were unwilling to be interviewed, meaning that I did not interview all of the former participants in the radical milieu in Aarhus, nor did I interview all of the members from the three radical groups within the radical milieu with which have been in contact. This implies that my interviewees are not representative of the milieu as a whole. Consequently, I took advantage of a combination of convenience and purposive sampling, drawing on my extensive network together with gatekeepers and snowballing, and I ended up interviewing those who were accessible and willing to speak to me (Schuurman, 2018a: 31). That said, I have interviewed core members within the milieu who have willingly shared their knowledge and experiences, thus contributing with unique insights about the radical milieu from a sufficient number of individuals to provide a nuanced picture.

Interviewing also poses other challenges such as data reliability. As previously mentioned, while the former participants in the radical milieu possess unique, in-depth knowledge about individual pathways and the radical milieu, they provide retrospective accounts of their participation in the past. They construct a near past of emotions, experiences, social activities, and high-risk activism. This could influence data quality in several ways. For example, some of the respondents revived their religion along their path to the radical milieu. Such recollection can be problematic when attempting to capture the full experience in process and detail, since I did not observe the religious revival but must rely on the respondents own accounts elaborated from a retrospective point of view (McGuire, 2002: 73-83). Along these lines, interviewing about past experiences can produce rationalized answers. On multiple occasions, some of the respondents began a reply: “When I talk about it now, it hits me...” or “now that I look back, I can see...”. These rationalized answers came after the respondents had described a process, an experience or observation, or a feeling. There is also the risk of the respondents possibly lying, glorifying their engagement, avoiding the whole truth, over-reporting or exercising self-censure out of fear of self-incrimination or retaliations from others. In contrast, most respondents have moved on from their past participation and seem to desire a more open approach and willingness to provide full disclosure. I experienced both approaches. A few respondents declined to answer specific questions. For example, one respondent initially declined but answered questions in a follow up interview about using social media to maintain contact with volunteers in Syria and the impact of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. In this case, the sensitivities of the question seemingly had an impact. Perhaps trust was also an issue. Moreover, in some parts of interviews, the respondents avoid telling the whole truth or exercise self-censuring. It is difficult to state these “hunches” in a proper academic and scientific manner, but I would argue that more than 10 years of experience in this field and talking to many different kinds of people within this context gives me some ability to read faces, body language, tone of voice, eye movement and so forth. I experienced this with the former participants in the radical milieu as well as in my individual interviews with the professionals. Some of the professionals did not disclose the whole truth when I introduced topics and questions directly targeting the group they worked with on a daily basis; they might have been trying to protect their target group by avoiding a statement that can be misunderstood or interpreted in a negative manner or possibly attempting to avoid jeopardizing their work-relation to their target group by answering honestly and/or in depth. It became clear that when the respondents talked about influential figures in the milieu, they retained information. This could be due to the sensitivity of the topic, as such topics typically become very close and concrete to

the interview person. Other possible explanations involve the protection of the prominent individuals and protecting oneself from potential retaliations. Moreover, another concern regarding reliability is how the episodic and autobiographic memory may not be totally accurate. In my interviews it, was usually a date or year, exact numbers or sometimes the exact words people have said that were blurry, mixed or forgotten. At the same time, other interviewees seemed to have a photographic memory, remembering experiences and observations clearly and easily (Schuurman, 2018a: 31).

Focus group interviews also have weaknesses. Similar to the individual interviews, recruitment was challenging and time-consuming, especially finding 5-6 individuals where the calendars would match and all of the respondents would actually show up. The format and practice of group interaction is difficult to complete at all times. Moreover, the participants typically say much less in focus groups than in individual interviews; Some respondents tend to fall out of the group discussion, and one respondent may dominate a group. In three of the focus groups, there were individuals from whom I repeatedly asked viewpoints because they were sliding into the background. Some of the focus group participants became evasive when the discussion turned to radicalization. It is fair to say that this topic can be sensitive or personal, especially because it is often intertwined with religion in the public discourse, especially Islam and integration. These respondents, who were religious themselves, may have been reluctant to engage in discussions about radicalization for such reasons. It is also possible that the focus group participants might have had family members, friends or other “intimates” who participated in the radical milieu, which might also be an inhibiting factor (Grossman, 2015; Thomas et al., 2017). After one of the focus groups, a respondent confided in me that he was familiar with individuals who participated in the radical milieu and that he therefore spoke in very general terms and tried to avoid specific questions. He was not comfortable talking about the people he knew in specific detail. Others did not provide reasons for their lack of engagement in the discussion on radicalization. Such reticence may also indicate a sense of indifference to radicalization and an attempt at turning a blind eye. On the other hand, I also experienced consensus among the participants on some issues; for example that the residents are in general happy to live in Gellerup-Toveshøj as well I have no reason to believe that status, hierarchy or negative social control influenced these group dynamics (Morgan, 1997: 15).

Finally, throughout the individual and focus group interviews, it can be difficult to verify or “cross-check” statements from respondents; that is, to control that they are not withholding information or making things up. This problem was reduced to some extent by interviewing multiple respondents, as the same accounts and descriptions appeared in different interviews within

the same groups of respondents as well as different groups of respondents. On the other hand, I would argue that hearing new accounts that are not repeated multiple times by others is not necessarily disqualifying. Some information may be limited to very few people, such as the information covering relations to terror organizations and contacts to foreign fighters and other prominent figures. Such information seems to be the reserve of the more trusted, dedicated and influential figures in the radical milieu.

### 3.8. The Researcher as Research “Tool”: My Past Experience, Procedures and Personality

I consider myself a “research tool” throughout the project. I used my pre-understanding in different phases: from the operationalization and data collection to the analysis. As previously mentioned, prior to enrolling as a PhD candidate, I was employed as a consultant for six years in Aarhus Municipality working with radicalization prevention. I drew on my former experience in several beneficial ways. First, after reassessing my project proposal and consulting the literature, the next stage consisted of conceptualization aimed at using core concepts that might help to outline the interview guide (David & Sutton, 2004: 141-2). At this stage, I went back and forth between the literature and my former experience with radicalization to compare concepts to find the most suitable match between theory and practice. Second, in preparing the semi-structured interview format, my pre-understanding, including past experiences with one-on-one sessions with radicalized young individuals, helped me to navigate what kinds of questions would generate answers that would contribute to my investigation (Weiss, 1994: 39-42). My past experience with one-on-one sessions with radicalized young Muslims was also valuable in the interview situations. I knew what it was like to talk about subjects related to radicalization and the individual’s life, and I had experience with initiating conversation or small talk in an attempt at creating a relaxed and safe atmosphere. Moreover, my years of mentoring radicalized young individuals have provided the experience, ease and composure necessary to focus on the conversations. All of this experience was invaluable in the interview situation. Fourth, when setting up the interviews, I used former practices from my mentoring. In all of the cases, I let the interviews decide whether the interview should take place in their home or an alternative location that they might prefer. This was meant to increase the likelihood that the respondent would consent to the interview and actually show up. This usually seemed to pay off. In a couple of instances, I picked the interviewees up and drove them back again after the interview. In these cases, we small-talked while I drove, and I had the

opportunity to speak about my project, saving time during the actual interview. It is also worth noting that I did not pay my respondents or give them anything beyond an offer to buy some food and beverage, such as a sandwich and a bottle of water, that we could eat together prior to the interview. If the interviewee had time and accepted this offer, I scheduled an additional half hour before the start of the actual interview. Purchasing food was convenient for various reasons, not least that it seemed appropriate to provide some form of reciprocity for their time spent: a token of gratitude. But this time before the interview also enabled me to restate or provide a short recap of the introduction of my project and myself, inquiring in an open manner regarding the respondent's present life and interests, using this prelude to the interview to get a sense of the atmosphere, and eating together made the transition to the actual interview easier. Eating together had a positive influence. I provided pizza and bottled water for the focus groups and the group interview with residents in the neighborhood of my field research for the exact same reasons. Eating together seemed to set a positive tone, and I was again able to use the time to elaborate on my project and to get a sense of the group dynamic, their interests and the atmosphere, which aided the creation of a safe and easy-going interview setting. Finally, in addition to using the time spent eating together to sense the mood, I also actively tried to influence the atmosphere in a positive direction; I was open and honest about my project, my educational background, former job and work, my project and myself. I tried to be accommodating as I answered the questions about my private background, such as about being adopted from Sri Lanka and my personal, non-religious approach to religion. I believe this further contributed to a reciprocal, give-and-take dynamic (Post & Berko, 2009). In addition, I was in no hurry to end the meeting when the interviews were finished. After some of the interviews, if the respondents had time, we chatted everyday life, religion and the afterlife. This seemed to have a calming and trustful impact, possibly making me more credible and "real." I did the same when mentoring and generally found that it had the same desired outcome. As mentioned above, I told my respondents about my former work, including mentoring. Some of them had direct personal experience with mentoring while others were familiar with it from acquaintances. As trust was established, some respondents asked me—after interviews—about aspects about their current life situation regarding their education and career—and even their choice of mosques. I always tried to give them my best and honest answers.

As previously mentioned, I did not follow the interview guide chronologically from start to finish, instead practicing a more flexible approach. I listened to my respondents and tried to let them formulate answers and elaborate their answers. Pauses were welcome. On several occasions, the pauses

made room for reflection leading to additional answers. However, I did also interrupt the respondents, for example when the former participants of the radical milieu mentioned names or concepts from Islam in Arabic, as I wanted to ensure a correct understanding and spelling. This did not seem to disturb the flow or irritate the respondents. Quite the opposite; taking such details seriously seemed to have a positive influence. During the interviews, I took notes while listening—both to help myself when writing summaries and field notes after the interview as well as making markers to remember to return to interesting viewpoints or details later in the interview.

The atmosphere in the individual and focus group interviews was generally relaxed and positive. I found that the atmosphere in my interviews with a couple of teachers became tense due to the sensitivity of the content as well as their past experiences. In the following, I focus on the 22 individual interviews with the former participants of the radical milieu as well as the four focus groups. During the 22 interviews, the atmosphere was generally positive and casual, which I base on how the respondents sat, talked, gesticulated, smiled, opened up and laughed. Conversely, there were two cases where the atmosphere became tense and pressed for a brief period of time due to specific past experiences that seemed to stir anger, resentment and feelings of injustice when recalling certain events, such as discrimination and Western foreign policy. After the interviews, I tried to ensure that the interviewees were alright. In contrast, when elaborating on similar events, other interviewees maintained a more neutral, calm demeanor. This reflects how some of them have distanced themselves from their past negative feelings, while others would appear to be still dealing with such emotions. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the respondents opened up about the specific *Salafi* version of Islam practiced by the participants in the radical milieu, knowing that radicalization and particular religion or understandings of Islam are heated subjects in the political and public debate. The interviewees seemed to be at ease and comfortable. They were not hesitant nor reluctant, all of them reporting in rich detail. This might partly be because they have an interest in tackling and confronting radical religious interpretations. The respondents may have tried to nuance the political and public debate about religion by shedding light on a religio-political interpretation in a radical milieu in contrast to a mainstream or traditional religious interpretation of Islam. Moreover, the respondents were familiar with my educational background in the Study of Religions, which may have influenced an interest in demonstrating their knowledge about their own religion. In addition, it cannot be ruled out that the interviewees' interest in going into detail about religion was facilitated by our shared pre-understanding of Islam, albeit from different perspectives. There were also moments where the respondents seemed interested in trying to impress

or teach me about Islam, since quotations from the Quran or hadith were recited or phrases such as “Have you heard about how...?”, “Did you learn about that in the Study of Religions?”, or “You’ve probably only heard about militant jihad” were common, although never in a negative or confronting manner.

I also consider my brown skin/ethnic minority background to be a positive factor when engaging in interviews with individuals of non-ethnic-Danish descent. As an anecdotal note, this was also my experience in my former work, when visiting schools and in one-on-one sessions with young radicalized Muslims. I mentored a young man with an ethnic minority background and immigrant parents for a couple of years. He once told me of how even though he knew I was adopted to ethnic-Danish parents, that he felt we shared a sense of “foreignness,” which contributed to a positive relationship between us. I took a pragmatic approach and had no hard feelings. While none of the interviewees in this project articulate such feelings explicitly, I have had the impression that they do also seem to somehow identify with or reflect in me, whether consciously or unconsciously. This might also be an explanation for their trust in me, opening up in interviews and providing me with dense accounts. In contrast, my beard somehow seemed to have a negative influence with two teachers in conversations about Muslim students. In the one instance, the interviewee suddenly asked if I confessed to Islam because of my beard. I answered in the negative and explained that I simply like having a beard in the winter. As the interview continued, the interviewee shared negative experiences with some Muslim students. It seemed as though the interviewee wanted to determine I was a Muslim or not before feeling safe enough to share these negative experiences.

As stated above, my previous work experience had obvious advantages. But it also entailed challenges. For example, I knew most of the professionals beforehand. They knew my educational background and were aware of my past work with radicalization prevention. On a couple of occasions, I found that respondents became nervous when talking about religion and ideology. I also experienced a couple of times that respondents answered rather curtly, followed by “but you already know that” or “but you know that better than me.” In such instances, I just reminded the respondents to “forget” that we knew each other in order to provide me with concrete and detailed accounts and reports. Another example relates to my preexisting knowledge possibly somehow being intimidating; on the one hand, I had relevant knowledge about socializing, situations and actions concerning the radical milieu, which I hoped the former participants in the milieu would mention on their own. And in most of these interviews, they did so. However, some of the respondents did not present this knowledge in a “natural” manner. In such cases, I

asked more directly, presenting more pointed questions, because this information or these experiences could contribute to my project. In this sense, the research-based interview is a kind of snapshot where significant information is not necessarily induced without some kind of direct or leading questions. On the other hand, this preexisting knowledge may have overshadowed other unforeseen aspects, thus steering too much from my past practical experience and knowledge concerning radicalization. It is also possible that my past work experience and theoretical knowledge concerning radicalization might have excessively influenced my analysis and interpretation. However, I tried to avoid this by emphasizing the openness in the conducted interviews together with integrated open coding in my coding strategy, where I was conscious of keeping an open mind in relation to my data. I return to my analysis strategy below, including the coding procedures.

My former work for Aarhus Municipality included the capacity building of frontline workers and one-on-one sessions with young radicals. This involved many hours of interacting with people and engaging in dialogue, guidance and discussions. During some interviews, such as those with the former members of the radical milieu and professionals, it was tempting to “jump” into the interview and participate on equal terms. I did not start arguing, since such behavior would risk creating a confrontation that would create a bad atmosphere and potentially disturb my data.

### 3.9. Interview Guides

I developed my interview guides in stages. After consulting the literature for selecting the relevant social-ecological approach to radicalization as my main theoretical framework and conceptualizing core concepts for outlining the interview guide, I began composing analytical questions. My four research sub-questions guided this process. For each sub-question (e.g., through which processes are individuals exposed to the radical milieu?), I drew further distinctions regarding theoretical concepts (e.g., social selection, self-selection and offline and online dimensions) aimed at systematically formulating questions that could help clarify my investigation. I then proceeded to translate the analytical and theoretical questions into concrete operational questions. In this process, I translated concepts and academic vocabulary into nonprofessional language. While I developed multiple interview guides for the respective respondent groups, I developed two overall interview guide templates, namely the guide used in individual interviews with former participants in the radical milieu and in focus groups with non-radical Gellerup-Toveshøj residents. I adapted the first template to the police officers, mentors and teachers I interviewed, who had either worked with or experienced young radicals, whereas I

adapted the focus group interview guide to individual interviews with residents and professionals in Gellerup-Toveshøj. In the following, I first elaborate on the interview guide used in individual interviews with the former participants in the radical milieu. Next, I introduce the guide used in the focus groups with the Gellerup-Toveshøj residents. While the interviews were conducted in Danish, the precise wording and full length of both interview guides are presented in English in Appendices A and B.

### 3.9.1. Individual Interview Guide: Former Members of the Radical Milieu

The interview guide contains thirteen main questions divided into four parts: Introduction, topic one (the individual's exposure to a radical milieu), topic two (exploring the radical milieu online and offline in terms of affordances) and topic three (how the radical milieu emerged and was sustained in a particular neighborhood, with a focus on neighborhood-level factors and intra-neighborhood interaction). As previously stated, I had no pre-formulated questions regarding the respondents' exit from the milieu; these questions were developed and asked more spontaneously. The introduction unfolds my scope of interest: I briefly introduced my research, focusing on the radical milieu and related actions, such as leaving for the conflict zone either as humanitarian relief workers or militants. In contrast to the often-used labeling of all volunteers in the Syrian war as foreign fighters or "Syrian fighters," some of the respondents in the pre-interview phase stated that they had volunteered as relief workers in the Syrian conflict. I integrated the engagement of "humanitarian relief work" in the interview guide to signal that I was familiar with other ways of participating in the Syrian conflict than fighting and that I was listening to the interviewees. I intended to start positive and open and with a sense of a shared starting point. As previously mentioned, I wanted to signal that I was interested in my respondent's viewpoint from an *emic* perspective whereby I tried to step into their lived world and viewed the world from their perspective, although I also met my respondents from an *etic* point of view via my preexisting experiences. For example, I maintained and introduced the term "radical milieu," although I knew that words such as radicalization or radical milieus may be perceived as sensitive or unjustified. However, I was prepared to change the label "radical milieu" to something more preferable during the interviews. I therefore asked the respondents to suggest what they would call the milieu of which they were part. Some provided direct answers, while others began describing the milieu. Their answers provided insight into the immediate label of a radical milieu concerning connotations such as "fellowship," "brotherhood," "safe haven" and "religious group or milieu." In that

sense, I integrated this labeling in my phrasing as a way of recognizing the respondent’s answer and positive perception to create a safe environment and a positive atmosphere. The shared point of departure kick-started the interview with a natural flow that either anticipated the first question or other questions in the interview guide or eased the transition to the first question. Next, topic one centered on the interviewees’ exposure to the radical milieu, tapping into the different selection processes that may have influenced individual pathways to radicalization. Table 2 below provides an example:

**Table 2. Example of interview question**

<b>Topic 1:</b>	<b>Research question/theme:</b>	<b>Interview topic:</b>
The individual’s exposure to the radical milieu	Through which processes are individuals exposed to the radical milieu?	Let’s turn to the first topic. It concerns about how you became part of a radical milieu/companionship... etc. [Used onwards]
Social selection, self-selection, recruitment or other processes	Focus on exposure, pathways	<b>Question 1: <i>Try to remember the very first time—can you describe how you got in contact with a radical milieu/companionship... etc.? How did you end up there?</i></b>

The first question in table 2 aims to start the interview relatively openly and to let the interviewee describe events and experiences in detail. The question also aims at tapping into how actively or passively the individual was in his exposure to the radical milieu as a contrast to the typical image of young people being brainwashed by a charismatic “radicalizing agent.” In this context, I tried to trace the respondents’ pathway as far back and in as much detail and nuances as possible, with a focus on relations, events, settings or unexpected influences. In some cases, the respondent answered with his immediate thoughts, such as “I looked for it myself, no one forced me.” As mentioned earlier, I was aware that all of the questions in the interview guide are connected to past experiences. In that sense, recollection past experiences can be difficult right away the question is asked. Thus, I introduced pre-formulated potential probes to help the interviewee refresh his memory to avoid missing information that might be relevant to my investigation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 193-6). Moreover, when adapting such questions to police officers and mentors, I would simply rephrase and adjust the questions, such as “Based on your experiences—can you say something about how the individuals with whom you have worked came into contact with a radical milieu? How did they

end up there?” Topic two explored the radical milieu—both online and offline—by focusing on the affordances of the radical milieu. Overall, this topic taps into for example everyday socializing, opportunities to establish new friendships, and mobility in time and space. Table 3 below provides a specific question:

**Table 3. Example of interview question**

<b>Topic 2:</b>	<b>Research question/theme:</b>	<b>Interview topic:</b>
Exploring the radical milieu	What are the functions/affordances of the radical milieu—offline and online—in which homegrown radicalization occurs?	OK—let’s move on to the second topic. Here, we’re going to talk about what went on and what you did together in the radical milieu/companionship... etc.
Exploring the radical milieu—online/offline exposure	Focus on functions/affordances of the radical milieu, interplay of online and offline dimensions	<b>Question 5: <i>Try to remember—did you also use the internet together when you met?</i></b>

This question is aimed to provide knowledge about the relationship and interplay between the online and offline spheres. Instead of analyzing offline or online domains separately, it aims to uncover online and offline practices in groups or alone as well as to inform about a persistent exposure to radical content face-to-face or virtually. For this question, I pre-formulated additional probes as a checklist of aspects I wanted to uncover if the respondents would neglect interesting aspects and nuances. Topic three tapped into neighborhood-level factors and interactions between neighbors in order to help investigate how the radical milieu in Gellerup-Toveshøj emerged and was sustained. One example includes:

**Table 4. Example of interview question**

<b>Topic 3:</b>	<b>Research question/theme:</b>	<b>Interview topic:</b>
Why there? How the radical milieu emerged and was sustained in a particular neighborhood	What characterizes neighborhoods in which a radical milieu emerges?	Let us turn to the final topic. It concerns the places/ neighborhoods and people around you.
Neighborhood-level factors	The response of the surrounding community/ neighborhood to the involvement in the radical milieu	<b>Question 13 (final question): Try to think back—how did people around you respond that you were part of the radical milieu/ companionship... etc.?</b>

The focus in this topic is on the surrounding environment: the characteristics of a neighborhood that might be conducive to the emergence of radicalization. For example, I wanted to focus on neighborhood-level factors, by interpreting awareness, reactions, acceptance or dissociation among community members in response to the respondent's participation in the radical milieu. Moreover, I knew from my past work that young radicalized individuals usually managed to conceal their activities from their parents, teachers and the police—at least for some time. Hence, I also tapped into coping strategies in terms of maintaining the radical milieu via formulated probes. The three examples of interview questions also indicate the study's dynamic mix of research units, including individual-level questions concerning individual pathways together with group-level and neighborhood-level questions. This reflects the ambition of the social-ecological theory framework of integrating individual, group and contextual perspectives.

### 3.9.2. Focus Group Interview Guide: Ordinary Gellerup-Toveshøj Residents

The interview guide contains seven questions or exercises divided into four topics: Introduction, topic one (positive aspects of living in the neighborhood), topic two (negative communities—gangs) and topic three (radicalization). The focus group interviews are primarily used for discussions about neighborhood-level factors and interactions between neighbors in Gellerup-Toveshøj, with additional discussions about radicalization and the emergence of the radical milieu in Gellerup-Toveshøj. I introduce topic two, about gangs, as a transition topic to introduce radicalization indirectly and softly. This is a strategic consideration, as some view radicalization as a sensitive topic. Participants in

three of the focus group interviews described how they were often dragged into the debate about radicalization through Islam and integration. Moreover, the interview guide combines different kinds of exercises and activity-oriented questions, such as vignettes, group work, images and newspaper headlines, as a way of motivating the participants in the group discussions as well as discussing sensitive topics. The experience of activity-oriented questions adds a playful element and eases the atmosphere. The participants seemed to enjoy the varied stimuli that influence positive engagement. The activity-oriented questions added another dimension through visible or concrete exercises and tools, thus facilitating an alternative way of gathering information and concrete examples. The exercises and activity-oriented questions worked well in all of the different age groups (Krueger & Casey, 2000: 44-55; Colucci, 2007). In topic one, for example, I introduce the first activity-oriented question as follows:

**Table 5. Example of activity-oriented question**

<p><b>Topic 1: The “wellbeing” of the neighborhood:</b></p>
<p>You’re going to say good things about your neighborhood (positive companionships)</p> <p><b>1. Exercise/instructions and questions:</b> First, please each list five good things about your neighborhood (on paper). Then share these five things with each other and list five good things together as a group. You must keep discussing until you agree on a shared list of five good things.</p>

The focus groups were intended to gather information on the group level concerning both positive stories and positive interactions in the Gellerup-Toveshøj neighborhood as well as focusing on the more negative aspects, such as neighborhood-level factors that may be conducive to radicalization. This question is meant to get the focus group off to a positive and open start by focusing on potentially positive neighborhood dynamics, such as social trust, informal social control, social cohesion and social interaction.

In topic two, I introduced gangs and a former gang conflict in western Aarhus via two newspaper headlines. One of them says:

**Table 6. Example of activity-oriented question**

<p><b>5. Exercise/instructions and question:</b> Look at the second headline—<i>Beboere i Aarhus Vest hjælper politiet i bandekonflikt</i> (2017), TV2 Østjylland [<i>Residents in western Aarhus help the police during a gang conflict</i>].</p> <p>Why do you think people in western Aarhus are doing this? You must keep discussing until it’s clear where you agree and where you disagree.</p>
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As previously mentioned, the topic about gangs functions as a transition to radicalization. Moreover, the activity-oriented question taps into specific neighborhood-level factors, such as informal social control and institutional trust in public institutions, such as the police force. These neighborhood-level factors helped shed light on different levels of informal social control and trust that may be conducive to the emergence of the radical milieu in this particular neighborhood.

The final topic concerns radicalization. Most of the residents were willing to discuss this topic, while (as mentioned above) some respondents—male and female alike—participated noticeably less in the discussions than in earlier conversations.

**Table 7. Example of activity-oriented question**

<p>Story regarding radical behavior:</p> <p><b>7. Exercise/instructions and questions:</b> I will now present a hypothetical example, which I would like you to discuss. Imagine a scenario: A group from your neighborhood (let's say a group of five boys and two girls in their teens—about your age/not your children) are planning to travel to Syria or Iraq to take up arms. You hear about the group and plan. OK—that was the scenario. I give you four options to choose from:</p> <p>A: Talk to the group about their plans to leave for Syria and Iraq and tell them that it's a bad idea.</p> <p>B: Talk to their parents or somebody from the neighborhood about what you know and about what to do.</p> <p>C: Call the police or the municipality and let them resolve the issue.</p> <p>D: Do nothing.</p> <p>Now it's up to you—what do you think should be done? Keep discussing until it's clear where you agree and where you disagree.</p>
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This vignette was inspired by my former job, where we conducted dialogue-based workshops in secondary and upper-secondary schools concerning radicalization prevention. One of the workshop exercises had a similar activity-oriented question, which worked very well in terms of participation, viewpoints and respectful discussion. It also worked well with students and adults alike. Based on these experiences, I decided to develop a similar exercise relevant to my investigation as I planned to recruit interviewees from similar age groups. In my focus groups, I used this exercise (among others) to tap into neighborhood interactions concerning social cohesion, informal social control and institutional trust. The vignette also opened discussions related to the moral context of the neighborhood as well as comparing informal social control across different kinds of norm- and/or lawbreaking behavior.

### 3.10. Data Analysis Strategy

The analytical approach to the analysis of pathways to the radical milieu (exposure), the participation in the radical milieu (cognitive, moral, attachment and social control affordances) as well as the emergence of the radical milieu (“Why there?”) are based on the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter. The dissertation applies the S<sup>5</sup> socio-ecological framework together with additional concepts to the unique empirical data described above, using the framework to guide the analytical focus. Within the applied theoretical framework, I identified specific patterns and instances of concepts that are empirically driven and originate from my data. In this way, the analysis constitutes an iterative process between deductive and inductive elements.

The analysis was conducted during different stages of the dissertational work. During the data collection, for example, I interpreted and validated answers from the interviewees. I could for example probe “You’re saying... does this mean that...?” or “Based on your answer, is it correct to say...?”. These probes enabled me to initiate the interpretation directly and to validate my interpretations. After the data collection, I applied qualitative content analysis as a means of systematic organizing, coding and analyzing the in-depth interviews using the NVivo software program. Critics have emphasized that NVivo and similar programs may lead to fragmented or mechanical analyses as a result of the many structuring and sorting possibilities (Kristiansen, 2005). For my use, however, NVivo has been a useful tool for the coding and structuring of substantial amounts of data. In the course of the data collection process, I engaged student assistants to transcribe my interviews, since the task was very time-consuming. The student assistants were provided with carefully outlined verbal and written guidelines to optimize precision and consistency, for example transcribing the interviews verbatim, including rephrasing and repetitions or stuttering, empty words, half-finished sentences, and to mark unclear words or sentences. I also instructed the student assistants to leave out the respondent’s name or names of colleagues, friends or other likeminded peers, neighbors etc. and instead write “[name mentioned].” After receiving the transcribed document, I did a replay and close reading to complete corrections and unclear words/sentences. Due to funding and time constraints, 60 interviews were transcribed from a prioritized list with the 78 interviews. All of the interviews with former members of the radical milieu were transcribed in their entirety. The quotes were prepared for inclusion in the analytical chapters according to a three-stage process. First, I selected relevant quotes in the transcribed texts. The quotes were often hard to read, which influenced the readability negatively and would potentially remove focus from the content. I decided to leave out the stuttering, empty words and half-finished sentences in

the quotes if they did not provide relevant insights. I also corrected grammatical errors. Second, the selected quotes had to be translated into English to ensure that non-Danes could read the dissertation. This was done by a professional language editor employed by the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, who has extensive experience translating spoken Danish into English. Finally, I read the translated examples to assess whether the quotes still captured the atmosphere of spoken accounts as well as the content.

I chose to fully code the 22 individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with the former participants of the radical milieu. My coding strategy did not rigidly stick to a single approach. Instead, I followed an eclectic approach combining inductive and deductive elements. In practice, I combined elements from *Grounded Theory* and *Cycle Coding*. More specifically, the coding strategy and procedures unfolded over three rounds of coding: *open coding*, *axis coding* and *closed coding*. Although time consuming, following this coding procedure attributed keywords or themes to segments of data, which has helped me to condense, categorize and interpret my data as well as compare and connect it to theory. In a nutshell, I deconstructed my interview data to discover patterns, similarities and differences (Charmaz, 2006: 42-71; Miles et al., 2014: 69-93). In other words, coding was useful to obtain an overview of my “1000-pages interview transcripts” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 249, 255-7). In the following, I elaborate on the actual processes involved in the three rounds of coding.

First, I read the transcripts quickly to get an overview of the data and to avoid code overload in the open coding process. I then conducted an open coding of the whole transcript to maintain an open approach to the data material. I did this to see if important or unforeseen themes or aspects are “hidden” in the data that were not generated via the theoretically informed interview guide. Thus, I tried to put my theoretical and empirical preexisting knowledge aside during the open coding. In practice, I generated codes (keywords or themes) inductively based on the data. I coded sentences or data chunks of about 3-7 lines (as opposed to single words) to obtain a better understanding of the content and context (Berg, 2009: 353-5).

Second, after the open coding was completed and had produced an elaborate coding scheme, I conducted an axis coding to connect and sort the generated codes into overall themes. I screened the codes to identify patterns and nuances in the texts as well as to see if any of the open codes would group together or categorize into similar themes, developing a coding hierarchy with primary and secondary codes. The most important codes and distinctions from this coding hierarchy were integrated with the theoretically informed codes to produce the final coding list (Berg, 2009: 356-8).

Finally, I did a systematic closed coding of all of the interview material with the former participants in the radical milieu based on the final coding frame. Codes from the open coding informed the list as well as theoretical codes generated from preexisting concepts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 261-3). See Appendix C for an English version of my final coding scheme used for the closed coding. After the closed coding, I conducted “queries” in NVivo, including the cross-comparison of codes and interviewees in order to identify details, nuances and patterns. This process was useful to develop the displays reported in the analysis, which functioned as an instrument to understand and visualize—in a condensed format—what was at play in my data (Miles et al., 2014: 108-119). I also sorted the coded themes into clusters, preparing the structure and reporting the analytical chapters. As mentioned earlier, my investigation tries to understand experiences from a certain period of the lived life based on the interviewees’ point of view. Such investigation attempts to gather experiences, interactions and processes the “thick descriptions” of the interviewees’ lived lives with the purpose of interpreting the accounts and examples (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 49). I did this by interpreting my empirical data in the light of my theoretical socio-ecological starting point.

The remaining individual and focus group interviews with professionals and ordinary Gellerup-Toveshøj residents were not coded systematically due to time constraints. The application of these interviews thus relies on a more overall thematic categorization.

### 3.11. Ethical Considerations and Guidelines

Throughout the dissertation, I have been confronted with several ethical challenges and dilemmas. I have tried to be honest and straightforward throughout the processes, including the data collection and not least in my interactions with interviewees, both in terms of respecting them for sharing their valuable time with me as well as in terms of concern for the potential consequences for further research if researchers act as deceivers and untrustworthy (Bryman, 2016: 133-4).

In addition to the previous descriptions of the ethical considerations in relation to the coordination of the sampling with my gatekeeper, which resulted in the discarding of potential interviewees, I also experienced when I contacted the professionals that a couple of individuals were not in a proper state of mind or emotional state for an interview due to personal issues or life-changing events that needed full attention. No interview was scheduled in these cases. Attempting otherwise would have risked harming these individuals (Berg, 2009: 60-1). Moreover, I interviewed five teens in a focus group.

Throughout the process, I employed several procedures to protect the interviewees as much as possible (Liamputtong, 2011: 107-9). My gatekeeper and I spoke on numerous occasions about how to secure a proper sampling of balanced young people. He knew these youngsters very well and worked with them on a daily basis as part of a municipal leisure initiative. They liked and trusted him. Prior to the interview, I participated in a gathering where I was able to brief them about the interview, their role, my research project and the following procedures. The interview was conducted in a building owned by the city, and we ate together before the actual interview, partly also to contribute to the sense of a safe atmosphere. I also suggested that the gatekeeper sat in the room next door with the doors open, which may have provided some further sense of security. I conducted a debriefing after the interview.

Furthermore, I made sure that I had the written, informed consent of my respondents to ensure that they were participating voluntarily. I described the consent form and read it aloud, and my respondents signed it (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 116-17). I lacked written, informed consent for three interviews, but they provided me with their verbal, informed consent for participating in the interviews (I had simply forgotten the consent forms in these cases). Fortunately, I had memorized the consent form and could say it out loud. The interviewees repeated that their participation in the interviews was voluntary. I also asked if the respondents preferred to have the form sent after the interview, that they sign it and return it to me. In these three cases, where there were no written informed consent forms, the affirmative, confirming replies to my questions regarding consent prior to the interview provided the verbal consent (Berg, 2012: 90).

Although I perceive the interview situation and format as more like a conversation, the interview situation also involves general asymmetrical power relations between me, as interviewer, and my respondents: I have initiated the interview situation, I have decided the themes and questions, and ultimately I end the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 55-6). Moreover, the interview situation with the former participants in the radical milieu adds another dimension to the asymmetrical power relation. My former employment with Aarhus Municipality working with radicalization prevention, where I acquired knowledge about the milieu and the individuals populating it, contributes to a particular power position. This might have intimidated some respondents. They may have been nervous about whether I knew any particularly sensitive information about them or the specific groups. As previously mentioned, I engaged in genuine dialogue and expressed interest in my respondents' lives, partly to create a relaxing atmosphere. This approach was also an indirect attempt at deflating the sketched power relation and to avoid any risk of respondents being intimidated by bringing the interaction to an ordinary level,

such as talking about everyday living. I also stressed my new role as a PhD candidate in an attempt at creating a little distance to my previous work, again to avoid respondents feeling intimidated by my past work experience and/or my relationship to the city authorities. Moreover, when I talked to the respondents on the phone about my project or to invite them to participate in the interviews, I explicitly stressed how their participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary and it was completely acceptable for them to decline the invitation. Some of the potential respondents declined. At the beginning of the interviews, I also repeated that participation was completely voluntarily. Nevertheless, I may have been perceived as an authority with solid knowledge relevant to the interviews. On several occasions, interviewees stated explicitly that the interview experiences were pleasant and that the interview was well-prepared, with well-thought and relevant questions. In addition, as mentioned above, some of the respondents seem to have perceived my past work experience (e.g., mentoring) as positive, and the fact that some of them actually asked me for advice about different aspects of their lives would indicate that I was able to establish some measure of confidence.

During the interviews with the former participants in the radical milieu, several respondents shared sensitive information. I was aware of how the intimate interview setting could influence respondents to reveal information that they may later regret. Moreover, the intimate interview setting—with me as an engaged listener—might also influence a pseudo-therapeutic setting via the long interviews about personal and group-related experiences and activities (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015: 119). On that background, there is some information and details that I have excluded on the grounds that they would risk jeopardizing their anonymity. Moreover, I was very aware of only talking about past experiences without shifting the focus to contemporary perspectives. This was intended to protect the respondents as much as myself. For example, speaking about potential contemporary radical milieus may be attractive from a research perspective, but it contained an ethical dilemma: Depending on the information provided, I might risk an obligation to notify the authorities if I became aware of criminal activities posing a threat to society. Even though doing so would breach my confidentiality with the respondent. Moreover, my research interests include both physical and virtual settings, tapping into specific places that the members of the radical milieu frequented, as well as specific neighborhoods in Aarhus. This also leaves ethical challenges. I point to one specific neighborhood, which is already experiencing other challenges. In that sense, critics may argue that I contribute to further stigmatizing this neighborhood or subjecting it to further criticism and shaming. This is by no means my intention. Instead, I want to address an important topic that may contribute to open and sober discussions about neighborhood-

level factors that may be conducive to radicalization with the genuine intention to help make things better, not least to protect children and youth from entering a radical milieu. I could have tried to conceal the focus of my investigation on a radical milieu in Aarhus and in western Aarhus in particular. Doing so would have been futile, however, as I investigate complex activity patterns and the broader surroundings, in which a radical milieu emerges (Malthaner, 2014). In this case, there is no single solution that balances ethics and research objectives in any perfect sense.

After securing the data, it was stored on my password-protected work computer (Bryman, 2016: 128). A new ethical challenge occurred when I engaged student assistants to transcribe my interviews. In a perfect world, a work-related e-mail account would have been created for them and they could have been given access to a shared computer drive. This was not possible. Instead, I decided on a pragmatic file-sharing solution; for example, I scheduled with one of the student assistants when I was going to upload an interview file on Dropbox. Immediately after uploading, I texted or mailed the student assistant, who then promptly downloaded the file to their computer. I then immediately deleted the file from Dropbox. When the transcription was ready, the student assistant sent the transcribed document to me via email. We had agreed in advance that the next procedure was that I downloaded the transcription to my secure drive and deleted the e-mail. The student assistants deleted the e-mail with the transcription that they sent to me—both from the e-mail categories “sent mail” and “deleted mail,” as well as completely deleting the interview files and the transcribed document from their computer. In that sense, the files and documents would not be stored multiple places. I kept my field notes in a locked cabinet. I used identifier codes for my respondents and created a participation list to keep track of the numerous groups of respondents, which I stored on my secure computer drive.

Finally, I was also—and still am—concerned about my respondents’ anonymity. We saw earlier that some potential interviewees, who were part of the radical milieu, declined to participate in my study because they lacked the confidence that anonymity could be maintained (Bryman, 2016: 127). I have used different strategies for safeguarding anonymity and confidentiality, especially of the nine respondents who participated in the radical milieu. First, the interviews were conducted in the informants’ private homes, at public facilities, and in my university office in the evening or on the weekend, when the university campus was more or less empty, to protect the physical appearance and identity of the informants. Second, none of the respondents are referred to by their real names. Instead, I provided the respondents’ fictitious first names (with letters A-I). The pseudonyms are Muslim male names and used in different countries and religious branches within Islam in order to protect the

respondents' identity. In some of the analytical chapters, I even exclude the fictitious names for additional protection of the interviewees due to the sensitivity of the content, for example with respect to participation in the Syrian war. In that sense, I argue that further caution is needed concerning aspects of self-incrimination, as the Danish Government is still passing new laws and drafting legislation and potential reprisals for former members. While this may influence the readability of the dissertation, it is outweighed by the reliability provided by the in-depth accounts that the respondents provided and the need to protect them (Schuurman, 2018a: 31). Likewise, when quoting other groups of respondents—professionals and ordinary residents—I do not use their real names, referring only to their qualification, such as police officer, teacher or resident. Moreover, I did not include background characteristics, such as age, nationality, education and residence, for the specific former members of the radical milieu, as such information in connection with particular quotes may risk revealing a respondent's identity. Third, in some of the included quotes, I excluded specific names, settings, street names or distinct aspects of an activity, or I used a term (parent/parents) instead of the related sub-terms (mother/father), as I argue that such detailed information in these examples would risk jeopardizing the anonymity of the interviewees.



**PART II:**  
**EXPOSURE TO THE RADICAL MILIEU**



## Chapter 4: Pathways to the Radical Milieu

Previous radicalization researchers (see, e.g., McCormick, 2003; Horgan, 2008; Sageman, 2008a; Aly & Striegher, 2012) advocate that no single pathway or explanation applies to all cases of radicalization, proposing that the pathways leading to radical milieus “be treated as complex processes in which multiple factors work together” (Jensen et al., 2018: 1). I build on this pathway approach, which seems to unravel the exposure to the radical milieu both in terms of obvious and more hidden selection processes wherein the pathways entail slow and gradual transitions. More specifically, theories of traditional recruitment into radical milieus tend to identify an “active” radicalizing agent that rallies or brainwashes “passive” potential recruits (AIVD, 2002; Taarnby, 2005; Gerwehr & Daly, 2006; Neumann & Rogers, 2007; Hoffman, 2008). Although such cases may occur, most individuals do not radicalize in this manner (Sageman, 2004: 107-13, 125; 2008a: 66-70; Borum, 2011b; Nuraniyah, 2018; Ünal & Ünal, 2018; Mkutu & Opondo, 2019). To the contrary, I argue that the individual pathways leading toward the radical milieu constitute proactive pathways, albeit not in a vacuum. The respondents experience influences and guidance in their sustained paths. Furthermore, Sageman’s (2008a: 66) theory of a preexisting “bunch of guys,” who collectively end up in a radical milieu is also visible in my data. The theory does not provide the full picture and requires further detail, however, as preexisting social ties are transformed and new social ties are shaped along these pathways. Moreover, there is a need to elaborate on the spatial dimensions of the activities. Finally, I identify a fourth contribution in terms of pathways to the radical milieu concerning a contra-intuitive tendency. I identify a recurring pattern in my data focusing both on young individuals who are experiencing a revival and other youth who experience an intensified Islamic religiosity. With a single exception, the former group, with little prior knowledge and religious practice, does *not* encounter a charismatic agent who influences their pathways to the radical milieu; conversely, those who have been practicing Muslims throughout their lives are influenced by charismatic agents who shape their entry into the radical milieu. This tendency is somewhat counterintuitive, as one would expect the individual revivalists without any prior religious engagement to encounter charismatic persons for guidance and direction.

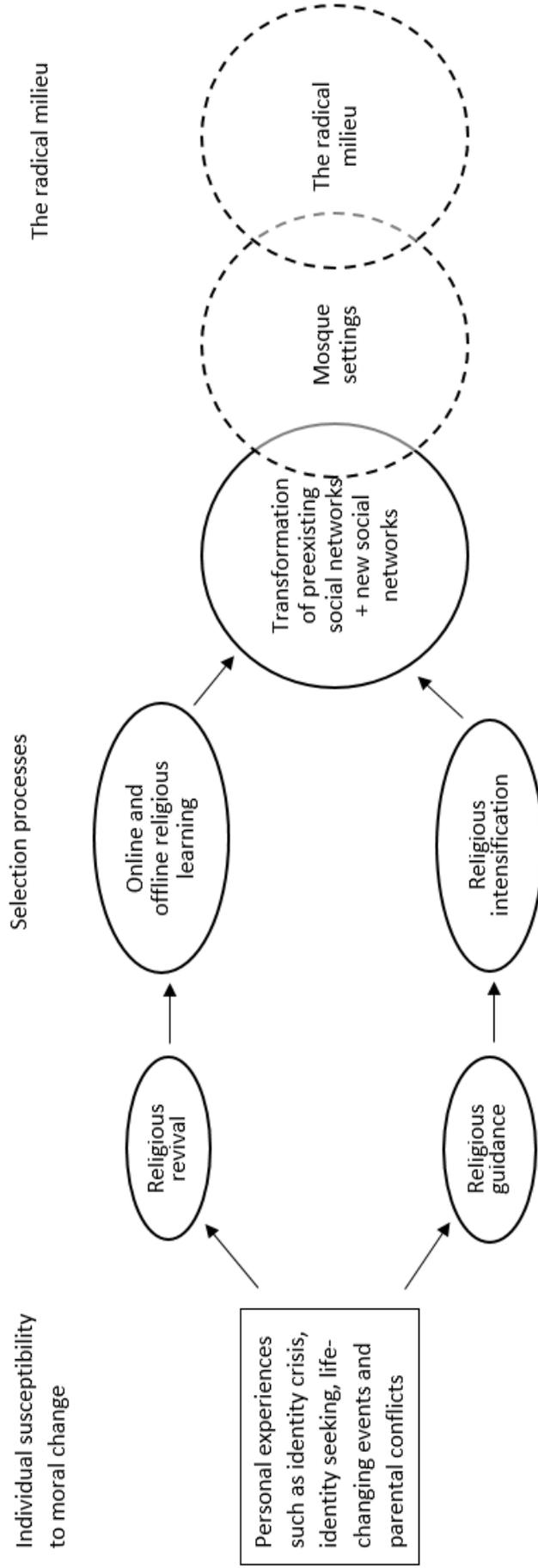
The main purpose of this chapter is an empirical presentation of the factors and processes which, in different combinations, constitute pathways to a radical milieu. The social ecology framework is relevant to the identification

of the detailed processes and nuances. In that sense, social selection and self-selection bridge “individual and environmental levels of explanations,” accentuating the interactions between individuals, activities, social networks and settings that contribute to pathways to radical milieus (Bouhana, 2019b: 15). In line with the aforementioned complexities, my data comprises nine distinct empirical pathways based on nine male individuals. These pathways contain individual and contextual levels that interact in time and space. Figure 5 on the next page illustrates how individual trajectories into a radical milieu develop via individual susceptibility to moral change and different selection processes, resulting in individual pathways to the radical milieu, which consists of different groups.

The figure is not to be understood unambiguously causally, and it does not contain clear-cut flow phases. Although it is simplified, it is intended to present fluid, gradual transitions, unfolding nine unique and complex paths leading to the radical milieu. My data constitutes nine distinct, within-case developments in which the individuals experience different personal experiences, including identity crises; identity-seeking, life-changing events; and parental conflicts. These experiences seem to result in individual susceptibility to moral change. The pathways to the radical milieu form when susceptible individuals are exposed to religious revival or intensification, religious guidance, online and offline learning, preexisting and new social networks, and certain settings (e.g., mosques). Interviewing ten or 11 former members of the radical milieu will thus likely produce ten or 11 unique and complex pathways.

Although the data produces nine distinct pathways to the radical milieu, cross-case comparison reveals two overall patterns running throughout my nine individual cases: *religious revival* and *religious intensification*. *Religious revival* is the most visible, since it represents a complete lifestyle transformation; a dramatic break from life as a non-practicing Muslim enjoying a Western lifestyle to a life of obedience to a strict interpretation of Islam. In contrast, *religious intensification* involves a development from life as a practicing Muslim to one who desires to deepen or strengthen their religious dedication. Furthermore, preexisting and new *social networks* play a prominent role in both *religious revival* and *religious intensification*, influencing further exposure in certain ways. The two overall patterns concerning revival and intensification will constitute the overall structure of the presentation of my analysis, which I develop further in the following sections. First, I expand more on personal experiences related to *individual susceptibility to moral change*. Second, I elaborate on the individuals’ selection to exposure, focusing on social and self-selection processes in which susceptibility becomes actual vulnerability. More specifically, I present the processes concerning *religious revival* and *religious intensification*.

**Figure 5. Pathways to the radical milieu**



Third, I focus on the importance of preexisting social networks and new social networks in the development of pathways to the radical milieu. I integrate *offline* and *online settings* continuously, as they play persistent and prominent roles. I begin with micro-level explanations, including personal experiences that influence the *susceptibility to moral change*. However, where many theories do not advance beyond this, I continue to the meso-level, including *selection* processes, since individual-level explanations are not in themselves sufficient to explain radicalization. In that sense, I argue that micro- and meso-level explanations are not competing perspectives, instead interacting with each other, integrating and relating individual and contextual perspectives to explain radicalization. Macro-level explanations will be touched upon in this chapter but discussed more comprehensively in the chapters that follow concerning participation in the radical milieu, how the individuals exited from it and how the milieu ultimately disintegrated.

My analytical approach is based on the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. I apply the S<sup>5</sup> theoretical framework with additional concepts to unique empirical data, using the framework to guide the analytical focus in this chapter and the subsequent empirical chapters. Within the applied theoretical framework, however, I identify specific patterns and instantiations of concepts that are empirically driven and originate from my data. In so doing, the analysis constitutes an iterative process between deductive and inductive elements.

## 4.1. Susceptibility to Moral Change: Identity Crisis, Identity Seeking and Life-Changing Events

I identify three recurring and related individual-level factors that seem to influence individual susceptibility to moral change: *identity crisis*, *identity seeking* and *life-changing events*. After first elaborating on the former two, I focus on the latter.

### 4.1.1. Identity Crisis and Identity Seeking

Especially in puberty and adolescence, identity and self-development are not in themselves abnormal or in any way radicalizing; quite the opposite. Erik Erikson and other researchers have stressed how the individual must progressively develop a sense of a meaningful self in society, emphasizing “who I am” and “who I am in this specific social context.” Exploration and commitment are other elements in identity development (Erikson, 1959: 88-94, 101, 110-20; 1968: 91-6, 128-30; Marcia, 1966; Marcia et al., 1993: 7-10, 19-21, 46-50, 167-9; Côté, 2009; Baumeister, 2011). This is by no means a simple process,

however, and may result in identity development failure or confusion (Waterman, 1982; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Meeus et al., 2012). In line with this trend, previous studies have emphasized challenges in the identity development processes of European Muslim youth, including identity loss, confusion and splitting (Vertovec, 1998; Cesari, 2003; Schiffauer, 2007; Goerzig & Al-Hashimi, 2015: 45-6). In the context of this dissertation, radicalization is analyzed through the lens of “identity vulnerability,” confirming previous research (see, e.g., Arena & Arrigo, 2004; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Dean, 2014; Bertelsen, 2015; Silke & Brown, 2016; Yusoufzai & Emmerling, 2017). More specifically, alienation, struggling to find a “place” in society and simultaneously managing two conflicting identities are examples of *identity crisis* and *identity seeking* that seem to produce individual susceptibility to moral change (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 87-91, King & Taylor, 2011; Borum 2014; Dawson & Amarnath Amarasingam, 2017). These existential concerns include a broken self, feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty, and confusion about one’s position in life (Schwartz et al., 2009). One of the interviewees, Bassam, thinking back on his early adolescence, illustrates these issues:

Why am I thrown around from the one side to the other? Why can’t I find my place? Why am I not the same as Lars and Jørgen [typical Danish names] in my class ... Why is everyone here in Denmark—they’re Danes. They have a flag. But we also have a flag hanging at home. We have brown or black skin—but they don’t. What am I supposed to talk about with Jørgen and Jens? This is a foreign country. I’m in a country where my religion isn’t shared by everyone else. Not everyone has the same skin color as I do ... And so on. So if you say that I have a country—what am I doing here in Denmark? ... That was my incentive to go out and search—and then I found it. (Bassam, Interview 1)

Ebi provides a similar account:

My background—I’m Muslim, and we’re practicing at home and so on. But I couldn’t relate to alcohol, parties, girls because of my religion and my parents ... Because from the elementary school that I attended, [that] if I’m going to do my prayers or that kind of thing, I always have to hide—I can’t show that I’m too religious, because it might lead to something bad for me. Or the teachers might look at me differently, right? ... In any case, it was hard for me to be myself. (Ebi, Interview 1)

These examples also touch upon the lack of a sense of belonging. Identification with classmates is non-existent, which results in a sense of not fitting in and losing a sense of meaning. Perceived dichotomies in terms of religion, background, skin color, ways of thinking, names and leisure activities seem to be

hard to overcome. These aspects hinder identity formation. Ghadi also encapsulates the identity factor in his adolescence, stressing feelings of uncertainty, inadequacy and a search for “something missing:”

I was involved in my sport. And sometimes, in order to [be better] and to find more enthusiasm than I was feeling, I kind of need to look for someone who could make me [better]. For me, that was God ... I mean, I needed places where I could say—with a sense of security—that I’m not actually [good] enough in relation to what I’m going through right now. I’m actually a little weak. I’m a little scared. You can’t tell that to your friends. You can’t tell that to your coach. There—I kind of needed someone to lean on (Ghadi, Interview 1)

The concept of individual self-uncertainty is at play in these examples. *Self-uncertainty* refers to an existential uncertainty “about oneself or about things that directly matter to or reflect on who we are” (Hogg et al., 2010: 1062). This state of mind is uncomfortable. I will return to this aspect in Chapter 5 concerning the cognitive affordances of the radical milieu, as the reduction of self-uncertainty occurred in high-entitativity groups within it (Hogg & Adelman, 2013; Hogg, 2014).

Other examples relate to the construction of identity, albeit in a different manner. Here, Coman experiences an inner conflict:

It started in the teen years—all those hormones. I had gone to some school parties and some other stuff. But the interest in girls kept increasing. I mean, the interest in parties and drinking and all those kinds of things—they just increased over time ... But generally you feel like “You don’t do that,” because you’re a Muslim. Especially because your background is Muslim. And I didn’t like that way of thinking—that I should feel like a hypocrite ... But somehow I had to figure out, “OK—either I’m a Muslim and I stick to these things and believe in it. Or else I’m not a Muslim—and then I can do whatever I want. (Coman, Interview 1)

Likewise, a similar account is reported, proposing lifestyle choices made in adolescence:

And then there was a time where I thought: This thing with religion—is it right or not? And if it is, then I was 100% not the best Muslim. As a person I suppose I was. I didn’t really hurt anyone, and I was an OK person, I think, but religion—there, you have to do something extra. For example, God also has some rights in relation to the person—and I didn’t fulfil them in the best possible way. So I thought, “OK—do you believe or not?” Or “Do you want this or don’t you?” And if it was something I wanted, then I should do it better than I was ... So I did some searching and thought about it a little: Do you believe? And then I reached the conclusion, “Yes, I believe in a god. And I think that Islam is the right

religion.” So I thought, “OK—then you have to tighten it up a bit.” (Fawaz, Interview 1)

In these quotes, identity formation comes across as an internal struggle about being honest with oneself. There is an ambivalence between life as a non-practicing Muslim and one’s Muslim origins, which contributes to an identity crisis. This schism calls for a conclusive decision regarding life direction and commitment to avoid living a divided existence. In this context, the identity crisis encompasses a state of “cultural schizophrenia” (Røgilds, 1995: 42, 158-60; Vertovec, 1998; Shah, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 87; Liht & Savage, 2008; Egerton, 2011: 41f; Goerzig & Al-Hashimi, 2015: 62). The interviewees seem to struggle between two overall positions, managing or choosing from, in my data, ethno-religious culture or “Danish” culture. One might ask, however, whether these two positions are contradictions or rather overlapping compositions in the identity development (Røgilds, 1995: 34-9, 154-8; Mørck, 1998: 78-88, 227-9). That said, the task is probably not so straightforward. Moreover, peer pressure on one side and pressure from the state or society on the other may contribute to a psychological tug-of-war, rendering this process even more complex. In line with these potential challenges, the respondents also refer to parental conflicts or intergenerational gaps. One respondent describes how some of his peers in the radical milieu seemed to struggle with their parents over work and school:

I mean—some of them had problems with their parents. A lack of understanding and so on ... For them, it was a matter of what is worse: “My dad or the state? He’s after me all the time. ‘Why don’t you find a job? Why don’t you do something with your life?’ Or ‘You go to school, but you get terrible grades. You’re a member of the family. You also have to deliver. You can’t just sleep and eat and not expect that there are people who expect something of you’.” And they want to. ... If you can’t even explain to your own parents how the Danish school system works—because sometimes it’s complicated—well, then they’ll think that you’re lying to them ... So they think there’s too much negativity around the house. Negative energy. They tried to create their own identity and say, “I sure as hell am not going to be like my dad!” (Ali, Interviews 3 and 4)

Ebi described his parents’ expectations to his education and job:

My parents wanted me to get an education. Right after elementary school, of course they wanted me to go to high school, and then I was supposed to start university—I was supposed to become an engineer or doctor ... They have the highest status. You know—parents are really aware of status. “OK, if my child is studying engineering or medicine, then we prove that we really are a family, which, you know...” With status. It means a lot ... I mean, grade 10 is the worst

thing you could take.<sup>13</sup> At the time, you don't understand that maybe you could have benefitted from taking grade 10. To develop more ... For example, if you say that you want to be a mechanic, then you got a "No—you'll make fools of us" ... And the worst thing you can do is to disappoint your parents. (Ebi, Interview 2)

Ebi (Interview 2) describes his lack of an emotional relationship to his parents: "I've never been close enough to be able to talk about feelings and that kind of thing with my parents. I've never talked about feelings with them." Ali (Interview 2) relates similar feelings in connection when his parent dies: "So you might say that I didn't have that channel with my other parent—in relation to sharing with him emotionally. So I went to the mosque, because I thought that it was a confidential thing for me—and I can pray for myself there." The accounts indicate how some of the members have experienced harsh or strict parenting, rejection and what some might deem to be parental neglect. Such conflicts have a negative impact on identity development, creating a distance to the parents and susceptibility to moral change (Farrington, 2005; Agnew, 2015). These aspects must be considered with caution, since I have not interviewed the respondent's parents. While I was in contact with some of their parents and other parents whose children were part of the radical milieu, they declined to participate in interviews. Some parents referred to fatigue from prior interviews with media and attempts at collaborating with authorities, while others simply wanted to be able to come to grips with their experiences or loss in peace. However, my data from schoolteachers who have experienced students participated in the radical milieu supports the patterns regarding high parental expectations. One teacher explains:

Most of them have no idea about what they want. Or maybe they want what their parents want for them. And whereas Danish parents are realistic, many immigrant parents are completely unrealistic ... Become a doctor. And if you can't become a doctor, then a lawyer. Maybe engineer. But doctor. Not nurse—that's totally irrelevant. It's medicine (upper secondary school teacher).

Likewise, another teacher experiences the same tendency, adding nuance to the challenge and elaborating on the parents' perceptions:

Well, many of the "bilinguals"—their parents don't really understand the Danish education system. To do well, you should preferably be a doctor, engineer or dentist. Or lawyer. ... Yes, well, if he goes to school, hands something in and raises his hand in class—well, why can't he then go to high school? And our whole

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<sup>13</sup> The Danish school system features an elective 10<sup>th</sup> grade, which is an optional year between elementary school and secondary school. Roughly half of all Danish school pupils opt out of 10<sup>th</sup> grade and go straight to secondary school from 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

understanding of academic proficiency and knowledge—it was difficult for them [the parents] to understand. That just showing up wasn't enough. Just saying something wasn't enough. They have a hard time understanding—how you actually measure and weigh and assess knowledge in our education system. So it's not just that it was a bilingual problem—it just became more pronounced. (secondary school teacher)

The final example from a teacher shows the same pattern of unrealistic parental expectations, demonstrating a fundamental mismatch between expectations and actual qualifications:

Well, my impression is that the parents want the pupils to go far. Their thinking is, “now you begin here, you have a year there—and then you have your 9<sup>th</sup> grade.” But they might not have been able to figure out how to go to school since 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I mean—there are limits to what I can do in a year or 40 weeks. And once you've completed 9<sup>th</sup> grade, you just have to complete high school. And then it's off to university. I mean—they often have great ambitions on behalf of their kids. Especially the “bilinguals.” (teacher at technical/vocational school)

It is fair to assume that the parents' expectations for their children's future prospects come from noble intentions, such as wanting better opportunities than they had themselves, to advance in life, to be successful, and to be proud of their children. However, such high expectations seem focused on a select few education programs, and there would often appear to be a mismatch with their children's abilities and how learning is obtained and evaluated in the school system (Mørck, 1998: 230-1). This asymmetry seems to foster a sense of being a potential failure or living with a constant pressure to try to avoid disappointing one's parents. The conflicts or intergenerational gaps may negatively affect their identity and influence a susceptibility to moral change which increases the risk of individuals seeking out a safe haven in a radical milieu (O'Duffy, 2008; Lynch, 2013; Sieckelink, 2019). Moreover, the individuals in the radical milieu have positioned themselves in contrast to their parents' national or ethnic versions of Islam, which are perceived as unauthentic, contaminated by cultural norms and customs (Vertovec & Rogers, 1998; Mandaville, 2001: 122; Cesari, 2003; Shah, 2004). Instead, the radical milieu promoted a transnational religio-political interpretation of Islam that matched young, diasporic Muslims. This form of religious *acculturation* represented a version of Islam detached from any particular culture and ethnicity (Roy, 2004: 23-5). Moreover, the construction of identity was “based exclusively on religious patterns, with no reference to a specific culture or language ... leading to the creation of a Western marginal subculture” (Roy, 2004: 117). I return to this aspect in Chapter 6, elaborating on the moral affordances of

the radical milieu concerning the specific *Salafist*-inspired religious interpretation of Islam.

#### 4.1.2. Life-Changing Events

Life-changing events sometimes trigger radicalization (see, e.g., Veldhuis & Staun, 2009; Trip et al., 2019). In my data, life-changing events regularly seem to influence a susceptibility to moral change. Personal experiences can lead to a loss of social anchoring and disconnection from everyday routines and relations, such as the loss of loved ones or moving to a new school. Ali experienced the loss of a parent:

My parent died. I think my life was a catastrophe—and I didn't want to live this unjust life. I couldn't breathe and I didn't eat much. I just thought to myself—all of the hate I have to this society that I have come to. All of the hate I had for the system ... at the time, I said to myself: Muslims are your brothers. Society is your enemy. I felt as though I should be hanging out with the Muslims, of course. I shouldn't be hanging out with ethnic Danes with their problems ... I was really angry. I had all of those frustrations running around in my head. (Ali, Interview 2)

In addition to the death of a significant relative, Ali also experiences what he felt to be a wrongful and discriminatory police investigation that instills *personal grievances*; that is, experiences of harm to oneself or loved ones (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017b). In that sense, system-level factors, including institutions or authorities like the police and school system, contribute to his susceptibility to moral change. Imad (Interview 1) tells of how “it was just like—where you think more about death and that kind of thing. Because my parent died. So I just thought that now I have to pull myself together and really become a good person and Muslim. That was an eye-opener.” Ebi experiences yet another kind of life-changing event after switching to a new school:

My parents wanted me to become better at Danish. And to do better academically. So they chose to change me—to send me to a Danish elementary school with Danish children ... obviously, they doesn't think about how I should be able to fit in at the school. And should have good friends and that kind of thing. They are only thinking that I should learn something. And I should just get smarter ... It was hard for me socially—and with that kind of thing. Most of all, I liked to get away from the school. Because I didn't really feel as though I had friends I could talk to. (Ebi, Interview 1)

These examples demonstrate the relevance of *unfreezing* (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; 2017b), as they express a loss of everyday routines and attachments. According to McCauley and Moskalenko, unfreezing occurs when

young Muslims in Western countries are marginalized, lonely and disconnected from family or friends. Losing social connections and routines results in susceptibility to moral change and possible exposure and attraction to radical ideologies and environments (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 85, 96; 2017b).

To sum up, the three individual-level and related factors *identity crisis*, *identity seeking* and *life-changing events* seem to result in susceptibility to moral change or *cognitive openings*—that is; when people become receptive to new moral contexts (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 20-24). However, it is important to emphasize how it is also obviously possible to experience identity crises, to seek identity, life-changing events, parental conflicts and other risk or background factors without ending up in a radical milieu (Nielsen, 2009; Klausen et al., 2016; Vergani et al., 2018; Smith, 2018b). As previously mentioned, identity development, including identity crisis and identity seeking, is universal during puberty and adolescence without necessarily leading to a radical milieu. And many teenagers experience parental conflicts without becoming radicals. Thus, the pathways to the radical milieu form when the susceptible individual is exposed to certain activities, certain social networks and certain settings through complex selection processes. At this point, we can talk about actual “vulnerable individuals” (Bouhana, 2019b). Thus, I argue that individual-level explanations are most useful in interaction with other levels of explanation to explain radicalization (Horgan, 2008; Dzhekova et al., 2017). I tend to the selection processes below.

## 4.2. Selection Processes: Religious Activities, Social Networks and Settings

The personal experiences related to *identity crisis*, *identity seeking* and *life-changing events* influence an individual’s susceptibility to moral change. The respondents are exposed to the radical milieu through certain selection processes. In contrast to the aforementioned theories of traditional recruitment to radical milieus, I argue that exposure occurs through such processes. In this section, I elaborate on the *social selection* and *self-selection* processes—which seem to encapsulate the socio-spatial dimensions of the pathways to the radical milieu. More specifically, I try to present how social selection and self-selection unfold and overlap through patterns such as *religious revival* and *religious intensification* and factors such as *social networks* and *settings*. I elaborate on these dimensions in the analysis below. As previously mentioned, I identify *religious revival* and *religious intensification* as two overall patterns. *Social networks* constitute significant factors across the two religious patterns in which the individuals connect with preexisting or new social networks.

More specifically, preexisting social networks (e.g., childhood friendships, neighbors, kinship) propel the respondent's exposure through various encounters, while new social networks, including likeminded peers, influence pathways to the radical milieu. Finally, it is a recurring theme that specific physical and virtual settings play an important role. I therefore integrate *settings* such as neighborhoods, mosques and the online dimension in the analysis.

#### 4.2.1. Religious Revival

Previous research emphasizes the importance of specific religious interpretations and practices in radicalization (see, e.g., Juergensmeyer, 2003: 5-10; Awan, 2007; Silke, 2008; Psoiu, 2012: 61, 108-9; Malthaner, 2014; Cottee, 2017, and Pokalova, 2019). In that sense, it is important to stress that religion(s) as such do not automatically imply a radicalization potential (see, e.g., Rogers et al., 2007; Aly & Striegher, 2012; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Goerzig & Al-Hashimi, 2015: 133; Mandaville & Nozell, 2017; Eggers & Magni-Berton, 2019). Based on my data, I build on this research and identify two general patterns in the pathways to the radical milieu: *religious revival* and *religious intensification*. Five respondents revive their religion, whereas four simply intensify their religious engagement. Religious revival is more visible and pronounced for two reasons. First, these respondents have been raised with a Muslim background without practicing or taking interest in Islam until adolescence or later. Before (re)turning to Islam, they did not actively relate to it. Likewise, the recurrent pattern within this religious approach is that the parents share this view on Islam as part of their cultural heritage (Bektovic, 2004; Cesari, 2007). My data illustrates this pattern with nuances drawn from their lives prior to their religious revival. Coman mentions his upbringing and lack of interest in Islam:

I had never been to the mosque at all before grade 8 or 9. I was 15 or 16 [years old]. Most people have been taken to the mosque or been in the mosque as a child. I hadn't, because I didn't come from a religious family. It wasn't a big deal for my parents. My dad—he didn't go to the mosque. He also drank ... as a Muslim, you pray and you don't eat pork. That was it. There wasn't much else to it—in relation to learning and teaching. Or studying the Quran or that kind of thing, before I took the initiative myself when I was around 15-16. It didn't matter at all. (Coman, Interviews 1 and 3)

Fawaz (Interview 1) makes similar remarks, explaining how “I was born and raised a Muslim. But I had never really thought about my religion until I started thinking about it a little when I was around 16-17. Because it didn't

really mean anything to my parents.” Ghadi expands on this pattern, elaborating on how partying and girlfriends were allowed in his home and religion meant little:

It [religion] is non-existent. In my upbringing at home—there wasn’t religion there ... Well, once a year or once every second year, maybe my dad felt like going to the mosque, and he took us along. But it wasn’t as though it meant anything. I mean—we had girlfriends, and the girls were allowed to come home to our place. And we were allowed to go home with them. And we were also allowed to go to the disco and to parties and all sorts of other things when we were young. (Ghadi, Interview 1)

Finally, Imad (Interview 1) looks back on his early years, which were marked by a lack of religious engagement and petty crime: “Yes, there are a lot [who committed crime] in the past, even me. We didn’t know what Islam was. We knew what it was—but we didn’t follow it at all.” Although Imad did not practice Islam before adolescence, he was exposed to religious upbringing in the home. He elaborates:

But it’s because [Islamic] knowledge mostly came from my dad ... I’ve lived abroad, where I’ve learned Arabic. So after I came back, he [father] has taught me about Islam and practice. ... But I just haven’t acted on it ... You know—in Islam, you become “mature” when you reach puberty. He [father] said: “Just start praying—because that’s the most important thing—believe in God first, of course, and then pray. And then you can just do whatever you want. (Imad, Interview 1)

The transmission of religion from the father seems to constitute a sense of religious continuity (Trovão, 2017). I return to this point below, focusing on *religious intensification*. However, these examples indicate that Islam has not been the primary guiding force in the respondents’ upbringing and early life. The religious transmission from parents to children, including spiritual, theological and practicing aspects, is almost absent. Instead, Islam is allowed a more passive role related to a cultural awareness (Cesari, 2007; Güngör et al., 2011; Fadil, 2017). There can be multiple reasons for this lack of transmission, one being that the parents were non-practicing Muslims prior to their migration to Denmark and continued this lifestyle in Denmark. Another reason may be an absorption of Danish culture resulting in assimilation and reducing their religious involvement. Third, the parents might be distancing themselves from Islam. Experiences with political turmoil in the country of origin, including militant religious groups with a specific interpretation of Islam, may come at the cost of religious faith. Lastly, the religious education may not be completed

due to practical reasons. In some families, grandfathers or uncles bear the primary responsibility for the religious training of children, and immigration can separate families (Cesari, 2003; Voas & Fleischmann, 2012).

Second, in adolescence or later, the respondents return to Islam and start taking their commitment seriously. The renewed embrace of Islam results in a totally new lifestyle, which is in striking contrast to the previous life, including partying and drinking, girlfriends and possibly petty crime. Hakeem experienced an incident that seemed to influence his susceptibility to moral change, going from an alcohol-consuming, non-practicing Muslim to embracing Islam as an all-encompassing system. In his own words:

and there, I promised God that I would stop doing such things. That I would never ever do these things with drinking ... of course to begin to practice, staying away from bad friends, going to the mosque, praying, following Islam, teaching—everything that goes with it. And you become such a strong person in your faith ... [and] got a completely different picture of life. And see and read... or I listen to great, learned people about how things work. What is Islam, and how is it related to politics? ... Of course, I visited Saudi Arabia, I went to Mecca and I did the hajj. Obviously, I became more devout and got closer and closer to God by carrying out these Islamic acts. (Hakeem, Interview 1)

In his religious revival, Hakeem experiences a fluid transformation through different steps in which a “psycho-spiritual experience of surrender” propels him with new purpose and fulfillment and “with a sense of connection with God and the community” (Rambo, 1993: 168-9).

In addition to previous quotes about experiencing a sense of cultural schizophrenia between the lived life and cultural heritage, Coman continues:

At the end of grade 8 or 9, I started thinking about my life. So I started on a kind of spiritual journey within myself. Started reading everything I could find on the Internet and was just curious in general ... I ended up with the things I could see in Islam—I could see the logic in it. So Islam was a really good fit. And that’s what I felt to be the truth ... And at the same time it became possible to watch Islamic teaching on TV, because they [parents] got cable ... I feel that it’s the right way, but I also had to be able to figure out how to read the Quran on my own. I don’t like reading a translation or having others tell me what things mean. So I went [abroad] for some time and I did actually learn to read Arabic. (Coman, Interview 1)

In a similar vein, Fawaz speaks about his newfound dedication and desire to acquire knowledge about Islam:

But it’s not as though they [parents] took me by the hand and actually guided me through all of these different things. And I sought out guidance on my own ... It

was just basic things in the beginning, such as the life of the Prophet and those around him—what were they like? And then, for example, there was a book about Islam and youth in the West and I thought, “OK, this might be my situation.” So I read it a little. And the Quran. Also on the Internet ... But then I just tried to find something where there was general consensus—OK, these people, a lot of different people listen to them. (Fawaz, Interview 1)

As previously quoted, Ghadi was turning to religion to reduce his self-uncertainty. Elaborating on his active search for knowledge and skills, he continues:

I turned to a religious environment and started looking for more knowledge about God ... footage—video footage, where you could see the person talking. Questions that I was thinking about—I turned to those kinds of authorized websites and read the answers to some of those questions. ... I mean, I started travelling to some of the Islamic universities around the world to try to learn more about religion ... I wanted to understand it from the very foundations ... And then I took a course in Arabic so you can understand what the Imam is saying. And then I was taught the Arabic concepts that help interpret the Quran and formulas for understanding it. (Ghadi, Interview 1)

The quotes from Coman, Fawaz, Ghadi and Hakeem illustrate different aspects. First, although they turn away from their previous, Western-inspired lifestyles, the interviewees seem to emphasize an acquired Western individualization. They stress the self-seeking personal realization and renewal of identity and values. Moreover, they want to avoid depending on religious authorities and to be able to interpret the holy texts themselves (Vertovec & Rogers, 1998; Roy, 2004: 181). This individualized search for learning also indicates how the individual seeks platforms and websites that are useful within the logic of consumerism (Cesari, 2003). Second, the interviewees’ proactive seeking, especially via virtual platforms, indicates a spillover or extension effect in which the online communication technologies are part of the everyday lives of most young people in school and at leisure, searching for information and engaging in online social activities. These preexisting skills and habits are simply transferred or extended for the purpose of acquiring knowledge of Islam (Behr et al., 2013; Ducol, 2015; Bouchard & Lavey, 2015) that exposes them to particular narratives through hardcopy material or transmissions available via satellite or the Internet (Aliyu, 2012; Archetti, 2015; Harris & Isa, 2019). However, the transmission on the internet or “circulation of such knowledge is horizontal between equals” and not necessarily “vertical from learned people to students” in which the virtual spheres consist both of authoritative and layman materials (Roy, 2004: 168-9). Moreover, in interaction with other factors, this exposure seems to influence the propensity to leave and become involved in the conflict in Syria. Third, going abroad to acquire

qualifications at universities or Islamic language schools seems to elevate the individual, evolving from possessing no prior religious awareness to acquiring tools and competences for reading, learning and understanding the Quran. Such experiences may influence the pathways to the radical milieu, as they seem to maintain the religious interest, propel a sustained motivation and dedication, going from a non-reader to a reader potentially able to approach the revelation of God. Moreover, these *transnational “people flows”*—that is, people traveling across borders in the Muslim World to achieve a personal religious experience or attend an Islamic school—may instill the idea of a transnational “authentic” interpretation of Islam through socializing with other likeminded Muslims across borders. Such travel may develop a greater awareness of an Islamic *Umma* (Muslim community), albeit based on a specific transnational *Salafi* orientation (Mandaville, 2007: 299, 313).

Compared to the aforementioned identity-related challenges, these accounts exemplify how religious involvement provides a navigation system in life to reduce self-uncertainty, avoid cultural schizophrenia and to compensate for *psychological or existential deprivation* (Glock & Stark, 1965; Knudsen, 1994). In embracing a newfound religious perspective, the respondents are seeking out religion proactively (Lofland & Stark, 1965; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 22). Moreover, the examples illustrate the religious revival as an individualized trajectory, where faith becomes the overshadowing principle for their entire life. The previously non-practicing respondents rediscover their Muslim faith and begin to practice Islam as an orthopraxis. In this manner, the identification with Islam offers a framework for embodying the religious prescriptions in everyday life in terms of worldview, purification of behavior, acquiring Arabic language skills, studying the Quran and other Islamic texts etc. (Vertovec & Rogers, 1998; Rahnema, 2005; Cesari, 2007; Raqib & Barreto, 2014). This newfound religiosity signifies a *contextual disjuncture* in which the respondent breaks with the past and separates the world in right and wrong: *halal* and *haram* (Awan, 2007). Somewhat reminiscent of the “born-again” phenomenon in Evangelical Christianity, where the believer experiences spiritual renewal and a return to Christianity as a practicing, convinced believer (see, e.g., Schwarz Lausten, 1997: 218-21; McGrath, 1998: 252f), the religious revival creates “born-again Muslims.” The respondents abandon their former, Westernized life and undertake a “spiritual rebirth” (Roy, 2003; Van der Veer, 2004; Cook & Allison, 2007: 84, 136; Kühle & Lindekilde, 2010). The respondents are therefore perceived as converts with no “previous record of religious practice” (Roy, 2004: 315), replacing one worldview and way of life for another (Lofland & Stark, 1965; Rambo, 1993: 2). The religious faith should be lived out in practice, leading to an all-or-nothing perspective whereby “prayers should accompany every activity; the ritualistic scansion of everyday life is a

way to sanctify even menial activity ... [insisting] that prayers and formulas be uttered on every occasion” (Roy, 2004: 186). In that sense, born-again believers often adopt a literalist reading of the scriptures because they cannot accept the complexity of balancing a secular lifestyle with a religious life. Submitting to God with dedication and eagerness to fulfil God’s demands propels a perception of a true bearer of Islam, leaving no room for flexibility or combination of two worldviews (Roy, 2004: 186). Subsequently, religious revival opens the door to a new worldview in the radical milieu, including morality and ethics, system of government and narratives in which Islam is perceived as an all-encompassing system covering all aspects of life, both personal and political.

The return to Islam, especially for young Muslims born in the West to immigrant or refugee parents, can be seen as a part of a larger awakening across the European Muslim “diaspora,” which has been going on for decades (Cesari, 1998; Shah 2004; Schiffauer, 2007; Lagrange, 2014).<sup>14</sup> Following this pattern, the Muslim world is experiencing a de-secularization—the process in which a re-Islamization is occurring in terms of faith and practice on both personal and societal levels (Berger, 2002; Esposito, 2003). In this way, Islam becomes the supplier of meaning and belonging (Haddad, 1999; Furseth & Repstad, 2003: 138). As previously mentioned, Roy underlines how such re-Islamization in the West often manifests itself as an acultural form of Islam, particularly Salafism, which stands in stark contrast to the Islam of the parents. Coman describes his parents’ initial reaction to the development of his religious revival:

My parents were really scared at first ... but they could gradually see how my manners, my way of being, my way of treating people, being helpful, not arguing with my parents that much anymore, and not having all of these bad qualities. Well, they started to calm down a little ... because at the same time they heard this imam [on cable TV] giving good advice about how to deal with children who are more interested and how to ensure that they don’t become too extreme—or some signs that they should be aware of. All these things that my parents didn’t quite know how to deal with. And that settled them down a little. But it gradually developed [negatively]. (Coman, Interview 3)

Surprised by their son’s (re)turn to Islam, the parents are not indifferent. Although worried, lacking the religious knowledge themselves, uncertain, and possibly not possessing the pedagogical capacity to engage in a constructive

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<sup>14</sup> This trend also has roots in the Islamic world, typically tracing back to the Sunni-based Muslim Brotherhood in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which the reorientation to Islam began to manifest in personal life and public sphere in the decades to come, culminating, however, with the Shi’a-based Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979 (Voll, 1983; Esposito, 1999).

dialogue, they react and seek guidance from family or institutions (Sikkens et al., 2018). This might not be the best place for guidance for at least two reasons. First, an imam is not necessarily trained in advising parents on how to deal with a new-found interest in religion among Muslim youth in the West. Second, a foreign imam may not consider the Danish context, speaking instead in more general terms.

Selection can be a useful prism for disentangling how the pathways toward a radical milieu follow different processes. The interviewees have been exposed to Islam only via their ethnic origins and cultural legacy. The respondents were socially selected into Islam, although faith and practice did not contribute significantly to their outlook on life while growing up. Islam was unexplored prior to adolescence or early adulthood, where the respondents revived their religious roots, apparently in response to identity crisis, identity seeking and life-changing events that fostered a susceptibility to moral change. In this new interest, the interviewees choose to reaffirm Islam and strive to acquire knowledge about it. Based on acquired preferences in childhood, the examples illustrate how the respondents self-select to a religious revival in their adolescence or later. In contrast, Ghadi seems to be socially selected to his return to Islam. As previously stated, he is influenced by a sports friend, who introduces Ghadi to Islam in his adolescence. However, my point is that the choice of religious revival is not isolated from other influences. Early-life exposure or exposure in later stages in life through social selection (e.g., the social group of one's kin or friendships) probably influence the choice to embrace Islam later in life. The combination of social selection and self-selection therefore seems to affect the likelihood that a person will spend time in certain settings and engage in certain activities (Bouhana et al., 2014). Moreover, a lack of religious knowledge and practice seems to increase the risk that the self-selected religious revival will evolve toward a radical interpretation of Islam. The respondents' religious revival does not involve an absorption of the Islam of their parents' generation; they pursue a different Islam, purged of cultural norms, customs and national boundaries. The alternative is a literalist version of Islam (Mandaville, 2001: 122). As religious novices, the respondents explore Islam in depth for the first time. Although determined to study and acquire knowledge and practice Islam, they lack a basic religious foundation. While it is one thing to embrace Islam in the present society, where Islam is much debated, it is quite another to navigate as a religious novice in terms of finding one's own religiosity, the expectations and/or demands of the surroundings, other practicing believers and their influence, and potential oppositions and disagreements toward one's faith. Hence, the combination of religious beliefs and practices is not acquired in advance (Annalakshmi & Abeer, 2011). In pur-

suings their religiousness, the respondents explore the mosque milieu in Aarhus, where most mosques have a national and cultural orientation. In contrast, the respondents experience a transnational *Salafi* orientation in the mosque, which they perceive as the “true,” genuine interpretation of Islam. This setting provides the theological foundation and social affiliation. Moreover, the lack of religious knowledge and practice becomes crucial when becoming part of the radical milieu and being exposed to radical teachings and nurturing. A religious novice may struggle to argue with an older and/or seemingly wiser person in the radical milieu. Any religious opinion or reasoning may seem reasonable, convincing or impressive (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 25). The lack of prior knowledge and practice therefore result in a lack of resilience, which could otherwise serve as a bulwark in relation to the radical milieu. In that sense, the revivalists seem vulnerable to radical interpretations of Islam. However, they are no more vulnerable than the individuals who intensify their religious engagement, to whom I now turn.

#### 4.2.2. Religious Intensification

The second form of religious activity involves *religious intensification*. In contrast to religious revival, these four respondents have been brought up with a traditional religious perspective and practice in which the moral and ethical prescriptions of Islam were recognized in terms of personal belief and practice (Bektovic, 2004; Bougarel, 2007). The following perspective is typical among this group of respondents:

I’ve been to Quran school and some other things. We came from a Muslim culture. And you also used it when you were together with other Muslims—you talked about common references and the things you shared in common ... You come home and say “*Salam aleikum!*” You don’t eat pork at the family table. There’s prayer. Common prayer. Quran readings ... Well, for example, on weekends there was an hour of Quran reading, where everyone held a Quran and maybe reads a chapter. Or read together by heart. Where you said a line and I said a line and it kept going that way. (Ali, Interview 2)

Ali continues his story about when he was performing the pilgrimage (*haji*) with his parents, elaborating on the emotions it aroused and the young, like-minded individuals he met:

And then we walk around what we call the “Kaba”—The big square you sometimes see on TV. Well, in my mind, this was big. Well, it was a spiritual movement created in me ... I see Muslim compassion for one’s fellow religious people. So for me, Islam was a very sympathetic religion. It’s about good core values. Family, friends and brotherhood. That’s what I came home with ... I met

people who were a little like me. Grew up in the West. Spoke good English, so it was easy to just talk with each other. So there really was something in common to talk about. Everyone was trying to be a better person. Could rattle off inside jokes. Had a common frame of reference ... I mean—of course you were against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. But it wasn't as though you thought, "I'm going to put together a little militia or a cell in the West" or that kind of thing. We talked more about why the hell is it that Muslims accept all of these things? Why don't these people dig in their heels and say, "We want a new system that is just for everything and everyone"? We all wanted something like that. (Ali, Interview 3)

In line with Hakeem's previously mentioned religious experience, Ali familiarizes a similar religious experience, connecting with God and the community of Islam. These kinds of religious experiences strengthen religious dedication and confirm the sense that one has discovered the truth (Roy, 2004: 167). The quote also illustrates how the conversations between likeminded young Muslims about Western foreign policies fostered *personal and group grievances* (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017b). However, the conversations in this sacred setting may have had an influence at a later point. After returning home with a stronger religious awareness, Ali experiences the aforementioned life-changing events that instill *personal grievances* and *unfreezing* (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2020: 37-37, 46-48). He ends up in a group in which some of the members later left for Syria as foreign fighters. My argument is that social selection through social ties may have influenced his further self-selected choices and continued exposure. Dawoud elaborates on a similar traditional religious education:

I grew up in a religious family ... My dad started by teaching [us] me within the context of Islam ... My father taught us to read the Quran and told us stories about the Prophet Muhammad and his friends. Just basic manners, ethics—how to be a Muslim. And also just generally about the five pillars of Islam and what Islam is, why we are Muslims, who is Allah, who is the Prophet Muhammad. That was something we talked about in our home. My dad took us along to the mosque, where we participated in Friday prayer and during the month of Ramadan—there, we participated in *tarawih*, which are extra prayers you pray in the evening after breaking the fast. (Dawoud, Interviews 1 and 2)

Ebi (Interview 1) experienced a similar religious upbringing and tells that "ever since I was little, I was connected to mosques ... You sit with your family. You have to pray the five prayers. You read the Quran together, you talk about becoming a better person. We talked about religion, we talked about some of the things that the Prophet did." These examples illustrate how parents transmit religious ideas to their children, where religion "functions" as a compass,

providing instructions for correct behavior and emphasizing wrongful behavior. The parental religious socialization is a way of reinforcing a religious legacy and strengthening a continuous religious involvement focusing on the children's faith and practice (Maliepaard & Lubbers, 2013; van de Pol & van Tubergen, 2014).

These respondents intensify their religious engagement via encounters with certain settings and charismatic persons. Bassam describes how he reaches out to his Quran teacher with his frustrations about finding his place in society:

He [the Quran teacher] told how things fit together. Where I'm from. What I had. Why I had the name I do ... And then there was a long explanation with colonization and you know—the white man's superiority and so on. And then suddenly there was something about the Crusaders—and then it was suddenly about religion. Whoops—I'm also a Muslim. I also pray five times a day. My mother wears a scarf. My sisters also. ... His answers pointed in the direction of how if you can't be part of this society, as I had experienced at that time. So I looked for an alternative. And yes—obviously it triggered some thoughts in me that made me look for some stuff. (Bassam, Interview 1)

In his answers, the Quran teacher underscores certain political and historical structures, processes and circumstances that seem to influence Bassam's susceptibility to moral change. The interaction with the Quran teacher seems to trigger a certain interest and curiosity. Ebi also describes how he introduces himself to a charismatic peer during upper secondary school, which sets the stage for further direction:

I could kind of see on his computer that he was reading some Islamic books—at least some Islamic things. And I thought, "Wow, he seems very interesting." He had a beard—I didn't have a beard at the time—and I kind of thought that he was pretty cool ... He seemed really self-assured—just sitting there, reading about Islamic texts in front of all the other students, who could see his screen. I thought that was very brave ... So I kind of tried to become friends with him. So I said to him: "You know what, I'd also like to learn more about Islam, I've been interested etc. So we gradually became friends, you might say ... So we talked together about religion after a month or so. That was also when we started being together a lot. That's also where we started to open up a lot. (Ebi, Interview 1)

Finally, Ali elaborates on his religious intensification, increasingly frequenting mosques after the death of his parent and the perceived wrongful and discriminatory police investigation:

I went to the mosque. Just to pray on my own. [The life-changing events] motivated me to become more religious ... When you really feel as though you

have lost everything, then you ask for help in relation to God, and I thought the best place to pray must be God's house ... So I read passages from the Quran about showing us the right path. Help in relation to not making you angry. So it was more about finding a way out of the mess I was in ... Grief. Tears. Humility. Those are some of the emotions I remember. So I prayed at least for a solution to my crisis. (Ali, Interviews 1 and 2)

These examples show how the interviewees' social networks and interactions with particular settings influence the direction of individual pathways to the radical milieu. For example, Ebi's encounter with a new person stimulates a curiosity and an attraction to the person, who is self-confident and dares to stand up for his religiosity. For Ali, the mosque setting, as a symbol and place of purity for Muslims, sets the stage for activities such as contemplation and an attempt to supplicate God, reaching out for help and guidance through prayers and Quran recitation (Rippin, 2005: 109). The encounter between Bassam and his Quran teacher also evokes a Muslim identity marker regarding a greater sense of transnational belonging that instills *personal grievances* and *humiliation by proxy*—for example, young Muslims in the West experience feelings of humiliation through empathy with the Muslim world, specifically Muslims in conflict zones (Khosrokhavar, 2005). I return to the aspect of social networks below.

Social selection and self-selection are repeatedly at play. The respondents are socially selected via a traditional religious background and practice in which Islam is transmitted through their parents. The respondents keep practicing Islam in their everyday lives. In a simple, uncontroversial manner, through their upbringing, the respondents are predisposed to certain directions for seeking answers in later stages of life. Ali (Interview 1) explains how religion “plays a bigger role when people are tested. And that was where I thought, ‘What do I have in my suitcase that I can use? Are there any answers? Because in any crisis, you're always trying to come up with an explanation for it. Or trying to solve it.’” The pathways involve combined and dynamic selection processes. As previously mentioned, Ebi attends *gymnasium* (upper secondary school). However, I argue that he is socially selected in the sense that the social group of which he is part, including his parents and their ethnic community, possesses strong views that gymnasium is the right step toward a university degree. Ebi enrolls in gymnasium, as he does not want to disappoint his parents. At school, he introduces himself to a peer based on his interest in Islam, which is another form of self-selection. They start socializing and become friends. Ebi receives guidance from his new friend on how to be a better Muslim and to learn more about Islam. Ebi is also invited to a specific mosque and joins his new friend's social network. In so doing, he becomes part of a

new social group consisting of his friend and likeminded young Muslims, resulting in his social selection to the radical milieu. I return to the importance of social networks below. Bassam is socially selected to interact with the Quran teacher through the social group and kinship ties in the sense that Bassam's parents introduce him to the concept of a Quran teacher, and his cousins influence his specific choice or preference. The Quran teacher's answers to his frustrations open up for an alternative direction. Bassam actively pursues this alternative, thus being socially selected onto this continuing pathway. Finally, Dawoud also encapsulates the combination of social and self-selection. Dawoud (Interview 1) reports how he and his family frequented a mosque in western Aarhus in his childhood: "I chose to go to that mosque, because I lived close by and my dad knew some of the older men who prayed there ... I think my father has known that mosque since the 00s." Dawoud chose to spend time in this particular mosque. However, his self-selection to it is based on acquired preferences in childhood via family socialization and previous exposure. Hence, social selection sets the stage for further directions in which Dawoud actively chooses directions for engagement and worship.

Although the respondents expressing religious intensification possess prior knowledge of Islam and practiced it earlier, they also appear to demonstrate a vulnerability or lack of resilience to influences from radical milieus. These respondents are familiar with their parents' Islam. Their prior knowledge and practice of their parents' Islam constitutes a foundation. However, on their respective paths to the radical milieu and later, the interviewees transform their respective religious interpretations of Islam as they intensify their religious engagement. Although the respondents build on an existing religious interpretation and practice within Islam, I argue that the processes toward a radical interpretation of Islam renders them religious novices and, similar to the religious revivalists, they require a renewed sense of navigation and adaption to one's life project and a changing world. The religious intensification in itself does not provide any automatic religious grounding or intrinsic resilience. The preexisting and new social networks influence the respondents in evolving from their parents' ethnic and national Islam to a transnational version of Islam. Thus, the religious intensification is causing a lack of resilience to a radical interpretation of Islam. I elaborate thoroughly on the role of social networks below.

### 4.3. Preexisting and New Social Networks

As previously mentioned, research exists in social movement theory that emphasizes how social networks play a significant role for those entering social movements (see, e.g., Snow et al., 1980, McAdam, 1986; Della Porta, 2013:

280-1). Similarly, radicalization research (see, e.g., Della Porta, 1995: 138-44; Sageman, 2004: 107-13, Wiktorowicz, 2005: 15; Malthaner, 2018) highlights how social networks represent a prominent role in explaining how “individuals in groups influence each other” when entering radical milieus (Sageman 2008a: 13). This section draws on the relational approach to radicalization by elaborating on how social networks form and develop, thus influencing the respondents’ continued path toward the radical milieu.

#### 4.3.1. Preexisting Social Networks

Sageman (2004, 2008a) and Wiktorowicz (2005) have both unpacked the components and dynamics of preexisting social networks in radical *Salafist* organizations. They distinguish between different types of social relationships—such as friends, relatives, neighbors, authorities and acquaintances—which may influence the direction into the radical milieu. My data resembles this trend. In telling his own story, Bassam mentions his Quran teacher, with whom he has a close, trusting relationship:

It was because some of my nephews had him [the Quran teacher] and said good things about him. So I thought that I would rather have him. My parents had been talking about someone else, but I’d rather be together with my nephews ... And that was a kind of authority—or someone I saw as an authority figure. Somebody you would go to. (Bassam, Interviews 1 and 2)

As previously described, Bassam confides in his Quran teacher about his identity-related frustrations and receives answers that seemingly influence seekership and exposure. Bassam proceeds as follows when reflecting upon re-connecting to his friends in different settings:

Obviously, some of them are peers who we share those kinds of thoughts with. Or ask each other for advice. It’s not as though I went up to somebody I didn’t know at all. They were people I knew. People I saw every day ... classmates in school. Some of them were older than me—a couple of grades older—and there were some others in a different class in my grade ... It was the neighbor’s son—I saw him every day. Or some guys I took the school bus together with ... You play soccer when you’re younger, so you can ask your soccer buddies, “Have you also had the same thoughts? I actually know some of those thoughts ... And you’re a Muslim, I’m a Muslim—and you are too, and you, and you. That’s what it was like all the time they were talking about Muslims—there was something attacking Islam. Well, shouldn’t we study Islam together? (Bassam, Interviews 1 and 2)

The quote illustrates how preexisting social networks are reshaped and given new meaning. In a nutshell, the childhood friendships evolve from playing

soccer to also discussing existential issues and frustrations with political rhetoric and pursuing religious learning. Moreover, the exposure is intensive and sustained, as they socialize and organize in many settings, seeking likeminded peers. Bassam details this development, evolving from a few individuals to a greater sense of companionship:

And then right there—you go from being “just me” to being two persons, then three persons, then four persons and then five. And then there’s a lot of people. And then I find out there are actually others who had these thoughts before I had them. And then you try to find them. And then you’re suddenly part of a much larger group. (Bassam, Interview 1)

Similarly, Fawaz first describes how he and his childhood friends proceed with religious learning and practice and then how they formed as a group, thinking back on the settings he encountered:

There were a lot of people in my circle who also happened to be starting to take stuff with religion more seriously and gradually also became more and more practicing ... In the beginning, it was just, “Let’s pray our five prayers.” Or maybe, “Should we do something with the Quran? Is there teaching going on somewhere that we can go to together?” ... I knew most of the guys from the area when we were really young. The neighborhood and mostly elementary school. And then later there’s also the soccer club ... And then I was in after-school programs and youth groups in the neighborhood. (Fawaz, Interviews 1 and 2)

Coman tells a different story of how he was introduced to a certain mosque in Aarhus Vest:

It was my neighbor, who was also Muslim. We went to the same elementary school. He was at the same stage as me. The only difference between me and him was that he had become acquainted with the mosque. But we begin to be interested at the same time. I mean—we used to play together, because we lived in the same area. So we decided to go to the mosque together. ... And it happened to be the month of Ramadan, too, so there was the night prayer. And so I thought, “OK—I’ll try it.” (Coman, Interviews 1 and 3)

Coman (Interviews 1 and 3) continues, describing how he re-connects with his friends in his pathway, focusing on religion and religious practice: “So the closest friends I had—you just start talking about the topic and about, ‘Do you believe in something? Do you pray? And why/why not?’ You start asking more and more curious questions to one another. We were talking more about religion at the time.” Finally, Coman (Interviews 2 and 3) also connects his exposure to kinship, describing how, “I had taken it [Islam] seriously for 6 months or a year—but it took a little more time for him [family member], where he

started to get a little more interested in it. But he had come along with us [in the mosque] a few times, but then he stopped and it took some time before he found it interesting.” Coman continues (Interview 3), telling me that when the relative discovered his religious interest, the family ties became a source of exposure. In that sense, Coman and his relative spend a substantial amount of time together, influencing each other (Della Porta, 1995: 138-40; Sageman, 2008a: 66f; Hafez, 2016). Ghadi also reflects on his preexisting social networks, however, illustrating different combinations of social connections. First, he (Interview 1) explains how he became interested in Islam, stating that “I remember it was a sports buddy I was together with. He was often reciting the Quran before we did sports. I thought it was very cool. ... Yes, [we talked about religion].” Ghadi also describes how, together with a childhood friend, he started attending a certain mosque in Aarhus Vest and slowly changed his lifestyle:

We went to the mosque—and then went out and partied afterwards. It was good to just go in and then just take care of ourselves. And then just be at peace. It was a lot like that at first. And then we found out that it doesn’t really fit with the religious beliefs we later developed. And then we had to start removing some things and adding other things. (Ghadi, Interview 1)

As already mentioned, Ghadi used the Internet to obtain religious knowledge and actively sought out Islamic education. In that context, his preexisting social networks seem to affect his pathway toward the radical milieu:

At one point I had a friend who had studied abroad. And at one time, I came down there while my friend was there ... I was allowed to go in and be together with some of the students who were studying. And I actually followed along for some time ... And then I got some literature and was reminded that this requires a person who is authorized and is able to teach this. Then I was referred to him, him and him... And in addition to their teaching in these educations, they also have some private teaching in mosques. (Ghadi, Interview 1)

The previous examples illustrate how social ties unfold in two ways: First, the respondents seek new knowledge together with friends or family who are also interested in religious learning (Sageman, 2004: 113-20; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 22, 127). In that sense, the individuals constitute a “bunch of guys” who collectively influence each other on their pathways to radical teachings (Sageman, 2008a: 66). Second, the preexisting social network transforms and develops. The network consists of childhood friends from school, leisure activities and the neighborhood. These deep-rooted friendships seem to be strong and trusted ties, where existential discussions and a religious quest become

interesting focal points in a safe, familiar environment (Wickham, 2004: 232; Sageman, 2008a: 66-9; Egerton, 2011: 151; Malthaner, 2018).

In contrast, preexisting social ties influenced some of the respondents through individual encounters that seemed to take them further along the path into the radical milieu. Ali, for example, connects with an older acquaintance when, as mentioned above, he visited a mosque after experiencing several life-changing events. He expands on this encounter as follows:

Someone I knew approached me. We were in a room, almost alone, where we could express ourselves and talk about these things ... And he asks how I'm feeling. And I told him what happened to me and my family—and all the consequences. And while he was listening to me, his eyes opened and compassion poured out of him as if he understood what I was experiencing. I felt as though here was a person who would listen to me. And then he says, "I feel you, brother. There are many like you. I will introduce you to some friends who have felt the same way you do."

And there I again had a feeling of, "OK—I'm not alone with this. I'm part of something bigger." ... There, I felt more relieved. I mean, he gave me moral support ... And he explains this group he has and how I should come along, and then I'm introduced. I should just come and eat. So my acquaintance picks me up the following day and we go over to the apartment where I'm introduced to the group. And the others have already been told that I'm coming. (Ali, Interviews 1 and 2)

Following Ali's encounter with the group, he is accepted and motivated to become a member. The encounter with Ali's old acquaintance seems to establish a deep-felt connection and caring, which introduces Ali to a smaller group within the radical milieu. Another example demonstrates the importance of a similar individual encounter, but in a different setting; the respondent meets an older person, who was a friend of one of Ali's relatives, thus establishing a lasting bond:

He came and visited us. He didn't know who I was, because he only knew my relative really well. I knew who he was. I didn't know him personally. It was first that day ... He took me along to a restaurant, we hung out together and we had a good time. And [asks] how I'm doing. And he buys clothing for me if I needed anything. Took care of me ... Just a little more than friends. Like brothers. He was also there for my family. (Imad, Interview 1)

In the same manner, Imad was introduced to another smaller group from within the radical milieu.

However, not all of the preexisting friendships are maintained during the pathways to a radical milieu. Some respondents describe their ties to non-religious friends crumbling due to the incompatibility of their worldviews and related activities (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 57). Fawaz, who broke with those of his childhood friends who were not Muslims and who were ethnic Danes, illustrates this point. As previously mentioned, he elaborates on how he was not into partying and drinking alcohol during his religious revival: “I was together with a lot of non-Muslims, and I felt really good about it. Some of the best times I’ve had—they’ve been together with them. But then you kind of start going to parties, and I say, ‘I can’t just do that, because I’m not interested in drinking beer. It’s just not my thing.’ So they [non-Muslim friends] start quietly saying: ‘OK—maybe he’s a little too boring. He isn’t just like us.’ And I get that. But then I gradually find some other people” (Fawaz, Interview 1).

When Hakeem revives his religion, he breaks with his former life and establishes new social networks: “You get tested, of course. And you should stay away from the bad friends, because they tear you down as a person. As a Muslim ... when I became religious, it wasn’t with the same people. I got new friends—I got to know them in the mosque” (Hakeem, Interview 1). In the following, I elaborate on the role of new social networks in the pathways to the radical milieu.

Some of the examples also illustrate how preexisting social networks can facilitate new social ties. For example, Ali gets to know a group of individuals through an acquaintance, whereas Ghadi is introduced to new contacts abroad for religious learning by his friend. Preexisting social networks thus provide opportunity to make connections (Della Porta & Diani, 2006: 115; Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Malthaner, 2018).

#### 4.3.2. New Social Networks

In addition to the preexisting social networks, three respondents are exposed to new social networks. In addition to Hakeem mentioned above, Ebi, as previously mentioned, established contact to a previously unknown charismatic peer at school with whom he later became friends. Ebi explains:

And then he tells me, “Well, I attend this mosque—would you like to come to the mosque once in a while?” And then I think—I’d like to do so. So we start going to the mosque and talking about different things related to Islam ... Sometimes we were together after school—and I was gradually introduced to some other people in his neighborhood. And he invited me out when they were doing things together. (Ebi, Interview 1)

Dawoud presents a similar example, joining the same mosque after frequenting different mosques around Aarhus, and he is integrated through established social networks:

To begin with, I meet some young people at the mosque who are really nice ... The young people in the mosque ask you how you're doing, if you need something ... It was actually really nice. Right up until things broke out in Syria ... I just felt that there was a strong relationship. So I felt more like attending the mosque, because there were so many young people who came to say their prayers, had started to become religious and talked about the various things they had learned about Islam. (Dawoud, Interview 1)

The quote also demonstrates how Dawoud encounters a companion who makes him feel at ease, identifying with each other on the background of a common religious position (Kohlman, 2004: 141-3). Moreover, in the previous excerpts, outreach and recruitment are interesting nuances of exposure; not in the traditional sense, that includes an "active" radicalizing agent brainwashing a "passive" potential recruit. The processes are more complex and fluid, the respondents are active in the socialization, thus contributing to shaping further development (Wickham, 2004: 232; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 21-2; Malthaner, 2018).

Ali, Bassam, Ebi and Imad also encounter persons who seem to influence and guide the pathways of exposure. With the exception of Imad, who revives his religious engagement, the other respondents intensify their religiosity. As a religious novice, it is natural for Imad to interact with a more experienced believer for guidance. However, the respondents who practice and possess prior knowledge of Islam encounter persons who seemingly influence and guide their further development. As experienced believers, their Islamic foundation is expected to suggest less need of guidance from an experienced religious person, thus illustrating a counter-intuitive pattern. One explanation might be the combination of access (e.g., to an authoritative teacher or to a familiar mosque, where there is a fair chance of meeting a religious person) and searching for help and answers. Ali is reaching out for God's help, for example, but an older acquaintance seems to step in and provide help and answers, which he accepts. Bassam is also reaching out to his Quran teacher, who delivers answers that he accepts and uses along his continued pathway into the radical milieu. In these cases, the persons who are perceived as proficient, worth listening to and charismatic seem to influence the interviewees through conversations and guidance upon which the interviewees act, leading them further along the path into the radical milieu. The respondents meet religious figures who are willing to listen and show understanding and compassion,

providing a platform where it is possible to express feelings of anger and grievance. The respondents encounter individuals who are willing to talk about controversial subjects. For example, confronting his parents with his frustrations related to identity crisis and identity-seeking, it occurs to Bassam (Interview 1) that he was given an unsatisfying answer: “And you know—I always got the short answer. But there had to be more.” Instead, Bassam turns to his Quran teacher and receives a satisfying answer that sets the stage for further seeking.

#### 4.4. Exploring the Mosque Milieu

In the quest for religious learning, the respondents also explore the mosque milieu in Aarhus to find a regular place of worship. A common trend is the focus on both theological foundations and social mirroring without specific national boundaries. Bassam elaborates on finding a mosque focusing on the transnational Muslim aspect:

Well, in as much as we're from different nationalities, you go to the mosque that's able to accept us being from different nationalities ... The other mosques—there's the Somalian, the Turkish, the Moroccan. There's a culture there that didn't talk the language that the majority of the group spoke. But we knew that this one—Somalians, Palestinians, Lebanese, Moroccans, Algerians—they all come here. So that's why this became a mosque we attended. (Bassam, Interviews 1 and 2)

Coman continues, commenting on the religious and social aspects of choosing this mosque:

Typically, all of the mosques we visited—they weren't always mosques that had the same ideology or mindset [as us] ... So it is again the social. So depending on whether there are more young people or how fun it is to be there, that's where you start going as your regular mosque, the one you often go to ... it was one of the first mosques I was introduced to and because my friends were going there, that's where you found your fellowship.” (Coman, Interviews 1 and 2)

Coman continues and elaborates on the formation process of the seemingly largest group within the radical milieu in Aarhus as more and more individuals join the radical milieu:

At the time, more and more young people started showing an interest in Islam. And because there was a larger social community and everyone was interested in it, you thought, “OK” —but then you can kind of establish an organization or a group that has activities and offers activities for people with a common interest. It was a shared interest. So it was something that was offered to all Muslims who were interested. (Coman, Interview 1)

Similarly, Ghadi adds the relationship between faith and practice, elaborating on how religious faith is manifested in practice within that mosque setting:

It's because the mosque is much more involved in how to call people to religion and proselytizing. There was a bit of movement in it rather than just attending the mosque, saying your prayers and then leaving immediately. And when you were outside, that you weren't a Muslim. For me, it was kind of like saying that our moral values and our manners and our good character—it was put in the mosque in a bag. And I didn't like that. (Ghadi, Interview 1)

In searching for a mosque to regularly attend, Fawaz expands on how the socializing dimension was appealing and attractive, hence ending up in the same mosque as the other respondents:

There were the mosques that provide Quran school and are very skilled at teaching the Quran. And then I was in another mosque. Because they were doing much more together with young people. There was a youth program. And then, yes, as I said, they talked about a lot of the basic things—and that's not something that you can disagree with. But it was just like the larger perspective. (Fawaz, Interview 1)

As previously mentioned, these examples illustrate how the interviewees integrate into a transnational interpretation of Islam that rejects the Islam of their parents. The interpretation includes a search for a “true” Islam stripped of cultural and national influences, thus striving for a place of worship that resonates with these requirements. The respondents search for a religious setting in which religion is preached in an understandable manner. As Ebi (Interview 1) puts it, “I'm Danish with [another ethnic] background, and I was struggling to deal with my environment [of ethnic origin], because I wasn't that good at my [original] language.” Moreover, the respondents and their social networks also search for a religious interpretation that is both comprehensible and meaningful to their beliefs. The socializing dimension also plays an essential role; some of the respondents emphasized the social aspect in search of the preferred mosque for worship and religious practice. They were in opposition to the majority of mosques, which are dominated by the parents' generation and where the respondents are bored or do not understand the language. The respondents and their social networks were looking for a mosque that could appeal to the younger generation of Muslims in Aarhus with respect to companionship and social activities. Such activities contribute to the reinforcement of commitment, a shared set of values and identity, loyalty and the attraction of potential new members (Wiktorowicz, 2005; Sageman, 2008a; Malthaner, 2018; della Porta, 2018). Dawoud was introduced to the aforementioned mosque in his childhood and later moved nearby. He recalls how the

atmosphere and social community were crucial: “I didn’t know very many people. So it made sense for me to come to the mosque. Because there were these young people who had this fellowship. And there I automatically formed some friendships, because it was actually really cozy to be there” (Dawoud, Interview 1). It is important to stress that social networks and socialization are not only relevant in joining the radical milieu. Relationships and social life also play a prominent role within the radical milieu through intense socialization that prepares individuals to take part in both low-risk and high-risk actions (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 6 and 167-70; Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Malthaner, 2018). I will return to this aspect in Chapter 6 concerning attachment and social control affordances.

In summary, then, selection processes refer to the ecological and dynamic interactions that introduce certain kinds of people to certain kinds of settings. Social networks constitute a type of social selection that influences sustained pathways to the radical milieu. More specifically, the social networks include childhood friendships or acquaintances, neighbors, kinship, religious authorities and new social networks that contribute to further directions. In the examples of Bassam, Coman, Fawaz and Ghadi, which include preexisting social networks (e.g., childhood friendships, neighbors and kinship on different occasions), they appear to select each other socially and continue religious learning and explore certain settings together. The examples of Ali and Imad show another variety of social selection as one-on-one encounters through preexisting social networks. Lastly, Dawoud, Ebi and Hakeem are socially selected through new social networks, although Dawoud’s trajectory is more complex. As previously illustrated, Dawoud was socially selected to the mosque in Aarhus Vest as a child by his father. Later, in adolescence, he acts upon that acquired preference and self-selects to the same mosque, where he explores the mosque and its social life. He meets an established group of likeminded persons, finds them appealing, which contributes to Dawoud’s pathway to the radical milieu. As previously mentioned, the socializing aspect influences the individual trajectories into the radical milieu, including shared dining, existential conversations, and the sharing of lifestories, activities and religious training.

## 4.5. Concluding Remarks

This chapter has tried to elaborate on the factors and processes that contribute to shaping pathways to a radical milieu. In contrast to the perception of a single path, my findings support the notion of multiple *pathways* by identifying nine distinct, individual pathways. I have identified recurring patterns across the nine unique pathways. The individuals experience *identity crisis*, *identity*

*seeking* and *life-changing events*. These individual-level factors seem to create a susceptibility to moral change. More specifically, the pathways to the radical milieu form when susceptible individuals are exposed to activities, individuals and settings through *selection* processes. On the one hand, the respondents are not detached from other influences in their lives; they are influenced through processes of social selection, such as preexisting ties to those they have met at school, in the neighborhood or at a mosque. On the other hand, my interviewees demonstrate individual agency in which they design their own trajectories through self-selection and seekership. They act on their reflections and considerations and look for solutions. They contribute to the shaping of their own experiences, facilitating and engaging in different activities (physical and virtual) across settings, thus being architects of their own trajectories. Moreover, the respondents are active in the transformation of the friendships or establishing new social ties in keeping with a new religious awareness and lifestyle. Thus, the *social selection* and *self-selection* concepts are ideal-type processes for analytical purposes. In my investigation, however, *social selection* and *self-selection* seem to combine and overlap, thereby constituting a dynamic relationship. The developments do not happen overnight; they occur through slow, fluid processes.

In my data, I identify *religious revival* and *religious intensification* as two overall patterns in the pathways to the radical milieu. In the first, respondents with no prior experience of religious practice or knowledge revive their faith and practice. On their pathways, these respondents generally seek to acquire Islamic knowledge through offline platforms (e.g., Islamic schools and universities) and online platforms (using, e.g., open access websites). They reject their former lives and pursue an Islamic life project. In the religious intensification, the respondents have experienced a religious upbringing and practiced Islam throughout their lives. However, these interviewees encounter charismatic persons, who seem to influence and guide further directions on their pathways to the radical milieu.

In both cases, the respondents ultimately reject their parents' national or ethno-religious versions of Islam, subscribing instead to a transnational *Salafi*-inspired interpretation of Islam. For years, the role and character of religion in radicalization and terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State have been much debated. Some maintain that religion plays the all-dominating role, whereas others maintain that it has nothing to do with radicalization (Schmidt, 2016; Cottee, 2017). There seem to be nuances in these competing perspectives. Based on my empirical data, I argue that a specific religious interpretation and practice plays a role. It is imperative to note that religion as such neither causes radicalization nor functions as the all-

dominating driver of radicalization. To the contrary, in this dissertation, a specific interpretation of Islam and practices “interacts with a wide range of other factors” (Mandaville, 2017: 1), suggesting that exposure to social networks and settings seems to influence the individuals’ pathways to the radical milieu. Thus, the empirical data is valuable in helping to understand the character and role of the radical interpretation of Islam in a radical milieu, which adds nuance to the competing perspectives.

In the exposure, *preexisting social networks*, such as childhood friendships, kinship and neighbors, play a significant role. These preexisting and deep-rooted relationships seem to establish a particular foundation upon which these ties slowly reshape in a safe and familiar environment. Furthermore, the respondents frequent different settings along their path to the radical milieu; some explore the mosque milieu in order to find the “true” version of Islam and a relevant socializing base stripped of their parents’ contagious influences. Moreover, settings such as schools, clubs and the neighborhood are focal points of socialization. In addition, new social networks appear to be part of the pathways to the radical milieu in which some of the respondents encounter new social networks and are socialized into these network ties through different activities. In the subsequent chapters, I elaborate on participation in the radical milieu. More specifically, I will tend to the socializing affordances in the radical milieu, focusing on the *cognitive, moral, attachment and social control affordances*.

**PART III:  
PARTICIPATION WITHIN  
THE RADICAL MILIEU:  
SOCIALIZING AFFORDANCES**



## Chapter 5: Cognitive Affordances

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on the pathways leading to the radical milieu. Exposure happens through a combination of selection processes providing the connection between susceptible individuals and contextual influences. More specifically, the combination of religious activities and social networks that unfolds in certain settings, such as schools, neighborhoods, mosques, sports clubs and youth clubs, seems to contribute to individual trajectories into a radical milieu. This and the subsequent two chapters consist of an interrelated, three-fold analysis in which I analyze the *socializing affordances* of the radical milieu (Bouhana, 2019b). More specifically, I analyze how group dynamics and socialization in certain settings prepare for and allow certain forms of activism as viable actions.

This chapter is primarily intended to investigate empirically the social activities that afford positive and negative emotions. I elaborate on how social activities and practices in certain settings form ideas and the preparedness to act. Broadly speaking, *affordances* refer to “that which is offered or provided to an individual by the environment ... An affordance may be thought of as an opportunity for action” (Wortley, 2012: 18). Within my scope of interest, the members of the radical milieu actively facilitate different forms of socialization. Interactions between members provide a range of opportunities and activities that enable the acquisition of a certain moral context sympathetic to particular actions, such as leaving for the conflict in Syria to engage in humanitarian relief work or even to become a militant. Affordances are dynamic; they develop and relate to both the immediate surroundings and the individual at a particular time (Williams, 2012; Bouhana, 2019b). Based on my data, the members in the radical milieu seem to experience meaning, direction, satisfaction and opportunities for shaping ideas and actions. They perceive the radical milieu as offering attractive companionship full of pleasure, social activity together with likeminded peers and shaping a shared identity through a specific religious interpretation of Islam promoting certain actions. Through these experiences, participants seem to maintain an interest in the radical milieu. These socializing affordances contribute to the propensity development to find certain behavior and actions viable. I thus argue that the perspective of socializing affordances can help us understand how the social context of the milieu contributes to certain possibilities and actions. In this chapter, I present the *cognitive affordances*. In the next chapter, I elaborate on the *moral affordances*, and I present the *attachment* and *social control affordances* of

the radical milieu in Chapter 9. Although the four socializing affordances are inextricably connected, I draw these distinctions for the sake of clarity. The socializing affordances unfold not in three sequential steps; I argue that the socializing affordances develop simultaneously.

As stated in Chapter 4, with a single exception, the respondents experienced a *cognitive opening* as an outcome of individual experiences, such as identity crisis, identity-seeking or life-changing events (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 20). The *cognitive affordances* offer a response to such individual cognitive openings through new moral beliefs inherent to and nurtured by the specific emotion-driven socializing activities in the radical milieu. These everyday emotions are important to the respondents but also a significant component in creating relations that bind individuals or groups together. Thus, emotions are an essential part of everyday experiences, encounters and interactions that influence a willingness to act (Jacobsen, 2019). More specifically, cognitive affordances bring about positive and negative emotions via socializing activities. The combination of sentiments seems to influence people to be more responsive to embracing new moral teachings (Bouhana, 2019b). It is important to note that distinguishing between “positive” and “negative” emotions may be questionable in practice. Feelings may not be *sui generis* positive or negative but instead vary in intensity, depending on the context and outcomes. For example, the feeling of fear is intuitively a negative feeling toward something unsuitable and unpleasant (Oatley & Jenkins, 2019). Conversely, fear can become a positive driver for survival or caution in traffic, for example. In that sense, emotions are complex. For analytical purposes, I use the positive-negative emotions distinction for structure and clarity. Although positive and negative emotions unfold in a dynamic, fluid and overlapping process, this distinction helps separate and identify the different emotions and related activities to be able to unfold processes and developments. More importantly, the distinction also contributes to underscoring the importance of the positive emotions. As described below, the positive sentiments are found in the radical milieu and not necessarily second to the negative emotions. The members of the radical milieu facilitate various activities in different settings that arouse positive and negative emotions. Such experiences enable discussions about potential solutions and actions.

This chapter brings forward two contributions. First, my data supports the existing research on social and religious movements (see, e.g., Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001; Nepstad & Smith, 2001; Gould, 2009; Jasper, 2011; Bosi & Della Porta, 2012; Linjakumpu, 2017; Sheikh, 2018; Van Ness & Summers-Efflers, 2019), which also points out the importance of positive feelings in activism. Yet my study contributes with detailed and nuanced perspectives on

positive and negative sentiments. My investigation shows how positive emotions are not always secondary to negative emotions and that they contribute to the fortification of the companionship. These processes lay the foundation for a focus on Western foreign politics and conflict zones within the Muslim world whereupon activism later became part of the agenda. The interaction is more emotionally complex. As previously mentioned, with one exception, the respondents experienced a *cognitive opening* as an outcome of individual experiences such as identity crisis, identity seeking and life-changing events. These experiences stir negative emotions but are qualitatively different from the negative emotions facilitated within the radical milieu via discussions of Western foreign policy and conflict in the Muslim world. The individual experiences generate negative feelings related to one's own life, whereas the negative sentiments generated in the radical milieu relate to one's worldwide Muslim brethren. As such, the negative feelings develop from a local perspective to a global perspective. However, the interview persons seem to be initially preoccupied with the social activities in the radical milieu and are therefore focused on and driven by positive emotions. The activism driven by a global outlook comes later. My data indicates that the individuals emphasize belonging, "brotherhood" and social activities that contribute to the establishment of the radical milieu; rather than a byproduct, these sentiments are core. The participants discuss their competences and interests with the purpose of identifying a division of labor, generating feelings such as acceptance and recognition. They also engage in numerous social activities and events including shared meals, football, swimming, go-carting, bowling and paintball, gaming, board games, movie nights, hanging out and goofing around, and overnight trips. In this sense, participation in the radical milieu is healthy, enriching, pleasant and amusing on an everyday basis. At least in the beginning.

The negative sentiments seem to be activated within the radical milieu via watching, sharing and discussing video footage, images and text material related to conflict zones throughout the Muslim world. These activities stir emotions such as resentment, anger and revenge that seem to enable discussions about potential action and a willingness to act upon the generated emotions. For example, Ali elaborated on how, prior to his engagement in the radical milieu, he socialized with likeminded European Muslims during his *hajj* or pilgrimage. Ali and his peers discussed Western foreign policies and conflict zones. In that sense, the grievances seem to be introduced during his *hajj*, but they are activated more intensively "at home" in the radical milieu after watching, sharing and discussing YouTube videos of footage from various conflict zones. On the other hand, other interviewees, such as Coman and Fawaz, are apparently introduced for the first time to topics of discussion such as Western foreign policies and conflict zones through socialization in the radical milieu.

Consistent with the presentation of pathways in the previous chapter, the interviewees are seeking, meeting new likeminded people and socializing in various settings that activate such negative emotions and enable discussions about future opportunities for action. Nevertheless, the interviewees do not participate immediately in activism. Instead, the respondents seem more concentrated on the activities that facilitate positive emotions. It is important to note that other radical *Salafists* may engage immediately in activism fueled by existing grievances. I argue that the positive emotions are vital and not merely secondary when engaging in activism. Based on my data, I argue for a more nuanced role of both positive and negative emotions. The processes seem dynamic, interactive and fluid. Second, most radicalization and terrorism research has favored a focus on the importance of negative feelings when participating in radical milieus or terrorist organizations, such as anger, humiliation, resentment, alienation and marginalization, injustice and revenge (see, e.g., Hacker, 1976: 290-3; McCauley, 2002; Stern, 2003: 9-62; Khosrokhavar, 2005: 195-8; Post, 2007: 11-14, 101-4, 121-32, 195-8; Hafez & Mullins, 2015; Ranstorp, 2016; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a:112-21; Smith, 2018a). In addition to the negative emotions elaborated below, I will expand by emphasizing the positive sentiments generated via various activities. I argue that the radical milieu is not only a companionship feeding off each other's negative emotions; to the contrary, I argue that the positive feelings are as important as the negative emotions. The social activities that foster positive emotions contribute to shaping "the brotherhood" and maintaining companionship.

**Table 8. The combination of socializing cognitive affordances and the radical milieu settings**

<b>Cognitive affordances and settings: Positive emotions</b>		
<b>Emotions</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Settings</b>
<b>Acceptance, belonging, safe, at ease, comfort, amusement and joy</b>	Socialization and conversations with likeminded	
	Eating together	In public restaurants throughout Aarhus, apartments and the mosque
	Sports, beach, gaming, cinemas, movies, hanging out and joking	In public facilities throughout Aarhus, apartments and the mosque
	Outdoor overnight trips	Outside Aarhus in public camping areas
<b>Appreciation, recognition and worthiness—being “someone”</b>	Conversations and identification of division of labor based on competences and interests such as lecturing, IT and social media management, setting up recreational activities, taking care of converts, writing text material, distribution of flyers, and communication and debate	Throughout Aarhus, apartments and the mosque <sup>15</sup>

The distinction between positive and negative emotions in tables 8 and 9 is heuristic, and the relationship between them is to be understood as interactive. There is a dynamic relationship between positive and negative sentiments, meaning that positive emotions are not always subordinated to negative sentiments. The positive emotions strengthen the engagement, cohesion and companionship between the members in the radical milieu through the various positive experiences. Conversely, the negative emotions initiate considerations and discussions about potential solutions and actions.

<sup>15</sup> I will elaborate more on the actual carrying out and related setting of the specific tasks in the next chapter concerning *moral affordances*, such as the “distribution of flyers” and “communication/debate” related to dawah and “lecturing” regarding religious training. I will also return to the everyday small reminders about the religious engagement in Chapter 7 concerning *attachment and social control affordances*.

**Table 9. The combination of socializing cognitive affordances and the radical milieu settings**

<b>Cognitive affordances and settings: Negative emotions</b>		
<b>Emotions</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Settings</b>
<b>Grievances such as resentment, hatred, despair and revenge</b>	Access, share and discuss videos, images and texts concerning specific conflict zones in the Muslim world	During common meals, gatherings, sports or outdoor trips in public; in apartments or in private during shared activities; on social media and encrypted platforms.
	Discussing Western foreign policy and apostate leaders in the Muslim world	In apartments and the mosque
<b>Alienation, exclusion and being a second-class citizen, frustration and hopelessness</b>	Sharing life stories	In apartments and the mosque

Overall, the activities that stir positive and negative feelings unfold in both physical and virtual settings. The positive feelings unfold in *neutral* and *open* settings, whereas the negative sentiments are aroused in settings ranging from *neutral* and *open settings* to *radicalizing magnets* and *radical micro-settings* (Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Malthaner, 2018; Lindekilde et al., 2019). For example, the respondents integrate online and offline interaction, elaborating on the access to and discussions of video, image or text material regarding conflict zones in the Muslim world, especially the conflict in Syria. The access to a variety of material through online platforms is easy. The respondents access material showing destitute, wounded individuals throughout the Muslim world. The activities unfold in a combination of offline and online arenas. The individuals watch and discuss videos during recreational activities or in private, accessing social media platforms together for discussions. Moreover, the interviewees share views and develop ideas and a willingness to act on the generated negative feelings. I elaborate on the positive emotions first, followed by the negative emotions.

## 5.1. Positive Emotions

Based on my data, the cognitive affordances of the radical milieu facilitate positive sentiments through various social activities, including conversations, recreational activities and humor.

### 5.1.1. Acceptance and Belonging

In contrast to the dominant focus on the negative emotions in radicalization, such as grievances, humiliation and alienation (see, e.g., Borum, 2003; Moghadam, 2005; Egerton, 2011: 23-43; Hafez & Mullins, 2015), I add in-depth perspectives on the generated positive emotions. The radical milieu in focus here constitutes a safe haven in which the members feel at ease and recognized for whom they are. Simply put, the different groups within the radical milieu succeed in creating a safe and pleasant refuge. Thinking back on his participation in the radical milieu, Ali elaborates on how he felt safe and comforted, arousing positive feelings in the radical milieu:

I'd call it a brotherhood. But also a safehouse, because the reason you went there was that it could offer something that society couldn't. Sometimes security. Sometimes a roof over your head. Other times, just a shoulder as a friend ... I mean—we could talk about everything. It was a safe place to express yourself. You could be understood. You could be listened to ... So it was almost a home. It was a family ... And I met compassion—which I had not seen in my own society. Compassion that meant that I no longer wavered. I was so happy to be there. It meant a lot. (Ali, Interview 1)

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on how Ali experienced multiple life-changing events. In this sense, the quote illustrates how Ali experiences alienation from Danish society, as exemplified in what he perceived to be wrongful and discriminatory attention from the police. In contrast, he finds openness and accessibility in the radical milieu (Frazer, 2011: 32, 43). Ali experiences warmth, security and compassion together with a sense of belonging. Bassam makes a similar observation regarding the experience of companionship:

Finding companionship. That was probably the most important thing ... those guys—they were brothers. They cared ... That was the foundation for everything. That's what meant that we just attracted more and more—because you had this open hand and an open mind toward one another ... You didn't find that anywhere else. (Bassam, Interview 1)

Here, Bassam is describing his struggle to find some kind of recognition. Further along these lines, other interviewees emphasize the religious aspects within the radical milieu. Coman tells of how he found acceptance for his new-found religiosity among sympathizers in the radical milieu:

As soon as you started practicing [Islam] you were looked at very, very strangely and differently from every angle. I mean, there were times when your family didn't understand you at all. Especially if a person was a convert. They just couldn't understand that the person had become a Muslim. Or if another person

didn't come from a religious family and he chose to practice a little more than his parents did—they looked at it very strangely ... You were kind of alienated and looked down upon from everywhere else. Whether in school or wherever. They thought it was strange to start praying, for example. Or they thought it was strange that you fasted ... Well, it meant something to me—to have a place where you could find yourself. Where there were other young people who felt the same way you do. Where there weren't any prejudices against each other. You didn't have to hide that you were a Muslim—that you chose to practice and pray five times a day. That you chose not to drink and go to parties. The others understood me... Everyone was striving for paradise. And everyone was striving to be a better person. (Coman, Interview 1)

This excerpt provides a sense of how participation in the radical milieu makes Coman feel liberated or released from societal institutions, such as school and home, which left him feeling alienated after his return to Islam. In school and at home, Coman experiences resentment toward his new lifestyle. In contrast, he meets likeminded young Muslims in the radical milieu who understand each other, which creates an alternative space for social interactions, companionship and identity formation (Lyng, 2007; 2007; Linjakumpu, 2017). Such experiences contribute to producing positive emotions. Similarly, Fawaz (Interview 2) speaks about considerations and mutual respect without having to defend one's position and lifestyle: "And the people you're together with—they understood it [religious practice and rules]. Mutual understanding ... which meant that you didn't feel alienated. To be able to practice Islam in the best possible way without it feeling weird or wrong in any sense. And that was just respected. That was really nice." In another account, Ebi speaks about how he felt relieved to be part of the group:

I got what I had long been searching for—this fellowship. You believed in each other, you liked being together and it was fun to be together. You really felt people were your brothers ... I mean—I felt really happy and really relieved. I felt understood. And I really felt that there were people taking care of me ... And everyone in that environment had a common interest in Islam and to make the world a better place—and then you really quickly become friends ... I didn't become uncertain. I found strength in it, because I found them to be good people. And when you were together with them, it was cozy. (Ebi, Interview 2)

Participation in the radical milieu fosters positive feelings. Ebi experiences relief and happiness as he finally finds his sense of belonging and companionship. Finally, Dawoud elaborates on how he feels comfortable in the radical milieu and how he enjoyed spending time with his peers:

It was really important—that brotherhood. That you saw each other as brothers and sisters. You were there for each other and you were a family ... Personally, it

just increased the desire to stay in it. Because you see people who are a bit like you. That's cool. And especially when they're the same age as you ... I mean—it gave me a kind of self-confidence. That I could feel accepted. I could form a community with people who had the same thoughts and attitudes that I do. And had pretty much the same interests. (Dawoud, Interview 1)

These quotes reflect how the combination of various activities in different settings furnishes comfort and recognition, thus shaping a companionship between the peers that develops through commonalities and social interaction. The interviewees socialize with likeminded peers and experience mutual respect and understanding for their newfound religious lifestyles. Participation in the radical milieu becomes a refuge or safe haven that stands in contrast to the sense of alienation felt in school or the feeling of being an “outsider” at home. The respondents seem to attain a sense of belonging through the socialization in the groups within the radical milieu, where they feel at ease, relieved, comfortable and recognized for whom they are. The members provide a shared understanding of what it means to exist and their lifestyle choices (Bertelsen, 2017). For example, Ali and Dawoud refer to a collective sense of brotherhood in which other group members are regarded as family, establishing deep-felt and caring social bonds (Della Porta, 2013: 243-4). In that sense, the respondents experience *reciprocal emotions* (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001); that is, the constant feelings that the respondents and other members have toward each other in the radical milieu, including the close sense of brotherhood, empathy, love and solidarity (Pilkington, 2016: 197-9). Although *reciprocal emotions* and the previously mentioned *shared feelings* (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001) reinforce each other, such feelings are neither constant nor unchangeable. Moreover, Ali, Ebi and Dawoud talk about safety, relief and compassion that generated feelings of certainty and confidence, whereas Bassam, Fawaz and Coman elaborate on companionship, openness, acceptance and recognition. In that sense, self-uncertainty appears to be reduced in the groups within the radical milieu. Such high-entitativity groups are clearly defined, with well-structured boundaries, a clear worldview, social interaction and action-oriented encouragements, “which makes a group ‘groupy’” and, thus, effective at reducing *self-uncertainty* (Hogg & Adelman, 2013: 439). More specifically, the groups within the radical milieu consist of a companionship with “brothers” and “sisters” based on a specific interpretation of Islam that provides a common set of values, including striving for Paradise. In contrast to perceived or real experiences in the broader society, the respondents experience that the groups within the radical milieu furnish a platform for practicing Islam openly and in a relaxed manner. This high enti-

tativity becomes even more conspicuous when elaborating on the religious interpretation of the radical milieu in the proceeding chapter about *moral affordances*.

### 5.1.2. Being “Someone” through Competences and Qualifications

The interaction in the radical milieu furnishes other opportunities. The individual’s qualifications or competences and interests are valued, establishing a division of labor among the members based on competences and/or interests (Altier et al., 2013). Such recognition stirs positive emotions. Fawaz (Interview 1) introduces this topic as follows: “It was like—what are your abilities? What can you do? Are you good at writing? Grammar and spelling? If you can do graphic design, then you can do the graphics in the flyers [for dawah]. If you’re good at talking, then you go out and talk to people. And if you can’t do any of those things—then what are you interested in? Then you can learn.” Fawaz (Interview 1) continues, describing other work: “Some took care of activities. What kind of activities are possible? Who buys the stuff you need and finds a computer so you can play? And arranged a trip to an online café together.” Coman (Interview 4) refers to how different competences and tasks were identified: “There were some people who were responsible for the converts. I mean—those who had just become Muslims. And you have to take care of them. Then there were others who were responsible for handing out leaflets. And others handed out reminders. And then there were others who kind of took responsibility for holding talks. So you had, like, different subgroups, each with its own area.” Dawoud explains:

Those who were really articulate and really good at talking and were good at debating—they were allowed to do this work and go out and talk to non-Muslims. They had a lot of knowledge, they had read the Bible, they had read the Quran, so they had a lot of general knowledge ... And then there were the ones who held lectures and stuff—they were the ones who went out to the Muslims. Because they had a lot of Islamic knowledge. And they knew which buttons to push when they saw a criminal, for example ... And then there were the ones who edited videos in a very professional style and went out on-line to Muslims and non-Muslims, religious and non-religious, white and black, tall—I mean, everyone. (Dawoud, Interview 1)

This quote also touches on the division of roles regarding *dawah* in which the specific target group is matched to the knowledge and skills of the participants in the radical milieu. I return to the aspect of proselytization in the next chapter concerning moral affordances. My respondents used their competences and interests in different ways among the tasks mentioned above. These tasks

and interests aroused positive emotions. In order to protect the interviewees, however, I will exclude their specific tasks.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the radical milieu consists of three different groups, two of which have recognized formal leaders, whereas one has additional coordinators for different activities, such as social events or dawah. The members of the radical milieu shape an overall religious interpretation that constitutes the shared point of interest in Islam and expectations. However, in contrast to a strict top-down hierarchical structure with dominating and authoritative leaders (Mitchell, 1993: 163-84; Hoffman, 2006: 197), the organizational structure suggested by my data is more “silent” and loose, with a “flat” apparatus in which the leaders are more symbolic (Sageman, 2008a: 143-5; Crenshaw, 2011: 62). Moreover, the spontaneous division of labor indicates that the members of the radical milieu develop an informal organization within the more formal structure. The division of labor unfolds in interactions that are intended to acknowledge people, making them feel at ease and useful (Anastasiu, 2014). There is a consensus of identifying each individuals’ competences with potential tasks. Note especially how Fawaz mentions how “if you can’t do any of those things—what are you interested in? Then you can learn,” indicating how there is a common effort to make the individuals in the radical milieu feel appreciated, worthy and satisfied by contributing to the companionship and different tasks. In that sense, the division of labor in the radical milieu gives rise to positive cognitive states. The interviewees not only achieve a sense of belonging, they also “become someone” through functions and important tasks.

### 5.1.2. Daily Life: Everyday Activities and Practices

The radical Islamist milieu is about more than leaving for the conflict zone in Syria or discussing violent attacks. The individuals within the milieu engage in various social activities, including everyday activities (Lyng, 2007, Hegghammer, 2017a; 2017b). In contrast to research highlighting how the positive emotions or aspects are secondary (Gould, 2001; Bosi & Giugni, 2012; Bosi & Della Porta, 2012), I argue that the social activities that facilitate positive emotions and constitute positive companionship are more than merely secondary means; the purpose is to nuance the positive and negative emotions, combining them in a dynamic and fluid manner. The everyday activities do not solely serve as time-consuming, creative pleasures. The everyday socializing has a more underlying and crucial function in fortifying the sense of brotherhood. The daily life in the radical milieu in focus here offers a range of social practices and routines that foster positive emotions among the respondents and reinforce commitment. For example, simply eating together is an important

social activity. As Dawoud (Interview 1) explains: “We sometimes [booked] a table at a restaurant [in the city centre] where we all ate together. Or sometimes we had [booked] a table at other restaurants [in western Aarhus].” Bas-sam (Interview 2) refers to “pizza evenings,” while Ebi (Interview 1) mentions that “we barbecued together.” Ali (Interview 1) told me about eating together in private: “I mean, we practically lived and ate together. We made food every weekend.”

The members of the radical milieu also play sports and participate in other active or outdoor gatherings. “We played soccer or did things in the local area. In the summer, we usually played soccer or street soccer and different sports activities. Or we went to the beach” (Coman, Interview 2). Dawoud (Interview 1) continues: “We actually had a lot of activities. Sometimes we went bowling, we could play soccer inside the mosque or in a hall.” Ebi (Interview 1) reminisces on how his sympathetic peers go-carted and shot paintball together. “There was always something fun to do. Sometimes we just went out. We went swimming together—went to the beach. Just didn’t drink alcohol—you know, party.”

Other activities were indoors. Ebi (Interview 1) elaborates: “I always thought it was fun because sometimes you were sitting at home together and then maybe you played computer ... We arranged Playstation evenings in the mosque.” Ali continues, thinking back on some of his movie night experiences in his group:

Well, we saw Islamic films—in the Arabic countries and in Turkey, for example, they have something that’s a little like *Game of Thrones* with a lot of religious wars. With English subtitles, of course. But they were the kind of films where we thought, “that’s how they fought back then.” It was brave. We didn’t watch Hollywood. We despised that at the time. (Ali, Interview 2)

Ali’s quote illustrates how movie nights are intertwined with engagement in foreign politics in terms of the group’s resentment and anger toward Western societies. As Ali and his group members develop their religious understanding and practice, slippage or overlap occurs, where the political engagement flows into the socialization dimension. In addition to going to the cinema, Farwaz describes a different approach to movie nights in private:

They were just well-known films [from Hollywood] ... I mean, if we had a movie night, for example, then we were at someone’s home. And we also played games. But some people might not want to play games. Maybe they thought that dice weren’t good, for example. OK—then we just avoided asking those people and we just asked those who wanted to play ... They wouldn’t play with dice because there’s a position in Islam—that it’s best to avoid dice. And that was respected. (Fawaz, Interview 1)

The quotes from Ali and Fawaz reflect a nuanced approach to political engagement. While Fawaz commented on how he enjoyed Hollywood blockbusters, Ali described how he despised and rejected Hollywood movies. The Hollywood phenomenon may symbolize a decadent Western lifestyle focused on money, parties, idols and fornication. Moreover, Fawaz touches upon a nuance regarding religious practice. In their research, Kühle and Lindekilde (2010) point to levels of “strictness” of religious practice and tolerance. The individuals in the “cultic milieu” were united by a common belief and practice of Islam guided by the Quran and the Sunna. On the other hand, there was acceptance with respect to national backgrounds and a combination of the four Sunni *madhhab* (schools of Islamic jurisprudence) (Kühle & Lindekilde, 2010: 17, 89-90). Bassam (Interview 1) echoes this approach: “Funny enough, because we were a lot of people, all of the schools of law could be found within the group. There was no single school of law on which we specifically relied. ... But for the most part, we agreed on everything.” Dawoud continues, presenting a specific example of differences:

What you couldn't disagree on was what is called *aqidah* [Islamic creed]. It's doctrine. The way we believe in Allah and what's in the Quran—you couldn't disagree with that. Whereas what's called *fiqh* [jurisprudence]—you can easily disagree with that. Like if you say, when we pray, “you have to hold your hand over your navel.” “No—I disagree with you. You should hold your hand under your navel.” It's great if you have an Islamic scholar who thinks that one of the four schools of law says something about it and he has a basis for it—so just do it. We could easily disagree with that. (Dawoud, Interview 1)

Such examples reflect how the “brothers” form companionship in which they agree upon an overall religious interpretation of Islam, such as the *aqidah*, but at the same time providing room for nuances or levels of devotion in the religious practice in the radical milieu. Anecdotally, a similar example occurred after a follow-up interview with Bassam after which I drove him home. Upon getting into my car, Bassam immediately muted the music in what seemed to be a reflexive action. He promptly apologized, as if realizing that he was a guest in my car and that he might be offending me by turning off the music without asking. I said it was okay, which led to a conversation about music. He explained that he did not listen to music, because Islam prohibits it on the grounds that it distracts from total devotion to God (conversation with Bassam, post-interview). However, music, especially for secular entertainment, has been debated throughout the Islamic history without any clear consensus. This includes the use of instruments (particularly drums), listening to music and performing music. In that sense, music would appear to be permitted or prohibited based on different interpretations of Islam. Radical *Salafists* who

advocate a strict *Salafi* interpretation, such as al-Qaeda and similar organizations, prohibit music (Pieslak, 2017). The quotes also unfold how the fixed social activities are important in maintaining and strengthening the cohesion in the radical milieu. The positive experiences generate engagement and companionship, which in turn contribute to discussions about negative topics and experiences.

In contrast to the organized activities, the members of the radical milieu also met simply for everyday socializing to enjoy each other's company. In a nutshell, Bassam (Interview 1) mentions how "we ate sunflower seeds, drank tea and just talked." Coman (Interview 1) also mentions this aspect, focusing on daily topics of conversation: "So most conversations—they were just like everyday conversations about 'How's it going? What are you up to? What are you studying? Do you have a job?' ... I mean, we asked each other about what was going on." As previously stated, the respondents develop companionship in which the members of the radical milieu care for and show interest in each other's lives, which contributes to their well-being. The interviewees also describe the radical milieu as having a humorous atmosphere. Coman mentions how he and his friends make fun of each other:

Then we used to joke together. If somebody had done something in the past, for example, then there would be someone who just wanted to joke with him: "Don't be so self-righteous—we all remember that you were one of the worst." Or for example, the thing with the beard. Guys with an African background sometimes have trouble [getting] it, and then we used to tease with someone if they had a single [piece of stubble] or two that stuck out. And then we made fun of it and tried to cut it off—and then he would say, "No, no—that's all I've got!" It was kind of funny. (Coman, Interview 2)

Dawoud presents another example:

We also just made fun of each other—you might tease a guy who couldn't read the Quran even though he had been religious for 10 years. You might tease him a little—poke him a little and say, "you better not point a finger at me—I've only been religious for two years, I can read, I can write, and I've memorized more than you have." And then you say something like, "just teasing!" (Dawoud, Interview 1)

These examples demonstrate how the members of the radical milieu make room for ordinary social activities within a safe environment. For example, humor as a way of socializing reinforces a commitment and companionship through interaction and considerable time spent together (Kuhlig, 1983: 104-6). The particular use of humor unfolds within a recognizable frame of reference. The beard is part of the physical appearance indicating an identification

and a sense of belonging to a transnational identity, while reading the Quran is important in terms of being confident with the sacred source. Two practices that are not easy to master. Humor provides levity and eases the atmosphere (Lauer, 2007).

Finally, some of the respondents also took part in trips in Denmark and abroad facilitated by members of the milieu. Farwaz (Interview 1) recollects different trips: “There was once a trip abroad. We’ve also been on a trip to a cabin a couple of times. And where we just had a tent and some food. Where you’re gone for just a few days. We might have been 15-20 guys. We had fun. We went swimming.” Coman presents an account from a camping trip, concentrating on the purpose of these trips: strengthening companionship and getting to know each other better:

So it was just supposed to be a social experience in the outdoors—that should bring us closer together. To strengthen the community ... Some people were responsible for finding games. Others for the food. And bannock on a stick, special sausages, eggs and other food. And of course we had to light a fire ... and then we just sat there two and two, four and four or five and five. Some went for a walk in the woods. And when the food was ready, we sat together again and talked. (Coman, Interview 1)

The quote emphasizes the ordinary socializing aspect, which unfolds simple and plain activities that take place in a safe, relaxed environment, albeit with a specific and vital purpose to reinforce their companionship and social ties. Thus, the social interaction influenced a positive atmosphere.

### 5.1.3. Positive Emotions and Settings

The members shape a complex *activity field* that that is, an individual’s exposure to certain settings, persons and activities in a given period of time (Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012: 67-70, 252). The positive daily activities and practices generally unfold in a combination of *neutral* and *open settings*. The members of the radical milieu frequent *neutral settings*, such as restaurants, beaches, the cinema and football or camping facilities to facilitate encounters with other likeminded people. These specific places or arenas are typically publicly accessible. *Open settings* are also used, such as frequenting the mosque with a religious and/or political agenda. The members use the facilities available throughout Aarhus (Malthaner & Lindekilde 2017; Malthaner, 2018; Lindekilde, Malthaner & O’Conner, 2019). This reflects how they feel safe in each other’s company, secure to explore the different facilities that produce positive experiences. In the group interaction, the members of the radical milieu feel strong and confident. Neutral and open settings do not

necessarily entail radical teachings. However, the specific religious interpretation seems to stimulate interest in more radical ideology (Malthaner, 2018). The next section focuses on the aroused negative emotions.

## 5.2. Negative Emotions

Negative emotions also play a vital role. They seem to occupy the participants increasingly in the radical groups, overlapping and merging into everyday social activities. All of my respondents referred to multiple topics of discussion in the radical milieu that aroused negative sentiments. They describe a wide range of negative emotions that make them think of and discuss potential actions. In this section, I will mainly focus on conflict zones. The respondents engage in discussions about conflict zones throughout the Muslim world. I integrate the online and offline interaction, elaborating on the access to and discussions of video, images or text material regarding conflict zones in the Muslim world, especially the conflict in Syria.

The respondents also talk about alienation, anti-Muslim political rhetoric, Western foreign policy and perceived apostate leaders in the Muslim world. Discussing such topics generates perceptions of stigmatization and exclusion in schools, at home and in the broader public sphere as well as hatred, anger and revenge. These topics have been discussed extensively in the existing literature (see, e.g., Ahmad, 1983; Ayubi, 1991: 35-42, 217-18; Sageman, 2004: 44-5; Cook, 2005: 131-1; Azzam, 2007; Saghi, 2008; Murshed & Pavan, 2011; Egerton, 2011: 23-43; McCauley, 2018; Du Bois et al., 2019: 16, 32), and I will briefly present them here to illustrate the breadth of topics of discussion in my data concerning negative feelings and to confirm previous research.

### 5.2.1. An Offline and Online Interactive Approach to Conflict Zones in the Muslim World

The members in the radical milieu are attentive to conflict zones throughout the Muslim world. Coman explains how Israel-Palestine, “the mother of all conflicts,” was a point of departure for discussing other conflict zones in the Muslim world, dividing the world into two spheres: good and evil, pro-Muslim vs. anti-Muslim:

There are issues that almost everyone agrees on, such as the conflict in Israel and Palestine. What’s going on down there [to the Muslims] is completely wrong ... Then it kind of develops—where people start mentioning other conflicts elsewhere in the [Muslim] world. Those are the kinds of things we discuss. Then we debate about who is right and who is wrong. (Coman, Interview 1)

The radical milieu has integrated TV media, the Internet and social media platforms in their focus on conflict zones (Sageman, 2008a:110-14; Malthaner, 2014). Bassam recollects how the awareness of several conflict zones and Western interventions in the Muslim world had an impact on him. He continues, presenting the exposure to radical material:

You took the news up and then you read about them. Of course you got upset. And you got depressed and you got depressed together. For example, when you heard that an entire village in Somalia had burned down or Somalis have been fighting. And then they shared it. And then they shared that a bomb had been dropped in Fallujah in Iraq or now Fallujah had been completely burned down ... I can't remember where, but just that a kid getting fished out from beneath a wall that had collapsed. Obviously that made an impression ... When you had 100 such incidents, you somehow also became aware that you'd be interesting to someone [e.g., the authorities]. So there were some encrypted forums. (Bassam, Interview 1)

Bassam also touches on the use of encrypted platforms for file-sharing to provide anonymity and avoid detection by the authorities. I return more thoroughly to the free spaces and coping strategies exercised by the participants in Chapter 7 concerning *attachment and social control affordances*. Ali elaborates in detail how, together with his group in their apartment, he discussed material concerning conflict zones:

When we saw Middle Eastern channels and saw the chaos, the problems and what was going on in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Then we could relate to what we could feel with these people ... When we saw YouTube videos with demonstrators from Palestine being beaten by Israeli police, we got angry. We did our research and had a lot of feelings about everything. Which meant that it came back to life every evening. The anger, I mean—the frustration. And we talked about plans for the future. “What should we do about this?” It wasn't nice information that we discussed with the group. (Ali, Interview 1)

This excerpt combines multiple dimensions. Through socialization with his group, Ali seems to undergo massive and intense exposure to certain events in the Muslim world using satellite TV and social media platforms. Ali and his group discuss how they perceive the treatment of Muslims around the world as unfair. They establish a forum for sharing negative sentiments, such as frustration, hate and loathing, which appear to harden opinions and propel discussions about the possibilities for action (Neuman, 2013; Davies et al., 2016). The group seems to take interest in conflict zones together and explore the topics, but within the established companionship. The sample also emphasizes the emotional affiliation toward Muslims abroad, intensifying sympathy

and compassion for Muslims in conflict zones, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Palestine (Güney, 2010). The combination of transnational Muslim belonging with the access to several media platforms connects Ali to events throughout the Muslim world, despite the geographical separation (Back et al., 2002; Aly et al., 2017). These visuals elicit feelings such as frustration, hate and loathing that seem to stir reactions such as outrage and an immediate desire to take action. In this sense, the group members hold *shared feelings* in which negative emotions are focused externally (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001). Based on my data, grievances are directed toward Western governments and authorities that inflict harm on Muslim populations. Furthermore, the examples of Coman, Bassam and Ali indicate that exposure to certain videos, images or messages produces a sense of *moral outrage*, which is a reaction to perceived wrongs against Muslims, such as government military intervention, actions by local authorities and the killing of civilians (Jasper, 1998).

The so-called Arab Spring began in late 2010 and redirected the focus on the conflict in Syria. Ebi refers to the increasing focus on the conflict in Syria:

It was through my friend and in the news. The Arab Spring—where everything was so cool, the way they toppled various tyrants. In Libya, then Tunisia, then Egypt. And then Syria, where soldiers started shooting civilians ... Watching women and children crying on the Internet. Blood and bombs everywhere. Then we talked [in the group]: “Have you seen the conflict going on in Syria? People need help.”

“Yeah, I also saw it.”

“Check out this video—there’s a person crying.” It increasingly became about the conflict in Syria. (Ebi, Interviews 1 and 2)

Ebi and his sympathetic friends begin watching videos and discussing the current events in the Muslim world. During the so-called Arab Spring, the conflict in Syria becomes the focal point. The members of the radical milieu shape the opportunity to socialize in this way, exposing each other to material concerning conflict zones in the Muslim world and discussing potential actions. As described in Chapter 6, this exposure and these discussions lead some of them to leave for Syria. Ghadi (Interview 1) continues, describing how the development in the Syria uprising caught the radical milieu off guard: “There—there was a massive silence. And everyone was just watching. And everyone was witnessing the very ugly and sad videos coming out of Syria—the civil war in Syria. And the silence from the whole world. And remember that there were [many] young people involved at the time.” This reflects how the awareness of the situation in Syria, which is especially strong among young Muslims, who are following the developments in Syria intensely. Dawoud goes into detail

about how the exposure to different video footage affected him. He searched for some of the content himself, while others referred him to other material:

When that happened in Syria, the entire Muslim world started to cry out. People were on social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat... Twitter and YouTube. Imams from all corners of the world started talking about this conflict and rebellion against [Syrian] President Bashar al-Assad ... And people from Syria started sending videos to the whole world: "We need you to come and help us. We need you to support us. ... And you got upset when you saw an elderly woman, holding a child by the hand, yelling and screaming. And you could see the chaos and destruction behind her. At moments like that, I would wish I could be there for her and help her. I wish I could fight those who had fought her. That was something I was really clearly thinking. Especially when you're in a group, where everyone around you was interested in it. And discussed and talked about the conflict. So you felt an obligation [to help]. (Dawoud, Interview 1)

The cited items describe the exposure differently. First, there is video footage recorded by the civilian population within and surrounded by the conflict. These videos become rather easily available via various social media platforms. Second, as previously established, the young Muslims in the radical milieu subscribe to a transnational version of Islam connecting them to fellow Muslims around the world. Thus, feeling *humiliation by proxy*, which is how young Muslims in the West experience a sense of humiliation via their empathy with Muslims in conflict zones (Khosrokhavar, 2005: 152-3). Third, the intense socialization about the conflict in Syria affect the different group members. The conditions in Syria are strongly debated and seem to influence opinions and ideas for action. Finally, the combination of consumed videos and discussions about the content and the conflict in Syria seem to contribute to a sense of *moral outrage* (Jasper, 1998). Coman refers to exposure to images and videos of tortured and mutilated civilians through the radical milieu. He speaks of how such videos and images were introduced to them via social media:

So people saw videos on the Net and then shared them with their friends or started talking about them while we ate ... Where you just sat with some friends or sat during one of the events and talked a little more privately ... We had some very ordinary activities, like celebrating someone earning their bachelor's degree, playing soccer or going camping. But then someone who had seen a video on the Net brought it up for discussion. (Coman, Interview 1)

This quote reflects how the videos and images are introduced in a dynamic or fluid way via different settings on a potentially daily basis. The combination of

ordinary social activities and more easily accessible material provides intensive exposure to material concerning conflict zones. More specifically, the participants in the radical groups show the material in an informal manner to each other face to face or share it through virtual platforms or sites, allowing discussions of such videos and the related content across activities. In that sense, the overlap and flow in activities make room for an interaction of positive and negative emotions that form ideas and potential actions, illustrating how the positive and negative emotions combine. In this example, the negative dimension is embedded in the positive dimension. This perspective shows how the positive emotions are as important in the radical milieu as the negative emotions. From this perspective, it is not sufficient to reduce the positive aspects to a subordinate role.

### 5.2.2. Exclusion and Political Rhetoric and Western Foreign Policies and Muslim Apostate Leaders

As previously mentioned, I will briefly present the subjects of discussion, such as exclusion and political rhetoric, and Western foreign policies and apostate leaders in the Muslim world. I will integrate a few quotes. First, Ali tells me about how he and his fellow group members shared their life stories with each other, eliciting negative feelings:

And it's in the apartment that we tell each other's stories—and when I tell my own story, they all had tears in their eyes in relation to everything I've been through. They took my side ... But they also told their own stories of racism, problems in school and with apprenticeships. One of the examples was of how one of them had a sister who was spit on just because she was wearing a scarf, which pissed me off. So there was a lot of hate rhetoric ... We were excluded from society. We felt marginalized ... We felt like second-class citizens. We pushed ourselves out. I mean—why should we beg for respect and recognition? (Ali, Interviews 1 and 2)

Ali gets the chance to share his life story with his fellow peers, including his experiences with alienation, discrimination and injustice, which instills or amplifies *personal and group grievances*, such as anger and hatred (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017b). They cry together in response to feeling sorry for each other and feeling anger toward formal institutions and the general public in Danish society (Hegghammer, 2017b). Ali can relate to his group members and receives empathy. As previously mentioned, the excerpt unfolds locally generated negative emotions related narrowly to the fellow peers in the radical group. We have already seen above how the negative feelings are expanded globally focusing on fellow Muslims worldwide. Moreover, Ali and his group vent their frustrations by sharing such negative experiences. In that sense, the

individuals provide a platform for expressing negative feelings. Such activity seems to have a positive, relieving outcome. Experiencing feelings of injustice and exclusion, Ali and his fellow group members start isolating themselves from the society in which they live because of feelings of marginalization and a sense of being ridiculed. Ali and his friends exercise *group isolation* in which “anyone and everyone who counts is in the group; nothing outside the group is important” (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 150). This isolation or withdrawal from society strengthens the bonding and cohesion within the group as well as consensus and shared values (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 158-9). Coman elaborates on the issue of a real or perceived constant stream of negative stories about Muslims in the media, many of which are propagated by politicians, which leaves them feeling stigmatized and unwelcome in the society in which they live and, on a more general level, results in an “us vs. them” approach:

It’s all these things that get these young people and this environment to consolidate and say, “Well, it’s rather clear they don’t want us. So, like, why should we want them? You see? It doesn’t matter what you do. Things don’t change. You can see for yourself that you’re marked for life.” (Coman, Interviews 2)

The political rhetoric and media coverage seem to affect the sense of being excluded from the society in which one lives. The dominant focus on Muslims associated with negative behavior is absorbed. This attention stirs feelings of irritation, frustration and hopelessness, feeling more connected to a transnational *umma* (Güney, 2010; Kunst et al. 2012; Ahmed and Matthes, 2016). On the other hand, the excerpt also illustrates the logic that runs within the radical milieu. Certain young Muslims face real or perceived experiences of exclusion and stigmatization. It seems as though the discussions encapsulate an *ideological encapsulation* in which the members seem to focus on opposites such as “us vs. them” or “good vs. evil” and feed off the frustrations of some young Muslims to foster victimhood (Della Porta, 2013).

Second, members within the radical milieu also discuss Western foreign policy, such as the US-led military interventions in Muslim countries. As Dawoud describes:

We talked about this war—that was against Islam. America goes into the Muslim countries, they invade the Muslim countries, they steal all of our resources, and then they go back again. In 2003 in Iraq, more than three million Iraqi Muslims were killed. One million of them were children. Those were the kinds of things we talked about—that they [the West] were trying to fight us. We had political talks that dealt with this fight against Islam. But also from the Muslim countries.

Because the Muslim leaders gained an increasingly Western mindset and Western attitudes. (Dawoud, Interview 2)

Here, Dawoud touches on two central points. First, “the war against Islam” is an ongoing narrative in radical *Salafist* milieus globally (see, e.g., Cook, 2005: 136-7; Sageman, 2008a: 75-82; Fuller, 2010; Malthaner, 2014; Sheikh, 2016: 133-7). Radical *Salafists* have played on such rhetoric and Western foreign policies as an argument that the “war on terror” is really a war against the Muslim world vanquishing Islam and Muslims (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 109; Maher, 2016: 44-6; Rink & Sharma; 2018). Second, the fellow peers do not solely focus on Western infidels, but also on perceived Muslim apostates. The typical perception of these issues is that the leaders in Muslim countries are leading their countries astray – they are not on the “right” path of Islam, they are enslaved and exploited by Western countries and promote a pro-Western way of thinking and living (Ahmad, 1983; Cook, 2005: 139-40; Cook & Allison, 2007: 8, 50-1; Hartmann, 2017). Furthermore, the image of enemies, such as the United States (the distant enemy) and Muslim apostates (the near enemy) can be identified (Gerges, 2005: 9-15, 29-34, 43-7, 117, 144-50; Stern & Berger, 2015: 274-5). Fawaz recollects a discussion about Danish foreign and refugee policy:

So some people say, “In Denmark, we can’t accept them [refugees], because the state can’t just accept so many, and it gets difficult and can create problems.” Whereas others say, “No, but try to see how bad those guys [the politicians] are. They bomb them in their countries, and when they [refugees] then come here, they can’t bother to accept them. They [politicians] are evil.” (Fawaz, Interview 2)

This excerpt reflects how the discussions in the radical group point to the perceived double standards of Western countries, which fuel continuous hatred. The members of the radical milieu promote us-them division and confrontation. The interviewees distance themselves from their host society, positioning themselves along a certain type of global *Salafi* Islam.

Overall, the interaction between the interviewees and their friends, regardless of whether it sparks positive or negative emotions, is an example of the *group polarization* phenomenon via processes of information cascades, ambiguity reduction and social comparison (Sunstein, 2009: 22-30). Based on my data, the interviewees socialize with their likeminded peers, thus providing access to new information and arguments about Western foreign policy and conflict zones in the Muslim world. Such arguments within the radical milieu divide the world into good and evil, telling of how the West is waging a “war on Islam” and how Muslims are suffering and humiliated around

the world. In this sense, the argument pool in the radical milieu is enlarged in a certain direction, although there is a limited diverse argument pool of opposing views (Sunstein, 2009: 22-3). Second, the interviewees relate and connect to their friends in the radical milieu through repeated deliberation. They share the same experiences such as alienation, injustice and stigmatization, and they share feelings and views, such as hatred and resentment toward the West or leaders in Muslim countries, and empathy and sadness for Muslim “brothers and sisters” globally, confirming that the participants are right. The interviewees and their peers seem deep-felt and confident about their views. The members experience a well-structured worldview, clear boundaries and in-group social interaction. This process also helps reduce *self-uncertainty* (Hogg & Adelman, 2013), and the corroboration process may influence the possibility of taking action (Sunstein, 2009: 23-5). For Ali and Dawoud, for example, the combination of exposure to video footage and discussions with the other participants in the radical milieu about conflict zones and foreign policies seems to influence a desire to take action. Third, the interview excerpts indicate consensus or conformity through repeated deliberation and social comparison. The interviewees may have adjusted their views to the dominant position within the radical milieu, for example to be accepted by other members (Schkade et al., 2010). The ages of the members of the radical milieu varied from early adolescence to adulthood. The oldest or more respected persons with strong views may have influenced other younger participants in a certain group-favored direction (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 119).

### 5.2.3. Negative Emotions and Settings

The activities that arouse negative emotions generally unfold in a combination of *neutral, open, radicalizing magnets* and *radical micro-settings* (Malthaner & Lindekilde 2017; Malthaner, 2018; Lindekilde, Malthaner & O’Conner, 2019). As previously mentioned, the negative activities unfold in *neutral* and *open* settings that are available to the public. Such examples include watching, sharing and discussing online material related to conflict zones while eating together or playing football. The combination of different negative activities also develops in more closed and secluded *radicalizing magnets* and *radical micro-settings*. *Radicalizing magnets* are settings in which organized groups of people interact regularly through a combination of activities, such as debating politics and conflict zones and engaging in religious training and study circles. In this sense, discussing conflict zones throughout the Muslim world and Western foreign policies takes place in facilities they can loan in the mosque or in apartments via virtual arenas. Finally, *radical micro-settings* unfold within smaller groups or cliques in apartments or secluded places during

shared activities through intensive forms of bonding and deliberation in an ongoing exposure to radical teachings. As described in the next chapter, the individuals allow discussions in *radical micro-settings* about potential high-risk activism, such as leaving for the conflict zone in Syria and neighboring countries (Lindekilde, Malthaner & O’Conner, 2019). We have already established that the participants in the radical milieu unfold a dynamic activity pattern. They actively use the facilities available in the city. Moreover, technology such as smartphones and tablets enable the members of the radical milieu to be online at all times, thus engaging in ongoing exposure to radical teachings and nurturing. The members can easily combine the online and offline arenas. They do not need to plan or wait to access a stationary computer to watch, share and discuss online material. In that sense, the participants demonstrate a complex *activity field* patterns (Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012: 67-70, 252). Such opportunities contribute to making the activities more fluid and overlapping with greater opportunities/risk for spontaneous accessibility (Haythornthwaite & Kendall, 2010). Furthermore, the virtual arena also varies in terms of open and restricted access and complexity. The members of the radical groups use mainstream, easily accessible social media platforms (e.g., YouTube and Facebook), albeit for different purposes. The members share negative emotions on YouTube and Facebook when watching, sharing and discussing text and video material related to conflict zones in the Muslim world. But they also use Facebook for positive activities such as making and distributing religious videos. On top of that, the members use dark web fora and media platforms for encrypted information related to conflict zones (Malthaner, 2018).

### 5.3. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have unfolded the cognitive affordances of the radical milieu, elaborating on how the interaction between likeminded peers furnishes certain opportunities. The members of the radical milieu establish platforms that offer opportunities to engage in social life that spark both positive and negative emotions. I argue that the positive and negative emotions unfold in a dynamic, fluid and overlapping process. The positive and negative sentiments interact but serve different functions. My study is in line with previous research that also points to the importance of positive feelings in activism and social movements. Nevertheless, my investigation contributes with in-depth and nuanced perspectives on positive and negative feelings. My data shows how positive emotions are not only secondary to negative emotions at all times. The activities that generate positive feelings seem to strengthen the engagement, cohesion and companionship between the individuals in the radical

milieu through the various positive experiences. I observe that the respondents socialize with likeminded peers to engage in various social activities and to learn more about Islam, thus shaping a meaningful, life-enriching companionship. The individuals in the radical milieu thus form a companionship that is healthy, enriching, inspiring and enjoyable, at least for some time. The respondents feel safe and relaxed among likeminded young Muslims. They experience a sense of belonging and their competences and qualifications are highly valued. This acceptance contributes to “being someone.” The respondents also enjoy life in the radical milieu through numerous everyday activities such as eating together, football, swimming, go-carting, bowling and paintball, gaming, board games, cinema and movie nights, hanging out and joking, and overnight trips. This lays the foundation for taking up sensitive political issues. The activities that stir negative emotions seem to initiate considerations and discussions about potential solutions and actions. Moreover, existing research within radicalization has favored a dominant focus on the negative sentiments in radical milieus or terrorist groups, seemingly downplaying the positive dimension. The positive feelings play a significant role in the formation and consolidation of the radical milieu. The respondents focus on the positive sentiments of companionship. Neglecting this will produce a blind spot in understanding radicalization and, more importantly, the prevention of radicalization. I elaborate on the implications of my findings in Chapter 10.

The radical milieu provides its members with opportunities to take part in social activities and to share negative feelings, for example when watching, sharing and discussing videos, images or text material related to conflict zones throughout the Muslim world. The respondents participate in the discussion of attitudes and ideas that form a propensity to act upon generated negative feelings. The activities take place in various settings throughout Aarhus, spanning from neutral and open settings, such as public restaurants, beaches and the mosque, to more closed and radical micro-settings, such as in apartments and on encrypted online platforms. The positive experiences unfold mainly in neutral and open settings, whereas the latter range from neutral and open settings to radical micro-settings. These activities influence attitudes and a willingness to act. In the course of this development, the negative emotions start to occupy a more widespread position that flows into everyday activities. The overlap between activities contributes to a fluid and intense exposure to videos, images and text materials. In that sense, positive and negative emotions contribute to the adoption of a new moral context, exemplified in my data by integrating a specific religious interpretation of Islam that directs preferred actions. The next chapter focuses on this aspect concerning the moral affordances of the radical milieu.



## Chapter 6: Moral Affordances

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on the socializing cognitive affordances of the radical milieu. The members engage in various social activities that generate positive and negative emotions. These positive and negative feelings interact and serve different functions. The positive sentiments strengthen the engagement, cohesion and companionship through the various positive experiences, which lays the foundation for taking up sensitive political issues. The negative feelings initiate discussions and considerations about possible solutions and actions. In this chapter, I continue the analysis of the *socializing affordances* of the radical milieu (Bouhana, 2019b).

The main purpose of this chapter is to analyze empirically the moral context that allows certain actions. I elaborate on how religious interpretation and imperatives in certain settings form ideas and opinions that are converted into action. I investigate how group dynamics and socialization in certain settings connect beliefs and actions. As mentioned in previous chapters, the three individual-level and related factors *identity crisis*, *identity seeking* and *life-changing events* seem to produce a susceptibility to moral change or *cognitive openings*; that is, individuals become more receptive to new moral contexts (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 20-4; Bouhana, 2019b). In response, the interviewees embark on either a religious revival or religious intensification along their path toward the radical milieu. The members construe their moral context rooted in a *Salafi-inspired* interpretation of Islam that develops into a religio-political ideology. The *moral affordances* provide rule-guidance and action-oriented guidance. More specifically, the members create a certain belief system that offers a worldview, values, principles of right and wrong conduct and boundaries. Furthermore, the moral guidelines or moral compass set the stage for promoting certain actions that are considered morally legitimate in certain circumstances (Juergensmeyer & Sheikh, 2020). Such actions, such as participation in the armed conflict in Syria, are seen as viable and admirable, and thus encouraged. In addition to social activities such as conversations, eating together, sports and the discussion of materials concerning conflict zones throughout the Muslim world, repeated exposure over time to social activities, such as religious instruction, training and nurturing, seem to normalize a new moral commitment. The shaped moral guidance functions as the standard moral anchor that facilitates certain actions (Bouhana & Wikström, 2010: 9;

2011: 6; Taylor, 2014; Bouhana, 2019b). As previously mentioned, the socialization and “group reinforcement also allows to leave behind traditional societal morality for a more local morality” (Sageman, 2008a: 87).

Figure 6 (next page) shows how the development of certain belief and ideas are converted into action. In that sense, this chapter underscores three contributions. First, existing research on radicalization (see, e.g., McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a) distinguishes between “radicalization of opinions” and “radicalization of actions.” These two dimensions do not encompass a linear stage model, i.e., attitudes do not necessarily transform into action. Moreover, activism does not necessarily require the prior radicalization of ideas. In addition to moral guidelines with clear instructions for actions, bridging beliefs and high-risk activism often requires additional opportunities, pressures and/or expectations. Within the scope of my study, I argue that the exemplary actions by well-known *mujahidun* (holy fighters) and martyrs, members who recently left for the armed conflict, and appeals to emotion and reason connect attitudes and actions. These ideal actions for imitation become tangible and “visible” via, for example, videos, images and text (see, e.g., Crone, 2014; Schuurman, 2018: 162-3). The appeals also center on different narratives producing emotions, such as grievances or guilt. The narratives compare the lives of the youth in the West with those living in certain areas of Syria, the intention being to trigger certain actions. In that sense, the combination of exemplary actions and appeals functions as opportunities, expectations and pressures that bridge attitudes and actions, especially *high-risk activism*, such as participation in the Syrian war (Lindekilde & Olesen, 2015: 31, 38-9; Greenwood, 2018: 176-201). *Activism* refers to participation in political protests aimed at social or political change (Lindekilde & Olesen, 2015: 31, 37). Individuals participating in activism invest different forms of resources, including time and energy, competences and financial support, in considerations that balance benefits and costs. However, activism sometimes also involves spontaneous behavior or perceived necessity and can be divided into two types: *Low-risk and high-risk activism*. The latter may require crucial changes in one’s life, such as leaving for the armed conflict in Syria, which demands numerous resources or investments in terms of time, dedication, economy or being isolated from parents and family. Volunteering in armed conflict can ultimately also end in serious injury, death, imprisonment or a (permanent) stigmatization from politics, the society in general or friends and acquaintances within one’s social network. On the other hand, *low-risk activism* seems to require relatively few resources and typically has few consequences for the life. Examples of low-risk activism in my study include clothing styles, visible markers and *dawah* (McAdams, 1986; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 45-6; Lindekilde & Olesen, 2015: 31, 38-9).

**Figure 6. Connecting belief and actions in the radical milieu**

Bridging belief/ideas and high-risk activism via encouragement cues, such as:

- Obligation to help fellow Muslims
- Exemplary actions through holy warriors, martyrs and individuals who recently left for the conflict in Syria
- Appeals to emotions and reason



Moral context – development of belief, ideas and practices through:

- A specific *salafi*-inspired interpretation
- Combining belief and practice through ‘ritualizing’ the entire living
- Religious cultivation

Performing high-risk activism based on moral imperatives:

- Humanitarian relief work
- Armed struggle
- Burglary

Second, some of the members of the radical milieu in focus here act on their willingness to participate in the armed conflict. Based on my data, I add nuance to the volunteer phenomenon. Some of the participants take up arms and fight alongside terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda or Islamic State (some changing from the former to the latter). Some remain in the conflict zone and ultimately die in combat. Other participants engage in humanitarian aid in the refugee camps, mostly conducting ordinary physical labor and diverse ad hoc tasks, such as entertaining children. And some of the members start as humanitarian workers in refugee camps but later become militants in various anti-Assad militias. This indicates a complex picture of the volunteer phenomenon in the conflict zones and related returnees.

Third, my findings stand in contrast to previous research in the study of religions (see, e.g., Van Genneep, 1960 [1909]: 2-12, 50-4, 105-6; Turner, 1969: 94-5; Sørensen, 1988: 18-20; Lehmann, 2002; Hobson et al., 2018) emphasizes how rituals are fixed in time and space with certain rigid, standardized sequences. Conversely, my empirical analysis corresponds to previous research (Smart, 1996; Mahmood, 2001; Suhr, 2015) showing that members in the radical milieu “ritualize” every aspect of their lives. In addition to typical, fixed and conventional religious activities (e.g., prayer, religious festivals and rites of passages related to birth and death), the members “ritualize” everyday life. Islam becomes a way of life whereby religious practice permeates even mundane everyday activities, including everything from personal hygiene to sleeping with the proper intention of being rested for one’s work the next day. Every breath, thought and action thus becomes “ritualized” and potentially dangerous if not performed in harmony with God’s divine revelation. I argue that this religious practice is expressed as a fluid and infinite ritual with no clear beginning or end.

## 6.1. Religious Ideas: A Framework for a Specific Moral Context

Previous studies (see, e.g., Rapoport, 1984, 1988; Hoffman, 1995; Juergensmeyer, 2003; Wiktorowicz, 2006; Seidensticker, 2006; Venkatraman, 2007; Brachmann, 2009; Hegghammer, 2009; Gregg, 2014; Maher, 2016; Sheikh, 2016: 122-163; Banarjee et al., 2019) have elaborated in great detail on specific religious interpretations and doctrines related to radical groups and terrorist organizations. I build on this research, as the radical milieu entails a moral context originating in a specific *Salafi*-inspired interpretation of Islam. The members are provided with opportunities to immerse themselves in religious studies via a combination of beliefs and practice with religious cultivation. In that sense, specific religious ideas are absorbed through different platforms,

which constitutes a belief system and rules honoring certain kinds of actions to follow. I elaborate on these aspects below. As stated in the previous chapter, focusing on the specific religious interpretation is not to say that religion per se is causing radicalization. I argue that the specific religious interpretation seems to play a crucial part, connecting the “brothers” and providing guidelines for proper behavior and activism in combination with other individual-level, group-level and contextual factors. Although this aspect has been investigated, I elaborate on the specific religious interpretation to present the breadth of my data. My point is to highlight how the interaction between offline and online activities contributes to a certain interpretation of Islam that furnishes a specific moral context and promotes certain actions and behaviors. Moreover, I situate the moral guidelines to shed light on the content and analyze the processes through which the worldview, values, principles of right or wrong conduct and boundaries are shaped and absorbed. This religio-political foundation sets the stage for action-oriented encouragements related to activism. Grounded in unique empirical data, elaborating on the religious interpretation will help us to understand better the role and “absorption” of the religious perspective. The religious interpretation is therefore important to include in this chapter. I do not provide any in-depth examination of *Salafism* in general and its complexity concerning historical roots, local and transnational developments and various forms of *Salafism*. Instead, I am focusing on how my respondents understand *Salafism* and how they develop a certain moral context based on a *Salafi*-inspired interpretation of Islam.

### 6.1.1. A Specific Salafi-Inspired Interpretation of Islam

Islam becomes the common denominator in the radical milieu, as Ali (Interview 2) illustrates: “So it [Islam] was a cornerstone in our relationship, because we thought that we were brothers here and beyond. For us, Islam meant that we didn’t need to fear the future. Our future, our past—everything was sealed by God’s grace. So we had faith in God.” Dawoud speaks about Islam as a commonality fostering “brotherhood” and “sisterhood” through a transnational religious interpretation in which the members support each other:

There’s a story where the Prophet Muhammad says that the entire Muslim nation is like a body and that if it hurts somewhere, then it hurts the entire body. In other words, if the Muslim nation in Syria is hurting, then we should all be hurting. If the Muslims in India are hurting, then we should all be hurting, and some might misinterpret that and turn it to their advantage (Dawoud, Interview 2).

This quote touches on how the Islamic *umma* is understood as constituting an entity. Dawoud refers to the mutual dependence of every single Muslim in order to keep Islam alive. As he indicates, the interpretation of the reported *hadith*—traditions or sayings from the life of the Prophet Muhammed—may be perceived literally, fostering a particular norm and encouraging action. As Co-man (Interview 3) explains: “So both historically and theologically, you’d say that the first generations who lived with the Prophet—they must have interpreted things better than those who came afterwards. In that sense, it was the foundation.” Dawoud elaborates on this perspective:

You follow the Quran and the Prophet’s example or practice [sunna] with *Salaf’s* understanding. Because who could have understood the Quran and Islam better than the Prophet Muhammad and those who lived with him? ... And then you follow how they understood the revelation and Islam, because they were around the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. We had the understanding that we took religion literally (Dawoud, Interview 3).

Previous research has emphasized that *Salafism* for example entails a scripturalist and literalist reading of the basic sources of Islam, the Quran and the *hadith* (see, e.g., Meijer (ed.), 2009; Brachman, 2009: 22-51; Wiktorowicz, 2005; 2006; Bonnefoy, 2011; Maher, 2016; Lauzière, 2016; Ranstorp (ed.), 2020). Within this framework of Islam, the first three generations of Muslims or the *Salaf al-salih* (“the honorable forefathers”)<sup>16</sup> represent the earliest version of Islam, hence manifesting the most authentic and unadulterated beliefs and practices of the faith (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 184; Meijer, 2009; Haykel, 2009; Wagemakers, 2020). These aspects resonate with the accounts of my respondents, who, I argue, outlined a certain *Salafi*-inspired interpretation of Islam. The specific constructed *Salafi* interpretation represents a certain outlook that “believes in progression through regression. The perfect life is realized only by reviving the Islam of its first three generations,” thus constituting a paradigmatic past or golden age of the truest form of Islam (Maher, 2016: 7). There is a search for a pious Islam, purified from national and cultural influences or innovations (*bid‘a*) and stripped of human influences and context-based alterations (Crone, 2008; Becker, 2011). The Quran is the direct word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammed, whereas the *sunna*—that is, the

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<sup>16</sup> “The honorable forefathers” are understood as (i) the companions of the Prophet (*sahaba*) who founded the first Muslim community, (ii) the second generation or the followers (*tabi ‘in*) and (iii) the third generation or the followers of the followers (*tabi‘ tabi ‘in*). These first three generations of Muslims extend from the Prophet receiving his first revelations from God around 610 to around 810 or 855 (Haykel, 2009; Becker, 2011; Maher, 2016: 7).

collections of the Prophet Muhammed’s practice—exemplifies what the divine revelation prescribes, thus providing guidelines (*hudan*) for everyday living for all Muslims. Thus, the members of the radical milieu in focus here recognize that the basic teachings of Islam are applicable for all Muslims at all times and advocate the imitation of the Prophet and the succeeding generations (Rippin, 2005: 44; Haykel, 2009; Becker, 2011).

### 6.1.2. Core Tenets of the Salafi-Inspired Version Practiced by the Radical Members

The specific religio-political interpretation encompassed a system of beliefs with interrelated doctrines. Hakim (Interview 1) presents the core elements as at the same time promoting boundaries: “We didn’t compromise on Islam. The way it is—what comes from the Quran and what comes from the sunna—we take that. So there was no room to be moderate, and there was no room to be a democratic Muslim, and there was no room to be anything else. What God says, we followed. And we followed the Prophet’s life. Period.” Ali (Interview 1) continues, stressing loyalty: “We definitely believed that there were Muslims in Danish society who had bet on two horses—who sold out their religion. Who spoke with two tongues. So they had to send clear signals. Are they in or out?” The passages illustrate the promotion of a specific legitimate beliefs and practices of Islam, relying solely on the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammed. Other versions of Islam are perceived as distorted, heretical and false, thus indicating that such novel forms of Islam are expressions of *jahiliyya* (living in a barbaric state of ignorance), a term that has been used to designate the pre-Islamic period or the perceived decay of Islam after the golden age, when Muslims became ignorant of Islam (Meijer, 2009). The quotes also indicate an integration of the doctrine *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* (loyalty and disavowal). This concept divides the world into two distinct spheres, such as good-evil, true-false or faith-disbelief (Wagemakers, 2009; Maher, 2016: 111-12). The participants advocate a strong sense of loyalty and “brotherhood” to Islam and a disavowal of everything un-Islamic. In that sense, the controversial and widely debated concept *takfir* is at play. *Takfir* is the judgment of another Muslim or group of Muslims as unbelievers, and hence no longer regarded as a Muslim (Maher, 2016: 71).<sup>17</sup> The participants perceive themselves as following the true, unadulterated Islam that is superior to other beliefs and practices of the faith. Islamic pluralism is therefore not an option. The perceived apostate Muslim leaders are undoubtedly regarded as un-Islamic, for

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<sup>17</sup> In contemporary global militant *Salafism*, *takfir* is widely used to license intra-Muslim killings, including those against Shia Muslims (Maher, 2016: 71-2).

example, demanding disavowal. Dawoud elaborates on how these boundaries had a positive influence:

I was surrounded by people who took Islam fundamentalistically. I don't like taking a little—the finesses you like—and then throwing the other stuff that you don't completely like away. You took the full package—and that was actually really nice. Because then you had something to relate to. You had something like a path—a path you walked (Dawoud, Interview 3).

The religious interpretation constitutes a perspicuous and straightforward system. High-entitativity groups are clearly defined groups that typically have a clear worldview, well-structured boundaries, social interaction and direction for certain practices. These boundaries foster an inner peace and direction that, as previously mentioned, seem to reduce *self-uncertainty* (Hogg & Adelman, 2013).

Moreover, the specific *Salafi-inspired* interpretation comprehends the doctrine *tawhid* (*the Oneness of God*); although not exclusive to Salafism, *Tawhid* is pivotal. *Tawhid* is an expression of God's absolute monotheism (Wagemakers, 2020). Ghadi (interview 2) echoes this tenet and told me of how God was perceived as almighty, believing in the existence of one God and in all of God's attributes. In that sense, God is the transcendent Lord who enjoys total command and control over all creation, constituting an ontological difference between creator, God, and the created (Sheikh, 2016: 131-139; Maher, 2016: 146). In addition to the exclusive belief in God, the unity of God also implies the exclusive worship of God as demonstrating one's faith in practice (Maher, 2016: 7). In other words, only God is believed to have sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) to command (Ranstorp, 2020). Dawoud (Interview 3) resonates this perspective: "So our opinion was that voting was not allowed, because you can't give your vote to a person who advocates a man-made law." The quote shows how participating in democratic elections leads to the rejection of God's oneness and sovereignty, hence performing idolatry (Brachman, 2009: 44-5). Likewise, Coman (Interview 2) elaborates on this aspect: "From a religious perspective, it was believed, 'OK, God always knows what's best for us. So naturally he also has the right to decide how things should go. That was everyone's approach.'" God is omniscient and should be worshipped without partners or equals, in which the *Quran* and *Sunna* provide instructions that are meant to govern every aspect of human life. Thus, Islam is perceived as an all-encompassing system (Wiktorowicz, 2006; Tibi, 2012: 178-9; Maher, 2016: 146). The "brothers" advocate that "true belief in Islam is both inner faith and manifest action, and that this can increase as well as decrease" (Haykel, 2009: 40). In this sense, the religious interpretation also transforms into a religious and political ideology for ordered society (Moghadam, 2008: 46-9; Tibi, 2012: 1-2).

At least in theory, however, beyond the doctrine of God's unity, apparently the members do not expand in further detail how to implement such religio-political foundation. One explanation for this lack of detail may be that the members simply did not develop such programs or ideas. Another explanation may be that the primary focus was to mobilize as many youth as possible to consolidate the companionship as well as focusing on an individual's combination of belief and practice. Although the members of the radical milieu do not seek political influence through mainstream political platforms, I argue that they are not apolitical. We have already seen topics of discussion such as Western foreign policy and conflict zones throughout the Muslim world. As we will examine below concerning low-risk and high-risk activism, some members of the radical milieu are involved politically in the local community through *dawah* and globally by taking part in the war in Syria (Crone, 2008; Olsson, 2020; Wagemakers, 2020). It is important to stress that many ordinary non-radicalized Muslims also emphasize *tawhid* or a strict approach to the teachings of Islam, focusing on both beliefs and practices (Martin & Barzegar, 2010). As previously mentioned, I argue that what is specific to the radical milieu is how the participants create a specific moral context through a certain *Salafi-inspired* version of Islam that seems to invite certain socializing activities and direct pious action.

Wiktorowicz (2006) divides the *Salafis* into three major factions: *purists*, *politicos* and *jihadists*. In my investigation, the radical milieu encapsulates all three in a dynamic manner. First, the members promote a religious, puritan project. The "brothers" envisioned themselves "as a vanguard or 'group of pioneers' whose purpose is to protect tawhid and the purity of Islam from [apostate] corruptive influences" and infidels, who seek "to destroy Islam by polluting it with their concepts and values" (Wiktorowicz, 2006: 218). Second, the radical milieu is more complex, combining a religious puritan project with political awareness and interest. Previously, I argued that the participants were not apolitical in the sense that they were preoccupied with and deliberated conflicts throughout the Muslim world, Western foreign policy and corrupt leaders in Muslim countries. In that sense, I argue that the participants demonstrate a political engagement and awareness of events and international campaigns. The "focus on fighting shirk [worshipping other than God] and promoting tawhid through propagation, education, and purification" ha[s] been superseded by a series of more pressing crises and [current affairs], at both the local and international level," urging "to interpret context" (Wiktorowicz, 2006: 223, 225). A return to a particular all-encompassing version of Islam becomes a solution or "exit strategy" to the crisis of Islam (Tibi,

2012: 202). Third, the scripturalist and literalist interpretation of Islam develops into an activist approach in which some members of the radical milieu in focus here transform into jihadists or militant *Salafists* (Wiktorowicz, 2006).

### 6.1.3. “Lived” Ritual: Unifying Faith and Practice

The religio-political interpretation calls for uniting faith and practice through specified instructions (Haykel, 2009; Maher, 2016: 147-8). In that sense, practice and rituals embody submission and obedience to a transcendent God. Ritual is then behavior that follows prescribed rules (Paden, 1994: 94, 98). Ritual research typically emphasizes how rituals are fixed in time and space in different phases (Van Gennep, 1960 [1909]: 2-12, 50-4, 105-6; Turner, 1969: 94-5; Sørensen, 1988: 18-20; Lehmann, 2002; Collins, 2004: 15, 47-9; Rippin, 2005: 103-17; Hobson et al., 2018). In rites of passage, for example, the ritual initiand or person participating in the ritual is separated from their ordinary life and social relations into a state of liminality. In the liminal phase, the initiand or neophyte is in a condition of “betwixt and between;” that is, a sort of “in-between” place. In this transition, the ritual initiand is neither what they were nor what they will be (Van Gennep, 1960 [1909]: 2-3, 10-12, 105-6; Turner, 1967: 93-111; Turner, 1969: 94-5). The initiand is on dangerous ground, and anything can happen (Douglas, 2003 [1966]: 96-8). Subsequently, the ritual initiand reintegrates into their familiar surroundings—but with a new identity and social status (Van Gennep, 1960 [1909]: 50-4; Turner, 1969: 94-5). In contrast, I argue that members “ritualize” their entire life to implement the revelation of God. This reflects how “any activity can become a ritual activity ... This means that the scope of ritual activity is without limit” (Smart, 1996: 74). Religious practice is not limited or reduced to conventional activities or specific recognized rituals and worship, such as the five pillars and rites of passages related to birth and death (Paden, 1994: 107-9; Smart, 1996: 74-5; Olsson, 2020). In that sense, the participants extend and “ritualize” their everyday lives. As Coman explains:

It [Islam] meant your entire life. Because it was a way of life, rather than a hobby or something that you just needed once in a while. Well, that was it—everything from worship and prayer and alms and fasting in Ramadan for a month to very low-key, everyday chores. When you had to go to the toilet, you said a prayer before you went in and sought refuge in God from the devil. Before you ate, you prayed. Muslims just say *bismillah*—In God’s name—before they eat. So in the past, you would have just eaten. But it became like an Islamic dimension. In everything you did. (Coman, Interviews 3 and 4)

Similarly, Dawoud emphasizes the negative outcomes and rewards:

[Islam] is a way of life, and you knew the consequences of not following what's in the books. And you also knew the reward of what's in the books. So it was all up to you, really ... Because that provided the [rules] for what was allowed and prohibited. So for example—you were not allowed to drink alcohol, you were not allowed to smoke, you were not allowed to take drugs ... And then some positive things—well, you should be a good person, you should smile to others, you should help people, you should give alms, you should pray. (Dawoud, Interviews 2 and 3)

Dawoud talks about how one's practice leads to either salvation or perdition on judgement day. This means that every breath, thought and action are “ritualized” and potentially dangerous if not performed in accordance with the message from God. Although the believers promote individual salvation achieved via religious beliefs and practices (Crone, 2008), we will later see that the process to salvation is collective. I return to this point in the next chapter concerning *attachment and social control affordances*. Likewise, Fawaz provides a specific example of how the teachings of Islam influenced “ritualized” living, focusing on “interior attitudes” (Smart, 1996: 72):

We often used general [*ahadith*], which could be used in different scenarios. For example, a very well-known *hadith* is about being judged for one's intentions [*niyya*]. So if I sleep with the intention that tomorrow I need to be healthy to have a productive day and be a good Muslim, then I'm rewarded for my sleep. Whereas if I now think: Tomorrow, when I get up, maybe I'll rob a bank'—then I'm not rewarded for the sleep. (Fawaz, Interview 1)

Fawaz (Interview 2) continues, providing another example, unfolding another hadith: “The more mandatory practices you perform, the closer God gets to you. And then you get even closer by performing voluntary actions. Then God will love you. And when God loves you, he protects you from all the bad.” These quotes show how the respondents express a religiosity that “ritualizes” their entire being. Religious practice is also attached to ordinary tasks and mundane activities in daily life, in which the realization of the pious self occurs via the combination of good deeds and practicing virtues that constantly occupy your mind with God. The purpose is to purify one's soul in accordance with God's message and the practices of the Prophet Muhammed with the hope of Paradise (Mahmood, 2001; Suhr, 2015). The respondents show a determination to demonstrate their faith manifest in practice in terms of recognizing God as the sole provider and judge on Judgement Day (Rippin, 2005: 28-9). This perspective contains an asymmetrical creator-created relationship: The respondents acknowledge their inferiority to God as a contractual servant who has been given existence and guidance in life. In that sense, the formula do

quia dedisti (I give because You have given) seems to capture the religious attitude in the relationship between God and the respondents: The respondents express gratitude to God by comprehensively ritualizing their entire lives, which they have received from Him (Jensen, 2000: 270, 522; Petersen, 2016). Thus, I argue that the religious existence is performed as an infinite, comprehensive ritual. This ritual becomes fluid, without any clear beginning or end. In that sense, my data corresponds to sociology of religion studies emphasizing “lived religion” or “everyday religion,” indicating that institutional religious practice expands into everyday living (see, e.g. Hall (ed.), 1997; McGuire, 2008: 3-18; Jeldtoft, 2011; Ammerman, 2014; 2016). Ali (Interview 2) tells me about how his group navigated ritualized life through the categories of permitted and prohibited acts: “And every other word that came out of us was about haram [religiously forbidden] and halal [religiously permitted]. So Islam even decided over work at times. ‘Are you into that job or aren’t you? Or do you have to pay taxes or money to the state that then drops bombs on the heads of Muslims?’ I can’t think of a single conversation that didn’t end with a religious angle.” The quote illustrates how different practical aspects are assessed through the lens of religion in order to worship God at all times. Ali speaks in terms of halal and haram, which suggests either-or dichotomies. This makes sense when considering the previously mentioned distinctions between the Western and Islamic worlds and internally between Muslims, such as good-evil, true-false and loyalty-disavowal, constituting the aforementioned religio-political foundation. The ritualizing of every aspect of life contributes to strengthening the moral context of the milieu and internalizing the religious beliefs and ideas of a specific Salafi-inspired version. With their bodies and minds, the participants emulate the teachings of the Prophet and the first three generations of Muslims (Olsson, 2020). The members find meaning in the combination of religious beliefs and practices, which influences a shared identity and cohesion as well as facilitating certain directions for actions.

The ritualized living also illustrates how the respondents focus on the inner or greater, non-violent *jihad*. Politicians and laymen tend to focus solely on the outer or lesser violent *jihad* when focusing on militant Salafist organizations such as al-Qaeda or Islamic State. That is understandable in terms of the horrific, violent acts carried out by such groups. However, I argue that the picture is more nuanced and stresses both types of *jihad*. The excerpts above illustrate how the respondents emphasize and practice non-violent *jihad* in which they strive or exert themselves to fight their sinful desires, tendencies and habits to improve every aspect of their being, including body, soul and mind. The purpose is to become a better Muslim and fully implement God’s direct message to Mankind with the hope of achieving Paradise (Peters, 1996: 1-8; Cook, 2005: 32-48).

In addition to the aforementioned loyalty to likeminded *Salafists*, the constitution of beliefs and practices seems to increase in-group solidarity through this constant ritualization (Atran, 2012; Olsson, 2020). Dawoud (Interview 1) presents this aspect of favoring one’s Islamic way of life and disavowing everything else as un-Islamic: “We just automatically started pointing fingers at people—especially Muslims. Then we began to say that they [other Muslims] misunderstand—the ones doing things wrong. And you were in a group that had the same opinion. So we started to think that we’re the only ones on the right path—everyone else was off track. Everyone.” In that sense, the concept of *identity fusion* is at play. *Identity fusion* merges personal and group identities into a unique identity producing a shared sense of unity. Close ties to other group members increase the fusion within the group (Atran et al., 2014; Swann et al., 2015). In my case, the respondents seem to feel oneness with their friends. The unique group identity consists of shared characteristics, purpose and a collective sense of “brotherhood” whereby other group members are regarded as family. The fusion of identities is bounded by a specific *Salafi*-inspired version of Islam, favoring the in-group and rejecting out-groups (Atran et al., 2014). Although fusing with likeminded people, the individuals “retain their sense of personal agency and channel it into pro-group action” (Swann et al., 2015: 52). We examine this aspect more closely later in this chapter in terms of low-risk and high-risk activism.

## 6.2. Religious Cultivation

The members of the radical milieu also provide space for religious “culturing;” that is, a deliberate form of religious teaching (*tarbiya*) aimed at inculcating the specific religio-political interpretation in other associates (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 6; 2006; Malthaner, 2014; Kenney, 2018: 99-131). This religious cultivation intends to propel interest in salvation in the hereafter and provides sacred sanctioned strategies and actions for achieving Paradise (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 29).

### 6.2.1. Religious Teachings and Religious “Laboratory”

Religious cultivation includes lectures on basic Islamic teachings through the connection of beliefs and practices. Hakim elaborates on this aspect:

They started with teaching, and you started to learn and understand [Islam]. Afterwards, you started to act. You were supposed to behave properly and stay away from what is forbidden in Islam ... It was ordinary prayer and ritual washing—what you’re supposed to do and how much you’re supposed to follow

the Quran ... We talked about the Prophet's biology, his way of life. So just the Prophet's story. (Hakim)

Ebi (Interview 2) presents a similar account, commenting on the religious foundations for every action: "so you always put religion first. Before doing anything you might be in doubt about—you returned to religion. That was the focal point." The statements show that connecting beliefs and practices in everyday life is a way to follow the straight path of God. The combination of beliefs and practices contribute to perfecting one's *aqida* (doctrinal creed) in which the core tenets of Islam are unfolded and absorbed in life (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 167; Maher, 2016: 147-8). Organized groups of "brothers" also interact regularly in study circles (*halaqah*), reading and reciting the Quran. Dawoud carefully describes how a *halaqah* was conducted:

It was voluntary—not something you had to do. It was usually the same person who ended up reading; someone with a little more knowledge than the rest ... We had *halaqah* around twice a week. I'd say around an hour with interpretation, depending on how good you were at reading ... We could be 10-15 people. The first one started by looking up a random page, and then he would read it. When he had finished a page, the guy sitting to his right or left would read the next page, and that would continue all the way around ... As soon as someone had read a page, then there would be someone who interpreted a verse that he felt was interesting. Then we could all benefit from what everyone had read ... if somebody couldn't read [the Quran], then he'd sit beside the guy who was interpreting and follow along in the Quran. (Dawoud, Interview 1)

In his study of a radical organization in England, Wiktorowicz observed a *halaqah*. Wiktorowicz (2005: 47, 50) describes the *halaqah* with words such as mandatory attendance, preparation and intensive, long and serious discussions. In contrast, Dawoud speaks of a *halaqah* that is optional, relaxed and at ease, short and pedagogical in terms of individual and collective benefits. The differences can be explained in terms of the different content or different national contexts related to temperament or approaches to learning. Moreover, praise was common, while there was no criticism. This approach may also be a deliberately strategy as a way of providing a safe and pleasant learning environment to get the participants to come again. In a similar fashion, Fawaz (Interview 2) comments on Quran recitation training: "I've mentioned earlier that we could [practice] memorizing the Quran. Then you could help each other with it. Where you read by memory, so you could read aloud for another person who was standing with the Quran and could see if you were reading correctly or not." The excerpts show that religious knowledge and behavior is absorbed through *social learning*. Religious learning occurs via interaction with other likeminded people. More specifically, imitation and observation

provide the transmission of values, norms and knowledge (Bandura, 1971: 2-8).

Debate training is also undertaken. Ali provides an example of how the training in his group took place in their apartment:

So the Quran. Then you had a strong source. That's number one. The Prophet's example or practice [*sunna*] is number two. And there was what you call *da'if* or *sahih*. Whether it was a strong source [*sahih*] or a weak source [*da'if*]. If it was a strong source, then you also had a good argument ... You can't have an imam who says one thing when there's something else in the Quran. There, your source fell to the floor. So that was another thing to be really careful with. (Ali, Interview 1)

The “brothers” are cautious about teaching each other proper rules of argumentation or techniques according to Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) (Speight, 2006). The excerpt also illustrates a certain interest in adopting the proper skills to succeed in the attempt to live in accordance with God's revelation and sounding convincing when performing outreach activities, such as *dawah*. Ali (Interview 2) continues, presenting another example of a concrete exercise: “It was more about reading things aloud. Or keeping up with homework to see how [we] debated. The man we called ‘the emir’, the leader [of the group], might say: ‘Convince me that your religion is right’. And then you practice that.” In addition to the *social learning* approach (Bandura, 1971: 2-8), religious training is conducted through preparation and practice with feedback from someone such as the leader. The radical milieu includes a religious “laboratory” for trial and error, where members can practice to become proficient in Islam. There is also a teacher-apprentice relationship, where the former guides the latter in the acquisition of proper skills. The leader seems to hold a major role, possessing great power to influence the other group members, including Ali. Although *Salafism* can be perceived as a lifestyle for each individual aimed at individual salvation (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 200; Crone, 2008), *Salafism* as a branch has no official leadership, meaning that “individuals are empowered to trust their own understandings of the Quran and Sunnah” (Stern & Berger, 2015: 269). The fact that the respondents mainly acquire religious knowledge and practices in larger or smaller comfortable groups may underscore this decentralization. As we already have seen, applying such decentralization with religious novices seems to leave space for radical interpretations of Islam and self-pronounced experts with little or no formal training in Islam who function as teachers (Stern & Berger, 2015: 269). I return to the aspect of role models and influential figures in the next chapter concerning *attachment and social control affordances*.

### 6.2.2. Religious Cultivation and Settings

As we have already established, the religious cultivation takes place in either larger or smaller settings. Coman (Interview 1) talks about lectures that took place every weekend in larger *open settings*, such as the preferred mosque with a religious and/or political agenda (Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Malthaner, 2018): “But it was kind of like just an open offer to everyone living in the local area to come for a lecture about Islam.” The lectures present different kinds of topics, indicating a broad and basic introduction to Islam that articulates what it is like to be a Muslim in the West. Such strategies may serve two interrelated purposes. First, to inspire a religious revival or religious intensification among as many Muslims as possible and, secondly, to mobilize a broad support base. Dawoud (Interview 3) provides an example in which the religious cultivation unfolded via publicly accessible online arenas: “You could go in and ask someone [on Islamic websites], who had more knowledge than you: ‘Can you do this in Islam?’ ... there were websites that had the exact questions I was searching for—or something like it.” Likewise, Fawaz (Interview 1) elaborates on the use of surface websites: “Google, if there were some titles that were interesting and exciting—then you could find something that suited you.”

Lectures and religious training also unfold in *radicalizing magnets* in which organized groups interact regularly through a combination of activities, such as religious study circles, and discussing politics and foreign conflicts (Lindekilde et al., 2019). These encounters include private settings or the facilities of their regular mosque. Here, religious cultivation unfolds within the mosque. Dawoud (Interview 1) provides an additional example: “Well, you sat with the others who joined this session with one of the lecturers and had the book in front of them. And then [you] took notes to get Islamic knowledge of what was being talked about.”

In addition to lectures in more formal settings, spontaneous *radical micro-settings* are established (Malthaner, 2018). Coman (Interview 1) illustrates this point as follows: “You read different texts about Islam and shared them. Either online or also when sitting next to each other—you just showed the guy beside you.” Private lectures also took place in apartments with a small group of associates. Dawoud (Interview 1) details this aspect: “There were private lessons, which could be anything related to the description of hadith and other elements in Islam that they interpreted and submerged themselves in.” It cannot be ruled out that such small settings would present and promote material such as text or videos promoting a more militant approach. The combination of various activities in certain settings, such as religious cultivation, everyday activities, consuming and discussing internet-related videos and

texts related to Western foreign policies and conflict zones, seems to reinforce and develop a commitment and willingness to act in “defense” of one’s fellow Muslims. The participants demonstrate a complex *activity field* (Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012: 67-70, 252). Within my study, the members have fluid and flexible mobility, spanning from open and accessible settings (e.g., their preferred mosque) to more closed and secluded settings (e.g., private homes such as apartments). The complex activity patterns contribute to an ongoing and intense exposure to radical teachings through various activities and for different periods.

### 6.3. Radicalization: Bridging Ideas and Action

The previous sections have shown how the radical milieu encompasses a certain *Salafi*-inspired interpretation of Islam. The participants provide various activities through which they develop and integrate the religio-political foundation. The specific *Salafi*-inspired version constitutes a particular moral context that provides values, guidelines and opportunities for sanctioned actions. The participants adhere to this moral context and actively promote certain kinds of action via different forms of encouragement. These *encouragement cues* are “situational and contextual factors which will lead the individual to express his attitudes behaviorally” (Abelson, 1972: 26). In the following, I elaborate on different forms of encouragement that influence and connect attitudes and actions, including the combination of a felt obligation to help fellow Muslims, exemplary actions of *mujahidun* (holy warriors) and martyrs, and appeals to emotions and reason.

#### 6.3.1. A Religious Obligation to Help

In Chapter 5, we found that the members introduced videos and images in a flexible and fluid way through different settings on an everyday basis. For example, the materials are introduced in informal, face-to-face activities, permitting the discussion of videos related to conflict zones in the Muslim world. Dawoud presents another example along these lines, showing how the content of the videos generates a desire to act:

Sometimes we could meet, and then it was just by chance during our meeting that someone says, “Have you seen what’s happening in Syria?” And then everyone would suddenly start talking about it. “Yes—I’ve seen the videos on YouTube and Facebook.” It began to circulate all over the place on the social media. “And you know what? We actually have an obligation to help them [the civilians].” (Dawoud, Interview 1)

The quote illustrates the shift in the focus in overlapping activities. The intense exposure to and subsequent discussions of video material from the conflict in Syria seem to influence a willingness to act. Dawoud continues, elaborating on “the obligation to help:”

What happened in Syria automatically began to plague us in the group—because when you’re in such a group and you’re religious and you heard that you have a commitment to people, then you really started to realize that the commitment could be now, because what happened in Syria was something that you’ve always talked about. “Well, we have to be there for Muslims—we have to support them if they need help.” And then suddenly they needed our help. It bothered you to see how they [civilians] were bombed and shot. It hurt to see civilians being killed. It’s Islamic—that we’re duty-bound to one another. (Dawoud, Interview 1)

Ghadi (Interview 1) continues, presenting an example of how the friends deliberate different forms of high-risk activism: “Was it permitted to go to Syria to make war? To defeat Assad? Was it permitted to go to war for the sake of other Muslims? Was it permitted to go down to Syria even if we live in Denmark—purely Islamically? This was before we talk about Danish law. Or was it permitted to go down and make a humanitarian contribution?” Dawoud (Interview 2) elaborates in a similar manner on two dominant opportunities for action: “For example, someone said, ‘We should help them. If you could go there and help the wounded in the refugee camps’. Others might say something like, ‘Bashar al-Assad should lose his head’ ... And then some of the elders might mention [violent] jihad—to go to war for God’s sake. And yes—that you could participate in war.” These excerpts from Dawoud and Ghadi illustrate in a nutshell the complex interaction of the three levels of explanation—individual susceptibility to moral change, the radical milieu and systemic factors—in the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. On the systemic level, the “brothers” collectively observe the armed conflict in Syria from a distance while apparently awaiting guidance from the religious authorities in the Islamic world. Simultaneously, videos on social media showing footage from the armed conflict are accessed (Bouhana et al., 2016). At the group level or within the radical milieu (Malthaner & Waldman, 2014; Malthaner, 2015b; Malthaner, 2018), the members see such content together and exercise group polarization and deliberation, discussing the legitimacy of different types of activism (Sunstein, 2009: 22-30). Socializing and engaging in these activities appears to reinforce individual susceptibility to moral change (Bouhana, 2019b). Certain emotions are produced through various social activities, such as anger and humiliation by proxy (Khosrokhaver, 2006), thus amplifying the

moral context (Stekelenburg, 2017). These activities across the levels of explanation seem to contribute to a willingness to participate in the conflict zone. The participants start to feel obligated to act through deliberation, producing expectations to each other to participate in the conflict zone. The samples also indicate how the consumption of the online videos and the discussions regarding a Muslim obligation to help unfold in radicalizing magnets (Malthaner 2018). Although Dawoud shows a willingness to act, an additional inspirational element or final “push” that would enable him to convert these attitudes into action appears to be missing. The passage from Ali below shows how he and his group discussed what they could do to help but that they lacked the final push or inspiration necessary to convert their ideas into actions:

Almost every day, we asked each other, “What are we going to do? What should we do?” ... So when you went home and slept in your bed, your head on the pillow, you thought of action, action, action. Everyone was focused on what was to happen in two years or five years. Iraq was mentioned. It had been going on for a while. (Ali, Interview 1)

The actual step from thinking about or preparing actions to actually carrying them out may not come easily. In the following, I elaborate on exemplary actions that seem to bridge the “radicalization of attitudes” and “radicalization of actions” (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

### 6.3.2. The Consumption of al-Qaeda and Islamic State Propaganda

The members of the radical milieu draw on material from both prominent ideologues and former fighters from within the global militant *Salafism*, such as *Abdallah Azzam* (d. 1989), the former al-Qaeda ideologue who fought for Afghanistan in the war against the Soviets in 1979-89. He is regarded as one of most influential architects of the modern global militant *jihad* movement. Another prominent figure is *Anwar Awlaki* (d. 2011), a former al-Qaeda cleric who embraced social media platforms for the dissemination of his views and lectures to a wide audience, not least Muslims living in Western countries, and *Muhammed al-Maqdisi* (b. 1959), an al-Qaeda intellectual who also fought for Afghanistan against the Soviets. The participants also familiarize themselves with prominent ideologues from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 20th century, such as Egyptians *Hasan al-Banna* (d. 1949) and *Sayyid Qutb* (d. 1966). They watched videos, read English translations of their books, participated in study groups and attended lectures. Ali provides an example of watching Anwar Awlaki videos with his group in their apartment:

There were tons of YouTube clips, where we saw an imam named [Anwar] Awlaki. Because it was cool at the time to hear him preach in English to Muslim youth in the West. Because he understood us. Here was somebody who had lived in the USA and knew what it was all about ... He said things like: “Muslims in the West—your governments will turn against you. Don’t trust the Western governments.” I thought that he was referring directly to us ... And then [Awlaki] said, “and why is it wrong for Muslims to defend themselves from external aggressions?” Very quick, conclusive points. We liked that. And he managed to create empathy and compassion and anger for his case (Ali, Interviews 1 and 2).

Ali and the other members of his group relate to Awlaki—to his persona, his experience and his messages. Communication technologies, such as lectures available on the internet, expand the social reach (Archetti, 2015; Milton, 2016). The way that Ali and the other members of the group watched the video messages is an example of propaganda that was produced and disseminated to “global portals such as YouTube, which had the effect of making the content much easier to locate for anyone, regardless of Arabic language skills or level of internet literacy” (Conway, 2012). However, “propaganda alone does not act as an agent of either radicalisation or recruitment; no curious observer graduates from potential recruit to active member without direct engagement from another party, either on- or offline” (Winter, 2015: 35). In my investigation, Ali watches the videos and discusses the content together with the other members of the group, which contributes to their radicalization and their willingness to perform activism. They draw on the beliefs and ideas of the foreign ideologues. For example, Azzam and Maqdisi are al-Qaeda veterans and former *mujahidun*. The combination of battlefield experience and their ideologue status provides them with a special status that has attracted a broad audience of Western youth.

Some participants also refer to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State as legitimate organizations. As Coman explains:

Everyone knew who al-Qaeda and these groups were, and everyone started out saying they were terrorist organizations. Then some of the older guys said things like, “maybe al-Qaeda has done something wrong, but shouldn’t we also agree that they’re also doing some good?” I mean—you knew that they were referring to something specific. That was typically something that wasn’t talked about in the group. It was more private. It kind of snuck in. (Coman, Interview 4)

The passage indicates mechanisms of *moral disengagement* in which al-Qaeda’s detrimental actions are downplayed or outweighed by what are perceived to be good actions. Following this logic, some participants emphasize al-Qaeda’s positive deeds for fellow Muslims, depicting al-Qaeda as an acceptable organization with praiseworthy purposes (Bandura, 1990; Posada et

al., 2017). Fighting under the banner of al-Qaeda becomes morally justified. Over the course of the developments in Syria, however, the radical milieu divides, some members maintaining their allegiance to al-Qaeda while others shift to the Islamic State (Bassam, Interview 3). Coman (Interview 3) elaborates on Islamic State's influence: "Many would say, 'I feel sick—nobody is bothering to do anything. The West won't help. And the only people who want to are Islamic State. Maybe they have some flaws, but you also have to look at how much [good] they do ... because it's either them [the Islamic State] or Bashar' [al-Assad]. And then it just escalated over the years." These quotes reflect how exposure to radical teachings through references and hints is introduced in subtle and discrete ways, implying that al-Qaeda and related organizations are not to be totally abandoned. To the contrary, the hints by older, more prominent figures seem to serve as indirect encouragements to support, approve and possibly serve as inspiration for further commitment and actions. In this way, the exposure may be internalized unnoticed and slowly, as the introduction is not presented in any intense or bombastic fashion. In that sense, the legitimacy of violent groups nudges the "brothers" toward a more pro-violence position (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 118-19). Ebi (Interview 1) presents another account, adding the social media element together with al-Qaeda and Islamic State propaganda: "The same 5-10-15 persons posted things in the groups. And it could be to share pure Islamic knowledge, Islamic videos and texts. And then there were people using these groups to share [other types of] videos. Then you had to [perform] relief work, then it was al-Qaeda videos, [video material from] ISIS [the Islamic State] training camps, training videos, combat videos etc." Coman (Interview 4) continues: "There were a few young people right from the beginning. But later there were more young people. Especially because Islamic State propaganda was being spread out—especially on the social media, on YouTube and elsewhere. Many of these young people were affected." The strategy for disseminating propaganda, including products, visuals and communications, through various medias and online arenas provides inspiration that seems to attract new followers, amplify a commitment and influence certain actions, such as engaging in violent actions (see, e.g., Awan, 2007; Zelin, 2013; Berger, 2015; Winter, 2015: 26-8, 34-40; 2020; Friis, 2018: 56-7).

### 6.3.3. Exemplary Actions

When attitudes translate into action, we may identify what connects ideas and behavior. Based on my data, I argue that the exemplary actions by *mujahidun* (holy fighters), martyrs and contemporary associates who joined the conflict

zones in Syria, Iraq and Turkey seem to bridge attitudes and high-risk activism. Although the moral context contains clear instructions for action, often additional opportunities, pressures or expectations are needed to bridge the gap between attitudes and high-risk activism (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 259-65; Moskalenko & McCauley &, 2020: 76-7). Ebi elaborates on this:

Then there was another guy named Emir Khattab, who fought in Chechnya at one point. He was also a major figure who was talked about a lot. “Look at him—he was only 17 when he travelled to Afghanistan, and later he went to Chechnya” ... *Mujahidun* were a big deal and you always had to remember them ... They were regarded as magnificent people—brave people, courageous people, cool people. It was like, “Wow—goals!” If you became someone who was standing with a Kalashnikov on top of a tank, then you were “Wow!” (Ebi, Interview 2)

Dawoud continues in a similar vein, explaining the impact of such action-oriented encouragement through the glorification of exemplary actions:

They paid tribute to him. When someone had gone to Syria to fight, everyone knew about it ... and you started talking about, “Well, God must be with him and he has done a heroic deed” ... The youth—who I was part of—also had some other friends in other cities who had the same ideology and thoughts. And when they came to visit—well, then they also knew that this guy and that guy had left. And then you say, “Wow—that’s cool! May God be with him!” And they got status. (Dawoud, Interview 1)

The excerpts reflect how the *mujahidin* category constitutes a special position, serving as an ideal type of action or functioning as role models worth imitating. Exemplary actions are glorified and encouraged for future actions. Seeing and hearing about other members who have connected ideas and actions by joining the armed conflict in Syria seems to provide an easier process for other “brothers” to imitate such actions. The exemplary action becomes tangible and real, thus concretizing opportunities for action (Crone, 2014; 2016; Schuurman, 2018: 162-3). Moreover, the past examples of specific performances are presented together with expectations or encouragement to follow the vanguard in Syria, Iraq or Turkey. This reduces the gap between opinion and behavior (Abelson, 1972; Vernberg et al., 1999; Wortley, 2012; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017b; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2020: 76-7).

Further along these lines, there is a focus on the reward of martyrdom (*shahadat*). For martyrdom to succeed, a martyr (*shahid*) is required: Someone who is willing to suffer or die to demonstrate an absolute pledge to God’s belief system. The martyr witnesses or testifies a commitment to God for

which they are prepared to sacrifice their own body and soul (Cook, 2007: 1-2; Sheikh, 2016: 153-4). Ebi describes how martyrdom was promoted:

We talked about how they [martyrs] were very heroic. We talked a lot about jihad and rewards ... Things were said, like about how we have to sacrifice our soul in holy war ... that's the ultimate death you can have—and then you get into Paradise and won't be subjected to any trials in the grave ... it [happened] a lot in small groups, but also in larger groups. (Ebi, Interviews 1 and 2)

Ali continues, explaining how he and his group were exposed to the martyrdom concept through *anashid* [a capella hymns] in online videos encouraging martyrdom:

There was one with the Kasmir conflict, where we saw how Muslims were treated. How Indian soldiers just trampled on people. The war in Bosnia, Chechnya. We saw a lot of different [videos]. It was a kind of feeling of, "OK to celebrate these martyrs—the ones who died. It's good to be a martyr." I mean [the messages] practically sold death, you might say, in some kind of strange way. (Ali, Interview 1)

The quotations show how the martyr also constitutes a special position, serving as a role model worth imitating. The excerpts portray battlefield martyrs.<sup>18</sup> The moral context contains ideas of martyrdom in which the martyr is used as connecting ideas with relevant actions to follow.

#### 6.3.4. Appeals to Emotion and Reason

The members provide platforms in which they allow certain appeals to the audiences. These emotional appeals seem to bridge the radicalization of ideas and actions (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017b; Moskalenko & McCauley, 2020: 76-7). Ebi illustrates this point:

And there was a lot of emotional manipulation—my emotions. We have to help, people are suffering: "Well, try to see—you have a warm radiator. There isn't any warm radiator [down there], we have warm water—they don't have warm water. And you have good food—they don't have good food. And they need people to

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to stress that, after the death of the Prophet Muhammed, the martyr category was extended, meaning that martyrdom was no longer reserved for an exclusive group of fighters and became accessible to ordinary Muslims. Martyrdom functioned as a means to acclaim a certain way of life, such as performing one's Muslim religious duties. Furthermore, those drowned, killed by fire or accident, disease, in childbirth, or defending one's home were also considered martyrs (Berenbaum & Firestone, 2004).

help to hand out food. And try to imagine a little kid making a tent at night—we have to help. We have to do something.” (Ebi, Interview 2)

Dawoud presents another account in which crying becomes a powerful tool in appealing to the respondent’s emotions:

I remember a time when I was sitting at one of these lectures, there was someone saying, “Try to imagine if it was your mother, your sister, or if it was your son who was killed down there. What would you do?” Then you were touched, and you sat there thinking: “What he’s saying—he’s right, dammit,” because if my mother or sister was down there or my son was down there, well then I sure as hell would have gone down there ... one time there was a guy holding a lecture who started to cry as he talked about the events in Syria. That also really affected you. (Dawoud, Interview 2)

The appeals to emotions unfold through different narratives. Such emotions may include grievances or guilt aimed at encouraging certain actions (Abelson, 1972; Gamson, 1992: 31-2, 36-7; Stekelenburg, 2014). While the specific religio-political interpretation provides clear instructions for actions, additional elements seem to be necessary before participants act on their beliefs, especially with respect to high-risk actions. Thus, the appeals furnish additional opportunities, pressures or expectations connecting ideas and attitudes to actions (Stekelenburg, 2017). In the example with Ebi, the appeal functions as pressure and expectation aimed at instilling guilt for not taking part in the conflict and for being more fortunate than the Muslims in the conflict zone (Misheva, 2019). Conversely, the appeal opens for an opportunity to participate in the conflict zone, performing an extra deed for one’s fellow Muslims (Stern & Berger, 2015: 108; Rocca, 2017; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 259-65). In that sense, the appeal provides opportunity to vindicate a passive position. The quote from Dawoud illustrates an appeal that produces an identification through family ties and influences a desire to act (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2014). One possible explanation is that by connecting Denmark and Syria through one’s family bonds, the imagined example becomes vivid and easy to process. It may not be a coincidence that women and children are mentioned in the narrative, as they are typically understood in Islam as innocent civilians in war zones and should not be killed (Peters, 2005: 13). The emotions generated by such appeals seem to accelerate the bridging of radicalization of beliefs and action (Klandermans, Toorn & Stekelenburg, 2008; Stekelenburg & Klandermans 2010).

Appeals are also made to the audience’s sense of reason. As Ebi (Interview 2) describes, “some people said things like, ‘Well, we have to fight’. They took some Quran passages and hadith—the Prophet’s statements—and then they said, ‘Well, it’s right there. About fighting. It’s right there. It means we have to

do it’.” The quote is indicative of how the holy sources of Islam are applied to appeals to logic or reason. As previously mentioned, the radical milieu encompasses a Salafi-inspired interpretation combining scripturalist and literalist readings of the sources of Islam. I argue that referring to the absolute and unquestionable sources is a rhetorical device aimed at rendering it difficult to argue against the core teachings of Islam. The assertion about fighting is proposed with support from the Quran and the hadith in an attempt at ratifying a logical reasoning for potential actions. Although the “lesser” or violent jihad has lengthy traditions in the Quran and hadith and has been influential in certain factions within the Muslim world (Cook, 2005: 13, 40-3), the quote shows a selective reading of the sacred texts. The historical context of the violent jihad as well as the “greater” jihad are connected to specific situations. The moral context encompasses a pious Islam, which is eternal and unchangeable in time and space, meaning that every assertion of the Holy texts is relevant to all times.

### 6.3.5. Decisions to Leave for the Conflict in Syria Unfold in Radical Micro-Settings

The respondents tend to retreat to *radical micro-settings* in smaller groups or cliques, where they shape secluded and intimate settings that offer opportunities to discuss and prepare for the departure for Syria. These settings include apartments, breaks when eating together or at other gatherings (Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Malthaner, 2018; Lindekilde et al., 2019).

Danish politicians and the general public are concerned with the topics of participating in the armed conflict as well as the returnees. The Danish Government is still working on new legislation. In the following, further caution is needed related to the content of the citations, aspects of self-incrimination and potential reprisals from former members. I have therefore excluded the fictitious names to avoid jeopardizing the anonymity of the interviewees. One of the respondents elaborates:

It kind of opened up our eyes to the crisis down there. You felt a little like you were being blamed for living in luxury and doing really well while many people were suffering [in Syria] ... Somebody was saying: “There are awful things happening down there. Should we try to go down and help the refugees and do what we can?” And a bunch of people were ready.

Another respondent provides a similar example:

You heard that people had left and were actually down there. That also gave a little sense of “I also have to show that I’m brave, dammit ... I want to make a difference, I want to be a good example.” So I talked with my friends ... You’re

very careful about your decision. It's kind of discreet, and you're often two and two, three and three, four and four etc. [who leave together]. And then we were talking one day, and someone said: "You know what? I'm going, dammit." So I said, "We'll do it together."

A third interviewee describes this process as follows: "We decided to [enter the armed conflict] after seeing a lot on social media. We had heard a lot at these lectures and seen the news. So we decided that we wanted to go down there and help ... It was really also to be recognized." The respondents typically travelled in smaller cliques, influencing each other, and a single group member seems to take the lead. In such cases, peer pressure seems notable to uphold expectations for certain behavior (Pynchon & Borum, 1999). As previously mentioned, the endorsed exemplary actions furnish opportunities, but also the pressure and expectations to engage in conduct receiving high praise. No one wants to fall short of the other brother's engagement; thus, the members perceive themselves as doers, not merely as talkers (Abelson, 1972; Bartlett & Miller, 2012). They are inspired to imitate such exemplary actions. Previous research emphasizes how activist may use "between categories," such as being a "carton"—that is, a mujahidin, who wants to engage in armed struggle, but awaits his or her opportunity. Such between-categories contribute to a gradual transformation process that shortens the path to actual action (Hemmingsen, 2010: 16). In a similar vein, the exemplary actions enable the members to transform themselves to another person in the near future by leaving for Syria, Iraq or Turkey to participate in the Syrian war. The quotes also indicate how the members see themselves in a certain way in an attempt at feeling successful and at achieving a status similar to their likeminded brothers (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017a: 70, 119). Those members who act upon their willingness to leave for Syria transform themselves and attain new "value" as Muslims (Greenwood, 2018: 172-5, 207-16). They attain status in the eyes of the other members in the hope of satisfying God and securing a place in paradise for themselves in the afterlife.

#### 6.4. Activism: High-Risk and Low-Risk Activism

The participants form a moral context that sets the framework for preferred behavior and admirable action. As mentioned earlier, within the frame of beliefs and actions, *high- and low-risk activism* are performed to bring about social or political change (McAdams, 1986; Wiktorowicz, 2005: 45-6; Lindkilde & Olesen, 2015: 31, 37-9), as described below.

### 6.4.1. High-Risk Activism

Some members perform high-risk activism. One respondent told me of how different actions were discussed in the radical milieu. Some focused on revenge on the Danish Muhammed cartoonists. Others were eager to take up arms in the war in various conflict zones. One interviewee elaborates on the various acts of high-risk activism:

Some left and became ISIS [the Islamic State]. Others went down and thought, “This just isn’t me, damnit,” and they returned home again. A third group went down to do humanitarian work, like the Danish Red Cross or Save the Children. And they came home again. Some came home thinking that Denmark is paradise, others that “Danes are the biggest assholes. When it was Libya, they were called freedom fighters, because they [Denmark] were bombing themselves. And now we’re called Syrian warriors. Denmark is actually the real enemy.” Others came home almost completely indifferent to politics.

This excerpt unfolds two important details. First, research points to different purposes for participating in the conflict. The members are able to join the ranks of the Islamic State, but they can also get involved in humanitarian relief work in refugee camps (Meines et al., 2017: 20; Speckhard et al., 2018). East Jutland Police supports this perception: that participation unfolds both in the form of humanitarian assistance and military commitment. A police officer explains: “Then they came home with relatively credible stories about how they had only done logistical work, helped out at refugee camps and maybe stood guard someplace or another ... Some people left to fight for some militias and to fight together with al-Qaeda, who later switched to ISIS [the Islamic State] along the way ... and [they] have stayed down there and become ISIS” (police officer, East Jutland Police). In this sense, the more general term “foreign fighters,” which has often been used to designate all those who joined the Syrian conflict, seems inaccurate. Overlooking this distinction may cause stigmatization that may *backfire*—a public reaction to events seen among, for example, politicians, authorities, media and researchers, which is perceived as unjust (Hess & Martin, 2006). Conversely, the distinction is not absolute. The picture is ostensibly more complex, as there has been an overlap in the engagement, whereby humanitarian relief workers proceed to become militants. The radical milieu in focus here consists of both foreign fighters and relief workers—and sometimes both combined (Greenwood, 2018: 178-179). I elaborate on this below.

Second, the distinction between humanitarian aid and armed struggle may help characterize the experiences and mindset of the individual returnee. The quotes above also reveal a different state of mind among the returnees. Some volunteers apparently had to experience the conflict zone before coming to the

conclusion that their actions were absurd and useless. Others felt betrayed or misused, leading to depicting Denmark as the real enemy. Throughout European countries more recently, governments, intelligence services, local police and municipalities have become preoccupied with returnees. The national authorities throughout Europe evaluate that male returnees pose a security risk in their home countries after having acquired battlefield experience, training in explosives and weaponry and ties to terrorists or terrorist networks. Women pose a security threat in terms of planning or participating in attacks, recruitment and transmitting ideology to children or other relatives in their home countries (see, e.g., Meines et al., 2017: 6-24; Speckhard et. al, 2018; Heinke & Raudszus, 2018; Ragab, 2018; Marone, 2020, Pugliese, 2020; Reinares, 2020). More specifically, since 2012, at least 159 individuals have left Denmark for the war in Syria, approximately half whom have returned to Denmark or other European countries (roughly one-third are now dead). There are approximately 34 adults still in Syria or Iraq or neighboring countries (Danish Police Intelligence Service, 2020). According to the *Danish Police Intelligence Service*, male and female volunteers and returnees pose a security risk to Denmark, where the returnees can contribute to the radicalization of other persons or groups of individuals in Denmark, disseminating propaganda or the financing of terror (Danish Police Intelligence Service, 2020). As already established, the engagement varies. This indicates a nuanced image of the volunteer phenomenon in the conflict zones whereby not all returnees necessarily pose a security risk. While Europe has indeed seen returnees participate in terror attacks, as in Paris (2015) and Brussels (2014, 2016) and possibly Berlin (2016), the terror attacks carried out in Western countries in the period 2012-17 have predominantly been carried out by perpetrators who have never been to a conflict zone. Conversely, when involved, these perpetrators carried out very lethal attacks (Hemmingsen, 2015a; Vidino, 2017; PET, 2018; Renard & Coolsaet, 2018; Malet, 2018). This may indicate that the foreign fighters—when they do engage in “domestic terror”—display a brutality that is more intimidating and strikes great fear in Western societies. Such attacks or potential risks may have political consequences, influencing the legislative interventions aimed at preventing radicalization and fighting terrorism.

High-risk activism also includes burglary. As one respondent explains: “You were told, for example, that stealing was prohibited ... Then you started to see a little hypocrisy in people ... There were some cases involving theft.” Another police officer from East Jutland Police experienced these burglaries:

And suddenly, they were caught committing a crime. The problem at the time was that it was the radicalized persons who were wearing robes and had long

beards. They weren't really criminals, as such. They weren't good criminals. But they had an agenda—to generate revenue. They were arrested for burglary again and again. So there were a lot of arrests during that period. We know that some of the boys were arrested in Aalborg and in North Jutland and put in prison for break-ins up there. And some were also working here in Aarhus. (police officer, East Jutland Police)

The illegal activities referred to here may be motivated by the need to finance different activities, such as travelling to the armed conflict and/or buying weapons (Normark et al., 2017: 36-9).

#### 6.4.2. Humanitarian Relief Workers

Five of my interviewees travelled to Syria during the war, and they all told me that they participated in humanitarian relief work in refugee camps close to the Syrian border or inside Syria. I believe them, as I have no reason to believe anything different.

The atmosphere was calm when I talked to the respondents about their high-risk activism. While two of the interviewees answered willingly and guided me through their experiences, displaying comfort, two others were ambivalent toward their own actions. On the one hand, they wanted to make a difference and believed that they could do so, thereby fulfilling a Muslim obligation. At the time of departure, this participation made sense to them. But the reality was different. While these two respondents were working in the refugee camp, the interviewees had to admit to themselves that their participation made no difference, and they returned to Denmark. For example, one of these interviewees actually laughed when describing his work in the refugee camp, which I interpret as tragicomic relief in a retrospective manner. In that light, these interviewees seem to feel rather ambivalent; neither ashamed nor proud. Another interviewee was proud of what he had done and told me openly and in detail about his experiences. He thought he did a good deed and made a difference. Another respondent was less than thrilled to detail his experiences in the refugee camp. He was uncomfortable. We agreed that I could pose a question and he could then choose to answer or decline to do so. I asked about his concrete path to the refugee camp; thus, we focused more on the “softer” experiences, talking more about how he arrived there, what he discussed with the others there, and the length of time he was abroad. Finally, one interviewee told me in the pre-interview phase that he also took part in the armed conflict in a refugee camp. He briefly touched upon some of the aspects mentioned above. We avoided talking about his participation in the refugee camp during the two interviews, since he was uncomfortable talking

about his experiences. Note also that I do not elaborate in detail on the respondents' different routes to their destinations and back to Denmark, as potential disclosure may compromise their anonymity.

Some of the respondents had rather easy and simple travel routes, with few transfers, whereas others followed a more complicated path to their destination, including numerous transfers and "alternative" border crossings. They used ordinary websites to book some of their transportation. Although they travelled to the conflict zone in groups, they did not necessarily remain together in the refugee camps nor did they return home together. The length of time they remained in the conflict zone ranged from several weeks to several months. A distinction can also be drawn in my data regarding the degree to which the interviewees had prepared their journey from home and whether they knew how to find their refugee camp. As one explains:

We had been in contact with some people and asked if they would help us with transport back and forth. Obviously, we had studied a map of Syria and various border areas and where we landed ... We got the number of the person who was going to pick us up, called him and said, "We're here!" And he came and picked us up [for a fee] so we could get to the agreed checkpoint ... They saw our papers, we were allowed to get through, and then we came in ... We were taken to a refugee camp and assigned what to do.

The passage indicates how the route to the refugee camp is planned in detail with additional help from various contacts. Other interviewees had not prepared from home, and their departure seems more spontaneous. As one respondent describes, "we asked the locals if there were any of these camps and where they were located. Then we were told where one of them was, and we thought, 'Let's go—just go there'. And so when we got to the camp ... we talked with some of these rescue workers or relief NGOs about what we could do."

The interviewees described their work in the different refugee camps: "Well, everyday life was much the same. We set up tents, distributed food, played with children. Went out, shopped and came back again." Another respondent tells of how "we just kind of tried to help to tidy up a little and clean—to hand out clothing, talking a little with some of the people who were here [in the camp]." A third interviewee elaborates on the work he did:

We helped people who were injured, we helped children who had lost their parents, we helped women who didn't have a husband beside them to be able to manage the daily chores, we helped people who had lost their children, we helped men who had lost their wives ... So it was hard for me in the beginning, but I got used to it. Also when you saw the kids. They came to me and I played with them. And I made them smile.

The excerpts indicate that the role of the interviewees included relieving the professionals in the refugee camps, assisting with everyday physical labor and diverse ad hoc tasks, such as playing with the kids. The interviewees also met new people with different national backgrounds. One respondent explains: “Most of the people I saw were French. People from Belgium, America. There were actually a lot from Sweden as well. Generally, there were a lot of people from Europe. We usually talked about what we were doing in our everyday lives. And sometimes we talked about our families.” Another interviewee had a different experience: “No, actually not—it surprised me a lot that I didn’t meet young people from the West.” Different refugee camps likely attracted different kinds of people. One’s network may have referred specific camps. Another respondent elaborates on his conversations with Syrians:

I talked with Syrians about what their lives were like before the war and what they wanted. And then of course you met people from other parts of the world. Everyone shared a desire to do something positive for Islam. Ultimately, everyone wanted a Muslim country. A caliphate might be an extreme example, but everyone wanted a Muslim country—where you could be a Muslim without any problems.

These quotes show how the respondents try to adapt to their new life and surroundings. They familiarize themselves with their work, and they establish relations with their new “colleagues” (Ellis et al., 2015). The newly established ties may also be a coping strategy with their new surroundings as a way of normalizing the situation as much as possible through everyday conversations.

In addition to the previously mentioned “soft” and ordinary tasks, such as cleaning, grocery shopping, setting up tents and playing with kids, one interviewee told me how he suddenly had a weapon in his hand. He elaborates: “I’ve also held a weapon, but it wasn’t in war, standing face-to-face with an enemy ... We had to go to a city to help a wounded person, and we knew that there were pro-Assad forces in that part of the town. So you couldn’t go without a weapon. So I had a weapon to protect myself—not to hurt anyone.” The interviewee did not participate in armed conflict. He carried a weapon to protect himself, his refugee camp colleagues and the wounded person. The example also unfolds an unforeseen shift in task and setting, illustrating a fluid transition from humanitarian work to potentially participating in armed struggle and risking one’s life. Although humanitarian relief work may sound unselfish and admirable, the participants can neither be sure of what will happen nor predict their lives in the refugee camps.

### 6.4.3. Foreign Fighters

Previous research has extensively focused on the phenomenon of foreign fighters worldwide (see, e.g., Paz, 2005; Moore & Tumelty, 2008; Malet, 2010; 2013; Hegghammer, 2010; 2013; Bakker & de Bont, 2016; Greenwood, 2018: 194-201; Milton, 2020; Pokalova, 2020). Foreign fighters can be defined as “insurgent combatants who fight beyond the borders of their home” (Borum & Fein, 2017: 249). Some of the volunteers in my study left as militants to fight under the banners of al-Qaeda and affiliated groups, the Islamic State or anti-Assad militias (Lindekilde et al., 2016). One respondent describes the groups that the foreign fighters joined: “There have been AQ supporters. Or Al-Nusra supporters ... Many were down there to fight the Free Syrian Army and Ahrar al-Sham. There were a lot of groups in Syria that people liked.” The members are apparently participating in a patchwork of different militant organizations, spanning from secular to *Salafist* (Neuman, 2016: 88-9). In general, my respondents were aware of battlefield involvement. However, they were unwilling to elaborate in detail about the participation of other individuals in armed combat due to the sensitivity of the topic. They might be honoring a code of conduct or are possibly afraid of incriminating former friends or receiving reprisals from former members. Thus, the interviewees spoke of militant engagement in more general terms.

One interviewee recalls a conversation about militant jihad and fighting. He tells of how they “sat talking, and then someone said: ‘I just read that if you die in armed conflict, you get 72 wives in paradise’, and then someone else said: ‘Listen—if you’re a warrior and standing guard, then it’s the same.’” The interviewee continues, recalling how some brothers from his group were eager to participate in armed struggle: “And then we found out that some of them also wanted to fight ... And it’s also clear that there are many who have travelled and just supported ISIS [the Islamic State] and been down to fight for ISIS.” Another respondent recalls how militant involvement became relevant: “And then there were those who said, ‘I have to do something physically to stop [the injustice]’—and they’re the ones who are now dead.” A third interviewee goes on, elaborating on the overlap between humanitarian relief work and the battlefield:

So someone told me that there were some people who would like to see if they could do more in the area ... And you also realized that some chose to cross the border to Syria [to fight] ... Gradually, more and more young people started to leave. And then there were some of them who stayed there, and some of them were simply killed ... some young people supported them [the Islamic State] actively and thought it was absolutely fantastic that it was [declared] a caliphate ... and they chose to travel.

In a more direct manner, another interviewee presents his account as follows: “Some people also did humanitarian [relief work] but were gone after 2-3 weeks. They had joined an organization involved in the war. There was more substance. They found it more interesting to have a weapon in hand.” The quotations imply that some members participated in militant jihad, for example joining the ranks of the Islamic State. Some of the members are not satisfied with humanitarian relief work, and they transition from humanitarian work to military engagement in the battlefield. This might partly be because as long as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is not defeated, the work in refugee camps is not enough. In that sense, military action is required. Another reason may also be that progressing to violent activism embraces a violent, destructive form of masculine power, seeking adventures or excitement in contrast to one’s everyday life. In addition, the combative involvement may provide heroism and status (Coolsaet 2015; Dawson & Amarasingam 2017; Meines, 2017; Greenwood, 2018: 168). One respondent comments on the motivation for joining militant factions: “I don’t think they [militants] have distinguished between fighting Assad or IS [the Islamic State]. If you have Free Syrian Army on this side and IS on that side and the Assad regime on another side—You really don’t care which of the two [Free Syrian Army or Islamic State] you’re joining—as long as you’re fighting Assad and the regime.” In line with developments in Syria, the general moral prescripts about helping fellow Muslims wherever needed become more focused. However, the statement reflects how some foreign fighters are indecisive as to which group to join. The focus seems to be on joining a group that is fighting Bashar al-Assad and there is not a great deal of consideration of the risks, costs and long-term consequences of participation in specific groups, such as the Islamic State. The dedication to armed struggle also led to death in some cases (Lindekilde & Olesen, 2015: 31, 38-9). One respondent explains how, “at the time I was part of the group, I don’t recall anyone [who went off to fight]. But as soon as I was about to withdraw, there’s someone who takes off for Syria ... I knew quite a few people from Aarhus who have been reported killed in Syria.” Another respondent speaks of converts who died in armed struggle: “Yes, I had [ethnic Danish friends]. Who were also [practicing] Muslims. We shared the same mindset. One of them actually fell in Syria.”

There are disagreements and conflicting perceptions in the radical milieu regarding the use of violent means and militant *jihad*. One respondent tells of his experience with debating violent approaches: “Some of them came from violent milieus where everything was all about beating and raping. They would work each other up. They always made sure to interpret everything from a violent perspective. As opposed to others, who argued against these things.” The respondent continues:

And then the Islamic State appeared and declared a caliphate. There—I just found that it created a great divide in the community. And it was completely grotesque. So I used to actually talk to the young people and tell them that this had nothing to do with Islam ... But there were some people who were just so hardcore—who would start discussing Islamic State, saying “Well, that’s the right thing” ... And then I thought, “OK—that might be their opinion. But I don’t share it.”

Another respondent provides a similar example, elaborating on a heated debate within his group about the justification of violent *jihad* and fighting:

And then one of the guys said, “if a Muslim’s life hangs in the balance, he’s allowed to defend his life ... but if they then come”—and this is where the argument got really intense, since Denmark was part of a coalition, ergo Denmark was at war with Muslims—“you’re allowed to lead [militant] *jihad* here in Denmark.” I didn’t think that you could attack anyone here in Denmark. And if you had to fight, then it had to be Syrians who had family in their home country. But I was drowned out by people who just said: “No—that’s not how it is. If someone is killed, then you also have the right to kill here” ... there are innocent people who are also killed in Palestine.” Eye for an eye and that kind of thing. And then I said, “Yes, true enough. But it doesn’t make it more just that you also do it.”

The respondents are against violent means and attacking civilians. One respondent tries to limit the concept of fighting abroad, although he also heard principled arguments for promoting violent *jihad*. Some participants argue that fighting and the use of violent means against Western civilians is permissible as “civilian deaths are justified under the law of equal measures (*qisas*) or equal retaliation” (Maher, 2016: 49). This argument is commonly used by transnational militant *Salafist* organizations to legitimize the targeting of civilians as an act of reciprocity for the death of Muslim civilians killed by Western alliance forces throughout the Muslim world (Maher, 2016: 48-56). Some of the “brothers” seem to have pre-developed a readiness for violence prior to engaging in the radical milieu. As we see below, at some point the milieu recruit from criminal groups—the so-called “cross-overs.” One careful explanation may be that the members with criminal pasts may have nurtured a familiarity with violence through prior socialization, exposure and violent experiences (Bjørngo et al. 2005; Basra et al., 2016: 38). Conversely, some participants may have been attracted to the Islamic State’s declaration of a “caliphate” and desired to participate in building and protecting it, or perhaps they were drawn by adventure, romantic notions or simply an interest in creating a family in the self-proclaimed Muslim society. Fulfilling the word of God by

becoming a martyr and the awards waiting in the next world may have functioned as “pull” factors for some, but seemingly in a romanticized fashion (Coolsaet, 2015; Saltman & Smith, 2015: 13-17; Bakker & Bont, 2016; Borum & Fein, 2017; Speckhard et al., 2018).

## 6.5. Low-Risk Activism

Previous research has focused on low-risk activism (see, e.g., Clark, 2004; Wiktorowicz, 2005; Rinaldo, 2013; Basra et al., 2016; Khosrokhavar, 2017). In my work, different forms of low-risk activism are performed on an everyday basis. I elaborate on this aspect to illustrate the breadth of my data to present a holistic account of the radical companionship. In addition to money and clothing collection for emergency aid, examples of low-risk activism include proselytizing or *dawah* (calling others to Islam), with the mode of dress and visible markers as a statement (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 108-9; Bonnefoy, 2011: 48-9; Rinaldo, 2013: 71-4). The following focuses on the mode of dress and visible markers as well as *dawah* targeting criminals and *dawah* in virtual arenas.

### 6.5.1. Mode of Dress and Visible Markers as a Statement

In line with previous research (see, e.g., Christiansen, 1998; Rasmussen 1998; Bonnefoy, 2011: 48-9; Khosrokhavar, 2017: 78), my respondents mentioned how displaying a certain mode of dress and visible markers were cardinal. Ali describes how “we had religious beards and clothes, after all. We had to look like we were sticking to the Prophet’s customs in relation to our style of clothing. [The beard] was laid back. The clothing was white and long—kind of like what you see in Saudi Arabia” (Ali, Interview 2). Such distinct practices seem to signal a statement of belonging to a specific religio-political companionship (Bonnefoy, 2011: 48-9). Coman presents a similar account focused on debating their style of dress:

It was really important for some guys to wear long robes, like you see in Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan ... Some began wearing them to school. Others started to ask a little critically, “What does your teacher think? Is it a good idea? I don’t think it’s a good idea,” but then they said, “It’s a good idea, because it’s something that is the practice of the Prophet and you’re rewarded for it.” “But where’s your evidence of that?” They couldn’t come up with anything. (Coman, Interview 4)

The quote discloses two important aspects. First, the persons who display certain visible markers seem to articulate a religious statement, “using distinctive narrative actions and embodied practices that are woven into the practice of everyday life” (Jean-Klein, 2001: 84). In that sense, this behavior seems to

unfold as *everyday activism* in simple conversation or while engaging in daily activities and chores aimed at social change (Mansbridge, 2013; Goldstein, 2017). For those wearing the traditional dress, this everyday activism entails a display of one's religious engagement possibly aimed at making Islam more visible and raising awareness and interest among other youth. Second, the traditional Islamic clothing is debated. One reason for questioning this behavior and suggesting a different dress code may be to avoid attracting negative attention from schoolteachers and authorities. This critical stance may be explained as a coping strategy to maintain the milieu and avoid negative attention from authorities in the school system and society in general. I return in detail to coping strategies in the next chapter regarding *attachment and social control affordances*.

### 6.5.2. Dawah Targeting Criminals and Dawah on Offline/Online Arenas

*Dawah* (proselytizing) is another example of low-risk activism. The perception is that any Muslim in the West are encouraged to invite others to Islam. In addition to simply preaching the message of Islam, this form of activism stimulates a version of Islam linking beliefs and practices in all spheres of Islam (Clark, 2004). In that sense, “activist dawa[h] ... is the promotion of an ideologically inspired interpretation of Islam that demands activism by others” (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 50). Dawoud (Interview 1) explains the target groups: “There was dawah for Muslims, and then there was dawah for non-Muslims. Dawah for non-Muslims, for example, was out on the streets. Dawah for Muslims was in Aarhus Vest, for example, where people were told that they were cared for—that they should come to the mosque and consider changing their lifestyle.”

The “brothers” also proselytize among criminals, who transition from a criminal past with possible gang associations to the radical milieu. These are the so-called “cross-overs” (Bjørge et al. 2005; Dones, 2012: 126-8; Basra et al., 2016: 7-10; Christensen & Mørck, 2017: 113-17). Dawoud speaks about how petty criminals entered the milieu via proselytizing:

[We] knew where the [criminals] hung out. Told them that they should stop what they were doing, told them about Islam, told them about Judgment Day, because they lived a life in which death was not particularly far away ... and when they saw another criminal change, I think it made a big impression on them. That they could also go that way if they wanted to, because “if he can, well, so can you.” (Dawoud, Interview 3)

As already established in Chapter 6, pre-existing social ties play a vital role in the pathways to the radical milieu. *Dawah* to criminals suggests the same *social selection* through pre-established relationships that is transformed (Christensen & Bjørge, 2017: 78; Malthaner 2018; Bouhana, 2019b). Ghadi adds to this, elaborating on another strategy to recruit criminals:

The [criminals] are from the local area. We've known one another all our lives, growing up and doing things together ... Sometimes they said: "I feel like shit. I feel I don't know anything about religion. I'm finished" ... Other times, they'd say, "I'm on drugs. They've ruined my life ... I owe people money, I want out of the [gang]environment. Is there anyone who can help?" Then there was someone who had a good contact, and we used it to send someone [over to the gangs] and said: "Wouldn't you please leave the guy alone? He wants to do something else with his life. Someday it will be you, at which time we will also want to help." (Ghadi, Interview 1)

The excerpt indicates how the appeals are tailored "to suit the needs of people with criminal pasts" (Basra et al., 2016: 23). The criminals are offered both mental and financial support as a way out of the criminal lifestyle. Trust and confidence are established, and the former criminals are provided with alternative companionship in which they embrace a new moral context derived from a *Salafi*-inspired interpretation of Islam. For the criminals who are breaking with a former harmful past, the religious interpretation may function as a kind of a redemptive turn or new beginning (Klein, 1995: 200-2; Basra et al., 2016). The quote also indicates how the members of the radical milieu and the criminals share the same demographics and live in the neighborhoods. Some of those involved were childhood friends (Basra et al., 2016). The preexisting ties may contribute to an easier and seamless selection of newcomers.

In Wiktorowicz's study of the radical organization *al-Muhajiroun* in the United Kingdom, the members of the organization set up organized *dawah* stalls in the local community every Saturday (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 48-50). In contrast, *dawah* within the radical milieu under investigation here is performed in a more fluid and dynamic way. Ghadi elaborates:

We walked around and handed out flyers to people in the Botanical Gardens on a nice hot summer day. We handed out flyers on the pedestrian street at Christmas. People could then ask about all of the crazy things they had seen in the media. And for every question there were wise people who could answer within the specific areas ... Sometimes three [persons]. Other times 15. So then we would spread the 15 around town. Then there were four in the Botanical Gardens, three on the beach, two in Aarhus West (Ghadi, Interview 1)

*Dawah* is also performed in the virtual arena. Ghadi elaborates:

To begin with, we used the technology that was available at the time we performed *Dawah*. It was very “hyped” to talk with people via Facebook and the Net ... And sometimes we opened up for streaming, so people could listen live. The online listeners often outnumbered those who were present physically. Sometimes there were 10 people here and 30 on the Net. And sometimes there were 100 here and 300 on the Net. It depended on the topic, the relevance and the speaker. (Ghadi, Interview 1)

Imad (Interview 1) shares a similar account: “In the past, there were 12,000 followers on Facebook, and they went out a lot and did *dawah*. There was time for that.” The offline and online approaches are combined. The participants use flyers and leaflets as part of their method when performing *dawah* face-to-face. The written material might contain information about upcoming social activities and lectures. They also expand their *dawah* by using social media and websites to disseminate their messages and inform about upcoming events. I argue that the offline and online approaches are not competitive, but rather supplementary and dynamic. The interaction of online and offline arenas takes advantage of the possibilities provided by the internet to reach easily accessible, mainstream platforms. Hence, the combination of offline and online *dawah* strengthens the public outreach to a wider audience within a short time. This includes raising awareness and attracting new entrants throughout Denmark, such as creating a support base surrounding the crowd of regular members (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014; Malthaner 2018).

## 6.6. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have extended the moral affordances of the radical milieu. I have elaborated on how the interaction between the members generates certain beliefs and allows certain actions. The members form and absorb a specific *Salafi*-inspired interpretation of Islam that supports their worldview, values, principles of right and wrong conduct and boundaries. Religious culturing and training is unfolded in lectures on the basics of Islam, combining beliefs and practices, Quran reading and recitation, and religious argumentation. In that sense, I have argued that the believers comprehensively ritualize their entire lifestyle around the message of God. I position this perspective in contrast to ritual research that typically underscores how rituals are fixed in time and space with certain rigid and standardized sequences. Based on my data, I argue that religious practice is not limited to conventional rituals and worship. Instead, the ritual practices are connected to ordinary tasks and mundane activities in daily life. This contributes to strengthening the moral context and internalizing the religious beliefs that set direction for certain actions.

The religious belief system and imperatives also constitute the moral context. The religious moral context forms ideas and opinions in offline and online settings that develop into specific actions. I argue that exemplary actions by well-known *mujahidun* (holy fighters) and martyrs, contemporary associates who left for the armed conflict, and appeals to emotions and reason all bridge attitudes and actions. The moral guidelines provide clear instructions for actions. However, bridging beliefs and high-risk activism requires additional opportunities, pressures or expectations before acting on one's willingness to act. The actions to follow become tangible, concrete and real, and thus easier to imitate. Moreover, the ideal type of action provides opportunities to position oneself as a "doer" and to achieve similar status as the holy *mujahidun*, martyrs and likeminded people who are already involved in the armed conflict. The appeals focus on different emotion-producing narratives, such as grievances or guilt. The narratives compare the lives of the members of the radical milieu with the living conditions in Syria. For example, Dawoud (Interview 2) stresses how the participants "weren't invited to go down there [to the armed conflict]. It was more a reminder to everyone that they should help and do something for those who were down there." Conversely, I argue that members encourage each other to perform high-risk activism. In my opinion, the combination of encouragement cues, such as exemplary actions and appeals, function as opportunities, expectations and pressures that bridge attitudes and actions.

In contrast to the political, public and scholarly focus on the violent aspect of participating as foreign fighter in Syria and the neighboring countries, I add nuance to the understanding of the commitment of the volunteer. In my investigation, the radical milieu consisted of militants and humanitarian relief workers alike. The two are not absolute categories, however, as they sometimes overlap in fluid transitions: Some started as humanitarian workers and later became fighters. And one of my respondents carried a weapon while working for the refugee camp, which further illustrates the blurry lines and unpredictable developments prior to departing for the war zone. Although I present different purposes of engagement, I understand the radical milieu in its entirety. Within this perspective, I analyze the processes preceding the different forms of high-risk activism. Regardless of whether the Syrian volunteers engaged in humanitarian help or fought for the Islamic State, they participated in the same religious culturing and absorbed the same religious ideas that directed their actions. The humanitarian relief workers were part of the same milieu as the militants. Both types of volunteers paid tribute and honor brothers who have already joined the armed conflict. In addition, those participating in different forms of high-risk involvement contribute to the formation and maintenance of the milieu via different roles and work, such as

lecturing, IT, setting up recreational activities and *dawah*. That said, not all volunteers in the armed conflict necessarily pose a security threat. The activities performed (and together with whom) in the Syrian conflict may indicate—with caution—whether or not a returnee poses a security risk. Moreover, someone who does not volunteer in conflict zones may also pose a danger to security via, for example, recruitment, fundraising, intense radicalization or the communication of encouragement cues for desired actions.

As already described in the previous chapters, the “brothers” meet and socialize in various settings, spanning from open to closed settings. For example, they facilitate easily accessible lectures in larger, open spaces. One reason may be that the invitation to public lectures is a way of creating a support base or in the neighborhood or local community through an awareness of a religious revival. On the other hand, they also shape small, closed settings. For example, the ongoing religious “culturing” unfolds in smaller settings within organized groups. Moreover, discussions about entering the war zones seem to take place in smaller micro-settings with only a few trusted people. In that sense, the participants provide activities that initiate an intense exposure to other like-minded people and radicalizing material in different settings. In this sense, the members frequent various settings, demonstrating a complex activity pattern. I argue that these opportunities to scale activities from open to closed settings present unique advantages; on the one hand, the fellowship can be depicted to the outside world as a project focused on religious revival. On the other, the “brothers” can engage in discussions in more secluded and isolated settings, where involvement in the armed conflict is encouraged. These activities seem to unfold without supervision from individuals who subscribe to the law-relevant rules and controls of Danish society. The next chapter focuses on the *attachment and social control affordances* of the radical milieu.

## Chapter 7: Attachment Affordances and Social Control Affordances

In the previous chapter, I elaborated on the socializing moral affordances of the radical milieu. The participants construe a moral context based on a certain *Salafi*-inspired interpretation of Islam. The “brothers” create opportunities to engage in religious cultivation, such as religious training and study groups focusing on the connection of religious beliefs and practices. More specifically, the moral context furnishes guidelines, values and boundaries that put forth clear directions for action. Additional specific encouragements seem to bridge beliefs and actions. The exemplary actions of heroic holy fighters, martyrs, contemporary participators who departed for the Syrian war as well as appeals to emotions and reason work to connect ideas and high-risk activism. Some individuals participate in Syria, Iraq or Turkey as militants or humanitarian relief workers (or the two combined), progressing from humanitarian aid to armed struggle. The analysis in this chapter focuses on the *socializing affordances* of the radical milieu (Bouhana, 2019b).

I thus analyze the *attachment affordances* and the *social control affordances*. In the first instance, the main purpose is to analyze empirically how new social ties are established and how these social relations influence behavior. The main purpose of the latter is to investigate how the members try to maintain their fellowship through sophisticated coping strategies, both externally and internally. As previously elaborated, the *cognitive* and *moral affordances* of the radical milieu provide a platform for strengthening the established social ties through various social activities. The radical milieu offers a sense of identity and belonging as well as a moral compass that directs behavior, and the *attachment affordances* provide opportunity to establish new social ties to friendships, networks and role models. (Bouhana, 2019b). In that sense, the radical milieu functions as a “connection-making” setting, establishing new relationships through numerous social activities (Malthaner, 2018). Furthermore, the radical milieu is characterized by participants who either relinquish or lack the means to implement mainstream norms and law relevant rules. Instead, they foster their own distinct control mechanisms (Bouhana, 2019b). The *social control affordances* thus enable the development of specific behavioral rules and norms aimed at preserving their fellowship and keeping their activities hidden from the authorities and their schools and families (Cross & Snow, 2011).

**Table 10. The attachment affordances of the radical milieu**

<b>Attachment affordances</b>	
New social ties	New friendships and networks
	New role models and attachments to other influential figures
“Onlife”—the interplay between online and offline dimensions	Interacting online while present physically
	Interacting online while separate physically
	Engaging in online activities alone while physically alone
Time consumption and settings	Mosques
	Schools
	Neighborhoods
	Apartments
	Surface websites, encryption services and dark web platforms

This chapter presents three contributions, as outlined in tables 10 and 11. First, in Chapter 4, we established the transformation of pre-existing social ties and the formation of new social ties along the path *into* the radical milieu. The existing research in social movement theory and radicalization (Snow et al., 1980; McAdams, 1986; Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Malthaner, 2018) emphasizes how socialization is not only relevant along the path *into* radical milieus but also within the radical organizations themselves in processes that integrate offline and online socialization. My investigation builds on this work, as new friendships and networks in Denmark and abroad are established within the radical milieu, and the members develop role models and attachments to other influential figures. In that sense, the radical milieu functions as a place for “connection-making” between friends and networks of like-minded radical *Salafists* (Malthaner, 2018).

Second, there has been a prevailing tendency in the study of radicalization and terrorism to treat the internet and face-to-face domains as two separate and distinct entities. Some studies have mainly focused on the role of the internet in radicalization and terrorism together with the instrumental use of the internet by terrorist organizations (see, e.g., Sachan, 2012; Weimann, 2015: 23-35; Macdonald & Lorenzo-Dus, 2019; Gross, 2020). Other investigations have focused on the “real-world” realm, concentrating either on “radicalizing hubs,” such as mosques, prisons, schools and asylum centers, or excluding the online dimension (see, e.g., Taarnby, 2005; Neumann & Rogers, 2007: 33-45; Vidino et al., 2017: 83). In contrast, I argue that the socialization unfolds in “hybrid *onlife* spaces” (Valentini et al. 2020: 2). The radical milieu

in my study combines the online and offline domains in a dynamic and fluid manner through various activities and social constellations: Interacting online while present physically side-by-side, as when they watch videos together on social media; interacting online while separate physically, such as performing “virtual jihad”; and engaging in online activities alone while physically alone, as when they are acquiring religious knowledge. Hence, the members demonstrate a natural and active way of interacting on the internet and social media. They apply their acquired skills and practices to different uses in the radical milieu. The mixed communication contributes to intense socialization in time and space, where activities overlap and social reach expands. Throughout the analytical chapters, I have unfolded such mixed online and offline communication. This chapter analyzes this phenomenon in greater depth.

**Table 11. The social control affordances of the radical milieu**

<b>Social control affordances</b>	
Coping strategies to preserve free space	Turn off your phone and put it aside when talking about participation in the Syrian war
	Be nice, “keep your head down” (i.e., behave) in school and get good grades
	Lie to parents
	Use encryption services and dark web platforms
Expectations and regulations among the radical members	Mutual expectations
	Everyday religious reminders
	Approval and disapproval

Third, I build on social movement theory that underlines how radical activists create *free spaces* to avoid state surveillance and intervention (see, e.g., Evans & Boyte, 1986; Polletta, 1999; Cross & Snow, 2011; Polletta & Kretschmer, 2013). Based on my data, I argue that the radical milieu works to maintain safe spaces to keep their activities away from authorities, families and schools. The members develop sophisticated coping strategies and/or a security culture to preserve these safe spaces via a set of behavioral rules, norms and practices. The sense of free spaces becomes dynamic and fluid. On the one hand, they navigate in open settings such as their mosque, schools and families as well as surface websites. On the other hand, closed settings such as apartments, encryption services and dark web platforms are frequented. In the following, I first elaborate on the attachment affordances and then turn to the social control affordances.

## 7.1. Attachment Affordances

In the following discussion of attachment affordances, I first focus on the establishment of new friendships and acquaintances. Next, I elaborate on the attachments to new role models and other influential figures as well as how the prominent figures influence certain behavior. Third, I concentrate on how the combination of individuals, activities and settings enable intense daily socialization. Finally, I elaborate on the “hybrid onlife spaces” (Valentini et al. 2020: 2) that suggest a combination of online and offline elements in radicalization.

### 7.1.1. Forming New Friendships and Acquaintances

All of my respondents develop new friends and acquaintances in the radical milieu. Dawoud (Interview 1) elaborates on this: “I made new friends, because I was together with people who also had friends. And when I was together with those who also had friends—well, then they also became my friends.” Bassam (Interview 1) tells of how he established new ties: “And then we just talked. And continued with what we shared in common. That the world is put together a certain way. And then just talk about it. Just talk about politics. And then we just suddenly had a bond of trust ... I got some good friendships out of it.” The interviewees experience opportunities for “connection-making, creating and shaping the networks as well as the spaces” (Malthaner, 2018: 40). Ali continues, presenting the process of becoming close friends, creating and shaping their own space. Ali knew a couple of the group members peripherally before entering the specific radical group, while others were unknown to him prior to his commitment.

But we really got to know each other as we opened up. So you could say that it was a new chapter for our relationship ... Here, you could meet almost every day in the apartment. Practically lived and ate together. So it was an intense friendship ... It also meant that you got to know the people. You gained confidence and trusted each other ... They created social trust. Here, I could express myself like I wanted to. (Ali, Interviews 1 and 2)

Ali and his group center most of their activities on their apartment. This *radical micro-setting* (Lindekilde & Malthaner, 2017; Lindekilde et al., 2019) becomes essential to him and his friends, forming a sanctuary for their fellowship, which was closed to outsiders. The members are able to participate in intense interactions and reinforce their dedication. The quotes from Bassam and Ali are indicative of how trust and compassion seem to be crucial emotions in how they established friendships and shared their inner thoughts (Ward, 2019; Wilkinson, 2019). In addition to a shared religious interpretation and

worldview, most interviewees reported that they “connected” with each other through shared interests such as politics, reading, gaming or different kind of sports. Thus, bonds and commitments are reinforced (Smetana et al., 2015; Grusec & Davidov, 2015; Malthaner 2018).

In addition, social networks are formed across the country, and there are connections to groups in Copenhagen, Odense, Aalborg and Esbjerg, as well as smaller cities such as Vejle and Roskilde. The Copenhagen-based radical *Salafist* group, *The Call to Islam (Kaldet til Islam)* deserves particular attention, as several members of the group went on to join the armed conflict in Syria as militants under the banner of the Islamic State (Sheikh, 2015: 161). Although the milieu in and around *Call to Islam* and the radical milieu in Aarhus are independent and separate radical milieus, they share perceptions, develop social ties, inspire each other and cooperate. They visit each other’s facilities and conduct lectures and teachings. Ghadi (Interview 2) explains how the relationships to *Call to Islam* members were established through dawah gatherings in different cities, online forums and private gatherings and celebrations. Fawaz (Interview 2) recollects a visit from *Call to Islam* where they conducted a lecture with the following message: “Someone said: ‘If the Danes—Denmark does something abroad, then they deserve what happens to them abroad. And if it happens in Denmark, then they also deserve it. You make your bed—you have to sleep in it. If you bomb there, you’ll be bombed here.’” Ebi presents a similar experience, focusing on the potential impact of the speakers:

When the *Call to Islam* came [and gave lectures], there were some slightly more political themes and hostility, such as “If the [ethnic Danish] cashier in the convenience store gives you money with the right hand, well then you take them with the left hand, because it is not good to use your right hand in such a situation” ... They were very prominent. They made the Sharia zone in Tingbjerg [a Copenhagen suburb], where they made a public statement about making the zone and videos in which they shouted “to Hell with democracy” or “to Hell with the Danish soldiers” ... Many saw them as role models. Some said, “Try to see how cool they are—see how brave they are. And they dare to say so many things. Why don’t we dare?” (Ebi, Interview 2)

The quote unfolds how *Call to Islam* seemingly intertwines politics and religious practice, as with respect to the use of one’s hands for virtuous things. Moreover, the excerpt accentuates the radical milieu in its entirety. I argue that I am not merely investigating a group of participants who perform humanitarian relief work; they also take part in the same activities, express the same viewpoints and look up to members from *Call to Islam* who fight for

Islamic State and creating a willingness to imitate the activism of the Copenhagen group. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 6, the radical milieu is complex and encapsulates three different *Salafist* factions, including *purists*, *politicos* and *jihadists* (Wiktorowicz, 2006). *Call to Islam* seems to unfold these *Salafist* approaches. They promote a specific perception of non-Muslims, dividing between good and bad interactions encouraging either physical or psychological segregation. They promote a religious puritan project intended to protect *tawhid* and the purity of Islam from infidels. The Copenhagen-based radical group also demonstrates a political awareness and interest. They unfold an activist approach, as in the establishment of sharia-controlled areas. Finally, *Call to Islam* legitimized reciprocal attacks on the Danish population and Danish interests. As previously mentioned, several members went on to join Islamic State, demonstrating a jihadist approach (Wiktorowicz, 2006). Conversely, Ghadi (Interview 2) describes how disagreements flourished in the radical milieu in the wake of the declaration of the sharia-controlled areas in Copenhagen, since Denmark was not an Islamic country and that sharia-laws could therefore not be implemented. Furthermore, the establishment of social networks outside Denmark unfolds via a combination of virtual and physical elements. Bassam explains the processes in detail:

There could be a lot of approaches. There was word of mouth, because your friends must also have a cousin who had the same thoughts or knew someone. And ultimately you found a person who had the same thoughts, and then you called them on the phone. Then he found even more, and then you found out that [the flow] you had in Denmark—it also existed elsewhere, in other countries. Another way could be to find one another on social media. (Bassam, Interview 1)

The radical milieu resorts to many different means of communication, including virtual as well as physical means and at times the two in combination. Bassam shows how the members use their network and connections and take advantage of the technological possibilities that provide easy global access (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 17-19; Stern & Berger, 2015; Malthaner, 2018).

Overall, the expanding relationships and networks throughout Denmark and beyond boost the dedication and reinforce the sense of shared commitment. Increasing numbers of individuals clearly wish to contribute to the revitalization of Islam with the purpose of creating a broad support base and encouraging the performance of high-risk and low-risk activism. Moreover, the national outreach and cooperation seem to contribute to shaping and consolidating an informal radical network of autonomous groups and individuals (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 18; Malthaner & Waldman, 2014; Malthaner 2018). Nevertheless, the radical milieu in Aarhus and especially the *Call to Islam* in Co-

penhagen seemed to drift apart as the conflict in Syria progressed. Imad (Interview 1) describes how, in the beginning, “they were on good terms and it was all about dawah and Islam and how you should get as much insight... Danes should get so much insight into Islam. But things changed all of a sudden when IS [the Islamic State] entered the scene—and then they were split apart.” The quote reflects what we have already seen in the previous chapter: The radical milieu in Aarhus divides internally and breaks with the *Call to Islam* after the introduction of Islamic State; some support Islamic State, other members follow al-Qaeda and affiliated groups, while a third group takes a neutral position.

### 7.1.2. New Role Models

The participants in the radical milieu are able to develop ties to influential figures: Men to whom they look up to and aspire to be like. Their parents are not considered role models. Fawaz (Interview 1) explains: “It wasn’t as though my mom and dad explained to me, ‘listen, son, you have to do this well. And you must not forget this and that.’ Because they haven’t been the best role models with respect to Islam. They’ve just been ‘cultural Muslims’.” The parents seemingly fell short of providing religious guidance. Instead, Fawaz turns to other likeminded people for religious advice. Ebi (Interview 2) elaborates on his perception of his parents: “You didn’t ask your parents, because you thought that they didn’t know enough to be able to give advice. And you kind of looked down on your parents ... Many of the fathers shaved. My dad didn’t have a beard, [he] didn’t know much about Islam.” The quote reveals a perceived discrepancy between the parent’s religious engagement and Ebi’s religiosity in terms of knowledge and practice. Ebi seems to believe that his parents were unable to guide him appropriately, and he looked down on them in this regard. Bassam (Interview 3) stresses how most members were not proud of their parents and how they were perceived as far too Western-oriented, supporting democracy and elections, being secular or cultural Muslims and travelling to Western tourist resorts with liberal dress codes. For some, such parents come to symbolize the mainstream society from which the radical milieu was distancing itself. In that sense, the radical milieu can be described as a counter-culture that stands in opposition to one’s parents and mainstream norms and values. Thus, the radical milieu provides an alternative belonging (Hemmingsen, 2010: 78, 110). The quotes presented here are also indicative of intergenerational conflict, as the parents neither echo nor accommodate the needs of the respondents (McCaslin, 1993; Bengtson, 1993; Hall, 2005). Ali (Interview 3) goes on, referring to an inter-generational gap: “Well, we just thought that our parents cared more about their children than the role they

had in religion. But it was up to us young people to take that fight to identify ourselves and fight for the Muslims ... My father didn't talk about 9/11 or what happened in Afghanistan. We thought it was weird how this held true in all of the parental relations." This quote reflects the contrasting dedications and needs of Ali and his group, on the one side, and their parents on the other. Ali and his "brothers" are disappointed that their parents are not more active in the fight for Islam and Muslims. In contrast, the interviewees develop strong ties to authoritative members within the ranks of the radical milieu in Aarhus, who are typically older than the interviewees. Ali describes an example with an influential figure, who is 7-8 years older than him:

He was an accepted authority—respected in the milieu. People would always say, "You hang around with him? Good stuff" ... he was a bit like me in that he had grown up in Denmark, understood the system, and understood the general situation of the Muslim community in Denmark. Reflected. And he spoke well. I also wanted to be good at debating. I would also like to speak well. So of course I looked up to him, as he was older than me, he spoke well and got everyone on board. (Ali, Interview 1)

Ali develops strong ties to an influential person who becomes a role model for him. A *role model* refers to an individual who is perceived by others as worthy of imitation. A role model may also have personal contact with the persons who consider him or her to be a role model (Pleiss & Feldhusen, 1995). Bassam (Interview 1) echoes this: "I liked the intellectuals. I liked that there was something behind the talk. And when people asked questions, the arguments were there. You weren't in trouble—your things were in order. I liked that. Obviously, I looked up to someone like that." The excerpts show how the respondents value personality and reputation, competences and knowledge about Islam as core attributes, which they would like to imitate (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 139-50). It is important to note that despite the fact that Ali's role model was neither employed nor studying, he was respected and admired for his knowledge about Islam and dedication to the cause of Allah. This indicates a discrepancy with mainstream Danish society, where formal education and employment are typically valued very highly. This aspect illustrates the shift in values in a nutshell: Ali has a hard time relating to mainstream societal values and instead relates to his role model. This might be because Ali and his role model share individual experiences, such as identity seeking or discrimination, that have led them to lose faith in broader societal institutions such as family, school and authorities, and they have therefore come to focus on other values and life perspectives. The role model shows how status can be attained without education or employment, revealing an alternative path to self-certainty and skills. In that sense, the moral context of the radical milieu seems

to function as an alternative to the broader society, emphasizing knowledge about Islam and related competences as conditions for respect and authority. The role modeling unfolds in an “apprentice-teacher” relationship between an individual and his role model, to whom the individual looks up and aspires to be like. Dawoud comments on this dynamic:

Sometimes it might be a completely different person giving the lectures—but who looked up to the person who typically held the lectures. And then maybe the new person used the very same rhetoric and method that the person he looks up to uses—kind of like to get recognition. “Look—I can also do what he does, and I’ve learned it from him.” (Dawoud, Interview 2)

This quote also shows how *social learning* is at play (Bandura, 1971: 2-8). The younger members learn from the older members through observation and imitation, thus transmitting religious knowledge as well as styles and techniques. As the role models are respected and perceived as trustworthy, they may also find it easier to encourage the younger group members. Overall, these role models come to replace the group members’ parents as their primary caregivers. They develop strong ties to the other group members and a sense of family-like belonging. This seems plausible, as the respondents perceive their “brothers” as family (Smetana et al., 2015; Dunn, 2015).

### 7.1.3. Global and Local Influential Figures

We have already seen in the previous chapter how the participants grew attached to prominent inspirational figures through their global-level propaganda; individuals such as Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Abdallah Azzam, Mohammed Maqdisi and Anwar Awlaki. There is an awareness of the messages and ideas propagated by these global influential figures in videos, books and articles, which are actively emulated by the members of the radical milieu. In addition, the members also establish ties to local influential figures in Aarhus, who can be divided into two groups. The first includes young participants in their late teens or early to mid-20s. The second group includes older adults who are perceived as father figures to some extent. In the following, I turn to the young influential members after which I focus on the older, influential adults. Prior to conducting interviews, I knew it would be very difficult to talk about specific local influential persons, as such conversation would risk incriminating others or lead to potential reprisals. I scheduled the topic about specific influential figures for second or third follow-up interviews, at which point I hoped that trust and confidence may have been established to the degree that the interviewees would feel ready to talk about local influential figures. One respondent confirmed an identity after an interview, while another

interviewee mentioned names and potential roles. However, the interviewees focused more on the personality, competences and authority of the influential figure. I therefore exclude the interviewees' fictitious names in the inserted quotes below to provide additional protection.

One respondent elaborates on the young, influential figures: "There were all of these young people who were influenced by other young preachers ... who have set the tone in leading the rhetoric in that direction." The respondent continues, mentioning a specific young, influential man: "So they were in different mosques. I remember seeing one of them in different mosques, but he came specifically to a certain neighborhood, where he then recruited several boys, who left for the Syrian war ... He knew a lot about the milieu—he greeted you if he knew that you were within the ranks." The passages indicate how the young, prominent figures play different roles, such as focusing on preaching and circulating ideas and messages, while other influential men focus on establishing close bonds to members to promote certain actions. Some influential figures are respected and trusted for their knowledge of Islam, others for their rhetorical skill and technique. Moreover, some young influential figures possess charisma, encouraging specific actions in accordance with the moral guidelines of the radical milieu (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 139-150). Another interviewee continues, describing the impact of prominent men: "The oldest members in the group sent a signal that they were on the right path and knew what they were talking about. They were people you looked up to. He continues: "And especially when they were older than you—then you started to think, 'well, he knows what he's talking about, because he's older than me, he has studied, he has knowledge, and he even quotes verses from the Quran and accounts from the prophet' [at the lectures]." The young prominent figures possess certain positions that give them authority, credibility and reputation, and they are generally referred to as having appealing and likeable personalities (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 135-6).

The radical milieu also contained older adults, who influenced decisions about actions such as partaking in the Syrian war. For example, some of the respondents mention a specific man around age 40 without mentioning his name. One respondent provides an example: "One of the men in the mosque. He could have been your father—I mean, he was a lot older than you. He kind of took care of the young people. He was a bit like the young people and had fun together with them." Another respondent continues: "We were interested in him because he had something to say on the board [in the mosque]; that is, we hoped he could give us more opportunities and get things through. That's why we took his side." A third interviewee also comments on this authoritative figure: "Quiet imam. Also really good at giving lectures. In fact, I really liked his Friday prayer. Because his rhetoric—when he spoke—you really listened

when he spoke, and he mastered Arabic really well.” Finally, one more respondent shares his experiences, speaking about the same influential figure: “Yes, yes—he attended the Quran readings and lectures. He was responsible for them. He was respected in Aarhus and Copenhagen. I think it was because of his knowledge.” One of the police officers I interviewed supports these accounts:

[We] could see that it was an adult male, around 45 years old, with strong opinions ... and when we talked about social conditions in Denmark with him, he was committed and articulate and had sensible views. Right up until we started talking about the U.S. role in the Middle East. You could see it was something he really, really didn't like. But he was such a charismatic figure and had a huge impact on this young milieu, because he helped them make the right decisions and with respect to what they should believe. So overall, they followed their own [beliefs], but he influenced them, he had views, he had opinions, he had charisma. But he got sick and died in 2015. (police officer)

A youth worker also told me about an older influential figure. He knew of three brothers, two of whom joined the conflict in Syria as foreign fighters. The two older brothers tried to encourage their little brother to join and take up arms, but he refrained from doing so. Instead, the youth worker became confidential with the younger brother. He continues: “I know that there's an imam who has been in running contact with the brothers while in Syria, where the younger brother sometimes got information through the imam's son about how they [the two older brothers] were doing ... The imam was in his mid-40s or around 50 years old” (youth worker). I argue that the radical milieu consisted of different role models and influential figures of different ages, providing peer-to-peer influence and adult-to-peer impact. In the previous chapter, we established that some influential members legitimized terrorist organizations, spoke about different forms of activism and provided different kinds of encouragement to engage in high-risk activism. The leading figures of different ages appear to transmit knowledge as well as influencing specific directions for actions, such as entering the armed conflict in Syria.

#### 7.1.4. Time Consumption and Settings

The “brothers” spend considerable time together in different settings, unfolding a complex *activity field*; that is, an individual's exposure to certain settings, individuals and activities in a given period of time (Wikström et al., 2010; Wikström et al., 2012: 67-70, 252). As we saw in the previous analytical chapters, the members engaged in various activities, including everyday social activities, the religious culturing, and deliberation and watching online videos about foreign politics, conflict zones and so-called “honorable actions.” These

activities unfolded in *neutral* and *open* settings, such as the city center, schools and neighborhoods and social media platforms, as well as *radicalizing magnets* and *radical micro-settings*, such as the mosque, apartments and encrypted platforms (Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Malthaner, 2018; Lindekilde et al., 2019). In this section, I focus on the preferred places for socialization and try to identify the amount of time the participants spend together.

The participants spend most of their time together in the mosque, at school and in their neighborhoods in a dynamic, overlapping relationship. Coman (Interview 2) explains: “You had a stable relationship to the mosque and went there when you had time—after school, when you had free time or on the weekend.” Fawaz (Interview 1) describes similarly: “We go to school every day, and most people are there. Other than that, just the area where we lived.” Overall, the interviewees mentioned that the mosque became the shared reference point and most frequented setting. It was designated as the most comfortable and relaxed setting for three reasons. First, for Hakim (Interview 1), the mosque constitutes a moral dimension: “What ultimately brought us together was Islam. We were there because we were supposed to stay away from other places that didn’t make sense ... And we were somewhere where we could be in a safe environment—and not getting involved in bad stuff. That’s why we were in the mosque.” The mosque functions as a safe haven or “shield,” representing a pure and unadulterated setting in contrast to the surrounding, polluted society, which holds temptations and dangers (Rippin, 2005: 109). Second, Dawoud (Interview 3) adds the dimension of belonging: “It was a nice place to be. You could be yourself. There were a lot of people who were like you and were Muslims.” In that sense, the mosque constitutes a meeting place for likeminded Muslims (Malthaner, 2018). The third aspect encompasses a practical and financial dimension: The members can use the mosque facilities for free. However, one of the groups in the radical milieu especially desired their own space, “a place that was 100% for the young people that wasn’t a mosque” (Bassam, Interview 1). In that context, the group was offered a clubhouse that had formerly been used by a motorcycle gang by a relative who was engaged in gang-related, criminal activities. Fawaz (Interview 2) goes on and describes his experiences: “We were always together anyway—now we just had to be together there. So we just had to clean up and then we had our own place.” Coman (Interview 2) comments on the same situation: “So we went to check it out ... The mood varied a little—some guys wanted to move, some didn’t. But it never amounted to anything. The renovations would have required a lot of work, energy and money... I mean—it was really dirty and falling apart. And there were lots of weeds, bushes and mess. You could see that it had been empty for a long time.” For some time, the possibility of taking over a motorcycle gang’s clubhouse marked a new beginning in several ways. First,

the brothers start tidying up the old clubhouse to create their own space, focusing on the aesthetics as they did so. It was to be nice and neat. Second, the potential new place constituted a moral dimension. The clubhouse was to serve as a base for practicing a shared religiosity and developing their moral context. They wanted to become emancipated, free from other adults and able to enjoy complete autonomy and freedom to cultivate their faith. In that sense, the clubhouse symbolized the opportunity to create a religious “home” of their own (Douglas, 1991; Suhr, 2015). In contrast, the group sought permission from the board of their mosque to borrow the facilities for shared activities. Third, the act of cleaning up was also something of a symbolic reflection of an attempt at cleaning up one’s own life, as some of the participants had a past riddled with petty criminal activities and lived at odds with Islamic teachings (Suhr, 2015).

The interviewees also elaborate on the time they spent together. Fawaz (Interview 2) provides an example: “I was in the mosque almost every other day ... So the people I went to school with—I saw them every day except for weekends. And maybe we did sports in the weekend. So there were people I saw every day. Maybe not the same people, but I saw some people every day. Because all of the people I was together with—they were also part of it.” Basam (Interview 2) shares his own experiences: “We met in the mosque every day after school with guys from school and some others. Just a couple of hours after school.” Coman (Interview 2) presents a similar example, stressing variation according to the specific activity: “Well, if we got together, then it would be for a few hours. If it was just to pray in the mosque, then maybe half an hour. It all depended on what we were going to do.” Dawoud (Interview 1) provides an example focusing mostly on the weekends: “I went there [the regular mosque] around three times a week, and of course when there were lectures ... Every Friday we met for a social evening, where we had different activities. We’d be together for 5-6 hours.” Ebi furnishes a similar account:

We spent a lot of time together ... I always made sure to get home by midnight [during the week], but I was out late on Friday and Saturday ... You could be together for 7-10 hours. You could easily be together in the weekend, then come Friday at 9 pm [to the mosque], sleep there [and then] go home again the next morning. Or make it to the mosque for an arrangement at 6 pm on Friday. Then we were 10-15 of us remaining after cleaning up. And then perhaps we could go for a drive, get some food, spend some time together, return to the mosque and talk. Then maybe we’d sit there until 2-3 am at night before driving home. (Ebi, Interview 1)

In Wiktorowicz’s study of *al-Muhajiroun*, a radical organization in England, he emphasizes how the *al-Muhajiroun* activists engaged in a range of weekly

activities, including lessons, dawah, protest rallies and other events. They spent substantial amounts of time every week around the al-Muhajiroun (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 47-51). In a similar vein, the participants spend substantial amounts of time together partaking in various activities that unfold inside and outside the mosque, including interaction on a daily basis in schools and afterwards in the mosque and the neighborhoods at least for a couple of hours. The weekend socializing appears to be more intense, at least 5-10 hours per day, including regular and more spontaneous activities, lectures and religious teachings, sleepovers and just hanging out. In contrast, Ali and his group spend most of their time together in their apartment, as the group felt most comfortable and relaxed in their private surroundings:

Of course we could see each other in the mosques on Fridays, but the discussions and thoughts flowed unhindered in the apartment ... We couldn't have such discussions in the mosque. So we thought, where can you express your thoughts? A place where you don't fear reprisals—where you're not reported. That's really why we chose the apartment ... We could meet at the apartment almost every day, 2-3 hours at a time. A little different ... And every weekend. We met especially often during the summer. Several days in a row. (Ali, Interview 1)

Parallel to previous research emphasizing how individuals decide to “move underground” to avoid interventions from the authorities and the like (Della Porta, 1995, Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014), Ali and his group isolate themselves in a *radical micro-setting* exemplified by their apartment (Malthaner, 2018).

Overall, the excerpts show how the members provide a wide range of opportunities for socializing in various settings for many hours every day. While I am aware of how there is uncertainty associated with the actual hours spent, from the examples in my data, I argue it is fair to say that the participants engage in intense socialization across open and closed settings, spending a great deal of time together. This demonstrates a spatial mobility that takes advantage of the available settings and opportunities throughout the city (O'Brien, 2003). These activities also include virtual behavior, to which I return below. They actively use the opportunities to socialize with one another, where one activity flows into the next without clear-cut breaks. These activities unfold across geographic areas, involve likeminded people, and both regularly scheduled and spontaneous activities. The members' mobility is fluid and flexible. They meet both in smaller numbers and in larger gatherings, ranging from open settings to more closed and secluded settings. The complex *activity field*, which is an individual's exposure to certain individuals and settings in a given time period (Wikström et al. 2010; Wikström et al., 2012: 67-70, 252),

results in intense socialization in different kinds of settings that furnish opportunities for the formation of new social ties (Snow et al., 1980;; Bouhana & Wikström, 2011; Malthaner 2018). As we have already seen, the socio-physical dimension is not detached from the online dimension, but rather an integrated part of it. I elaborate on this below.

## 7.2. “Onlife”: the Interplay between Online and Offline Dimensions

Obviously, broadband, wireless connectivity and mobile computing offer a wide range of opportunities for communication and gathering information in a rapid exchange of large amounts of data (see, e.g., DiMaggio, 2001; Wellman et al., 2003 and Meyen et al., 2010; Haythornthwaite & Kendall, 2010). Similar to others, the internet has become an integrated element in the everyday lives of radical groups (Ducol, 2015). Moreover, the participants integrate online activities in their daily lives and various activities, as mentioned above. With a few exceptions (Brachman-Levine, 2011; Conway, 2012; von Behr, 2013; Ducol, 2015; Valentini et al. 2020), the focus has generally been on the role of the internet in radicalization and terrorism, focusing on fundraising, disseminating propaganda, instilling fear, recruitment, training, sharing information and inspiring terror attacks or militant jihad abroad, and planning via either open accessible platforms, such as surface websites, forums and social media, or concealed material available through special software and encrypted communities, platforms and websites—the so-called dark web (see, e.g., Sachan, 2012; Nouri & Whitting, 2014; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2016; Aly et al., 2017; Macdonald & Lorenzo-Dus, 2019; Gross, 2020). Moreover, other studies have outlined a predominant emphasis on the “real-world” realm containing “radicalizing hubs,” such as mosques, prisons, schools or asylum centers, for the purpose of recruitment (see, e.g., Taarnby, 2005; Bakker, 2006; Neumann & Rogers, 2007: 33-45; Vidino et al., 2017: 83). I argue that these approaches disintegrate the online and offline elements as two distinct and separate entities. However, instead of clinging firmly to a “false dichotomy which artificially distinguishes cyberspace from the ‘real world’” (Ducol, 2015: 90), I argue that “radicalization is better conceived as a process that unfolds online, and offline, simultaneously in a hybrid *onlife* space ... This *onlife* space seamlessly integrates elements that pertain to both the online and offline spheres” (Valentini et al. 2020: 2).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Valentini et al. adopt the expression “onlife” from Luciano Floridi (see, e.g., Floridi, 2015: 51-63).

The members combine a mixed “onlife” space in several ways. In addition to the examples presented throughout the analysis, I extend additional examples to illustrate the blending of “onlife” in the following. First, the members spend time together online while together in the “real” world. Dawoud shares his experiences from recurrent social gatherings in their regular mosque:

When we meet for these Friday night social evenings, 2-3 people might be sitting in a corner, watching a video ... It might be a video with a woman in Syria who is holding a child and calling on Muslims around the world. Or it could be a video showing a group of *mujahad[u]n* [holy warriors], who are at war against some of Bashar’s [Assad] forces. (Dawoud, Interview 1)

The example also shows the dynamics of creating radical micro-settings embedded in larger gatherings. In this case, a small group of persons does not retreat to a closed and secluded physical setting, such as an apartment. Instead, the small group withdraws within a shared gathering in an open setting to create a more private space. Wireless connectivity and mobile computing, for example, furnish dynamic and flexible usage, thus helping such opportunities to become possible. Second, at other times, they interact in online social life while being separate physically. Ali provides an example, elaborating on “virtual jihad” aimed at defending Islam or battling in a non-violent behavior, such as fighting perceived lies or distorted views about Islam (Awan, 2010):

We each had our own personal profile [on the Facebook chat], but we coordinated the discussions kind of aggressively. So you wrote [on the telephone]: “Hey, I’m debating now.” “OK—I’ll come in now, I’m coming now,” and then you were up and running. We acted as though we didn’t know each other, but you really supported each other’s arguments. So that the guy felt as though he was one against many. (Ali, Interview 1)

Third, online activities sometimes also unfold alone while being physically alone. Fawaz (Interview 2) expands on some of his experiences in the following way, using easily available websites: “Google—if there were some titles that were interesting and exciting, you could read there. Something you liked ... then maybe I found a website, then you searched for something. And that led to something else. Yes, sometimes you could find some articles on the websites.” The quotes show how the “brothers” engage in a “hybrid *onlife* space” (Valentini et al., 2020: 2). Ali sums up the function of fusing online and offline elements:

I mean—we were close to one another 24/7. You had your cell phone in hand, so therefore you also had each other by the hand, you might say. You could be doing your laundry, but you were still present [online] ... The digital [togetherness]

meant the most. Because the physical contact was limited by time. We could easily be in digital contact [at night] ... That meant that when we came [next day], we could refer to the same thing. (Ali, Interview 1)

The virtual and physical realms are intertwined, which furnishes a certain presence. The online element can be integrated in face-to-face activities as well as ensuring that the connection continues when physically separate. Social life continues via the constant interplay between online and offline elements, where “onlife” behavior overlaps in time and space. Further along these lines, the members’ “onlife” behavior within the radical milieu seems to be a natural extension of their daily life and existing practices (Gergen, 2002; Subrahmanyam, 2008; Campbell & Mia Lövheim, 2001; Seiler, 2014; Floridi, 2015). One explanation may be that the younger generations, who have been born and raised in a technological and digital environment, interact with media naturally and actively (Prensky, 2001; Masanet, 2019). Bassam (Interview 1) illustrates this point: “So when you’re a teenager in the oos, you have a flair for technology and computers. So we also had some groups on different media. Encrypted as well as non-encrypted.” The members use their acquired skills and practices, employing them in different activities within the radical milieu. This also means that the activities unfold in safe spaces. I return to this aspect in the sections below.

### 7.3. Social Control Affordances

The radical milieu forms a moral context that does not support the pro-legal norms of mainstream society. The radical milieu includes role models, influential persons and other authority figures who either abandon or lack the means to exercise such mainstream, law-relevant rules and norms. In contrast, distinct control mechanisms are developed based on the specific moral compass (Bouhana, 2019b). The members are also focused on maintaining their fellowship. For this purpose, the participants exercise their own coping strategies to preserve their *free spaces*, thereby keeping their activities “out of sight and away from the notice of local authorities” (Cross & Snow, 2011: 119) as well as social control mechanisms to live up to an internally mutual commitment. In the following, I attend to the free spaces and coping strategies before moving on to behavior regulations within the radical milieu.

#### 7.3.1. Coping Strategies to Preserve Free Space

As already mentioned, I build on research in the social movement literature emphasizing the establishment of *free spaces* by radical activists (Polletta, 1999; Cross & Snow, 2011). In my study, the participants in the radical milieu

try to hide their discussions and activities from the authorities, school system and their families. Thus, they develop certain coping strategies to preserve their safe spaces (Polletta, 1999; Cross & Snow, 2011). The coping strategies unfold in general terms as well as in more specific contexts. Bassam describes an overall frame for careful behavior:

Make yourself as unnoticeable as possible. So you could to do what you had to do. Some were better than others ... Some general rules were to avoid defying your parents, because that would draw attention; don't complain too much about what's going on in society—be a good citizen; don't stand out. Have a humble approach to things. There was no need to shout about everything. (Bassam, Interviews 1 and 2)

Summing up in general terms, Ebi (Interview 1) explains how talking about politics and high-risk activism require caution: “If you were talking about some [specific] things, then your phone had to be put a long way away, because the PET [Danish Police Intelligence Service] were bugging the phones. You could never talk about political issues on the phone because it could be dangerous.” There is no need to make oneself conspicuous or “loud.” Instead, the general coping rules promote a particularly disciplined behavior for keeping calm and remaining under the radar of the bearers of mainstream pro-legal social controls (Malthaner, 2014: 644). As already established above, smaller groups or cliques isolate in intimate *radical micro-settings* such as apartments to discuss and prepare for such things as engagement in the Syrian war. They chose such secluded places to keep their activities hidden from the broader society, including their families, schools and the authorities (Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Lindekilde et al., 2019). However, the location of the apartment was not insignificant. The members preferred certain areas in which they could blend in with the surrounding residents and be more anonymous. Bassam (Interview 1) continues, providing an example of an undesirable location: “In fact, we had also just got an apartment [very close to Aarhus University]. And then someone thought, ‘is that [place] a good idea?’, because there were more ethnic Danes than immigrants there ... He was pressed to move away from there very quickly. He moved out to [western Aarhus].” The members of the group appear to be very conscious of where they live. Some city neighborhoods are considered improper for social activities, as they will risk attracting attention to themselves from neighbors and authorities. Operating in such settings may jeopardize their *free spaces* (Polletta, 1999; Cross & Snow, 2011). I return to the broader surroundings in Chapter 9 concerning the characteristics of certain neighborhoods surrounding the radical milieu. In addition to closed and secluded apartments, the sense of safe spaces be-

comes dynamic and fluid as the participants also navigate in more open settings, such as their regular mosque, schools and families as well as the online element. Their preserved spaces become embedded in public settings where their coping strategies prompt disciplined and cautious behavior.

### 7.3.2. Turn Off Your Phone and Put It Away When Talking about the Syrian War

The members were cautious about talking about potential actions in public and they were aware of state surveillance. One of the interviewees provides an example: “I was sitting in the mosque and saw some of the elders having private conversations with some other young people. They put their phones away, because they knew that they were being monitored ... And the people who did so—they were the same ones who ended up in Syria.” The same respondent elaborates on a specific incident related to his participation in the war in Syria:

It could be in the mosque or in a restaurant where there happened to be someone who knew I had taken part in the conflict in Syria. . “May I ask you something?”

And I thought, “Yes, of course.”

And then he asked, “should we put our phones away and go outside?”

And I said, “Yes, yes.” I knew what he wanted to ask me.

And then he asked, “How did you get there? What did you do?” And that kind of thing.

The radical milieu has basic ground rules for behavior to secure the *free spaces* and defend their companionship. This includes being attentive to the risk of discussing politics or the idea of joining the Syrian conflict. They learn how to keep activities away from the attention of the authorities (Cross & Snow, 2011).

### 7.3.3. Be Nice, Keep Your Head Down at School and Get Good Grades

Many of the participants are in school or pursuing different training or education at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Ebi (Interview 2) elaborates on proper conduct at school: “Of course you knew that you shouldn’t be doing strange things in class, such as seeing all kinds of videos ... We just had to be like we usually were—be the same students, wear the same clothes, and laugh together with our classmates.” These coping strategies concerning school settings are important, as the members attend school on a regular basis. In the previous chapter, we saw a critical stance toward those who attended school

wearing traditional Islamic clothing. Doing so may attract unnecessary attention from the teachers, thereby jeopardizing their safe spaces. My data from schoolteachers who experienced students who either participated in the Syrian conflict or were convicted under the Danish terrorism legislation supports the pattern of security measures. Several teachers mentioned how they were unaware of some of their students' high-risk activities. One teacher recounted how "we've had young people who have ended up in Syria, and they weren't the ones who made the most noise. They've been some of the quiet ones who have been out on the sidelines and felt a little marginalized ... I know of two cases from my time. They were precisely the more anonymous ones who remained under our radar" (teacher, secondary school). Another teacher presents a similar example, elaborating in detail on how the student navigated under the radar considering another conflict zone:

The student who should have caused the most concern—we didn't notice him. He was a very well-raised, polite and smart kid I had in my class. It had never occurred to any of us that he was considering the things he was obviously preoccupied with. He stood out in relation to his clothing, but not in how he acted—quiet, nice, attentive and conscientious. At no time did he ever say anything in relation to discussing religion or society or democracy. So it came as a shock to suddenly find out, "Shit—this is actually a former student who is accused of planning terror!" ... That was around two years after he had graduated and had continued on with gymnasium. (teacher, secondary school)

Another teacher comments on the same student and his later development:

We had a student who was arrested [and ultimately convicted of violating the Danish terrorism law]. That was really strange, because he was one of my students, and I didn't have any suspicions whatsoever. I mean—he wasn't one of the ones we had suspicions about whatsoever. He was quiet, but polite and nice. Also a smooth type, but not one who made any trouble at all. And then suddenly he was arrested—and none of us really knew anything. And the class didn't understand anything. We later found out that he had been in charge [of financial assistance for his biological brother's departure]. It was something that was put in connection with the al-Shabaab terror organization. (upper secondary school teacher)

Some members seem to apply the coping instructions to perfection at school or even in different schools, although failing to avoid state surveillance. Based on my data, it would also seem as though the teachers and school principals had no idea of how many of the members of the radical milieu were actually enrolled in their schools. This is explained by the group's security culture.

Other reasons for going unnoticed may be explained with reference to a structural aspect of the school system that seems to make it easier to avoid attention. In the second account above, the teacher adds how

I met the mother at a single school-home meeting. She just asked, “Is he doing his work?”

“Yes, he is.”

“Is he smart?”

“Yes, he is. It would be great if he participated more in class.”

But that was about it. (teacher, secondary school)

Further along these lines, Bassam also told me about how the general maxim was to perform well in school and get good grades. This strategy was meant to assure parents, as they focused on getting good grades and being able to get into good university programs (Bassam, Interview 3). There seems to be a predominantly focus on good grades as an indicator of either well-being or failure to thrive among some teachers and some parents alike. In the words of one teacher: “After a while, as we became aware [of how they had taken up arms in the Syrian war], I was left with a feeling of ‘how could such academically proficient, intelligent young people in a country where they could read, write and see television be so stupid?’ To this day, I still don’t understand it” (teacher, upper secondary school). The participants seem to have figured out that as long as they behave and get good grades, they can avoid negative scrutiny. This might also be explained by some teachers and frontline workers being anxious with respect to initial contact and lacking the tools to engage in dialogue with students who subscribe to a literalist religiosity. I return to this dimension in Chapter 10 concerning implications for practice. However, not all of the participants are always able to avoid the local authorities. During the developments in Syria, the frontline workers seem to become more proficient with respect to detecting, handling and reporting their concerns about radicalized students to the authorities.

#### 7.3.4. Lying to Parents

The coping strategies also include parents. In addition to hiding most activities, not disclosing specific friendships and the mosque, not speaking about grievances, and refraining from rebuking their parents for their lack of religiosity (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 56), the members of the radical milieu validate lying to their parents as a strategy for avoiding unnecessary attention that potentially threatens the *free spaces* (Polletta, 1999; Cross & Snow, 2011). All of the

respondents who entered the conflict in Syria lied to their parents about their participation (Greenwood, 2018: 177). One respondent explains in detail:

When the time came to leave, we all agreed to lie to our parents, because they didn't want you to go down there or have anything to do with the war and to be worried ... So I just said, "I'm going [out of town] with some friends." Some days passed, and then they realized I wasn't coming home.

Another interviewee tells of how he initially asked his parent's permission and then defied them when they did not give it to him: "And my parents were incredibly against it. Which meant that the first trip fell apart. So a few days later, I bought a new ticket and ended up having to lie to be able to go. I told my parents that I was going to a social event—and then we went down there. I was gone for five days before they heard from me." According to Islam, parents are to be treated with loyalty and respect, and the Quran emphasizes love toward and care for parents next to one's faith in Allah (Omran, 1992: 27; Franceschelli, 2016: 105-7, 126-34). In certain circumstances, however, this moral standard can be overruled. According to Abdallah Azzam, who was a globally influential figure in the radical milieu and one of the most inspiring persons within the transnational radical militant *Salafism*, the focus on protecting Muslims overrides "a number of obligations that would otherwise govern inter-personal relationships," including the parent-child relationship (Maher, 2016: 38). The need to help fellow Muslims becomes an individual obligation (*fard al-ayn*) in response to either an external intruder, political events or suppression with no permission from parents (Hegghammer, 2020: 293-306). This maxim seems to be practiced by the humanitarian relief workers and the foreign fighters alike. Since the parents do not subscribe to the specific religious interpretation practiced by the brothers, the need to lie seems inevitable in order to maintain their safe spaces for deliberation and preparation as well as actually participating in the war in Syria.

### 7.3.5. Using Encryption Services and Dark Web Platforms

The security culture is also seen in online activities. In Chapter 5, we saw how encrypted forums were used to share certain types of documents to avoid being detected by the authorities. Imad (Interview 1) continues, providing a similar example of the focus on open as well as encrypted communication services: "Most [communication] was on Facebook—that was the line of contact. PallTalk and Skype were also used ... One also used encrypted [platforms], such as Telegram and WhatsApp ... Those who supported IS [the Islamic State] or had something to hide used encrypted [platforms]." The digital mes-

saging unfolded on a variety of social media platforms. However, some communication took place via encrypted services that facilitate an easy exchange of private messages and information in safe settings. Such practices flow as “end-to-end encryption” in which the content is solely exchanged between sender and receiver (Weiman, 2016; Graham, 2016; Bloom et al., 2017; Shehabat & Mitew, 2018; Valentini, 2020).

Communications with friends participating in the Syrian conflict also unfold via open and encrypted services and equipment. According to one interviewee, “there were some international groups down there that had some pages you might like on Facebook and had people down there who reported on what was happening. It was on the militias’ front and the civilians’ front ... So we used different things. We wrote on Facebook, but we quickly dropped that, because we knew that we were being monitored. So we switched to Skype, because it wasn’t monitored and was more secure. The guys down there advised us to use Skype for security reasons.” The interviewee later left for the war in Syria. The communication with his friends who were already in the conflict zone—reports of their experiences and the general atmosphere—may have also impacted his decision to leave. Moreover, the excerpts in this section unfold how these online security strategies contribute to preserving the *free spaces* in the attempt to keep the authorities at bay (Cross & Snow, 2011). The use of dark web platforms and encryption services introduces an extra dimension, broadening the outreach and extending the toolbox of communication means.

### 7.3.6. Expectations and Regulations among the Radical Members

The participants also set expectations for each other and exercise internal regulations aimed at maintaining a mutual commitment and ensuring the continued existence of their fellowship. Overall, the expectations included the rejection of human-made laws and democracy, advocating instead for an Islamic government. The ability to follow orders was also valued (Bassam, Interview 3). More specifically, there are also expectations regarding friendship: “Loyalty that one should not hurt each other, not snitch on one another, not create problems for each other. So it was trust, loyalty—it was respect” (Ali, Interview 1).

Everyday reminders concerning a current Islamic topic or a recurring topic that needed extra attention to practice a pure version of Islam were an integrated part of the radical milieu. These reminders functioned to preserve the mutual commitment to the specific religious interpretation. Coman (Interview 1) provides an example: “If there was a reminder, you could just gather

where there was focus on a particular topic in Islam. It might be how important honesty is. Or how it's a blessing to pray. Or one of the five pillars of Islam, about death or the next life. Sometimes these reminders could be a few minutes long or a whole lecture." Dawoud (Interview 3) relates the reminders to being a good Muslim: "You remind each other: 'Remember to be a good Muslim. Remember to be a good person and to do this and that'." Coman (Interview 4) continues, articulating the reminders as a supportive approach: "So it was difficult if you had no support and reminders about why you abstain from [certain] things and why you are that way. So in that way it was a support ... rather than criticizing anyone or controlling anyone." I argue that the members exercise *informal social control* on each other; that is, the processes through which the individuals are expected to conform to the common norms and values in accordance with the moral context of the radical milieu (Moore, 2001: 323). I argue that the informal social control has positive and negative consequences. The reminders, lectures or teachings function as supportive foundational elements to the participants who have recently embraced Islam. In this case, the controls have a positive impact on their fellowship and shared values. In line with previous research on right- and left-wing radicalization (see, e.g., Sprinzak, 1998; Simi & Futrell, 2009; 2010), a more general sense and in addition to the developments in the radical milieu, however, I argue that the informal social control becomes negative, as digression from norms seems to be policed via different kinds of disapproval. As Ebi explains:

You kept each other on a short leash in relation to religion. Someone wearing pants that were sagging a little too much—someone might say, "Hey, don't do that. Pull your pants up. You're changing. What's happening to you? Take care of yourself." I remember being friends with my classmates and girls on social media, where there was someone who said to me, "Brother, don't do that. They comment on your post—you should delete them as a friend ... So if someone had just cut off their beard—"You shouldn't do that." (Ebi, Interview 2)

The members seem to keep each other under tight control in relation to specific moral boundaries. The moral compass sets the stage for approval and disapproval of behavior (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 57-8). The informal social control serves two purposes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the participants promote individual salvation via religious faith and practices (Crone, 2008). However, the path to salvation is collective, to some extent. Each member is responsible for their own salvation, but they can also influence and motivate each other via positive and negative social control. Hakim (Interview 1) comments on the collective aspect: "You go out and talk about Islam so that more people can end in Paradise and not go to Hell ... it's no secret that we all die at some point, but we help each other to end up in the right place." Beyond the

nurturing principle, however, the informal social control centers on the maintenance of their fellowship, which is based on a specific scripturalist and literal interpretation of Islam. Informal social control is also exercised externally throughout society, especially during *dawah*. Ghadi (Interview 1) expresses his experiences as follows: “If there were some young gangsters standing on the corner ... or you saw some of the young people [in the night life], you might stop them and say: ‘It’s really important that you get more out of life—get an education, try to see if you can make it to the mosque more often. Don’t waste your life just walking around and staggering around town’.” The participants function as “religious controllers” who pressure other same-age persons (Kühle & Lindekilde, 2010: 72). It is important to note that religious social control—both positive and negative—is not particular to Islam; informal social control is a well-known practice across religions (see, e.g., Ellwood, 1918; Shelton, 1971; Ainlay, 2001; McGuire, 2002).

## 7.4. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have extended the attachment and social control affordances of the radical milieu. I have elaborated on how the radical milieu functions as a setting that facilitates opportunities for connection-making to other like-minded people. In Chapter 4, we saw how socialization into the radical milieu unfolds, but socialization is also relevant within the radical milieu. More specifically, new friendships and new social networks are established, and new role models and attachments to influential figures are developed. The new friends meet and socialize in various open and closed settings, such as the city, schools, neighborhoods, the mosque, in apartments and online. The role models and influential figures facilitate peer-to-peer impact and adult-to-peer influence.

The radical *Salafists* also spend substantial amounts of time together in different settings engaging in a “hybrid onlife space” (Valentini et al., 2020: 2). They unfold mixed communications and socialize in a dynamic and fluid manner. Instead of clinging firmly to a false dichotomy whereby the internet and face-to-face domains are understood as two distinct, separate entities, I argue that the radical milieu encompasses a complex “onlife” approach. As outlined in my theoretical model in Chapter 2, the online element is a systemic factor that provides a general structure to everyday life. In addition, the virtual domain is actively intertwined in the physical social contact by the participants in the radical milieu. The online element provides prompt and easy outreach to other brothers and to a wide range of networks of likeminded radical

Salafists in little time. Additionally, the online realm enables different possibilities to connect and socialize in time and space. Hence, such sophisticated integration of offline and online spheres contributes to intense socialization.

My investigation also underscores how the role models and influential figures or other authority figures either abandon or lack the means to exercise mainstream law-relevant supervision. More specifically, my findings support research within social movement theory emphasizing how the radical activists want to create safe or free spaces to maintain their fellowship and to avoid attracting the attention of the authorities. In my examples, the brothers try to hide their activities and discussions from their families, schoolteachers, the municipality and the police. Thus, I argue that coping strategies or a security culture with specific behavioral rules and guidelines are developed in accordance with the specific moral compass and promoted actions. The safe spaces contribute to *echo chambers*. This means that individuals' ideas resonate with those of other, likeminded individuals. Instead of receiving feedback contrary to their own views, perceptions are thus reinforced (Sageman, 2008: 87; O'Hara & Stevens, 2015). Moreover, echo chambers foster *group polarization* via processes of cascading information, ambiguity reduction and social comparison (Sunstein, 2009: 22-30). In addition, the members of the milieu navigate in closed or isolated settings, such as small groups in the mosque, apartments or encrypted platforms online as well in more open and public settings, such as at school, in restaurants or on conventional websites. This dynamic set of activities suggests a sophisticated set of disciplined coping strategies.

Final, the combination of preserved “onlife” spaces and a strict security culture help to keep the authorities, parents and schools in the dark—at least for some time. The nature and affordances of the virtual dimension lack effective controls, and the state authority struggles with monitoring and evidence-gathering (Weimann, 2015: 141-6, 238-74; Bloom & Daymon, 2018; Bouhana, 2019b). In addition, the participants set mutual expectations and exercise religious social control—both positive and negative—on each other, which is intended to ensure individual salvation via a collective process and to maintain their tight-knit fellowship. The moral context sets the stage for the approval and disapproval of behavior. The next chapter focuses on the process of exiting the radical milieu and the collapse of the milieu itself.

**PART IV:**  
**AWAY FROM THE RADICAL MILIEU**



## Chapter 8: Individual Exit and the Disintegration of the Radical Milieu

In the previous chapters, I elaborated on the pathways to the radical milieu and the participation therein, and I focused on the exposure to the radical milieu. More specifically, the combination of religious activities and social ties in certain settings, such as mosques, schools, youth and sports clubs and the neighborhood in general, contributed to individual trajectories toward the radical milieu. I also investigated the socializing affordances of the radical milieu, including cognitive, moral, attachment and social control affordances. More precisely, how group dynamics and socialization formed ideas, beliefs and opinions through an interplay of online and offline domains that allowed certain forms of activism as viable action alternatives. The socializing affordances were inextricably connected and developed simultaneously. In this chapter, I elaborate on the exit process and the disintegration of the radical milieu.

The main purpose of this chapter is to investigate empirically the individual factors influencing individual exit as well as the contextual factors contributing to collective exit or, rather, the disintegration of the radical milieu. As mentioned in Chapter 2, I build on previous studies within radicalization research, as my investigation suggests that certain “push” and “pull” factors influence the exit of the individual group member. Exit is conceptualized as involving de-radicalization and disengagement (Hansen & Lid, 2020). The beliefs and ideas of some individuals may shift away from embracing a radical and/or violent ideology (de-radicalization) and/or they may begin to engage in different behaviors, breaking off their participation in radical and/or violent groups (disengagement) (Bjørge & Horgan, 2009: 3-4). Exit processes may also result in the *re-integration* into mainstream society—via government actors and local multi-agencies—when there is no evidence supporting the prosecution of returnees who have volunteered in the Syrian war or similar conflict zones or after imprisonment should such evidence exist (Hemmingsen, 2015b; Horgan, 2015; Meines et al., 2017).

**Table 12. Individual exit and the disintegration of the radical milieu**

<b>Exit</b>	<b>Factors</b>
Individual exit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individual level (“push”)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Disillusionment with other members and actions</li><li>- Unmet expectations</li><li>- Loss of faith in the underlying moral context</li><li>- Exhaustion</li></ul></li><li>• Individual level (“pull”)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- New priorities and aspirations in life</li><li>- Supportive parents and moderate friends</li><li>- New social ties</li><li>- Educational and job opportunities</li><li>- Establishment of family</li></ul></li></ul>
Disintegration of the radical milieu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Group level<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Internal feuds among members</li><li>- Disputes with the mosque</li><li>- Dwindling numbers (i.e., participants exit permanently, reengage in other radical milieus, die in the Syrian war or are still active in the war in Syria)</li><li>- Lack of charismatic leaders</li><li>- Unsuccessful recruitment of new members</li></ul></li><li>• Systemic level<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Developments in the Syrian war, including the Islamic State violence</li><li>- Increased monitoring from authorities of safe spaces</li><li>- Lack of support from broader surroundings, e.g., local communities within neighborhoods</li><li>- Negative media coverage</li><li>- Political focus on antiterror legislative and punitive measures</li><li>- Increased imprisonment of participants</li></ul></li></ul>

As previously outlined, the theoretical framework of the dissertation informs relevant perspectives concerning the exposure to and participation in the radical milieu by integrating individual and contextual perspectives in explaining radicalization. The theoretical framework provides useful perspectives for examining individual exit and group disintegration by integrating and relating individual and contextual perspectives. For analytical purposes, the distinction between individual and contextual factors with respect to exit seems beneficial, although they interact and overlap in fluid transitions (Horgan, 2009b). Table 12 shows how individual exit and the disintegration of the radical milieu unfold due to a combination of different individual and contextual

factors. In that sense, this chapter brings forward two interconnected contributions. First, when it comes to individual exit, the interviewees experience different “push” factors, such as unfulfilled expectations, disillusionment with other members and the use of violence, loss of faith in the religio-political ideology and exhaustion. The individual “pull” factors include positive interactions with moderate “outsiders,” opportunities for educational and employment, new priorities and aspirations in life and family life (see, e.g., Jacobson, 2008; Della Porta, 2009; Bjørgo, 2009, 2011; Rabasa et al., 2010; Horgan, 2009b; Della Porta & LaFree, 2012; Altier et al., 2014; Windisch, 2017). The interviewees start to frequent new settings and engage in new social ties and activities, which in turn lead to new priorities and opportunities. Second, contextual factors at both the group and systemic levels influence the disintegration of the radical milieu. Some members are imprisoned, while others die in Syria or Iraq or remain in the Syrian conflict. Internal feuds increase among the members, and there are disputes with the mosque. Influential figures in the milieu die, are imprisoned or leave the milieu, which hurts the recruitment of the next generation. Other factors contributing to the disintegration of the radical milieu include the developments in the Syrian war and the influence and consolidation of Islamic State, the increased political focus on punishment, media coverage about Syrian volunteers, increased monitoring from authorities and the lack of support from local communities in certain neighborhoods (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 213; Horgan, 2009b; Bjørgo, 2009; Della Porta, 2009; Della Porta & LaFree, 2012; Doosje et al., 2016). These findings suggest that the interaction between micro-, meso- and macro-level factors can help us to understand individual exit as well as the disintegration of the radical milieu from a socio-ecological perspective.

In addition to these fluid and transient exit processes, some of the interviewees also refer to members who “exit” involuntarily in the sense of being excommunicated. In such cases, expulsion is due to a breach of orders and rules, unpredictable behavior and/or a violation of trust. Another respondent elaborated on potential reasons for being expelled: “We talked a lot about snitches. Snitch—that means to really support democracy, to turn your brother in to the authorities. Just going against Islam.” It is difficult to predict whether expelled members will de-radicalize or if they will re-enter new milieus or specific groups. Some de-radicalize with the help of family members or the authorities, helping and affirming new outlooks (Garfinkel, 2007; Beg & Bokhari, 2009; Meines, 2017). Others drift, as their beliefs and ideas remain unchanged or radicalize even further, ultimately re-engaging in other milieus or groups. In such cases, the inability and/or lack of possibilities to adopt a new worldview, social roles and a new sense of belonging will increase the risk of re-engagement (Della Porta & LaFree, 2012; Horgan et al., 2016; Altier et

al., 2019). Other individuals may drift or isolate themselves, further radicalizing and leaving for a conflict zone or conducting a violent attack (Lindekilde et al., 2017; Lindekilde et al., 2019).

In the following, I focus on the fluid and transient individual exit and the disintegration of the radical milieu. First, I elaborate on the individual exit. Next, I expand on the disintegration of the radical milieu. Since this chapter includes the respondents who performed high-risk activism in the Syrian war, I exclude the fictitious names to provide additional protection of identity. I also include accounts from respondents who did not perform humanitarian relief work in the conflict zone. In order to avoid the risk of a reader possibly narrowing down who left for the Syrian conflict, I also exclude their fictitious names for further protection.

## 8.1. Individual Factors Contributing to Individual Exit

It is uncommon to be able to identify a single reason for leaving the radical milieu; exit is multi-faceted, based on a combination of different push and pull factors. Overall, six of the interviewees exit while the radical milieu still exists, while three interviewees exit because the milieu disintegrates. Five of the six interviewees who left while the milieu still existed took part in the Syrian conflict. As previously mentioned, they seem to share certain patterns in common, emphasizing unmet expectations, disillusionment and the rejection of the moral context. Moreover, new aspirations and priorities in life, supportive parents and new social ties influence and reinforce a new lifestyle (Della Porta & LeFree, 2012; Windish et al., 2017).

### 8.1.2. Individual “Push” and “Pull” Factors—Part I

One interviewee’s exit develops gradually over a few years, a combination of different factors seeming to lead to his withdrawal. He articulates his disillusionment with the group, especially the violent members:

You realize who supports what and what kind of ideology they had. And then later it started to develop ... I started to read and study and learn more about Islam, and that opened my eyes ... When you can check the sources yourself and can see that it was just a lie—that also made it a little easier to filter things. Because your black-and-white approach started to break down ... You realized how people in the milieu acted differently than they preached. Or had some attitudes that were completely different from your own values. Especially when there were people who knew nothing but violence and aggression.

He continues, focusing on his engagement and unmet expectations in the Syrian war:

In the end, it just opened your eyes to the conditions down there. After a while, I could see that [my participation] didn't make a difference ... And then you became a little aware of how there were better ways to help. And that's where my interest for [a specific education] was stimulated ... When I got back, I knew I wanted to get away from this milieu. I actually decided to leave the group and get out.

This interviewee's accounts indicate that a series of events, experiences and decisions "culminate in changes to the individual's level of commitment and a gradual termination of [his] involvement" (Horgan et al., 2016: 2). He expresses his disillusionment with the moral context and specific actions within the radical milieu, such as the need for violence (Disley et al., 2012; Altier et al., 2014). Acquiring more religious knowledge also seems to influence a certain mindset, discouraging specific beliefs and ideas. The interviewee also experiences infighting, double standards and lying between members, all of which contribute to his exit (Della Porta, 2009; Windisch et al., 2017). Despite experiencing these disappointments, he nevertheless leaves to join the Syrian war. His involvement may partly be explained as an attempt at distancing himself both physically and psychologically from the rest of the group. Another reason may be that he believed in the necessity to participate to make a difference for the sake of God and for his own sake as a "doer." Apparently, he became disillusioned with what he was doing. In that sense, the interviewee seems to start re-interpreting the dominant message within the radical milieu: that members must help fellow Muslims in need whether by taking up arms or humanitarian aid in order to fulfill their Muslim duty and to become a better Muslim. Thus, this dawning re-orientation apparently turns the perception of the inner non-violent *jihad* upside-down. The religious worship, such as the "ritualizing" of the entire lifestyle, religious training and lectures, initially seems to facilitate moments of *collective effervescence* among members; that is, participants "moved by a common passion" that evokes certain intense emotional states "to an extraordinary degree of exaltation" through past, present and future points of religious references and actions (Durkheim, 2001 [1912]: 157, 162). The members establish ideal moral guidelines, glorified images and expectations that render leaving for Syria a more concrete and appealing opportunity. For some members, however, participation in Syria is associated with an experience of dissonance between the realities, the moral context and the encouragement of high-risk activism promoted within the milieu. Likewise, other respondents experience disillusionment regarding the moral context and the promotion of violence within the radical milieu. One respondent told me of how when he acquired more knowledge about Islam, it became easier to be critical and to detect misinterpretations by prominent figures, thus initiating new religious perspectives.

Failed expectations regarding participation abroad also seem to shatter any sense of making a difference in the conflict in Syria. These frustrations mount to the point where exit seems sensible (Horgan et al., 2016). In that sense, participating in the war zone provides a period of *intellectual doubts*, making people contemplate how to spend their lives in the future (Doosje et al., 2016). As previously quoted, one interviewee starts thinking about potential study plans and future job opportunities, thus contemplating new directions and priorities. Another respondent experiences similar doubts in a refugee camp: “It hit me that I can make a difference—but not from there. And the difference is not with weapons. I want to build something with what I have—and give to people who have not. And to tell them: ‘Listen, you don’t have to kill to get these things’. And you have to be smart. Not aggressive.”

Other factors also contribute to exit. The respondents working in the refugee camps are in contact with their parents via telephone. One respondent details these conversations: “I often called to talk to my parents. Convinced them, saying, ‘I’m fine. I’m not at war. And how are you?’, and you could hear them gradually taking it easy ... At the time, they called and were really struggling and kept crying. And so I thought I’d go home soon.” Another interviewee provides a similar account, recollecting a particular phone call with his parents:

Then I had a conversation with my parents that changed everything. We had an entirely normal conversation without tears. And then they told me: “You’re actually very young—what about coming back and getting an education? We’re your family, we need your help.” They recognized that I had good intentions but that it just wasn’t the right thing to do. That helped me.

For the next while, thoughts were running around in my head: “Maybe I should go back. Maybe I should get an education and [job].” It was a lot of the same work [in the refugee camp], so I started to understand what my parents were saying. It’s not as though I’m making a big [difference] ... And then I decided to return to Denmark.

Although some respondents described how their parents scolded and yelled at them, this group of respondents maintained contact with their parents while abroad and engaged in positive interactions and constructive conversations, thus providing room for warmth and caring (Bertelsen, 2015). This connection to moderate “outsiders,” such as their parents, plays a significant role in their de-radicalization and disengagement. Although damaged, the maintained family ties contribute to exit in several ways. For example, the parent-child bond secures an attachment to outside influences and perspectives other than those promoted in the radical milieu. Similarly, the family bond expresses a reciprocal, unconditional, loving relationship: Parents don’t give up on their

children—they hold tight (Jacobson, 2008; Bjørgo, 2009; Disley, 2012: 11-12; Bertelsen, 2015; Sikkens et al., 2017). The positive interactions with parents also seem to facilitate *intellectual doubt* (Doosje et al., 2016). One respondent experienced the loss of a fellow relief worker at a field hospital, which led him to reconsider his future. He was in contact with his parents at the time: “When I was in touch with my parents, I could hear and see that they weren’t happy [with my participation]. We talked about the future and children ... Then I started to miss them and thought: I want to go back [to Denmark].”

In addition to the aforementioned factors, respondents also refer to how they began to feel burned out. One respondent emphasizes this feeling, which triggered the process leading to his withdrawal: “The atmosphere became really crappy. There was too much hate in the environment. Too many people were angry with society, complaining—but what were they doing themselves? People had loose, empty ideas. Too little education ... I found that people came and tried to convince me to come back. But I couldn’t do more.” This is indicative of the emotional and physical exhaustion linked to intense devotion (Della Porta, 2009). This individual reaches out to his family and friends outside the milieu, who help him to leave, initiating new priorities, including education and employment. Overall, the combination of failed expectations or disillusionment with other members and violent actions together with the rejection of moral imperatives as well as new priorities and supportive parents and friends seems to initiate a gradually de-radicalization and to reinforce disengagement (Bjørgo, 2009).

### 8.1.3. Individual “Push” and “Pull” Factors—Part II

After initiating the exit process, “pull” factors reinforce exit pathways. One interviewee reaches out to the local authorities working with the prevention of radicalization in Aarhus:

I contacted [the local info house]<sup>20</sup> and got in touch with a [police officer] I had heard of. And that he might be able to help me. And he said that he [was part of] this anti-radicalization team. We had a long conversation ... The team helped [me] to get out of the milieu. They gave me the tools and the things I needed to

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<sup>20</sup> The Info houses assess incoming concerns about potential radicalization, and they plan and coordinate the prevention of radicalization on an individual level. The employees assess whether the concern primarily relates to ordinary social challenges, radicalization or whether the concern is a security matter. Info houses have been established in each police district in Denmark. The employees assess concerns about radicalization and the use of violence that may have been put forward by front workers, families, civilians or agencies. The Info houses bridge police districts and municipalities (Hemmingsen, 2015b).

move on. Because I know that there were people who struggled to find a job. Like—maybe they lacked a driver’s license to be able to get a job. And then they helped you to get an education or to move.

The interviewee seeks help and receives individual counselling and the tools required to exit the radical milieu together with support and guidance to begin an education. Similarly, another returnee contacts the local radicalization prevention program via the aforementioned police officer. In this case, the returnee reintegrates into his education and is assigned a specialized mentor, whose role “is to be a well-informed, interested and empathic sparring partner, with whom the mentee can discuss questions and challenges of daily life as well as the ultimate concerns of existential, political and religious questions of life” (Bertelsen, 2015: 243). The mentor also supports inclusion regarding relationships, tasks and activities in the mentee’s everyday life. In that sense, the mentor plays an important role in the de-radicalization and disengagement processes by emphasizing the personal and societal dangers, the rule-breaking, as well as the pitfalls and risks of conducting high-risk activism, even if humanitarian relief work may seem sympathetic, honorable and unselfish. Mentoring is voluntary (Bertelsen, 2015). The respondent comments on how engaging in the prevention program and mentoring had a positive impact:

At first, I thought my mentor was a bit of a spy and didn’t really like him. But after a while I started to get to know him and he could put things in perspective for me and help me with my thoughts. We talked about everything and he was honest with me. That helped a lot. And when I sometimes needed it, I could also call and talk with the [police officer] ... This mentor—that’s helped me a lot. So I look at life and religion differently today.

In addition to a supportive family, the respondent engaged in positive interactions with “outsiders,” such as establishing a trustful relationship to his mentor and the police officer who supported his exit (Garfinkel, 2007; Bertelsen, 2015; Meines et al., 2017: 19-20, 35). Such “soft” interventions—in contrast to prosecution, punishment or exclusion from re-entering one’s home country—have been widely criticized as “rolling out the red carpet” for returnees by helping with housing, education and jobs (see, e.g., Faiola & Mekhennet, 2014; Ravn, 2015). Applying a pragmatic logic, however, re-integration efforts for returnees are initiated “when prosecution is not an option, e.g., due to a lack of evidence on criminal activities or of criminal liability” (Meines et al., 2017: 4). Doing nothing in such cases potentially leaves the individual alone and isolated. This may risk re-radicalization or further radicalization,

frustration and re-engagement or a return to the radical milieu. Other respondents exit more individually; they receive counselling but take responsibility for their own exit. In some examples, they receive support from families and preexisting moderate “outsiders.”

Disengagement processes also seem to implicate a new start in life. As one of the interviewees explains, “at the same time, I found a sweet girl and started a family ... and when you have your own family, you don’t need anything else... Obviously, I was also busy with my education.” This was the same time at which the radical milieu divided over the emergence and consolidation of Islamic State. This contributed to strengthening one interviewee’s de-radicalization and continued disengagement: “It just meant that I totally withdrew. I didn’t actually go to the mosque for months. More than half a year went by before I went to any mosques at all.” His loyalty is shifting as he rejects the radical milieu and embraces family values (Altier et al., 2014). The quotes also indicate how new priorities and new positive ties, such as establishing a family, result in new personal priorities and a desire to live an ordinary, quieter life. Likewise, completing an education and prospects for future employment typically become part of the interviewee’s re-orientation (Bjørge, 2009; Disley et al., 2012: 12; Altier et al., 2014). This interviewee also receives assistance from the local radicalization prevention program in Aarhus, which supports and tries to provide tools for disengagement and a peaceful transition into mainstream society (Horgan, 2015). During his disengagement, however, he also experienced a sense of ambivalence; enjoying his new life while at the same time missing his old friends and everything they experienced together: “I just stopped socializing with those who were part of it. Some of them were just against it: ‘Why? And is anything wrong?’ You could say something to some of your close friends. I just told the others that I was busy.” Leaving can be difficult for the devotees after having invested substantial time and social belonging in the radical milieu (Kenney, 2018: 172-3). However, the respondent’s family and authorities seem to function as anchors (Beg & Bokhari, 2009). The interviewee mentioned above emphasizes a new place of worship: “I still identified as a Muslim and wanted to practice the religion. So after half a year or so, I started going to other mosques. So I had an alternative—that made it easier.” Another respondent provides a similar account of how “if I were to do something for myself and my future, I’d make some changes in my circle of friends ... I was still a Danish Muslim, so I started to attend my new mosque. And there I met some new guys. We formed a relationship.” Both interviewees find alternatives to the former mosque with a more moderate interpretation of Islam. These alternatives meet a need, as the young individuals are still practicing Muslims.

One respondent stands out with a unique exit experience. He did not travel to the war in Syria. In contrast to the examples above, his de-radicalization, disengagement and reintegration unfold after engaging in the local anti-radicalization program in Aarhus. He was contacted by the aforementioned police officer working with radicalization prevention, who wanted to talk to him. The respondent recalls how the police officer was “so insistent. And I thought that the only way I could get him out of my life would be to show up.” While the respondent thought that the meeting was about an old police investigation, the police officer actually “apologized that the case had been handled unprofessionally.” At the time, the respondent was angry, and told the police officer

“I’m thinking about leaving Denmark.”

[The police officer] replied immediately, “No, no—I don’t think you should leave. You belong in Denmark. You’re just as Danish as I am.”

“I thought, ‘What the hell is he talking about?’ And I said to him, ‘listen, I’ve been subjected to racism and discrimination.’ The conversation continued, and the police officer suggested mentoring.” The respondent continues: “So then I’m thinking, ‘OK, what kind of a snitch is that? I mean—he works for the police? I’m interested in putting a face on him, so of course I agree to meet with this ‘mentor’.”

Although skeptical, the respondent starts meeting with his mentor regularly.

I told him my whole story. And I started with the volume pretty high—but I wasn’t interrupted, which meant that the volume automatically fell and I thought, “OK—there’s someone listening here.”

Afterwards, the mentor said, “you’ve been treated unfairly. But what you’re doing is only hurting yourself. It’s not the police, it’s not society—you’re only making it worse for yourself if you don’t take up the fight and make it back to the surface.”

The mentor also told me that he had been subjected to racism himself and various things—but that he managed to improve every single day and move on with his life ... The mentor said, “it really depends on which reality you choose to make it.”

The respondent engages in a positive and productive relationship, the mentoring providing a platform for listening as well as challenging and presenting alternative opportunities for the mentee. The respondent and his mentor continue discussing different topics, such as religious beliefs and practices, being a Muslim in Denmark, and how to deal with one’s religiosity. And the respondent recounts of how “there, he really hit on something. I had actually seen everything black-and-white—and here’s someone with an ethnic minority background who is integrated and can see how I feel—but at the same time finds a

way out of the mess.” At the same time, the respondent is still part of the radical milieu: “I said to the group, ‘this guy—he’s crazy. He can argue and so on’. And they told me, ‘use these quotes and use those quotes’—but everything just bounced off him.” On the one hand, the respondent is undertaking his de-radicalization; on the other, he is still part of his radical group, which obstructs and delays his de-radicalization with reference to his socialization in his radical group. Although the respondent tries to make his mentor give up by changing his phone number multiple times without notice and not responding to calls, after approximately six months of mentoring, “I lowered my guard and said [to my mentor]: ‘What do I need to do to get out of all this?’ He replied, ‘continue your education—and make sure you let me know if I can help you with your homework. Keep fighting—you have opportunities in front of you’. And then I started to work hard and immersed myself in things.” Simultaneously, the respondent also witnesses the brutal and, in his view, meaningless violence of the Islamic State, which affected his exit: “I found out that they beheaded people—killed people, regardless of whether you are woman, Muslim or something else. You’re the enemy if you’re not in their group. I dropped out immediately.” As previously mentioned, the emergence of Islamic State seems to influence this respondent in the sense that he rejects the violent ideology, simply having had enough (Bjørge, 2009; Doosje et al., 2016), which triggers his disengagement: “I gradually started pulling back... I was contacted, where they said, ‘What’s happening? Are you OK?’ And I said, ‘I’m busy with school and my family also needs me’. So they said, ‘For sure—just help them as much as you can’. That was relatively easy for me. I wasn’t in bad standing when we parted ways.” He continues, focusing on his future life: “The more things fell into place, the better I felt about myself, because I was thinking that I had something to look forward to. I finished my education, got a job and got married... It was good that I got some help. Even though I [really] hadn’t asked for it. It was lucky that [the police officer] called me.” The mentoring went on for a couple of years, and the exit process combines a set of factors. The respondent starts to engage in positive and supportive interactions through mentoring, which contributes to initiating a reorientation of his worldview and rejection of the religio-political foundation of the radical milieu as well as growing disillusionment with violent actions. The respondent redirects his time, energy and efforts toward his educational opportunities, his family and his new relations, including his mentor and future wife. Thus, he begins to envision a new life (Garfinkel, 2007; Horgan, 2009a; Altier et al., 2014).

## 8.2. Group and System-Level Factors Contributing to the Disintegration of the Radical Milieu

The individual factors that influence individual exit simultaneously contribute indirectly to the disintegration of the radical milieu. On top of which group-level and systemic-level factors in combination also undermine the milieu. One interviewee explains how “a lot of people left. They didn’t have time anymore. People didn’t care anymore. People couldn’t stand it anymore ... people took sides, went against each other. I’ve heard that people got into fights and snitched on each other because of the conflict in Syria.” There were also reports of disillusionment with other members, internal conflicts and fighting, and many members simply burning out. Participation in the radical milieu takes its toll, which leaves the individual group members emotionally and physically drained. The constant pressure and demands from their joint activism together with keeping their activities hidden from families, authorities and schools becomes exhausting (Bjørge, 2009; Kenney, 2018). And the quote indicates how some members redirect their lives and energies. The formerly undivided loyalty to the radical milieu splits and, instead, other aspects of life help produce a way out (Altier et al., 2014).

It also becomes increasingly difficult to preserve the free spaces. One respondent observed how “there was [pressure] everywhere—from the mosque, the police, parents and the news. And that’s also why I think things disintegrated.” The security culture fails. The authorities, families and media uncover the *free spaces* within the radical milieu, which is no longer removed from the surveillance and control of institutionalized authorities (Polletta, 1999: 1; Cross & Snow, 2011: 119). The hidden, high-risk activities therefore become public, which makes it all the more difficult to conduct activities in the future. Likewise, after his return to Denmark, another respondent experiences different things that contribute to his exit and new direction in life:

But you could feel that [the circumstances] weren’t the same again. People in [the immediate community] mentioned, “look at that guy—he’s been to Syria. He’s this and that. What has he done down there? Maybe he has helped? Has he [fought for] IS [the Islamic State]?” And that got me to pull back—because I didn’t like it. Also because [the politicians talked] a lot about how those returning from Syria will be prosecuted. I couldn’t get past that—and because I had a lot of goals in my life that I wanted to achieve.

At the same time, the respondent observes how the use of violence becomes the dominant reason for going abroad. “People started going to Syria to go to war. [At first] I thought it was cool. But you start asking yourself questions ... [At a point in time,] I knew that this wasn’t my purpose. So I totally cut my

ties to them.” Several contextual factors seem to contribute to the respondent’s exit, including the lack of support from certain neighborhoods that used to provide indirect or overt support to the radical milieu, and the politicians increased their focus on anti-terror legislative and punitive measures, especially for individuals who have participated in the Syria conflict (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 213). Moreover, an interest in exit is also affected by Islamic State’s increased and consolidated role in the Syrian war as well as new aspirations and opportunities on the individual level. Other interviewees also refer to the lack of support from their local community. As one respondent explains, “I remember when I came into [a certain ethnic] environment, where everyone knew each other. Then they were also aware that I had [participated in the Syrian war], and where people were saying behind my back, ‘be careful with him—don’t hang out with him’. Knowing that there were parents who were warning their kids about being together with me. That was very hard.” Likewise, another interviewee experiences the same resentment and lack of support. He elaborates on how he was accused of facilitating a young Muslim’s departure to the Syrian war: “I don’t know how—or who—he had contacted. But his family got really upset and angry. They thought that I had something to do with it. We were just seen as being the same group—everyone. There was no difference between who was where and who [did what]. So they thought I was the one who helped him to get away.” The local communities in certain neighborhoods become more alert regarding the situation in Syria and more attentive to the returnees. Parents increasingly view the radical milieu as a bad influence that will bring the lives of other young Muslims in danger, and they withdraw their support. I return to the neighborhoods in the next chapter concerning the characteristics of certain neighborhoods and the radical milieu.

Concurrently, the remaining participants are decimated in both numbers and prominence. One respondent explains how “the ones who were left were confused. They didn’t know what to do. There was just a lot of mess. Nobody was in control of anything.” The strong sense of brotherhood vanished together with any sense of belonging. The remaining members lack the ability or dedication to maintain the activities of the radical milieu, missing leadership, agenda and direction. The implosion of the radical milieu seems inevitable as the remaining members become increasingly isolated, losing support in the local communities as well as failing to recruit the “next generation” of activists (Della Porta, 1995; Cronin, 2009). Many formerly influential figures die or abandon the milieu. The East Jutland Police support the argument that the group disintegrated due to these factors and developments. One police officer explains:

it was a mix of people leaving and disagreeing about many things. Partly because of the dialogue many people had with us, which contributed to internal disagreements. Some people went to other cities and became hardcore. After all—it's outside the police district. Some guys tried to leave programs. Some did [well], some didn't ... [The milieu in Aarhus] kind of looks like the “Call to Islam” path in [Copenhagen], which also had a “heyday” period. But when key people disappeared or looked elsewhere instead of keeping the community together—well, then the community disintegrated (Police officer, East Jutland Police).

Another police officer echoes this perception and adds other factors: “The environment disintegrated [for several reasons]. Some were able to move on. We were able to help others to move on [via] exit to another town and a new network. But we still have some sitting in prison. Who go in and out of prison” (police officer, East Jutland Police, Interview 1). Another interviewee adds “everything is disintegrating in that group. It disbanded itself during all of the chaos in the media.” In sum, I argue that the combination of different individual, group and contextual factors interacts and influences the disintegration of the radical milieu. Fractures begin appearing on the surface of the tight-knit milieu, and the robust sense of companionship falls apart due to different factors. Several members leave permanently or join the radical milieu in another city, while others are imprisoned. Some participants die in Syria or Iraq while others are still active in the Syrian conflict. Conflicts develop between the remaining members and with the mosque. The parents also become more proactive, trying to prevent their youth from being further radicalized and leaving for Syria. The negative media coverage becomes intense, casting light on the radical milieu and covering individual cases and foreign fighters. The remaining members are unable to re-establish the popularity and position the group in response to the different challenges, crises and the lack of leadership.

Three respondents who did not participate in the Syrian conflict leave the radical milieu because it falls apart. As one respondent explains, “There wasn't any group [left]. It was destroyed.” After the interview, the respondent commented on the period that followed, when he felt as though he was in a vacuum. He had opportunities to become involved in other radical milieus, which was tempting because he felt “institutionalized” and had certain incorporated ideas, behaviors and actions. Reorienting his worldview and pursuing a new life course in mainstream society was difficult after many intense years of living in accordance with the radical morals of the milieu (Della Porta, 1995). Conversely, the disintegration of the radical milieu triggered *intellectual doubts* (Doosje et al., 2016), which provided opportunity for exit. The respondent felt disillusioned with his past activities. He was exhausted and had had enough. He began to revise his own role and became increasingly interested in pursuing new directions in life.

### 8.3. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have investigated individual factors contributing to individual exit together with group and systemic factors that influence the disintegration of the radical milieu. We saw in Chapter 4 that the paths to the radical milieu were distinct and complex. Likewise, the pathways for leaving the radical milieu are distinct and multiple. The different factors interact in fluid and gradual transitions. The respondents start questioning their ideas and actions as well as the radical milieu, which has served as an existential anchor and provided friendships, loyalty, a *Salafi* orientation and numerous experiences. A wide range of open and closed settings and relations in the radical milieu used to function as their safe haven, life foundation and socialization. In the individual exit process, the interviewees more or less reboot their life trajectories, frequenting new settings and rebuilding pre-existing ties as well as establishing new social ties. They exit under the influence of different “push” factors, such as disillusionment with other members and actions, unmet expectations, a loss of faith in the underlying moral context and exhaustion. Add to this the “pull” factors that contribute to their reorientation, such as new priorities and aspirations in life, educational and employment opportunities, supportive parents and new social ties, and establishing their own family. When it comes to individual exit, de-radicalization generates disengagement. All of the respondents are at some point in time in contact with East Jutland Police as part of a preventive strategy, informing the members of the radical milieu of the dangers and risks of leaving for the conflict in Syria as well as the support available in the mentoring and exit programs. The East Jutland Police also meet individually with members who returned from the Syrian war. More specifically, some interviewees receive individual counselling and tools to exit the radical milieu and/or engage in mentoring as part of their exit program. Two respondents take part in the intervention program and formal mentoring, which facilitates positive influences and re-integration. Other respondents receive individual counselling but continue the exit process on their own with help from supportive families and friends outside the milieu. Some participants manage to navigate more or less individually, others require counselling and sparring, while others yet need specifically tailored intervention to leave the radical milieu. I return to this point below in a discussion of the implications for practice. However, mentoring guarantees neither de-radicalization, disengagement nor re-integration. A potential interview person from the radical milieu who initially accepted but later declined to take part in an interview was briefly part of the formal mentoring program. He has also been in continuous contact with the police and the radicalization prevention program, and he has served time in prison. On an anecdotal note, I mentored this individual

for about two months, before he terminated the mentoring process. Either he was not sufficiently motivated to change his path or I was unable to connect with him. Here, it is also worth noting that I met him at the point in time when the radical milieu stood strongest. Prior to engaging in this case, I knew that this individual had been an influential figure in the milieu for a long time, which could possibly make mentoring more difficult (Rabasa et al., 2010: 36).

I argue that the radical milieu in Aarhus disintegrated due to a number of different factors. Several participants exit permanently or re-engage in other radical milieus in other cities, while others end up in prison. Some members die in Syria, while others are still involved in the conflict there. In addition, the internal security culture fails, as the members are unable to keep their activities and safe spaces hidden from the authorities, their families and the media. Local communities also become more alert to the engagement or future engagement of young Muslims in the Syrian war, resulting in an increased monitoring of children and youth and the withdrawal of their indirect or overt support. At the same time, internal feuds among the members develop and the clashes with the mosque intensifies. The milieu is decimated numerically. Prominent figures die, are imprisoned or leave the milieu. The remaining members are unable to re-establish the popularity and attractiveness of the milieu. They seem unmotivated, and the lack of influential figures seems crucial in the failure to recreate the structure, direction and recruitment of next generation. Hence, this combination of factors influences the fluid disintegration of the radical milieu. In addition, the fluid use of “hybrid onlife spaces” (Valentini et al., 2020: 2) changes dramatically as the priorities and activities progress in new directions with education, employment and new social ties. Finally, I have demonstrated how the social ecological theory of this dissertation can also function as a framework for analyzing de-radicalization and disengagement. I argue that the combination of different individual, group and systemic factors interacts and influences individual exit as well as the disintegration of the radical milieu.

PART V:  
THE BROADER SOCIAL AND  
POLITICAL SURROUNDINGS

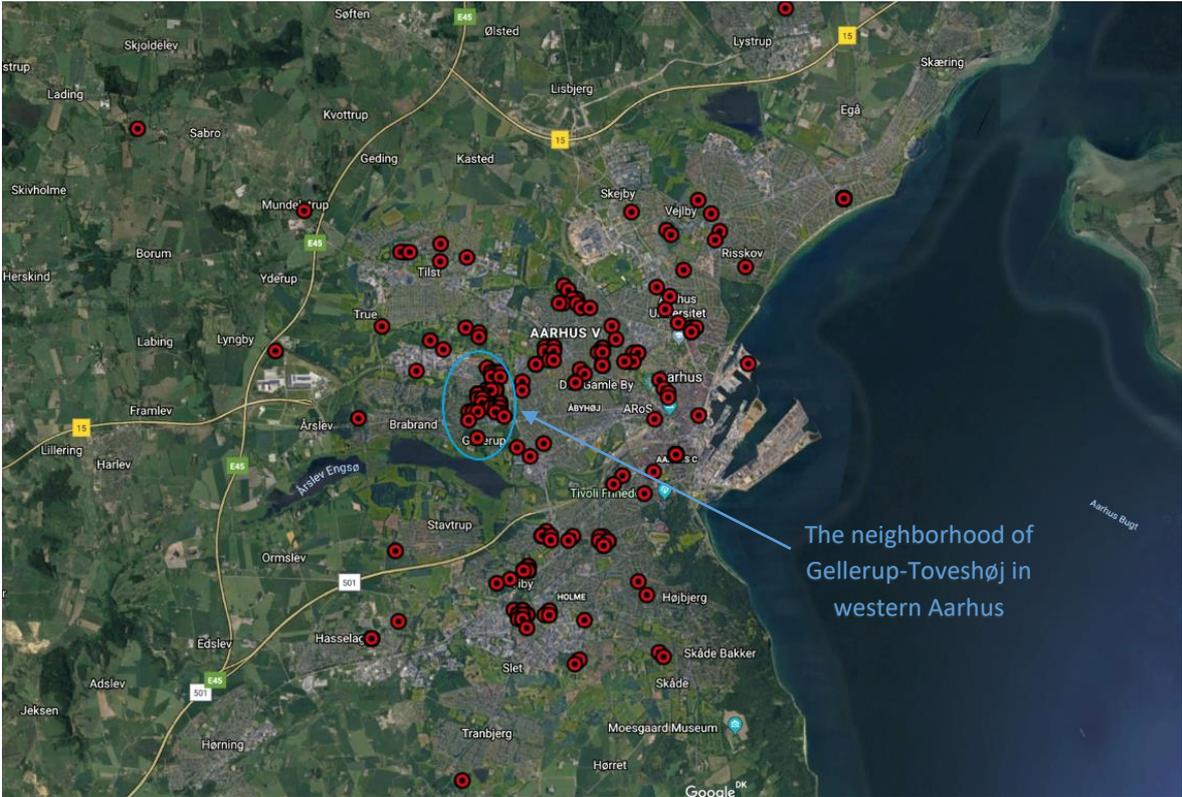


## Chapter 9: Why There? The Emergence and Sustenance of the Radical Milieu in a Particular Neighborhood

The radical milieu is connected to factions that are willing to engage in high-risk activism, both violent and non-violent, and it has links to the broader social and political surroundings (Malthaner & Waldman, 2014). In that sense, the radical milieu “emerges in a wider conducive environment and takes root in specific local conditions. Knowledge of the local context thus deeply matters” (Coolsaet, 2017: 3). Throughout the analytical chapters, we have seen how the members of the radical milieu develop a sophisticated and complex *activity field* (Wikström et al., 2010), wherein they engage in various activities with other likeminded individuals in different settings throughout Aarhus in a given period of time. However, the participants spend most of their time together in the mosque in Gellerup-Toveshøj in western Aarhus. The previously introduced restricted police data unfolds the distribution of radicalization in Aarhus. To recap, figure 7 below shows how problems of radicalization exist in the entire city. On the other hand, the figure also reveals an uneven geographical distribution of radicalization in western Aarhus and, more specifically, within my case area rooted in the disadvantaged neighborhood of Gellerup-Toveshøj. This indicates how the geographical distribution of radicalization can concentrate locally (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020). Moreover, the observations in Aarhus seem similar to observations in other European countries. The radicalization problem seems highly geographically concentrated in disadvantaged neighborhoods in European cities such as Molenbeek in Brussels, Angered and Bergsjön in Gothenburg and Sparkbrook in Birmingham (Weine & Ahmed, 2012; Gudmundson, 2013; Varvelli (ed.), 2016; Coolsaet, 2016; Coolsaet, 2017; Vidino et al., 2017: 82-92; Klausen, 2019; Bouhana, 2019b).

These observations beg the question as to why the radical milieu emerged and was sustained in Gellerup-Toveshøj in western Aarhus and not in another neighborhood?

**Figure 7. Distribution of preventive talks with East Jutland Police force regarding concerns for radicalization based on residence in Aarhus, 2010-17**



Throughout the dissertation, I have applied a social ecology perspective. I have investigated the connection between individuals and their immediate surroundings in producing radicalization, focusing on how socialization—both physical and virtual—between individuals in different settings in a given time produces situations, opportunities and actions. In this chapter, I continue to apply a socio-ecological paradigm and address the question “Why there?” by focusing on the neighborhood’s characteristics. Certain neighborhood characteristics may contribute to the emergence of a radical milieu. Research in neighborhoods and radicalization can thus contribute new knowledge about the local context and strengthen efforts aimed at preventing radicalization. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to discuss the neighborhood-level factors and patterns of interaction that might explain the emergence and sustenance of the radical milieu in one neighborhood rather than others. More specifically, I focus on the differences in neighborhood-level factors as possible explanations in addressing the “where of radicalization.” The uneven concentration of radicalization suggests a focus on the broader surroundings in which radicalization takes place and the processes through which neighbors interact in different neighborhoods. The social ecology perspective is relevant in terms of explaining why radical milieus emerge and are sustained in particular neighborhoods (Bouhana & Wikström, 2011; Bouhana et al., 2016; Bouhana,

2019b). The distribution of criminal activity is also uneven; disadvantaged or “vulnerable” neighborhoods in Western countries typically being characterized by higher-than-average crime rates. For decades, criminology research has conducted social-ecological investigations into neighborhoods, crime and risk behavior, emphasizing how the interplay between individuals and their environments produces particular (potential) actions (see, e.g., Stark, 1987; Farrington et al., 1993; Triplett et al., 2003; Wikström et al., 2012; Weerman et al., 2018; Rotger & Galster, 2019; Sampson & Levy, 2020). For my use, *neighborhood* consists of “a geographic and, hence, ecological section of a larger community or region that usually contains residents and institutions and that has socially distinctive characteristics” (Sampson, 2013: 8). Within this logic stemming from criminology, neighborhood-level factors and interaction shape the neighborhood structures and social activities (Sampson, 2003), which may or may not facilitate the emergence of radical milieus (Bouhana, 2019b).

As already mentioned, my investigation is part of a larger international research project, *The Social Ecology of Radicalization: A Foundation for the Design of CVE Initiatives and Their Evaluation (SER Project)*, which has several sub-projects. The Danish part of the SER Project consists of two sub-projects. My qualitative investigation has contributed to the larger project with a socio-ecological analysis of the pathways to the radical milieu, the affordances of the milieu, the exit process from it and the ultimate disintegration of the milieu. I have carried out semi-structured focus groups and individual interviews with residents and professionals in the Gellerup-Toveshøj neighborhood, which is also located in Aarhus Vest, with a high concentration of radicalization. This qualitative data collection has been intended to tap into the neighborhood interaction. The second sub-project is a quantitative investigation conducted by Lasse Lindekilde and Kim Mannemar Sønderkov, which focuses on the emergence of radical milieus in particular neighborhoods. The quantitative investigation combines the previously mentioned police data and community surveys with 426 residents from three disadvantaged neighborhoods in western Aarhus, thus exploring the uneven geographical distribution of radicalization in Aarhus and what neighborhood-level factors can possibly contribute to explaining the concentration of radicalization in certain neighborhoods (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020). For this chapter, I draw on some of the survey results presented in *The Social Ecology of Radicalisation in Aarhus*, a report which summarizes the findings of two sub-projects of the Danish part (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020).

In the following, I first present parts of the Danish SER Community Surveys, including two selected results that indicate a positive relationship between internal social cohesion and the concentration of radicalization as well

as a negative relationship between informal social control and the concentration of radicalization. Next, I elaborate on my insights from the focus group interviews and individual interviews, studying neighborhood-level factors and interaction in Gellerup-Toveshøj. Here, I discuss the selected results from the survey in the light of the more in-depth and detailed insights from my qualitative investigation of Gellerup-Toveshøj.

The survey investigation captures a broad spectrum of neighborhood-level characteristics and patterns of between-neighbor interaction. As with all survey data, however, what it may present in terms of scope and breadth, it lacks in depth and nuance. In contrast, the qualitative focus groups and individual interviews can help us to understand the survey correlations of the neighborhood characteristics and add more complexity to the selected results in analyzing why the radical milieu materialized in Gellerup-Toveshøj. Within this logic of data triangulation, the different types of data supplement each other. The surveys, the focus groups and individual interviews share the same ambition to investigate the “where of radicalization.” In the focus groups, I used exercises or activity-oriented questions, such as vignettes, articles and images, to facilitate group discussions and reflections about relevant neighborhood-level factors, which are also in focus in the community surveys. The surveys and focus group interviews focused on certain neighborhood characteristics, including social interaction and activities, social trust, social cohesion, feelings of safety, neighborhood problems (e.g., crime, gangs and radicalization), informal social control, the physical features of the neighborhood (e.g., empty areas, unlit roads and walking paths), and intergenerational dynamics between parents and children. Thus, it is relevant to discuss selected findings across the two kinds of data.

## 9.1. Selected Findings from the Danish SER Community Surveys Regarding the Prevalence Rates of Radicalization in Particular Neighborhoods

Before turning to the selected findings from the Danish SER Community Surveys, I will briefly introduce the sampling strategy and survey data collection.<sup>21</sup> Parallel to my investigation, Lindekilde and Mannemar Sønderkov conducted The Danish SER Community Surveys working together with Epinion, a polling company. The surveys were conducted with residents from the Bispehaven, Herredsvang and Møllevangen neighborhoods in western Aar-

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<sup>21</sup> For a full description of sampling cases, data collection and analysis strategy, see *The Social-Ecology of Radicalisation in Aarhus* (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020).

hus. The three comparable neighborhoods were selected from a list of “vulnerable neighborhoods” (categorized on the basis of high unemployment rates, low education levels, low income levels, high crime rates and high ethnic diversity) provided by Aarhus Municipality. Local knowledge about where problems with radicalization have emerged, newspaper reports and previous interviews with local police also influenced the choice of neighborhoods, and the three neighborhoods were prioritized due to geographical proximity. The Danish SER Community Surveys focus on comparing neighborhoods marked by significant radicalization (Bispehaven and Herredsvang) against a neighborhood (Møllevangen) that is comparable in terms of vulnerability but with fewer radicalization-related problems. The survey data is combined with the aforementioned police data, which was used to calculate the prevalence rates of radicalization in the Aarhus neighborhoods,<sup>22</sup> identifying hotspots such as Gellerup-Toveshøj, Bispehaven and Herredsvang. Within each of the three neighborhoods, 400 residents (aged 18 or older) were randomly sampled by the Danish Health Data Authority (Sundhedsdatastyrelsen) based on the Danish Civil Registration System (CPR-register). The surveys were translated into Danish, English, Arabic and Somali. As already mentioned, the surveys asked questions concerning neighborhood characteristics, such as local networks, social trust, social cohesion, neighborhood problems, informal social control and physical features of the neighborhood. The surveys were fielded between September 11, 2018, and October 21, 2018, via numerous attempts at securing respondent participation. The participants were first contacted via email (E-boks), reminded via physical letters, telephone and finally contacted via home visits. The total sample size was 426 respondents with a 37.1% response rate, which is a reasonable response rate compared to similar prior research (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020).

The analysis of the community survey data reveals two main findings. The first is in line with recent research (Soufan & Schoenfeld, 2016; Vlierden, 2016; Vidino et al., 2016: 83-4; Coolsaet, 2017) and emphasizes that the problems with radicalization in Aarhus are predominantly found in disadvantaged and vulnerable neighborhoods, where there are problems with unemployment and low levels of education, drug trafficking and other crimes, and where the percentage of ethnic minorities is high (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020). This is not to say that such socio-economic challenges and “societal issues inevitably generate radicalization. Indeed, there are many cities, towns, and neighborhoods

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<sup>22</sup> For the neighborhoods selected for the community surveys, the prevalence rates are 1:226 (Bispehaven), 1:349 (Herredsvang) and 1:460 (Møllevangen). The radicalization prevalence rate for the city of Aarhus as a whole is 1:1528 (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020).

throughout the world that suffer from similar societal ailments yet do not produce” radicalization (Soufan & Schoenfeld, 2016: 36). The second main finding is that the prevalence rates of radicalization seem to be different across disadvantaged neighborhoods and that the identified neighborhood-level factors can contribute to explaining this variation (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020).

The Danish SER Community Surveys propose with caution that certain neighborhood-level factors possibly indicate why the concentration of radicalization emerges and consolidates in one place and not another. Although there is no evidence of one key factor explaining the bulk of variation in radicalization prevalence rates between neighborhoods, the analysis of social cohesion and informal social control provide interesting findings (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020). *Social cohesion* refers to a number of social characteristics contributing to “connectedness” in terms of the ability of a community to generate moral and social integration and loyalty (Sampson 1993; Barolsky 2016: 3-5), whereas *informal social control* is the tendency that residents in a neighborhood will intervene if they observe norm- or law-breaking behavior in the neighborhood community. Interventions can be exercised directly, where the observer confronts the norm- or law-breaker, or indirectly when the observer calls the police or other public authorities (Britt & Rocque 2017, 185ff). The findings from the Danish SER Community Surveys suggest a positive correlation between social cohesion and the concentration of problems with radicalization in a neighborhood. This finding suggests that in highly cohesive neighborhoods in which residents are committed to the local community, radicalization is more likely to develop in larger concentrations. Lindekilde proposes that socially cohesive neighborhood communities are relatively closed or isolated to the broader society. Some communities are inward-looking and display a desire to solve problems internally without intervention from authorities, which may be conducive to the emergence of radical milieus, as they may be tolerated or even overtly supported (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020).

Furthermore, the Danish SER Community Surveys present mixed results regarding informal social control, a neighborhood-level factor. There is no immediate variation in the average levels of informal social control between the three surveyed neighborhoods. Thus, the difference in radicalization prevalence rates cannot be explained by levels of informal social control. Conversely, the expected negative relationship between informal social control and the concentration of problems with radicalization in a neighborhood is present when using a measure in the community survey of perceived problems with extremist groups propagandizing in the community as the outcome measure rather than the police data. The Danish SER Community Survey analysis thus reveals some measure of support for the notion that a radical milieu

emerges in neighborhoods with a low degree of informal social control (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020).

## 9.2. Gellerup-Toveshøj: Neighborhood-Level Factors That May Be Conducive to the Emergence of the Radical Milieu

In the following, I discuss the selected survey findings in the light of my semi-structured focus groups and individual interviews in order to answer the question as to why the radical milieu emerged in Gellerup-Toveshøj. The focus groups and individual interviews add in-depth and nuanced knowledge of how certain neighborhood-level factors, such as social cohesion and informal social control, may be conducive to the emergence of the radical milieu.

As described in Chapter 3, the focus groups were conducted with residents in the Gellerup-Toveshøj neighborhood, both males and females in their teens to late-30s. Some interviewees were attending secondary school or higher education, others were employed and some were unemployed. The interviews were conducted between October 2017 and February 2018. Three focus group interviews consisted of five respondents, while one focus group had only two respondents. One of the five-respondent focus groups consisted of a mix of young men and women with an ethnic Danish background. The other focus groups involved respondents with ethnic-minority backgrounds. One of these focus groups consisted of mothers with adolescent children. As previously introduced, Gellerup-Toveshøj is a “most similar case” to the three neighborhoods in the Danish SER Community Surveys. This implies that it experiences similar socio-economic factors concerning categorizations based on unemployment rates, low education levels, low income levels, crime rates and ethnic diversity. Gellerup-Toveshøj is relatively close to Bispehaven, Herredsvang and Møllevangen (Landsbyggefonden and Aarhus Kommune, 2018; Aarhus Kommune, 2018; Trafik og Boligministeriet, 2019).

### 9.2.1. Social Cohesion

My data from the focus groups and individual interviews presents similar patterns of high social cohesion, as identified in the Danish SER Community Surveys. On the one hand, the neighborhood that is the focus of my field research consists of communities with strong social bonds in which the residents engage in various social activities in private gatherings, associations or municipally sponsored activities such as sports, indoor and outdoor communal dining, needlework, volunteer work, movie nights and trips. The community members know, trust and help each other. The respondents thus express a

general sense of satisfaction with life in Gellerup-Toveshøj, which they characterize as vibrant, creative and lively. They also highlight safety, good food, companionship and numerous activities, diversity, shopping centers such as “City Vest” and “Bazar Vest,” public facilities and low-cost housing. Undeniably, the residents genuinely feel comfortable living in the neighborhood and describe it in positive terms, providing a sense of belonging and creating loyalty.

Conversely, all of the respondents also mention problems with crime, drug trafficking, gang activities, scripturalist and literalist religious orientations, unemployment and “vulnerable” youth who experience challenges to their sense of belonging and identity. Moreover, the abovementioned positive neighborhood characteristics also have a downside. In two focus groups with respondents with ethnic minority backgrounds, the participants refer to the lack of social networks stretching outside of Gellerup-Toveshøj concerning employment opportunities. In the words of one respondent: “We don’t have networks like Danes do—who have lived here [in Denmark] their whole lives. They have their friends and family. They have a lot of people they can count on. And if they need to look for work, then: ‘if we know each other, and you’re working somewhere, then you can recommend me’. That’s what we’re missing” (female resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). Similarly, a young man in his 20s elaborates on the lack of broader relationships to persons outside one’s family and friends in the local community: “There’s a lack of resources. A lack of network. What everyone shares in common here is that most people came to the country 10-20 years ago and had to start from the bottom” (male resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). The local ties are solid and strong, but many residents have little or no *social capital* in the form of social bonds to the broader society outside Gellerup-Toveshøj (Lin 1999, 30). In some cases, this may contribute to continued unemployment, dependence on social welfare and poverty. Employment may provide opportunity to establish new ties and networks, thus expanding one’s social ties.

Moreover, in line with the community surveys, the internally cohesive communities are inward-looking and tend to deal with problems internally. For example, the focus group with five young female respondents with ethnic minority backgrounds emphasizes how if they experienced radicalization within the community, they would refrain from contacting the authorities, trying instead to solve the situation internally. One of the interviewees provides an example, referring to a local family with a young son who left for the Syrian war: “I’m not going to call the police. Because ‘it’s not about me’. Contacting the police is a little empty. Talking with the parents or the person is [best]. You know the family, and the person can get into trouble with interrogations” (female resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). Another interviewee adds how “the last

thing I would do would be to contact the police. Because then you're the enemy—and you don't want that" (female resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). The respondents would solve the problem internally without interference from the public authorities or the police. Reporting to the police is seen as initiating unnecessary and unpleasant interference as well as a breach of the intra-community social trust or loyalty. The quote is indicative of a lack of trust in the police and other conventional authorities (Grossman, 2015: 30-2, 46; Thomas et al., 2017: 25-7, 32-3). I turn to institutional trust below. I also conducted a one-on-one interview with an ethnic minority father in his 30s from my field neighborhood. He painted a subtle, nuanced picture, emphasizing the positive and negative aspects of life in Gellerup-Toveshøj. He also talked about solving problems internally; including radicalization. The interviewee told me that he became part of a local Gellerup-Toveshøj parents' association, which was created when a local family lost two children in the Syrian war. Other parents were supportive and wanted to help: "That's actually when many people went all-in to do something ... [and] then the association was established" (male resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). He continues:

We heard about ISIS [the Islamic State] on TV [and said]: "It can't be—that more and more of our young people go down there. And we lose them" ... I mean, we got four young people who were actually on the way to Syria via Turkey—we got them to change direction. They're now all studying or working. We don't have too many resources in our association. But as parents we have the resources to be able to provide this support and this knowledge to our youth—so that they don't go down there and kill themselves. (male resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj)

The association was intended to intervene when they discovered youth who had become part of the radical milieu and were preparing for high-risk activism. In some cases, the parents succeeded in establishing trust with the young radicals and maintained a positive relationship through continued encounters. In that sense, the young radicals experienced a supportive parent network of moderate "outsiders." These aspects resemble the exit processes and mentoring cases unfolded in the previous chapter, also contributing to positive life changes and new priorities. A couple of the interviewees who participated in the radical milieu provide similar examples, and they explain how local communities in Gellerup-Toveshøj try to deal internally with the problem of radicalization and Syrian volunteers. Ebi mentions how his parents reacted the first time he shared his thoughts with them about leaving for the Syrian conflict. They became worried, frustrated and angry: "Then my parents tried to get some other [adults] from our [ethnic] community to talk with me. And they hit really hard, saying: '[Why] would you do something like that?

What were you thinking?!'. But those conversations just strengthened my feeling that I was doing the right thing" (Ebi, Interview 1). Dawoud provides a similar example. His parents contacted an adult friend of the family when they discovered that some of the members in the radical milieu frequented the mosque and had left for Syria. Dawoud (Interview 2) elaborates on this encounter with the family friend: "One of my parents' friends said, 'My son—be careful of going to that mosque, because they can mess with your brain'. I was so into it, and I was so happy, I just thought, 'Shut up—you don't know what you're talking about', but I tried to smile and said, 'You're right. It's right what you're saying, and I'll be careful'." Ebi (Interview 2) continues, unfolding another way of dealing with radicalization internally: "There was a lot of talk about whether it was right to travel down there. There were a lot of campaigns against travelling, and in our [ethnic] community, they [arranged] for two great, respected scholars to come from our country of origin together with one who lived in the West—just to come to tell people that it wasn't right to travel down there." These accounts also demonstrate how the internal attempts at encouraging Ebi and Dawoud not to leave for Syria ultimately failed (Pidd et al., 2014; Thomas et al., 2017: 31). We have already seen in Chapter 4 that the participants in the radical milieu positioned themselves in contrast to their parents' national or ethnic versions of Islam, which are perceived as unauthentic, contaminated by cultural norms and customs. Thus, the two highly esteemed religious figures invited by the parents apparently did not achieve the desired outcome. We also saw earlier in Chapter 7 how the parents and their generation were replaced with likeminded members in the radical milieu as role models. Within that logic, it is fair to say that the members would probably not listen to their parents or other adults. The quotes also indicate how the attempts made by the older generation to establish relations to Ebi and Dawoud were not constructive. Yelling and imperatives did not produce the desired outcome, which would be to abandon the mosque and not leaving for Syria.

Overall, my qualitative interview data echoes the findings of the surveys regarding social cohesion, thus tapping into neighborhood-level factors that may help explain the emergence and consolidation of the radical milieu in Gellerup-Toveshøj. On the one side, the focus group and individual interviews show highly socially cohesive communities in which the residents develop strong bonds, loyalty and involvement. On the other hand, the socially cohesive communities seem to produce an interest in dealing with problems internally, including radicalization. This can be due to a lack of institutional trust (Grossman, 2015: 30-2). For example, we saw earlier that some residents either displayed no trust in the police or only trusted the local police. The mixed levels of trust may result from negative experiences with the Danish police

and/or negative experiences with the police in one's country of origin, which influence a certain perception of authority (Wasserman, 2010). Moreover, the willingness to solve problems internally may represent a strategy to avoid further negative attention in addition to existing, publicly known problems; not least a much-politicized problem such as radicalization. Within that logic, dealing with problems of radicalization internally seems to provide a sense of control as well as keeping the problem away from the attention of the broader society. At least for some time. Finally, the internal problem-solving may be preferred out of ignorance—of not knowing whom to contact or what will happen with the provided information or because community members fear criminalizing the radicalized individual, who may be family, a friend or another important “intimate” (Grossman, 2015: 32; Thomas et al., 2017: 25-7, 31-3). Although previous accounts demonstrate positive outcomes of individuals leaving the radical milieu, such as via the parents' association network, other examples demonstrate the opposite. In that sense, my focus groups and individual interviews support the finding in the community surveys concerning a positive correlation between social cohesion and the concentration of radicalization. However, further research and more data are needed to understand better how social cohesion may be conducive to the emergence of the radical milieu and to help answer the “Why there?” question more conclusively.

### 9.2.2. Informal Social Control

My data from the focus groups and individual interviews seems to resonate with the finding produced by the Danish SER Community Survey that “radical milieus emerge in neighborhoods where there is a low degree of informal social control” (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020: 27). In the following, I add complexity and nuance to the neighborhood-level factor “informal social control,” which may help us understand why the radical milieu emerged and could be sustained in Gellerup-Toveshøj.

My data presents an ambiguous picture of informal social control. First, respondents would seem to distinguish between important and trivial problems. They intervene when certain activities are perceived as potentially dangerous or life-threatening, such as illegal activities that could harm other residents or damage facilities. In contrast, when observing or imagining an activity that is apparently perceived as “softer” or trivial norm- or lawbreaking activity, such as graffiti, all of the respondents but one in the various focus groups indicated that they would not intervene, since they do not regard it to be an important problem. Whether the graffiti painter is a stranger is also a factor in this equation. Some respondents state that this would constitute a police matter but that they would probably not contact the police, even though

they are aware that graffiti is vandalism and therefore a violation of the law. The motivation behind the graffiti also has an impact on how the informants perceive it; they do not mind if the graffiti is art or if it contains a relevant message. In contrast, if the graffiti is perceived as repulsive, discriminatory or anti-police, the respondents find it inappropriate but will still likely not intervene. In this sense, the respondents perceive the graffiti as trivial. Second, discussions about the potential knowledge of a radical group with specific plans to join the Syrian war facilitate a complex picture of informal social control. Across the focus groups, one respondent prefers to turn a blind eye, whereas the others display a willingness to exercise informal social control. Among the group of respondents who are inclined to intervene, we see different ways of intervening. We saw earlier how some respondents tend to be inclined to solve the problem internally by confronting the young radicals and/or speaking to the parents. Some would turn to the police as a very last resort, while others would not involve the police even though the internal attempts at problem-solving would likely be futile (Grossman, 2015: 30-2, 46; Thomas et al., 2017: 25-7, 31-3). One respondent adds:

Interviewee 2: I wanted to talk with some of the [older boys] from the neighborhood because I don't think they would listen if we told the parents.

Interviewee 5: But if they're passionate about God—won't they do anything?

Interviewee 2: Then I'd just let them go. "See you." (female residents, Gellerup-Toveshøj)

In another focus group, the ethnic Danish respondents describe a lack of courage or the competence necessary to engage in direct dialogue with the radicals. They would instead intervene by contacting the police and including the parents of the youth in question. These respondents explain that they trust the police. One respondent provides an exception. In one of the focus groups, when talking about radicalization in their neighborhood, I introduced the spontaneous probe "Is it any easier to blend in out here [in Gellerup-Toveshøj]? Is it easier to avoid being discovered?"

One respondent explains her indifference to radicalization and opens up for a potentially broader lack of informal social control—both direct and indirect—among the residents in some situations: "It's easier here, where you don't [get involved]. Why should I interfere in such things? ... Everyone looks after themselves [unless] we can see that [somebody] is destroying some things—then people are aware" (female resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). In the focus group discussions about radicalization, some respondents also grew rather silent in comparison to earlier discussions. This may also be indicative of an unwillingness to intervene.

All of the focus group interviews contribute to the sense of a fragmented and nuanced picture regarding institutional trust, which seems to be divided in the community. *Institutional trust* concerns whether residents (do not) have confidence in the authorities, including the municipality and law enforcement agencies such as the police (Bornstein & Tomkins, 2015: 1-11). Here, my interview data seems to stand in contrast to the findings from the Danish SER Community Surveys. The survey findings emphasize that although highly cohesive communities try to solve problems internally, the residents in the three neighborhoods also generally trust the authorities and public institutions to a high degree. More specifically, the high degree of average trust includes, for example, greater trust in the local police than the city police (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020). There can be many reasons for the more mixed picture of institutional trust in my qualitative investigation. The internal loyalty or social trust in fellow residents may exceed the institutional trust and desire to reach out for external help. The lack of trust may also be a result of previous personal negative experiences with the police and other authorities. Two young male respondents with ethnic minority backgrounds provide an example, referring to why the trust in the police is low among certain groups of Gellerup-Toveshøj residents. One respondent elaborates on how “there are just a lot of people who have had some unfortunate episodes with the police ... I think we’ve all felt what it’s like to be under suspicion. I’ve been stopped a lot” (resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). The other respondent continues:

People feel that you can be stopped by the police because you’re a foreigner... I was once driving in an old car and was stopped by the police. So I asked, “Why did you stop me?”

“It doesn’t have anything to do with the color of your skin. It’s because it’s an old car. We have to check the registration.”

“Oh, OK—that’s fair,” I said. Later, I got a new car. And I was stopped again. So I asked the policeman, “Why did you stop me?”

He answered, “well, I just had to make sure that it’s your car. How can you afford a car like this?”

“Because I work,” I answered. But I mean—I’m not allowed to drive a new car, and I’m not allowed to drive an old car. So what’s the reason? So maybe it’s those kinds [of experiences] that make people keep the police at a distance. (resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj)

Experiences of real or felt discrimination may contribute to a tense relationship with the police characterized by mistrust. What may seem insignificant on the surface—personal experiences with being pulled over by the police for

routine traffic checks—may facilitate feelings or the perception of racial discrimination. The police may have proper cause to pull over certain cars in Gellerup-Toveshøj, as the neighborhood experiences high rates of problems with crimes. However—proper causes or not—these repeated experiences generate feelings of rejection and stigmatization, which in turn contribute to a negative perception of the police. These stories are sometimes shared, which may reinforce grievances toward the police and other public authorities. In some cases, and combined with other experiences or group/systemic factors, the personal experiences may instill *individual susceptibility* or result in a shift in morals (Bouhana, 2019b).

The focus group with ethnic minority women also unfolds a more complex understanding of the institutional trust in public institutions, such as the unemployment office and the police. In general, they report that the trust in the police is mixed based on past disappointments. Similar to the Danish SER Community Surveys, based on their own experiences, the residents trust the local Gellerup-Toveshøj police but not the East Jutland police central station. One interviewee explains this as follows:

Yes, it depends—are we talking about the police here in Brabrand or downtown? They have different eyes. The police in this area know me and trust me if I tell them something. Maybe they meet me on the road a few times. Maybe they meet me in school. But if I call the police in downtown Aarhus, they might not take it seriously. (resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj)

Another interviewee from the same focus group echoes such experiences and provides an additional example, elaborating on the trust in the local police, which has been developed through relationships and their presence on the streets. She elaborates on this mistrust:

Also when you call ... I was once afraid that some children were going to set fire to a moped. I called [the downtown police]. And they just asked, “but did they do it?”

My response was, “should I wait until it burns?” The police downtown don’t take it seriously if you call from here. You can’t expect to get help from them. (resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj)

The local police seem to have succeeded in establishing trust with the local residents through relations, everyday presence and local actions. This seems to have facilitated the cooperation with some residents, furnishing mutual trust and shared expectations about countering deviant behavior (Wasserman, 2010). Moreover, the respondents emphasize how the local police make public presentations and engage in dialogue concerning current crime-related issues and safety, which is perceived as positive. In contrast, the focus group

consisting of ethnic minority female respondents discusses mistrust to the local police, one of the respondents commenting on how “if the police are after someone, then they know that nobody is saying anything” (resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). This could indicate that the distrust among the residents prevents them from cooperating. Conversely, the quote may also indicate a more complex picture in the sense that some residents possibly refrain from talking to the police for fear of reprisals from other community members if they breach the internal values and loyalty. The local police refer to cases involving both dynamics:

The biggest challenge is getting people to open up to the authorities and tell what’s really going on. That has improved, because we articulated it from Day One, and we’re still articulating it. You can get a lot of information, but nobody will stand by it. We enjoy the trust of the people out here—and they like to talk to us. But when it comes to getting things on paper in our journal systems and for court cases, then things become difficult (police officer, East Jutland Police)

During the heated gang conflict in Denmark 2017, which also affected Aarhus Vest, the police and residents united to protect the common good (Wasserman, 2010). The respondents in all of the focus group interviews reported a common cause to support the police and intervene in the fight against the gangs. They mentioned several motivational factors, including the prevention of new generations getting involved in gang activities. The respondents with children have been especially preoccupied for years with their children not ending up in gangs or criminal activity. The gang members are visible in their numbers and clothing; they display a conspicuous presence and intimidating behavior. Some of their activities are easy to identify as risky, law-breaking actions, and another reason for opposing the gang activity is that the negative public attention it generates further stigmatizes the neighborhood and contributes to a sense of insecurity. The respondents also mention that many Gellerup-Toveshøj residents have fled war, conflict and weapons in their home countries and that they do not want to experience violence again. The merchants in the Bazar West shopping center lost customers and revenue due to the gang war. In addition, the police strategy also seems to influence a willingness among the local residents to help. As one respondent explains: “That’s why the [local] police station has done so much to get to know those who make trouble. The police have not taken everyone who might look like they’re a gang member, but they’ve taken hold of gang members. And they’ve also received support to do so [from the residents]” (male resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). The residents support the police in the fight against gangs. The gang conflict threatens their existence in different ways, including their children, their jobs and the basis for their livelihood.

In sum, there seems to be a mixed approach to exercising informal social control in the neighborhood. Some respondents are inclined to intervene, whereas others are not. Some respondents will exercise direct informal social control and solve the problems internally, whereas others will intervene indirectly by contacting the police or other authorities. Moreover, the actual norm- or law-breaking activity may also influence one's willingness to intervene. One respondent elaborates on an unwillingness to intervene when experiencing radicalization. This possibly indicates that the lack of informal social control may contribute to community culture that is conducive to radicalization. These perspectives seem in line with the Danish SER Community Surveys, which suggests a negative relationship between informal social control and the rates of radicalization (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020). However, more data and further research are needed to understand better how informal social control may be conducive to the emergence of the radical milieu and help answer the "Why there?" question more conclusively.

### 9.3. Other Neighborhood-Level Factors Identified in the Qualitative Data That May Be Conducive to the Emergence of the Radical Milieu

The focus groups and individual interviews contain other findings for further research into neighborhood interaction aimed at answering the "where of radicalization" question. In addition to the neighborhood-level factors (social cohesion and informal social control), other neighborhood interactions in my study of Gellerup-Toveshøj may be conducive to the emergence of radicalization. These factors include the moral context of the neighborhood, intergenerational dynamics, the physical features of the neighborhood and the segregation between the communities in the neighborhood. In the following, I focus exclusively on the moral context.

#### 9.3.1. The Moral Context

The quotes displayed above concerning the respondent who elaborated on the lack of informal social control when it comes to radicalization are also relevant with respect to a certain *moral context* characterizing the different communities in the Gellerup-Toveshøj neighborhood. The *moral context* may be defined as specific norms and rules applied in neighborhood communities "and their levels of enforcement and sanctioning" via certain behavior (Wikström, 2006: 90). The moral context seems to encapsulate shared moral values and expectations that influence a willingness to intervene in gang activities and other criminal and deviant activities. In contrast, the shared moral values and

expectations do not seem to influence the same united willingness to intervene—either deliberately or unintentionally—in behaviors and activities related to the radical milieu. Reasons can be many. Residents may not find it necessary or experience a fear of first contact and might lack the tools to engage in dialogue with the members of the radical milieu. One respondent elaborates: “There are a lot of weak individuals—young people and their parents alike—who lack the knowledge and help necessary to realize that their children were being radicalized. There—they’ve been very weak to realize it in time. They first realized it when it was too late” (resident, Gellerup-Toveshøj). However, the developments in the Syrian war, including the violence perpetrated by Islamic State, and the awareness of more young Muslims participating in the war, led more parents and the local communities within the neighborhoods to become more observant regarding the situation in Syria as well as more alert to the returnees.

Moreover, previous research emphasizes how it is more difficult to identify and react to concerns about radicalization or terrorism than ordinary crime (Murphy et al., 2017; Pearce et al., 2019). This also seems to be the case in my study. We saw earlier how the Gellerup-Toveshøj residents and police united for the common good during the heated gang conflict in 2017 in the fight against the gangs after establishing a sense of mutual trust and shared values (Wasserman, 2010). In contrast to gang activities, shootings and drug trafficking, which seem to be easier to perceive as negative, intimidating, risky and deviant, identifying radicalization pathways and knowing when to be alert appears to be more difficult. This is especially the case if religion is generally perceived as an overall positive factor in life that can influence choices with respect to rejecting alcohol, drugs and other substances, or if community residents may subscribe to similar Islamic doctrines, such as the tenet of *tawhid*, the role of the Prophet of Muhammed or concerning specific religious practices. In that sense, radicalization—when involving a certain religious interpretation of Islam—may be a grey zone for some residents. The former members of the radical milieu provide several examples of this being the case. One of the former participants, a Gellerup-Toveshøj resident, explains how he felt the support of his parents and their friends when he started taking Islam seriously and frequenting the mosque. The atmosphere in the local neighborhood was positive and accepting. He comments on his parents’ reaction concerning his involvement in the radical milieu:

My parents were actually happy that I went to the mosque. I don’t think they knew what was going on there until it started becoming public and you saw it in the media ... My parents sometimes said [in the beginning] that “we’d rather have our son going to the mosque than going out and selling drugs. We would

rather our son go to the mosque and be surrounded by religious people than that he end up ruining the lives of others because he has sold them 2-3 grams of coke.”

Another former participant in the milieu provides a similar example, encountering positive feedback and support from parents and local communities in Gellerup-Toveshøj:

But back then, people weren't aware about religious [radicalization] ... We're talking about the local community. So a woman might say: "I met your son—he's together with a religious group. That's really good to hear" ... My parents didn't know what I was doing. What we were doing. But they had heard from acquaintances that I was together with a religious group. They didn't see it as a problem. At the time, nobody knew anything and people thought that if you were serious and pious, then you were on the right path. So they were happy. There wasn't anything negative about it in your circle of acquaintances, either: "You've become religious and you're taking life more seriously as a man." They were supportive.

As stated in previous chapters, I do not argue that religion per se is causing radicalization. Young people turning to a religion such as Islam is not necessarily an indication of radicalization. Instead, the accounts above indicate that the radical milieu did not initially meet much resistance from surrounding communities, possibly because religious radicalization may be a grey zone for some residents. The local communities surrounding the radical milieu would seem to have provided positive feedback and supported the religious orientation and their fellowship. The religious engagement of the members in the radical milieu seems to converge with shared hopes and values in the local communities, contributing to the surrounding moral context. At the time, some community residents seem to view the religious orientation in itself as a protective factor against joining gangs or getting involved in criminal activities. That may well be true. In addition, the sophisticated coping strategies of the radical milieu seem to have prevented others from growing attentive or worried. Especially concerning those members in the milieu who succeeded in practicing the coping strategies. The strategies contained specific behaviors related to their surroundings, such as being nice and calm, showing respect to one's parents and elders, and not attracting negative attention in school. Moreover, the scripturalist and literal reading of Islam in the radical milieu seems to resonate with an existing religious approach within some communities in and around Gellerup-Toveshøj. In one of the focus groups, two respondents share their thoughts on this topic:

Interviewee 1: There are some adults here in Aarhus Vest—they study the Quran a lot and make you think a certain way— "It's the right way"

Interviewee 5: They [set the direction for] their life with the Quran.

Interviewee 1: They use the Quran in their everyday lives. We use the [Danish] Constitution and we also use the Quran—but they use the Quran as their law (residents, Gellerup-Toveshøj)

The quote shows how some of the Gellerup-Toveshøj residents and members of the radical milieu subscribe to matching religious interpretations of Islam in Aarhus Vest, thus contributing to a surrounding moral context that provides the foundation and facilitates directions for certain behavior.

## 9.4. Concluding Remarks

The radicalization problem is highly geographically concentrated in disadvantaged neighborhoods in cities throughout the Western world. Aarhus is no exception. More specifically, unique police data from the East Jutland Police illustrates how the problems with radicalization are concentrated in specific disadvantaged neighborhoods, such as Aarhus Vest, including the Gellerup-Toveshøj neighborhood in my field research. The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss if certain neighborhood-level factors can be used to explain the emergence and sustenance of the radical milieu in a particular neighborhood rather than others. First, I presented two selected findings of the Danish SER Community Surveys, which has been fielded in three proximate neighborhoods in western Aarhus. Second, I elaborated on these findings via insights from the focus groups and individual interviews. More specifically, I discussed the selected results from the survey in the light of my more in-depth and fine-grained qualitative data. The surveys and qualitative interviews are supplementary, as they both have investigated neighborhood-levels factors, including similar questions aimed at understanding why a radical milieu can emerge in one neighborhood and not another.

Overall, the Danish SER Community Surveys emphasize how problems with radicalization in Aarhus are predominantly found in disadvantaged and vulnerable neighborhoods, including troubles with low education levels and high levels of unemployment, high concentrations of ethnic minorities and criminal activity such as drug trafficking. Moreover, based on police data, we see that the prevalence rates of radicalization seem to vary for disadvantaged neighborhoods. In that sense, the neighborhood-level factors identified can contribute to explaining this variation. Although there is no single factor explaining the differences in radicalization prevalence rates between neighborhoods, the importance of social cohesion and informal social control seem to be interesting findings worth further investigation in the future. The two selected findings in the Danish SER Community Surveys indicate a positive re-

lationship between internal social cohesion and the concentration of radicalization as well as a negative correlation between informal social control and the concentration of radicalization. However, further studies and better data are needed to produce more comprehensive conclusions concerning the emergence of radical milieus (Lindekilde & Hjelt, 2020).

In support of these preliminary findings, my focus group and individual interviews provide detail as to how social cohesion and informal social control may contribute to the emergence of the radical milieu. My study unfolds how Gellerup-Toveshøj contains socially cohesive local communities, which are characterized by strong social bonds, loyalty, socialization and common values. These cohesive communities tend to deal with problems internally, including radicalization. They are inward-looking and want to deal with problems internally. In addition, the willingness to exercise informal social control is mixed in relation to petty crime, gang activities and radicalization. Some are willing to exercise direct informal social control and thus prepared to solve the problems internally without involving the police. Others are willing to contact the police. Many would also appear to be indifferent. Some residents will not intervene, turning a blind eye instead, which may be conducive to the emergence of the radical milieu, as certain community members may tolerate or even overtly support it. In addition, the focus group and individual interviews unfold perspectives regarding the moral context of Gellerup-Toveshøj. It seems easier for some residents to identify the gangs and related activities as negative and undesirable behavior. The residents are united via shared moral values and expectations about gang conflicts and violent activities. In contrast, it seems more difficult to identify religious radicalization pathways, as these examples may be a grey zone for some residents.

The Danish SER Community Surveys and the focus group and individual interviews contribute to taking the “Why there?” question seriously. The surveys have width, whereas the focus group and individual interviews have depth. My qualitative data is valuable in terms of contextualizing the survey and supporting and qualifying selected findings in the surveys. In that sense, my focus group data and individual interviews act as a kind of “reality check” to the surveys. In the efforts to explain the emergence of the radical milieu in Gellerup-Toveshøj and how it was sustained clearly and conclusively, further investigations and data are needed in addition to these preliminary findings, for example via joint research ventures that include both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

## Chapter 10: Conclusion and Implications

The interest driving this dissertation has been to explore the connections between individuals and their immediate surroundings that contribute to radicalization by investigating individual pathways and the radical milieu with a focus on a specific radical *Salafi*-inspired milieu in Aarhus in the years 2007-17. These explorations have been directed at producing an answer to the following research question: What characterizes the interplay between the radical milieu and individual pathways of radicalization? I have investigated the following four sub-questions to this end:

1. *Through which processes are individuals exposed to the radical milieu?* (Chapter 4)
2. *What are the affordances of the radical milieu—physical and virtual—in which homegrown radicalization occurs?* (Chapters 5-7)
3. *What is the role of the interaction between exposure to material in offline and online settings for socialization within the radical milieu?* (Chapters 5-7)
4. *Through which processes do individuals exit the radical milieu?* (Chapter 8)

To investigate these research questions, I conducted an empirically driven investigation with a multi-level hermeneutic-interpretive analysis that focused on an interrelated analysis of the individual pathways to the radical milieu, the dynamics within the milieu and how they affect the participants, and how the participants in the milieu ultimately left it. Qualitative data sources constitute the basis for this study. I collected the data in Aarhus, wherefrom 35-40 young individuals have left for the Syrian conflict zone to take part in humanitarian relief work and/or to fight. The data collection applied a mixed methods approach, combining semi-structured individual interviews with focus group interviews featuring multiple types of respondents, which helps us to understand radicalization better via an in-depth analysis. At the core of the investigation are 22 individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews, including follow-up interviews, with nine young male former members of a radical *Salafist*-inspired milieu in Aarhus. In addition, the investigation included 56 semi-structured individual and focus group interviews with police officers, social workers, schoolteachers and leaders from Aarhus Municipality and the East Jutland Police, all of whom work with radicalization prevention throughout Aarhus, together with non-radical residents from the Gellerup-Toveshøj

neighborhood. In this chapter, I will briefly summarize the main findings of the dissertation, followed by a presentation of its main empirical and theoretical contributions. Third, I will reflect on the potential policy implications of my findings.

## 10.1. Summary of the Main Findings

The analysis chapters demonstrate how a combination of factors can explain the pathways to and from the radical milieu as well as the socialization taking place within it. These findings emphasize how members develop a certain moral context that allows for certain actions. Thus, no single explanation or explanatory level is sufficient to inform my investigation. The dissertation has also demonstrated how the exposure to and exit from the radical milieu unfolds as a series of slow, fluid and overlapping transitions. Likewise, the developments within the radical milieu proceed gradually via fluid and overlapping processes. In the following, I will use my theoretical framework as an outline to report my main findings. More specifically, I have drawn on Noémie Bouhana's recent *social-ecological* theory, which presents a perspective that integrates and relates individual, group and systemic perspectives in the analysis of radicalization (Bouhana, 2019b). I have also further developed this theoretical framework by introducing related and specifying constructs, such as the *radical milieu* (see, e.g., Waldman, 2008; Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014) and *socio-spatial settings* (see, e.g., Malthaner & Lindekilde, 2017; Lindekilde et al., 2019). While I consider my investigation a context-sensitive case study of a specific radical milieu in the city of Aarhus, my study resembles other similar ethnographic studies of radical milieus in terms of its focus on pathways, group dynamics, religious beliefs and practices, and high-risk activism (Wiktorowicz, 2005; Hemmingsen, 2010; Malthaner, 2014; 2018; Greenwood, 2018). Moreover, the uneven distributions of radicalization, especially the concentration identified in western Aarhus, is not unique. Similar clusters are found in cities such as Copenhagen, Gothenburg and Brussels.

Although the analysis uncovers nine distinctly individual pathways leading toward the radical milieu, certain overall patterns can be teased out. The analysis begins on the individual level (Chapter 4). When conducting my interviews, experiences of identity crisis, identity seeking and life-changing events emerged as factors contributing to a *susceptibility to moral change*. However, where many theories do not advance beyond this, I integrated group-level perspectives. The paths to the radical milieu formed when the respondents were exposed to immediate social influences, such as particular activities, individuals and settings, through *selection processes* (Bouhana, 2019b). On the one hand, *social selection*, such as one's kin, friendships, peers

or neighbors, seems to influence behavior and actions via early life exposure to certain ideas and settings. On the other hand, the interviewees also demonstrated individual agency whereby they actively contributed to the design of their own trajectories through *self-selection* and seekership by frequenting certain settings based on personal desires, aspirations and needs acquired over time. Although the respondents often connected to the radical milieu in a proactive manner, they did not turn their lives upside-down overnight; instead, the processes unfolded in fluid and overlapping transitions. Within the selection processes, I identify *religious revival* and *religious intensification* as two overall patterns of the pathways leading in the direction of the radical milieu. In the first instance, the interviewees with no real prior experience of religious practice and knowledge revive their faith and practice, rejecting their former lifestyle and pursuing a new Islamic way of life. The interviewees seek to acquire Islamic knowledge through offline and online platforms, including Islamic schools and universities and surface websites. In contrast, religious intensification applies to the respondents who received a religious upbringing and have practiced Islam throughout their lives, but at a certain point in time encounter charismatic individuals who influenced their continued ideological development. Finally, the interviewees slowly transformed their preexisting social ties, such as childhood friendships, kinship and neighbors, in safe and familiar settings.

The analysis continues on the group level, where the focus is on the internal dynamics characterizing the *radical milieu* (Malthaner & Waldman, 2014). More specifically, I have focused on the *socializing affordances* of the milieu, which unfolds how the interaction between likeminded individuals provides a range of opportunities and activities that enabled the acquisition of a certain moral context sympathetic to particular actions, such as leaving for the Syrian war to work as a humanitarian relief worker or a militant (Bouhana, 2019b). In that sense, *affordances* refer to the various social activities among the participants that furnish opportunities for specific actions (Wortley, 2012). Thus, I argue that the perspective of socializing affordances can help us to understand how the social context of the radical milieu contributes to certain opportunities and actions. In analyzing the socializing affordances of the radical milieu, we saw how group dynamics and socialization in certain settings prepared for and allowed certain forms of activism as viable and justified actions. Within these perspectives, I disentangled different socializing affordances: *Cognitive affordances*, *moral affordances*, *attachment affordances* and *social control affordances* (Chapters 5-7). Affordances are dynamic, as they develop and relate to both the immediate surroundings and the members at a particular point in time. Although the affordances were investi-

gated separately for analytical clarity, they are inextricably connected and develop simultaneously. The *cognitive affordances* included complex emotions, distinguishing between positive and negative emotions. On the one hand, the interviewees and their “brothers” enjoyed a healthy, enriching, inspiring and enjoyable companionship; at least for some time. They engaged in various social activities in various settings, including conversation and just hanging out with likeminded, eating together joking around, holding sleepovers, engaging in sports and other recreational activities, in addition to the agreed-upon division of labor, such as performing dawah, lectures or IT-tasks. These activities generated positive emotions, such as acceptance, belonging, safety, comfort, amusement and joy, which strengthened the engagement, cohesion and companionship. This laid the foundations for taking up sensitive political issues, which was a significant step toward activism. On the other hand, negative sentiments seem to be activated within the radical milieu via the opportunities to watch, share and discuss video footage, images and text materials related to conflict zones throughout the Muslim world. These activities took place in different settings and stimulated feelings of anger, resentment and revenge. These feelings seemed to enable discussions about potential solutions and actions together with a willingness to act upon the generated emotions. In the course of this development, the negative sentiments started to occupy a more dominant position that spread into and accompanied more and more everyday activities. The overlap in activities provided a fluid and an intense exposure to images, texts and video materials that further contribute to a willingness to engage in high-risk activism; for some even participation in the Syrian war. The analysis of *moral affordances* showed how group dynamics and socialization in certain settings worked to connect beliefs and actions. The participants constructed a moral context based on a certain *Salafi* interpretation of Islam that provides a particular worldview, values, principles of right or wrong conduct and clear-cut boundaries, thereby facilitating clear directions for action. This moral context provided opportunity to engage in religious cultivation, for example lectures, religious training and contemplation, as well as study groups combining religious beliefs and practices. The members ritualized their entire way of life, religious practice no longer reserved for conventional ritual and worship but also integrated in mundane activities in order to submit to God’s will and attain salvation. Moreover, the exemplary actions of heroic holy fighters, martyrs, contemporary participants who joined the Syrian war as well as appeals to feelings and reason helped to bridge beliefs and actions. In that sense, some of the members travelled to Syria, Iraq or Turkey to serve as militants or humanitarian relief workers or a combination of the two, progressing from humanitarian aid to armed struggle with a desire to fulfill a religious obligation to help the Muslims in Syria. The *attachment*

*affordances* analysis unfolded how the radical milieu provided opportunities to establish new social ties to other likeminded radical *Salafists* in Denmark and abroad, including groups affiliated to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. For example, new friendships, role models and social networks were established. Likewise, members constructed ties to influential (father) figures and role models. These role models and influential figures furnished peer-to-peer influence and adult-to-peer impact. The analysis of the *social control affordances* revealed how the participants developed sophisticated coping strategies to preserve free spaces and hide their more political activities from their families, schools and the police. Such strategies included turning off one's telephone and/or putting it aside when talking about politics and possible participation in the Syrian war, behaving nicely, staying out of trouble at school and getting good grades, lying to parents about plans for leaving for the Syrian conflict, and using encryption services and dark web platforms. Moreover, the moral context provided the approval or disapproval of different behavior, such as clothing and the use of social media platforms, to keep their free spaces unnoticed. Such behavior also exemplified how the members combined processes oriented around salvation. On the one hand, the members preached the responsibility of the individual for attaining their own salvation. On the other, they practiced collective processes, such as support and informal social control, aimed at satisfying God and obtaining rewards in the Hereafter.

Finally, the dissertation also analyzed the processes through which individuals left the radical milieu and the ultimate disintegration of the milieu itself (Chapter 8). The pathways for departing from the radical milieu are just as distinct and multiple as are the pathways leading toward it. The individual exit processes and the disintegration of the radical milieu were influenced by a combination of different individual and contextual factors. The respondents each experienced multiple "push" and "pull" factors in the course of their individual exit. The "push" factors included disillusionment with other members and the use of violence, failed expectations, loss of faith in the religio-political ideology and exhaustion, whereas the "pull" factors included positive interactions with moderate "outsiders," education and employment opportunities, and new priorities and aspirations. Thus, the respondents started to frequent new settings and engaged in new social ties and activities, which furnished new opportunities. The disintegration of the radical milieu was also influenced by group and system-level factors. Some participants died in Syria or Iraq or continued to participate in the Syrian conflict, while other members were imprisoned. Internal conflicts increased among the members as well as feuds with the local mosque. Influential figures in the milieu have been imprisoned, died or left the milieu, which has also had a detrimental impact on the recruit-

ment of the “next generation.” Moreover, the developments in the Syrian conflict and the consolidation of the Islamic State, the increased political focus on punishment, media coverage of the radical milieu and the engagement of its members in the Syrian conflict, increased monitoring from authorities and the lack of support from the local communities within certain neighborhoods all contributed to the disintegration of the radical milieu.

The theoretical framework of social ecology has been applied throughout the dissertation. After trying to answer the research questions, I continued applying a socio-ecological paradigm and turned to the question of why the radical milieu in focus developed where it did by focusing on the *neighborhood interaction* and characteristics (Bouhana, 2019b) (Chapter 9). Based on restricted police data, we see that Gellerup-Toveshøj experienced a higher prevalence rate of radicalization than did similar vulnerable neighborhoods close by. Why this concentration in Gellerup-Toveshøj? I use selected parts of the Danish Minerva SER Community Surveys, conducted by Lasse Lindekilde and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov, together with my qualitative data to address the “where” of radicalization. As discussed, certain characteristics may contribute to the emergence of the radical milieu in western Aarhus in Gellerup-Toveshøj, such as social cohesion, informal social control, institutional trust and moral context; however, more investigations and research are needed. While the residents in highly socially cohesive neighborhood communities display strong bonds of loyalty and internal involvement, these communities seem to try to solve problems internally, including radicalization-related problems. In that sense, the institutional trust in public institutions, including the police, was divided. Some trust the police in general, others distrust the police in general, and others yet trust the local police while distrusting the central police. The findings regarding informal social control are also mixed; for example, some residents perceive certain norm- or lawbreaking activities as trivial and harmless, such as graffiti, which contributes to an unwillingness to intervene and turning a blind eye. On the other hand, watching a potentially dangerous situation, such as children who are about to vandalize a moped by setting it on fire, contributes to a willingness to intervene by contacting the police. Experiencing radicalization makes some residents intervene directly by confronting the implicated individuals (but not involving the police), whereas some prefer to contact the police, and others yet prefer to turn a blind eye, regarding this as none of their business. The moral context also seems to encapsulate collective moral values and expectations that influence a willingness to intervene in gang and other criminal activities. In contrast, the shared values seem to contribute to an unwillingness to intervene when experiencing activities related to the radical milieu. This might partly be due to a fear of engaging in dialogue with those participating in the radical milieu. Another

reason may be that it appears to be more difficult to identify radicalization and to know when or how to be alert as opposed to gang-related and other criminal activities. In that sense, radicalization may present a grey zone for some residents when including a religious interpretation of Islam. This particularly seems to be the case if religion is generally perceived as an overall positive factor for providing guidelines for living or if residents share different Islamic doctrines with the members of the radical milieu. The scripturalist and literal readings of Islam in the radical milieu seem to resonate with a religious approach existing within some communities in and around Gellerup-Toveshøj, thus contributing to a surrounding moral context that provides support to certain behaviors. Such characteristics may be conducive to radicalization, which possibly contributed to the emergence of the radical milieu in Gellerup-Toveshøj.

In addition to these main findings from the analysis chapters, the dissertation presents findings that are unfolded across the analysis chapters as a whole. For example, the members of the radical milieu constitute a sophisticated *activity field*; that is, an individual's exposure to certain settings, individuals and activities over a given period of time (Wikström et al., 2010; and Wikström et al., 2012: 67-70, 252). Across age and authority, the members socialize with other likeminded "brothers" in cities throughout Denmark and abroad, including recreational activities, religious teachings, discussions, petty crime and high-risk activism. The participants also socialize in numerous settings throughout Aarhus, often for many hours each day, on weekends and during vacation periods, where one activity flows into another without clear-cut breaks. However, the members spend most of their time in the Gellerup-Toveshøj neighborhood in western Aarhus and in the mosque. The frequented settings include *neutral* and *open* settings throughout Aarhus, including the city center, public restaurants, beaches, public sports facilities, schools, clubs and neighborhoods, the mosque as well as social media and surface websites. The activities in these settings are aimed at maintaining and strengthening the engagement, cohesion and companionship between the members of the radical milieu. Moreover, socialization also happens in *radicalizing magnets* and *radical micro-settings*, such as small groups socializing in the mosque, in apartments, in small secluded "spaces" during shared activities, as well as via encryption services and dark web platforms (Lindekilde & Malthaner, 2017, Malthaner 2018, and Lindekilde et al., 2019). Thus, I argue that the members demonstrate a fluid and dynamic spatial mobility. These complex activity patterns shed light on the neglected "where" of radicalization, focusing specifically on where the activities take place, with whom individuals socialize, and in what kinds of activities likeminded peers engage. Interestingly, the members were also intensely aware of how this mobility spanning

settings such as schools and youth clubs, neighborhoods, restaurants and other public facilities as well as social media platforms necessitated a security culture to preserve the free spaces. The secluded and isolated settings provided room for deliberation and watching online videos about foreign politics, conflict zones and honorable actions aimed at shaping ideas and opinions, allowing and preparing for participation in the Syrian war. In addition to integrating system-level factors throughout the dissertation, such as conflict zones across the Muslim world, Western foreign policy and political conflict, I also include other larger *systems*, such as television and social media and encrypted services and dark web platforms (Bouhana, 2019b). This complex field of activities results in intense socialization through which the participants engage in a “hybrid onlife space” (Valentini et al., 2020: 2). They engage in an interplay of online and offline dimensions in a dynamic and fluid manner. They interact online while present physically, interact online while being separate physically and engage in online activities alone while being physically alone. This complex and intense socialization means that the online element is integrated in face-to-face activities and ensures that the socialization continues when not physically present. The social life unfolds through a constant interaction of online and offline elements, where “onlife” behavior overlaps in time and space. Further along these lines, the members’ “onlife” behavior within the radical milieu seems to represent a natural extension of the existing practices in their everyday lives.

## 10.2. Empirical Contributions

First and foremost, the dissertation contributes with unique, in-depth empirical qualitative data that provides new insights that contributes to a better understanding of individual pathways to the radical milieu, how their participation in the milieu affects them, and their exit from the milieu. Drawing on my prior network as well as gatekeepers and snowballing, I managed to gain access to a radical milieu and nine former participants who spoke candidly in multiple interviews about their past experiences, emotions, observations and viewpoints. Such milieus are normally closed to outsiders. The former participants in the radical milieu provided numerous concrete examples and accounts, which I have shared throughout the dissertation. In that sense, I have overcome the task of gaining access to primary data in investigating radicalization. Added to these 22 individual interviews are 56 individual and focus group interviews with professionals, such as police officers, social workers, mentors and schoolteachers, and leaders from Aarhus Municipality and the East Jutland Police, all of whom work with radicalization prevention in Aarhus, as well as non-radical Gellerup-Toveshøj residents. In sum, I argue that

the new qualitative empirical data upon which this dissertation rests contributes to a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the individual pathways to and from the radical milieu as well as the participation taking place within the milieu. My empirically driven investigation also contributes to taking the “Where?” question of radicalization seriously by shedding light on neighborhood-level factors and neighborhood interaction to understand the emergence and maintenance of the radical milieu in a particular neighborhood. In that sense, the qualitative data material supports and adds nuance to the Danish SER Community Surveys, thus bringing depth to the neighborhood characteristics. I elaborate on this further below.

The dissertation unfolds distinct empirical contributions. I will elaborate on these contributions based on four empirical clusters: *social ties, beliefs and actions, high-risk activism* and *interaction of online and offline activities*. First, the selection processes play a crucial role in exposing susceptible individuals to the radical milieu. While the respondents shape their own pathways pro-actively, this does not take place in a vacuum without social influences. The social and self-selection processes can be perceived as distinct theoretical ideal types of selection for analytical purposes. In applying the concepts to my empirical data, however, I argue that social selection and self-selection are more complex and seem to overlap and combine, thus forming a dual and dynamic relationship. My empirical data also adds nuance to Sageman’s (2008a: 66) theory regarding a preexisting “bunch of guys” who collectively end up in a radical milieu, as my data unfolds how preexisting social ties are transformed and re-shaped via fluid transitions along the path toward the radical milieu. The preexisting childhood friendships with others who attended the same schools, have participated in leisure activities and live in or frequent the same neighborhoods are reshaped and attain new meaning. Preexisting ties initially made while playing soccer or doing homework together lead to the discussion of existential issues and frustrations with political rhetoric together with an interest in religious learning. The participants also establish new social ties. In line with previous research (Malthaner, 2018), the radical milieu functions as a “connection-making” setting—both online and offline—that facilitates new social ties and networks between likeminded individuals in Denmark and abroad through numerous social activities. The members—who have preexisting social ties and new social ties between them—socialize through various activities. This socialization paints an emotionally complex picture in which the positive and negative sentiments constitute a dynamic relationship. On the one hand, my data material stands in contrast to most radicalization research, where the focus is on the negative feelings generated in other radical groups or organizations (see, e.g., Borum, 2003; Moghadam, 2005; Hafez & Mullins, 2015), as my study shows that positive feelings *are*

present, not least in the array of different social activities. On the other hand, my data is in line with studies concerning social and religious movements (see, e.g., Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001; Gould, 2009; Bosi & Della Porta, 2012; Sheikh, 2018; Van Ness & Summers-Efflers, 2019) which also points out the importance of positive feelings in activism. Nevertheless, my investigation contributes with detailed and nuanced perspectives on positive and negative emotions. My study shows how positive emotions are not only secondary to negative sentiments at all times but that they actually contribute to strengthening the fellowship. This laid the foundation for a focus on conflict zones and the politics through which activism later became part of the agenda. The interaction is dynamic and fluid.

Second, the positive and negative emotions contribute to the adoption of a new moral context, exemplified in my study by integrating a specific religious interpretation of Islam that informs desired actions. Although previous research has elaborated in detail on specific religious interpretations in radicalization, my data contains in-depth accounts and descriptions concerning the religious cultivation of a specific *Salafi*-inspired version, focusing on activities within certain settings. My empirical data thus adds nuance and new perspectives to this religio-political dimension of radicalization. The members of the radical milieu practiced a “lived ritual.” On the one hand, these findings stand in contrast to the classical research in the study of religions emphasizing how rituals are fixed in time and space via standardized sequences (see, e.g., Van Gennep, 1960 [1909]; Turner, 1969; Collins, 2004). On the other hand, my empirical analysis corresponds to previous research (Smart, 1996; Mahmood, 2001; Suhr, 2015) that shows how the members of the radical milieu “ritualize” every aspect of life in an infinite and fluid ritual without any clear beginning or ending. This implies that every breath, thought and action—even sleeping—is “ritualized” and potentially perilous if not performed in congruence with God’s direct revelation. In that sense, my findings are reminiscent of studies within the sociology of religion that emphasize “lived religion” or “everyday religion” that expands religious practice into everyday living as opposed to something that only transpires in religious institutions (see, e.g., Hall (ed.), 1997; McGuire, 2008: 3-18; Jeldtoft, 2011; Ammerman, 2014; 2016; Olsson, 2020). Moreover, the “brothers” also focus on the inner or greater *jihad*. Public debate often tends to focus solely on the outer or lesser violent *jihad* when focusing on militant *Salafist* organizations, such as groups with affiliations to the Islamic State or al-Qaeda. In line with previous research (see, e.g., Cook, 2005; Khosrokhavar, 2005; Hegghammer, 2017), however, my data adds nuance in terms of the emphasis on both types of *jihad*. The members strive to fight their sinful desires and work to improve body, soul and mind (inner or “greater” *jihad*), some participants choosing to take up

arms to fight a perceived enemy (outer or “lesser” jihad). The moral context sets the stage for a certain behavior as well as promoting desired actions. Thus, exemplary actions or modelling connects the radicalization of belief and actions. My data echoes previous research that distinguishes between the “radicalization of opinions” and “radicalization of actions,” albeit not framed within a linear stage model (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017b).

Third, the moral imperatives facilitate clear instructions for action, whereby the members are motivated to engage in high-risk activism. However, bridging belief and high-risk activism requires additional opportunities, expectations or pressures before acting upon one’s willingness to act. The ideal actions become easier to imitate via concrete, real and tangible encouragements (Crone, 2014; 2016; Schuurman, 2018: 162-3). My empirical investigation adds nuance to the phenomenon of understanding volunteers in conflict zones. Some of my respondents participated in the Syrian war as humanitarian relief workers, while they knew other members who either participated in armed struggle or began as relief workers but transitioned into militants for different anti-Assad militias. While high-risk activism unfolds distinct modes of participation, it is fluid and overlapping in some cases. The participants are aware of their actions and complex mobility, thus developing coping strategies work to preserve *free spaces* (Polletta, 1999; Cross & Snow, 2011). Here, I build on social movement theory of free spaces but refine their functions. The members of the radical milieu develop the detailed and deliberate use of coping strategies to hide their discussions and activities from the authorities, school and their families, and they maintain their companionship.

Finally, in contrast to most research on radicalization that analyzes the online and offline arenas separately, my data contributes with a dynamic focus on “onlife” interaction (Valentini et al., 2020) in which it becomes more evident how the members engage in online and offline interaction in fluid and overlapping transitions. Their online and offline interactions provide mobility and flexibility together with ongoing exposure to radical teachings and nurturing in fluid and overlapping activities; for example, wireless connectivity and mobile computing provide easy access to videos online about foreign politics, conflict zones and honorable martyr actions that are viewed while eating together or engaging in other social activities together.

### 10.3. Theoretical Contributions

The dissertation builds on Noémie Bouhana’s social ecology framework, which contributes new theoretical perspectives to the field of radicalization. Overall, the social-ecological perspective contributes by capturing micro-, meso- and

macro-level aspects to the understanding of radicalization, which go beyond the predominantly individual-level explanations in the extant literature. For my dissertation, the social ecology framework combines personal experience with different group dynamics and more structural influences, such as large-scale political conflicts, social media and encrypted platforms as well as broader surroundings, for example neighborhoods. Hence, in analyzing radicalization, the social-ecology perspective emphasizes the interplay between certain individuals that socialize in certain “onlife” settings and provides opportunities for conducting promoted behavior and actions. However, this does not happen in a vacuum. Contextual factors—at both the systemic and neighborhood levels—contribute to the emergence and maintenance of the radical milieu as well as influencing certain developments within it, including the willingness to partake in the Syrian war and the ultimate disintegration of the milieu. In that sense, I contribute theoretically by applying Bouhana’s S<sup>5</sup> theoretical framework to this type of in-depth qualitative data, thereby demonstrating the practical relevance of the theory. The use of Bouhana’s S<sup>5</sup> provides new insights. No one has done this before. Thus, my dissertation is a first attempt at applying ecological theory to detailed qualitative data. I hope more radicalization research will be conducted through the lens of social ecology. In addition, I elaborate on selected concepts related to Bouhana’s theoretical framework by combining concepts and theoretical perspectives such as the radical milieu and socio-spatial settings. This integration of theories and concepts contributes to refining the social-ecological framework to make the theory more applicable to my empirical data. Thus, I contribute by further developing the theoretical framework.

The application of the *socio-spatial settings* concept (Malthaner, 2018; Lindekilde et al., 2019) to my detailed empirical data contributes to expanding the understanding of spatial mobility, thus contributing to taking the setting dynamic and mobility seriously. The use of the *radical milieu* concept (Malthaner & Waldman, 2014; Malthaner, 2014) in relation to my data also contributes to strengthening an already advanced and robust theoretical perspective. I have also demonstrated how the social-ecological framework of the dissertation is not only beneficial in terms of understanding and explaining radicalization but also advantageous for analyzing individual de-radicalization and disengagement as well as the disintegration of the radical milieu itself. My data material seems to reflect an ongoing discussion of how radicalization as well as de-radicalization and disengagement relate to or entail distinct factors (Della Porta & LaFree, 2012; Kruglanski et al., 2014; Winter & Feixas, 2019). The dissertation contributes to this discussion by emphasizing how some of the same factors are at play in both the pathways leading toward the radical

milieu as well as those leading away from it, including individual experiences, social ties and broader surroundings.

## 10.4. Selected Implications for Radicalization Prevention

The current initiatives aimed at preventing radicalization in Denmark—both nationally and locally—are solid and include an array of well-thought-out initiatives. And there are many dedicated practitioners and frontline workers dealing with radicalization prevention on a daily basis. The selected implications of my findings for practice position themselves within the existing work being done, thus informing suggestions that either support or could be used to adjust initiatives. Conversely, the suggestions for practice inform new aspects or concrete initiatives that could contribute to strengthening existing prevention efforts—either directly or indirectly. Thus, my dissertation aims to contribute to the prevention of radicalization as influenced by my accumulated knowledge of radicalization and my past work experience with the prevention thereof. This approach has both strengths and weaknesses. The former include how I position myself in a field of which I have in-depth knowledge and can therefore expand upon. The latter that I am trained in a particular way of thinking about radicalization prevention, meaning that I am too closed or locked in my thinking and suggestions. In the following, I will structure the implications for practice based on the Danish approach to preventing radicalization, including primary (general), secondary (specific) and tertiary (targeted) levels of radicalization prevention. My suggestions are not exhaustive, and I would like to engage in dialogue with interested parties to elaborate on my prevention proposals.

### 10.4.1. Primary (General) Level of Prevention

The primary or general level of prevention is a broad approach usually aimed at young individuals and those considered to have close relations to youth, such as parents, teachers and social workers. Awareness and capacity building are focal points for improving the general conditions for the individual and broader society alike (Hemmingsen, 2015b). On this level of prevention, I suggest a need for building trusting relationships to inward-looking communities that either are inclined to solve problems internally or at least prefer such problem-solving solutions. This is in line with the “community policing” strategy pursued by the East Jutland local police in attempting to empower the communities in the problem-solving police work (Fleming, 2009). In the spring of 2019, the East Jutland local police unit working in western Aarhus relocated to new offices in Gellerup-Toveshøj. Additional employees from the

central prevention section joined the local police unit to reinforce the local presence and to establish ties to community members and different associations to build or strengthen trust and safety (East Jutland Police, 2019). The presence, accessibility and dialogue, and the involvement of the community may improve the ongoing relationship-building work. The effort invested in ongoing dialogue with different communities (e.g., certain mosque-centered milieus) is also a necessity. In practice, the East Jutland Police and Aarhus Municipality engaged in such dialogue in 2014 with the particular mosque in focus here after the police discovered that many of the Syrian volunteers from the radical milieu in Aarhus frequented that mosque. This was intended to raise awareness and engage in dialogue about how to handle the situation as well as the general prevention of radicalization. Although, fundamental disagreements did exist, the dialogue—in combination with other factors—seemed to help to reduce the number of young people leaving for Syria (Agerschou, 2014). It is also important to note that police forces do not have to be alone in working to develop trust. Other institutions, agencies and individuals may also engage in such dialogue or more specific collaborations. This may also influence an increase in the networks outside Gellerup-Toveshøj.

I am able to provide an example from my own work of how a data-collection procedure influenced the trust and collaborations with a local community. We have seen how one of the focus groups was scheduled as part of a give-and-take approach: I was able to recruit five respondents from a local organization for whom I in turn conducted a dialogue-based workshop focused on neighborhood interaction. The focus group and workshop both helped to establish relations and trust between the members and me. Subsequently, the members and I entered into a different kind of cooperation. The members knew that, parallel to my investigation, I was developing an initiative concerning meta-conversations about religion for Aarhus Municipality. We scheduled two dialogue-based workshops in which most of the participants engaged openly: posing questions, engaging in critical dialogue and doing exercises. Next, the organization contacted me to learn about radicalization. Some of the members knew a little about radicalization from the media, whereas others knew nothing at all about it. We scheduled a lecture and dialogue about the similarities and differences between politically and religiously motivated radicalization, and I provided inspiration for how to engage in dialogue if concerned for a young person as well as when and how to contact the authorities working with radicalization prevention. They knew I used to be a former mentor working with radicalized youth, and some of them shared past experiences with families with youth who left for Syria and died. While this may sound trivial, my point is that these activities indicate how the practice of reciprocal

partnerships can contribute to establishing ties and trust that can in turn promote a willingness and desire to talk openly about sensitive topics, such as religion and radicalization in local communities, which are usually difficult to access.

The example above also serves to demonstrate how some local communities and individuals are genuinely interested in preventing radicalization. However, my findings call for a focus on the moral context in certain neighborhood communities in which radical milieus are allowed by community members who turn a blind eye. In that sense, it is beneficial to raise awareness and make clear that turning a blind eye or allowing radical milieus can have dire consequences for the young people who end up in such a milieu. For example, they can be wounded physically and/or damaged psychologically, killed, end up in prison or “just” find that their past actions will have a negative impact on their later life. While many Gellerup-Toveshøj residents do care and take responsibility, some members of the community are failing to acknowledge the importance of helping to care for the community youth and to take responsibility for the prevention of radicalization.

My findings also demonstrate how a particular religious interpretation of Islam is playing an essential role in radicalization. As stated above, religion as such is not to be perceived as any kind of scapegoat for the problems relating to certain forms of radicalization. In addition, other specific religious interpretations play a corresponding role, providing a religious alternative in exit processes via moderate “outsiders.” However, I argue that balancing one’s religious beliefs and practices is a challenge in the sense of ensuring that one’s religiosity becomes a positive influence instead of a negative impact. I argue for the need to articulate religiosity more openly with a focus on knowledge and reflection: declaring one’s religious engagement is one thing; determining how to practice said engagement is another. Moreover, navigating in daily life and Danish or Western society more broadly as a Muslim is not always easy. As previously mentioned, such a way of life may require formal training and proper guidance regarding Islam that encompasses a “complex, technical area of study” that includes many aspects that leave many untrained religious seekers “unequipped to determine whether a given Islamic interpretation represents a ‘real Islam’” (Wiktorowicz, 2005: 136). Some of the respondents who participated in the radical milieu provided examples of how they started questioning some of the religious interpretations made by influential figures as they acquired more knowledge of Islam. For example, the respondents who either dedicated themselves to a religious revival or intensified their religiosity on their path into the milieu lacked prior religious knowledge and practice, which would seem to result in a lack of resilience that might otherwise bolster against exposure to the radical milieu. I also argue that contemplating about

one's religious engagement with family members or in school through reflection and meta-conversations is pivotal. Questions such as "How can we perceive religion?", "Why do some people integrate religious perspectives into their lives?", "What can religion provide me?", "What is good and bad concerning religion?", "Who will define my religiosity?", and "In what ways is religion something for me?" Such questions possibly open up for curiosity and respectful dialogue about religious beliefs and practices in relation to one's life, friends and family and society as a whole as well as providing tools for how to engage in conversation concerning religion.<sup>23</sup> On an anecdotal note, I found inspiration for the initiative concerning religion in my past work mentoring radicalized young Muslims, where religion also played a significant role. In two cases in particular, the contemplation for practicing a certain religious orientation seemed absent. The questions above and others were presented in a respectful tone, thus opening up for conversations and critical reflection about religious perspectives related to the life of the individual in question. The mentees were positive. I perceived this opportunity as an alternative to the radical milieu, providing alternative viewpoints and challenging the mentees. Other mentors engaged in similar positive and constructive conversations about religion with their mentees. It is important to note that the critical discussions were neither intended to prove religion false nor to strip the young mentees of their faith. The described initiative concerning religion offers an example of how national and local actors can work with religion. Based on my data, the members of the radical milieu felt accepted for their Muslim background among likeminded individuals. In contrast to schools, families and the public debate, the milieu facilitated room for religious practice without the need to defend one's religious engagement. In that sense, the radical milieu became an existential breathing space. This may be felt or experienced. Regardless, I argue for making room for the "religious conversation" in similar ways as other existential conversations with young people in schools, leisure

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<sup>23</sup> Parallel to my PhD project, I advised Aarhus Municipality and contributed to the development of two initiatives. One of them is based on my past work experience together with my project data and concerns religion. This initiative has been implemented as part of the ordinary Aarhus Municipality strategies to promote well-being among youth. Developed as a school program for use in the classroom, it emphasizes dialogue, reflection and understanding through meta-conversations about religion. Thus, the initiative does not provide formal teaching in different religions. The format consists of brief introductions, dialogue and individual and group exercises. It is dynamic in the sense that "religious" individuals from different religions as well as non-religious individuals participate together, and the program is designed to impart knowledge about different religious worldviews and practices to provide greater understanding and tolerance for the religious and non-religious individual alike.

clubs and at home via open and critical conversations and discussions about religion. Such a perspective—in addition to other factors—intends to contribute to identity formation, life-balance, certainty and resilience life-grounding that may indirectly bolster against exposure to radical milieus. I admit that articulating religion can be hazardous. However, I argue that implementing such an initiative as part of preexisting strategies to focus on well-being and classroom companionship will be beneficial in contrast to a more direct radicalization prevention strategy.

The members of the radical milieu developed a sophisticated security culture to conceal their activities from their parents, teachers and other prying eyes. At least for some time, many were able to remain under the radar via careful behavior in school: avoid trouble, don't make too much noise and get good grades. I argue that there is a need to rethink how we perceive of well-being in school. In many ways, the school system provides holistic perspectives on different subjects and learning approaches. We must re-think well-being to prevent situations in which radicalized young people are able to “hide” behind good grades and decent behavior. I have met skilled frontline workers, including teachers and social workers, who engaged in constructive dialogue with young individuals regardless of whether the topic is nonattendance, smoking, a literalist religiosity, or more general concerns about the failure to thrive and radicalization, thus creating a relation and a responsive young individual. I have also experienced the opposite (also during my data collection). In that sense, there is both a need to tackle the fear of engaging in specific dialogues as well as to provide the tools and motivation for engaging in constructive dialogue.

#### 10.4.2. Secondary (Specific) Level of Prevention

The secondary or specific level of prevention is a focus directed at individuals or groups of individuals identified as being at-risk of radicalization or assessed as being radicalized because they are exposed to radical milieus via their immediate social surroundings. Exit and interventions (e.g., risk assessments and mentoring) are the focal point. Other activities include community outreach (e.g., dialogue with community members) to prevent young people from leaving for conflicts zones and/or networks and coaching for parents and other relatives of young individuals who might be thinking about leaving for a conflict or who have left for a specific conflict zone, such as the Syrian war (Hemmingsen, 2015b). The predominant risk assessment procedures emphasize social ties and group dynamics, whereby some actors in the prevention field include the immediate social surroundings in their work to some extent. My findings concerning dynamic social ties call for a systematic approach that

largely integrates the immediate surroundings in both prevention thinking and concrete initiatives in addition to the predominant individual risk factors. It is more a matter of integration than an either-or question. Hence, there is a need for a sharper focus on how the preexisting ties can transform and reshape over time and how this possibly influences the at-risk individual. The preexisting ties can change character in terms of activities and settings, thus encompassing new meanings and purposes. In that sense, the knowledge about dynamic social ties suggests the ongoing assessment of individuals at risk. While the social ties may function at a given time as a protective factor, social bonds may also transform into a risk factor—and vice versa. Moreover, the members did not only interact with other likeminded individuals in the radical milieu; they also frequent certain settings during their interactions. This perspective indicates a greater focus on the significance of the setting. It is not only about with whom an individual interacts, but also where the interaction and activity take place. Focusing on the individual's activity patterns in this manner must be integrated more in the prevention of radicalization in general and the risk assessments in specific. Such knowledge may also be useful to the mentors; that such a perspective can be integrated in the daily work with a mentee in terms of background information as well as the general mentor-mentee conversation. The focus on settings can also be related to one's peers and activities in a more systematic approach. We talked about settings during our mentor-mentee relations, but not based on any systematic approach or directly connected to companionship and activities with others. These new insights would have been useful.

Although the participants in the radical milieu frequented most of the city, including schools, leisure clubs, mosques, neighborhoods and social media platforms as well as dark web domains and encryption services, the members spent most of their time together in the mosque in western Aarhus. At the peak of the radical milieu in Aarhus, several Danish politicians called for the mosque to be closed. Researchers disagreed, however, as the problem with radicalization would not disappear and closing the mosque would likely just send the radicals “underground,” which would render intervention more difficult (Kristensen 2014; Ejsing, 2015). I share this view, as my data shows how the members met in various settings, indicating a flexible mobility. Had the mosque been closed, the participants would probably have spent more time in apartments or other secluded settings. Some members also moved to other cities after the authorities targeted the milieu in Aarhus. Drawing inspiration from criminology, closing down the mosque at that time or in a similar situation in the future would probably only influence some sort of “(crime) displacement” (Weisburd et al., 2012: 11) as individuals move around, whereas

physical settings and buildings do not. Instead, continuing efforts to intervene, such as mentoring or dialogue with radical groups and local communities, seem more valuable. Group-based dialogue may also be useful. I know that the integration of group-focused initiatives may be challenging, as working with one individual at a time seems easier. However, in relation to the 2014 dialogue with the mosque mentioned above, the East Jutland Police also engaged in dialogue with one of the radical groups in Aarhus (via the mosque) collectively, the purpose of which was to discuss and advise on the social, health-related and legal downsides of leaving for the conflict zone in Syria and neighboring countries. The dialogue with the mosque seems to have created relations that were useful in terms of establishing contact to the radical youth group. Such initiatives seem to establish ties that were later useful in mentoring and exit programs as well as providing facts and knowledge that seem to contribute to influencing some members to withdraw from the Syrian war. Thus, I suggest that such approaches should be integrated more systematically as part of group-level measures.

The participants also furnish encouragement cues, such as an obligation to help Muslims in conflict zones, appeals to emotions and videos with exemplary actions aimed at bridging beliefs and actions. With that knowledge in mind, these cues can be articulated and challenged, for example in mentoring or by other agencies that conduct preventive talks with radicalized individuals. Under the right circumstances, for example in the right situation with a trusted employee with the necessary professional skills, motivation and tools, such an approach—in combination with other factors—may help to prevent individuals from leaving for conflict zones. On an anecdotal note, some other mentors and I have practiced this approach. In my case, one of my mentees showed me—after having worked together and establishing some measure of trust—one of the many Islamic State propaganda videos to which he was referring. The video combined light war material and everyday life in the Islamic State territory. No beheadings or other horrifying violent content were shown. Thus, I asked the mentee if he was interested in watching the video together to analyze it frame by frame to identify the sender and receiver, purpose, message and anticipated reactions, instruments and symbols. This is rather similar to *framing analysis*, consisting of diagnosis, prognosis and motivation (Snow & Byrd, 2007). He agreed to doing so, and the activity provided valuable discussion and insights that added nuance to the perception of a “real” Muslim, the glorified martyr stories and the Muslim obligation. More importantly, the mentee decided not to leave for Syria to fight and later left the radical milieu entirely. I think the analysis of the video contributed to his reflections and decision.

Based on my study, the participants unfold a complex “onlife” interaction. I will echo many parents and professionals: In practice, the online-offline distinction seems out of touch with the lived reality of most young people in the Western world. Everyday life seems to constitute an interwoven, hybrid “onlife” interaction. This knowledge leads to at least two suggestions. First, exposure is not an all-or-nothing question; rather, it is a dynamic and fluid process. For example, although an individual stops frequenting a certain radical mosque or no longer visits certain websites providing radical material, we cannot know for sure that they will not be exposed to radical material. Although this knowledge is difficult to include in a formula or to translate into a specific initiative, it may be useful to the mentoring process in terms of focusing on the dynamic approach to “onlife” exposure. The second aspect relates to the general level of prevention, especially concerning school programs that articulate a more one-sided focus on the online element. In the wake of al-Qaeda’s virtual strategies and online publications (e.g., the *Inspire* and *Al-Shamikh* magazines), as personified by the digital ideologue Anwar Awlaki as well as the emergence of the Islamic State and their focused media strategies, there was an increase in online prevention programs worldwide targeting children and youth, teachers and/or parents. Public, professional and academic debates focused on preventing young people from becoming exposed to or uncritically becoming involved with such radical material. Denmark, including Aarhus, was no exception. In Aarhus, I participated in such programs in my former job, contributing to the development of a school program focused on the online element (albeit with offline elements). My point is that future initiatives such as school programs should integrate a more balanced “onlife” approach as opposed to focusing exclusively or predominantly on either the offline or online element.

### 10.4.3. Tertiary (Targeted) Level of Prevention

The tertiary or targeted level of prevention focuses directly on individuals who have engaged in past criminal activities or are in impending risk of such behavior, for example recruiting for, planning or committing to a violent cause, participation in burglaries for a higher cause or leaving for a banned conflict zone area or leaving as a foreign fighter. The Danish national police, prison and probation services, and municipalities with local police provide the individually tailored programs. The focal points are exclusively interventions and exit. However, in specifically tailored cases and when possible, moderate “outsiders,” such as the parents and friends of the individual, are included to provide skills and abilities to support the individual (Hemmingsen, 2015b). My data adds nuance to the concept of Syrian volunteers: Some perform relief

work, some fight, while others combine both. This finding may be useful in several ways when dealing with returnees. First, the foreign fighter concept has often been used to designate all of the Syrian volunteers. This seems inaccurate and stigmatizing, which may be counterproductive and even *backfire* (Hess & Martin, 2006). Such labelling can have long-term personal and professional consequences. Second, the question of posing a danger to Danish society is also interesting. I cautiously argue that an individual's engagement (and together with whom) in the Syrian war, as well as the individual returnee's motivation and state of mind, may indicate whether or not a returnee poses a security risk. Not all of the volunteers in the armed conflict necessarily pose a security threat. That is not to say that I condone leaving for conflict zones; quite to the contrary, regardless of whether this participation is to provide humanitarian aid or to take up arms. Moreover, someone who has not volunteered in conflict zones may also pose a danger to security through other activities, such as recruitment, fundraising, intense radicalization or the dissemination of encouragement via honorable actions. Third, it has been difficult for the authorities to provide evidence of criminal activities concerning the returnees from the Syrian conflict zone. In such cases, where prosecution is not an option, I support the actors who initiate re-integration programs as part of their Syrian contingencies aimed at helping returnees back to everyday life. Alternatively, the returnees may risk returning to the radical milieu or further radicalization.

Participation in the radical milieu also involved positive emotions, not least as part of an enjoyable social life. The members engaged in positive activities and became part of a genuine comradeship. Such findings call for an approach that does not underestimate the value of this comradeship. It may be difficult to replace these social ties during exit processes. Thus, I am in line with the many actors who have already underlined the importance of bonding together with alternative social ties, including parents, community role models, police officers, mentors and other moderate "outsiders" when individuals engage in exit processes and mentoring. Such ties seem to support and influence new directions and to facilitate new positive activities.

My findings also indicate that proactive measures may contribute to the disintegration of a radical milieu; some exited the milieu, others moved to other towns and other milieus, while others died. More importantly, when the influential figures either exited or died, the remaining members seemed to become unmotivated and failed to recreate the structure and to recruit the next generation. In that sense, I suggest that it may be beneficial to focus on the influential figures through individually tailored programs. After successfully isolating such figures, the radical milieu may disintegrate relatively quickly.



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## English Summary

This empirically oriented dissertation underlines the importance of the context when trying to understand radicalization. It is the story of a specific *Salafi*-inspired radical milieu in Aarhus, Denmark (2007-17), which draws on an interplay between individual- and context-level factors. Such an approach contributes to understanding the individual pathways to the radical milieu, the dynamics characterizing participation in it and the exit process. Qualitative data interview sources constitute the basis for this investigation of a specific radical milieu and its broader surroundings. The data was collected in Aarhus, wherefrom 35-40 young individuals have left for the Syrian war to perform humanitarian relief work and/or to fight. The data collection applied a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured individual interviews with focus group interviews featuring multiple respondent types to help us better understand radicalization through an in-depth, multi-level analysis. Of the 78 interviews in total, 22 were conducted with nine former members of the radical milieu in focus.

The dissertation focuses on the immediate physical and virtual surroundings by linking space and socialization processes, hence investigating the neglected “where” of radicalization. First, different kinds of personal experiences facilitate a susceptibility to moral change through which religious curiosity and searching through face-to-face guidance and online learning are elements in proactive trajectories. Likewise, childhood friendships within the same neighborhoods, schools and leisure activities are re-shaped and transformed over time and contribute to exposure to radical teachings. Second, the participants within the radical milieu provide a range of activities and opportunities through different socializing features. More specifically, the participants construct a certain moral context that directs certain behavior and actions. They experience meaning, direction and satisfaction, perceiving the radical milieu as offering attractive, enjoyable companionship. The dynamic and fluid relationship between non-violent everyday activities and discussions of Western foreign policy and conflict zones throughout the Muslim world contributes to finding certain behaviors as viable action alternatives, such as leaving for the conflict in Syria to take part in humanitarian relief work or military campaigns—or a combination of the two. Such activities take place via interaction between physical and virtual arenas—a hybrid form of socialization—to create and reinforce a sense of fellowship. Moreover, the participants are able to establish new friendships and networks in Denmark and abroad as well as developing ties to role models and father figures. Socialization unfolds through a dynamic spatial dimension, frequenting a wide range of “open” and more

“closed” settings depending on the nature of the activity and purpose. The participants socialized in numerous settings throughout Aarhus for several hours each day, including weekends and vacations, where one activity would flow into the next without clear-cut breaks. They are aware that some of the activities need to be hidden. Thus, the members create a sophisticated set of coping strategies to preserve their safe spaces from the authorities, schools and their own parents. Over the years, the character of the established radical milieu changes from operating as a *dawah* group to becoming affiliated with al-Qaeda and then turning to the Islamic State. Third, the fluid transitions also exemplify individual withdrawal from the radical milieu as well as the collective disintegration of the milieu. Individual exit processes entail a combination of individual “push” factors (e.g., disillusionment with other members and the use of violence, failed expectations, loss of faith in a religio-political ideology and exhaustion) and individual “pull” factors (e.g., positive interactions with moderate “outsiders,” opportunities for educational attainment and employment, and new priorities and aspirations in life). In addition, the disintegration of the radical milieu was influenced by different contextual factors, including internal conflicts, dwindling numbers, the developments in the Syrian conflict and the consolidation of the Islamic State. The increased focus on punishment among politicians, media coverage of the group’s engagement in the Syrian conflict, increased monitoring from authorities and lack of support from the local communities in certain neighborhoods also contributed to the radical milieu ultimately disintegrating.

And it is important to note that radical milieus are not detached from their surroundings, including certain neighborhoods. Individuals who have left for Syria from countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Belgium and the UK seem to influence this trend. They come from and are shaped by the same environmental characteristics, radical milieus being unevenly distributed in and around certain cities, and, more specifically, concentrated in certain socio-economically underperforming neighborhoods. Aarhus is no exception. In that sense, another dimension is added to the neglected “where” of radicalization by examining why the radical milieu in focus here emerged and was sustained in a particular neighborhood in Aarhus and not elsewhere. For this purpose, I draw on some of the results from *The Danish SER Community Surveys* conducted by Lasse Lindekilde and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov, which focus on the emergence of radical milieus in particular neighborhoods. I supplement with my focus group and individual interviews. More specifically, the dissertation sheds light on characteristics of the neighborhood surrounding the radical milieu, thus emphasizing neighborhood-level factors such as social cohesion, institutional trust, informal social control and moral context.

## Dansk resumé

Denne ph.d.-afhandling beskriver en empirisk undersøgelse af et specifikt salafistisk inspireret radikalt miljø i Aarhus i perioden 2007-2017, som fokuserer på at integrere individuelle og kontekstuelle perspektiver i analysen af radikaliseringsprocesser. Afhandlingen kaster lys over individuelle radikaliseringsstier ind i et bestemt radikalt miljø, miljøets interne dynamikker og disses indflydelse på deltagerne samt vejene ud af miljøet. Kvalitative interviewdata udgør afhandlingens empiriske fundament. Dataindsamlingen er udført i Aarhus, hvorfra 35-40 unge individer er rejst ud for at deltage i Syrienskonflikten gennem humanitær nødhjælp eller som krigere i væbnet kamp. Dataindsamlingen er baseret på en kombination af semistrukturerede individuelle interviews og fokusgruppeinterviews med forskellige typer respondenter. En dybdegående multi-level analyse af respondenterne bidrager til en bedre forståelse af radikaliseringsprocesser. 22 ud af 78 interviews blev gennemført med ni tidligere kernemedlemmer af det specifikke radikale miljø i Aarhus.

Afhandlingen fokuserer på de umiddelbare fysiske eller virtuelle omgivelser og sociospatiale processer med henblik på at undersøge det oversete radikaliserings 'hvor' eller stedets betydning for samme. For det første gør personlige erfaringer og oplevelser nogle personer modtagelige for moralsk forandring. Religiøs søgen via ansigt til ansigt-vejledning og online-undervisning er elementer i proaktive individuelle radikaliseringsstier. Gamle venskaber med personer fra samme kvarter, skoler og fritidsinteresser genskabes, transformeres og bidrager til gensidig eksponering til radikalt materiale og et radikalt miljø. For det andet tilbyder deltagerne i det radikale salafistisk inspirerede miljø hinanden et utal af aktiviteter og muligheder. De skaber eksempelvis en bestemt moralsk kontekst, der anviser en bestemt form for adfærd og handlinger. De opfatter det radikale miljø som et attraktivt fællesskab, der giver deres liv mening, retning, tilfredsstillelse og glæde. I hvert fald for en tid. I det dynamiske og overlappende samspil mellem almindelige dagligdagsaktiviteter og fx diskussioner om Vestens udenrigspolitik og konfliktzoner i den muslimske verden kommer bestemte handlinger til at fremstå som brugbare handlingsalternativer, fx at deltage i Syrienskrigen som nødhjælper, kriger eller en kombination. Derudover får deltagerne i det radikale miljø mulighed for at opbygge nye venskaber og netværk i andre byer i Danmark og i udlandet og for at udvikle nye rollemodeller og knytte bånd til faderfigurer. Socialiseringen er dynamisk, og deltagerne i miljøet frekventerer en bred vifte af 'åbne' og 'lukkede' steder afhængig af aktiviteterens indhold og formål. De er sammen mange steder i Aarhus og i mange timer hver dag, inklusiv weekender og fe-

rier, og en aktivitet flyder over i en anden uden tydelig afgrænsning. Deltagerne er opmærksomme på, at nogle aktiviteter skal holdes hemmelige. De udvikler sofistikerede coping-strategier for at beskytte deres 'frirum' mod myndigheder, skoler og forældres indgriben. Overordnet set går det radikale miljø over tid fra at fokusere på dawah (missionering) til også at blive affilieret med terrororganisationerne al-Qaeda og Islamisk Stat. For det tredje begynder deltagerne at forlade miljøet, ligesom miljøet opløses. Individuelle veje ud af miljøet består af en kombination af individuelle push-faktorer (fx desillusionering over andre deltagere og brugen af vold, skuffede forventninger, tab af troen på den religiøs-politiske ideologi, udbrændthed) og individuelle pull-faktorer (fx positive bånd til moderate udefrakommende, muligheder for uddannelse og job samt nye prioriteter og livsmål). Ud over individuelle faktorer bidrager kontekstuelle faktorer til miljøets opløsning, fx interne konflikter i miljøet, Islamisk Stats konsolidering og politikernes øgede fokus på straf til Syriensfrivillige. Også mediernes dækning af deltagernes engagement i krigen i Syrien samt øget overvågning fra myndighederne bidrager til opløsningen.

Endelig er radikale miljøer ikke løsrevet fra deres omgivelser, som kan være bestemte nabolag, hvilket vi ved fra Syriensfrivillige fra eksempelvis Danmark, Sverige, Belgien og Storbritannien. De kommer fra og er formet af de samme miljøer, hvor de salafistisk inspirerede radikale miljøer er ujævnt fordelt i og omkring bestemte byer. De radikale miljøer er koncentreret i bestemte udsatte nabolag – Aarhus er ingen undtagelse. På dette område udvikler afhandlingen det oversete 'hvor' i radikaliserings eller stedets betydning ved at undersøge, hvorfor præcis dette radikale miljø voksede frem og bestod i et bestemt nabolag i det vestlige Aarhus og ikke i et andet. Afhandlingen tager med andre ord det radikale miljøes omgivelser seriøst. Den trækker på udvalgte spørgeskemaresultater fra *The Danish SER Community Surveys*, der er gennemført af Lasse Lindekilde og Kim Mannemar Sønderskov og fokuserer på fremkomsten af radikale miljøer i bestemte nabolag. Jeg supplerer med mine fokusgruppe- og individuelle interviews. Helt konkret stiller afhandlingen skarpt på nabolagskarakteristik i et bestemt boligområde i det vestlige Aarhus og undersøger nabolagsfaktorer såsom social sammenhængskraft, institutionel tillid, uformel social kontrol og moralsk kontekst.

# Appendices A-C

## **Appendix A:**

### Semi-structured interview guide, individual interviews with former members of a radical *salafist*-inspired milieu in Aarhus

#### **Introduction**

Welcome! And thanks for coming—I'm really pleased about that.

My name is Mikkel, and I'm a PhD candidate at Aarhus University. I have a degree in Study of Religion, and I worked in the Aarhus Municipality anti-radicalization unit for 6 years before my “comeback” to the University.

Before we get started, I will briefly introduce the interview. My project focuses on different kinds of communities, such as radicalization and how young people become part of a radical group or a radical milieu.

I have invited you because you have special knowledge about these issues. You're the expert in the room.

The interview is set to last approximately 1½ hours. I have prepared three topics, which we will look into shortly. For every topic, I've prepared some questions that I'd like you to answer. I'm interested in your experiences and stories. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers—all answers are welcome.

I will use my dictaphone to record the interview. The interview is for my research only. It's confidential and anonymous—your identity will not be identifiable. I will be saving the recording on a secure drive at Aarhus University, which I can access via my computer and which is password-protected.

<p><b>Intro (def.):</b> To make sure that we're on the right page/understand one another</p>	<p>Radical individuals and Radical milieu</p>	<p>My research interest is in people who have been part of <b>milieus</b> or <b>groups</b> where, among other things, the use of violence for either political or religious goals has been discussed. It could involve, for example leaving for Syria or Iraq as a foreign fighter or humanitarian relief worker.</p> <p><b>What you have experienced may resemble such a milieu. What would you call the milieu or group that you were part of?</b></p> <p>Sometimes in research, people refer to such milieus or groups as “radical milieus.”</p> <p>What should we call these milieus during the interview?</p>
<p><b>Topic 1:</b> The individual's exposure to the radical milieu</p> <p>Social selection, Self-selection, recruitment or other processes</p>	<p><b>Research question:</b> Through which processes are individuals exposed to the radical milieu?</p> <p>Exposure, pathways</p> <p>Social selection and self-selection</p>	<p><b>Interview topic:</b> Let's turn to the first topic. It's about how you became part of a radical milieu/this companionship/your group... etc. [used onwards]</p> <p><b>Question 1: Try to remember the very first time—can you describe how you got in contact with a radical milieu/this companionship/your group ... etc.? And how did you end up there?</b></p> <p>Potential probes about <b>social and self-selection</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You said something about... Can you say more about what happened?</li> <li>• Where did it take place (which settings, face-to-face or online)?</li> <li>• Who introduced you (family, schoolmates, friends, acquaintances or someone else (a stranger))?</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who did you meet?</li> <li>• What did they say to you? What did they do?</li> <li>• What was your first impression?</li> <li>• Was it something you had already given some thought or something that just happened?</li> <li>• How did the people who were already part of the radical milieu/this companionship/your group...etc. respond to you?</li> <li>• You said something about... Can you say more about that?</li> <li>• Have you always been interested in politics or religious relations? Where did these interests arise?</li> <li>• Can you say something about your first awareness about the radical milieu/companionship?</li> <li>• Were there times when you were seeking more actively—when you decided to seek out these kinds of milieus?</li> <li>• How did you find what you were looking for? (face-to-face or online)</li> </ul>
	<p>Recruitment</p>	<p>Potential probes about <b>recruitment</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did a specific individual (“radicalizer”) or group of people contact you?</li> <li>• Can you tell me what happened the first time you met him/them?</li> <li>• How long was that meeting?</li> <li>• In which place/places did you meet?</li> <li>• What did the radicalisator/the group say to you?</li> <li>• Can you remember how you responded back then?</li> </ul>
	<p>Other processes</p>	<p><b>Question 2: Have you participated in recruiting someone?</b></p> <p>Potential probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did it happen?</li> <li>• Do you know if other people have experienced other ways of becoming involved than what we have already talked about?</li> </ul>

		<p><b>Question 3: From your experiences, what would you say is the most typical way to get involved?</b></p>
<p><b>Topic 2:</b> Exploring the radical milieu</p>	<p><b>Research questions:</b> What are the functions/affordances of the radical milieu—offline and online—in which homegrown radicalization occurs?</p>	<p><b>Interview topic:</b> OK—let’s move on to the second topic. Here, we’re going to talk about what went on and what you did together in the radical milieu/this companionship/your group... etc.</p>
<p>Exploring the radical milieu—socialization</p>	<p>Functions/affordances of the radical milieu</p>	<p><b>Question 4: Try to think back—what did you do when you were together?</b> Potential probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you give examples?</li> <li>• Study groups, discussions, lectures, field trips, sleepovers, meetings, being online together, sports, restaurants etc.</li> </ul>
<p>Online/offline exposure</p>	<p>Online/offline</p>	<p><b>Question 5: Try to remember—did you also use the internet together when you met up?</b> My comment for progression: I will leave out Q5 if the IP says something about online activities in Q4 and then just move to the potential probes below, depending on what IP said in Q4. I will ask Q5 if the IP does not say something about online activities in Q4.</p> <p>Potential probes – <b>online/offline</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You said something about... Can you say more about that or...</li> <li>• You said something about... What about watching videos? If we should be more concrete—which videos did you watch (content; recruitment, ideology etc.)?</li> <li>• What about reading online material? If we should be more concrete—what did you read (e.g., al-Qaeda or the Islamic State magazines or anything else)?</li> <li>• I know some people have been active on social media. What do you think of that? Is it something you also tried?</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mosque/apartments, elsewhere?</li> <li>• Where did you meet most often? Why?</li> <li>• How often did you meet up? (every day, weekends)</li> <li>• For how long? How many hours?</li> <li>• Did you meet over consecutive days?</li> <li>• Which physical places (buildings, houses or surroundings) did you go to?</li> <li>• Did you sometimes have to change meeting places? Why?</li> <li>• Were there places that were not good to meet? How did you know that?</li> <li>• Did some of the elders in the group let you stay at their place?</li> </ul>
Exploring the radical milieu —Organization (structure)	Top-down, loose bottom-up or flat structure?	<p><b>Question 8: Try to think back—how did it happen when you were to meet?</b></p> <p>Potential probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who initiated the face-to-face meetings?</li> <li>• What about social media profiling?</li> <li>• Was there a distribution of tasks? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did anyone from the group take the lead?</li> <li>- When decisions were to be made, who did that?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Did you meet up with other groups/people? In Denmark? Abroad?</li> </ul>
Exploring the radical milieu —meaning	Companionship	<p><b>Question 9: I'm also interested in knowing what it meant to you to be part of your group. Can you say something about that?</b></p> <p>Potential probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you remember how you felt when you had been with your friends from the milieu?</li> <li>• (e.g., happy, proud, strong, satisfied, part of something bigger, angry, revenge etc.)</li> <li>• What did it you get out of being part of the group/why did you like it?</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (e.g., friends, on the right path, sense of meaning, sense of belonging, bonding, found peace, leanings etc.)</li> <li>• You being part of the milieu—did it sometimes also make you feel more unsafe, insecure or maybe even afraid?</li> </ul>
<p>Exploring the radical milieu – Encouragement cues (action-based)</p>	<p>Bridging belief and action</p>	<p><b>Question 10: I know people have been encouraged (either directly or indirectly) to go to Syria or Iraq to fight. Try to think back—did you also experience that?</b></p> <p>Potential probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happened?</li> <li>• Was going to Syria something you discussed?</li> <li>• Have you been to Syria or Iraq? Can you say more about that? How long did you stay?</li> <li>• What did you do? How did it happen?</li> <li>• How did you get there?</li> <li>• With whom did you stay?</li> <li>• Have you encouraged others to go to Syria or Iraq?</li> <li>• Have people in the milieu been encouraged to do other things? (raise money, cover/hide things etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Topic 3:</b> Why there—the emergence and sustenance of the radical milieu in a particular neighborhood</p>	<p><b>Research question:</b> What characterizes neighborhoods in which a radical milieu emerges?</p>	<p><b>Interview topic:</b> Let’s turn to the final topic. It concerns the places and people around you.</p>
<p>Neighborhood-level factors</p>	<p>Neighborhoods - tracing back</p>	<p><b>Question 11: Try to think back—can you describe the neighborhood in which you grew up?</b></p> <p>Potential probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you spend your time?</li> <li>• Did you have any interests?</li> <li>• Did you have any leisure activities?</li> <li>• Did you have ethnic Danish friends?</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you say something about the composition of people in the place(s) you have lived (e.g., a mix of people with different ethnic backgrounds or mostly one-sided)?</li> <li>• Can you say something about your school's composition in terms of people (e.g., a mix of people with different ethnic backgrounds)?</li> <li>• Did you talk much about politics or religious relations at home?</li> <li>• Did you talk much about politics or religious relations outside home? Where? With whom?</li> <li>• How was parental supervision growing up?</li> </ul>
	<p>Neighborhood surrounding the radical milieu</p>	<p><b>Question 12: OK—We've talked about where you've lived in the past. Now let's move forward. Can you describe the neighborhood around you when you were part of the radical milieu/this companionship/your group...etc.?</b></p> <p>Potential probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earlier you said something about... Can you say more about that?</li> <li>• What did people around you (family, friends, neighbors or strangers) say about the conflict in Syria and Iraq?</li> <li>• Where did you hear about the conflict for the first time?</li> <li>• Can you remember other things/events that somehow affected your views on politics and religious relations?</li> </ul>
	<p>Neighborhood interaction</p>	<p>Potential probes about <b>neighborhood interaction</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earlier you mentioned... In the neighborhood where you usually met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did people trust the police?</li> <li>- Did people know each other/trust each other?</li> <li>- Did people help each other?</li> <li>- Did people do things together?</li> <li>- Did people look out for each other?</li> <li>- Did people keep an eye on each other?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>Community members' response to the involvement in the radical milieu</p>	<p><b>Question 13 (final question): Try to think back—how did people around you respond to you being part of the radical milieu/this companionship/your group...?</b></p> <p>Potential probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you have to hide your activities? Or were people aware of what was going on?</li> <li>• Were other members of the community sympathetic to your position?</li> <li>• Were other members of the community hostile to your involvement?</li> <li>• Did your parents (or others from your family) react to your involvement? How?</li> <li>• How about friends, neighbors or teachers—did they react? How?</li> </ul>
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**Closure:**

I do not have any further questions. Do you want to add, elaborate on or ask about something before we close the interview?

One last thing. I would like to hear your immediate response to the interview about the questions and the progression of the interview. Was something unclear or not understandable?

Then, I would like to thank you very much for your time and participation—you've been a huge help. Thanks!

## **Appendix B:**

### **Interview guide—focus groups for ordinary residents in Gellerup-Toveshøj in western Aarhus**

#### **Introduction**

Welcome! And thanks for coming—I'm really pleased.

My name is Mikkel, and I'm a PhD candidate. I will be steering you through today's program and the focus group.

Before we get started, I will briefly introduce the interview. My project focuses on positive communities in local neighborhoods. This includes people helping each other, trusting each other, knowing each other, and/or doing things together, like eating together. I also focus on negative communities, which could be gangs or radicalization/radical milieus. I investigate how these two types of communities emerge and exist side by side. In that sense, I'm interested in both types of communities.

I have invited all of you [4-6 people], because you (live close to each other and) know what it's like to live in your neighborhood. You're the experts. You live in a place where both positive and negative communities are present. Therefore, I would like you to discuss the positive communities you're part of and the negative communities in your neighborhood. The positive communities you are sharing with each other are not always broadcasted in the media. I also want to hear those stories.

The focus group is set to last approximately 2 hours. I have prepared three topics. For every topic, I have prepared exercises and questions. The idea is that you discuss these questions amongst yourselves. If the discussion gets off track, if you run out of things to say, or if not everyone is speaking—someone will usually do something about it or I will help.

Before every exercise, I will guide you on what to do and which questions to discuss. I am interested in your opinions, but also your experiences and stories. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers—all answers are welcome. As I said—I'm on the sidelines, ready to supplement with further questions.

I'm recording the interview on video, simply because it makes it so much easier to transcribe the interview afterwards when we a focus group has more than a couple of participants. The interview is for my research. The interview is confidential and anonymous—you will not be identifiable. I will be saving the recording on a secure drive at Aarhus University, which I can access via my computer and which is password-protected.

We have just shared pizzas. I've brought additional refreshments [fruits and chocolate and tea and coffee]—just go ahead.

## **Topic 1: The “well-being” of the neighborhood:**

- You’re going to talk about good things about your neighborhood (positive companionships)
  - 1. Exercise/instructions and questions:** First, please list five good things about your neighborhood individually on paper. Then share with each other and list five good things together. You must keep discussing until you agree on a shared list of five good things.
    - (a) If the group lists some of the factors I want to address, I will go on as follows: I notice that your common list mentions social control, trust, cohesion, helping each other, doing stuff together, a willingness to intervene and similar things. Could you say more about that?
    - (b) If the group does not list some or any of the factors I want to address, I will go on as follows: I noticed that your list does not mention [some of the factors]. What if we consider... let’s say “trust.” By trust, I mean people who trust each other in a neighborhood. Would you say that trust is something that influences your neighborhood?

### **Possible ways of prompting:**

- Why have you not listed...
- Why did you not think of...

*[Note: This exercise is meant to get the focus group off to a positive and open start]*

- Now you’re going to talk about different kinds of activities in your neighborhood
  - 2. Exercise and question:**
    - a. Exercise:** Now we’re going to look at three pictures—one at a time. The first picture—what do you see? Then question(s). Then picture 2...  
*Note: I will show both positive and negative acts/situations via the pictures (eating together, spray-painting graffiti, children playing in a playground and intergenerational well-being).*
    - b. Questions for each picture:**
      - 1. Eating together (tapping doing things together/interaction):**
        - What about eating together in your neighborhood?
        - Do you do other things together?

2. **Spray-painting graffiti (tapping intervention or not/informal social control):**
  - Is there graffiti in your neighborhood?
  - Let's consider an example: If someone from your neighborhood saw a person spray-painting graffiti on a local building, what do you think they should do? Keep discussing until it's clear where you agree and disagree.
3. **Children playing in a playground (tapping neighborhood values):**
  - Is the picture positive or negative?
  - Is there something that could cause problems? (No parents)
  - The picture shows no adults/no parents. If we imagined parents in the picture, for example, we could say that the parents were watching the children. Now I want you to discuss parental supervision. When is it a good thing and when is it a bad thing? Keep discussing until it's clear where you agree and disagree.

**Possible general prompts:**

- Can you say something about the interaction between people in your neighborhood (sense of belonging with others living in this neighborhood)?
- How do people in your neighborhood feel about the neighborhood (ownership and cooperation, for instance, to maintain order or to improve the neighborhood)?

*[Note: These picture exercises should be a springboard to talking about different kinds of neighborhood interaction between community members.]*

- Physical spaces—places to go to and places not to go to:

**3. Exercise and question:** Now we're going to imagine that a new resident from—let's say Copenhagen—moves into your neighborhood. They need an introduction to the neighborhood. So, you get the task of coming up with 3 places to go to and 3 places not to go to. What do you to say to this person? Keep discussing until you agree on the places (3+3).

**Possible prompts:**

1. Are there any other places in your neighborhoods (areas, buildings, houses or surroundings) you recommend that the new resident should not go to?

2. Are there any other places in your neighborhood where you do not want to go to?

*[Note: This exercise is meant to tap into the material or physical aspects of the neighborhood]*

## **Topic 2: Negative communities—gangs (transition topic):**

- Now we're going to look at gangs. Since June 2017, western Aarhus has experienced a serious gang conflict/rivalry. I want to show you two newspaper headlines.

**4. Exercise/instructions and questions:** Look at the first headline—*Københavnsk bande slår lejr i Aarhus—'Vi overtager byen'* (2017), TV2 [*Copenhagen gang is coming to Aarhus: "we're taking over the city"*]. Until now, western Aarhus has successfully managed to keep gangs out of this part of the city. It has proven to be difficult for gangs to establish bases in western Aarhus.

Why do you think it has been difficult for gangs to settle in western Aarhus? You must keep discussing until it's clear where you agree and disagree.

**5. Exercise/instructions and question:** Look at the second headline—*Beboere i Aarhus Vest hjælper politiet i bandekonflikt* (2017), TV2 Østjylland [*Residents in western Aarhus help the police during gang conflict*].

Why do you think people in western Aarhus are doing this? You must keep discussing until it is clear where you agree and disagree.

## **Aarhus also experiences another challenge—radicalization... [next topic]. When I say *radicalization*, I mean...**

- Process
- Cognitive and behavioral change/development toward acceptance—and in some cases use—of violence for political/religious ends
- Radicalization of ideas and/or behavior
- Violent and non-violent

*[Note: Topic two is a transition topic that is meant to introduce radicalization indirectly and softly. I do this by introducing the gang conflict first, which may not be as sensitive as radicalization. For many years, radicalization has been a "hot topic," and it is often mixed into the debate about integration and Islam.]*

## Topic 2: Radicalization:

- Radicalization—causes and places:  
**6. Exercise/instructions and question:** Now we're going to talk about the causes of radicalization and where it takes place.  
**(6a)** Official numbers from East Jutland Police say that 35-40 people from Aarhus have gone to Syria—the so-called Syrian volunteers (whether as militants or relief workers). What do you think are the most important causes of radicalization? Keep discussing until it's clear where you agree and where you disagree.  
**(6b)** Here is a map of Aarhus. We're going to try to pinpoint the volunteers' radicalization. Please mark on the map of Aarhus where you think that problems with radicalization have occurred.  
**(6c)** OK, you have marked western Aarhus/Gellerup-Toveshøj—that's correct/I can say that radicalization also took place here in western Aarhus/Gellerup-Toveshøj. What do you think of that?

### Possible prompts:

1. We don't see radicalization everywhere. What makes some places/neighborhoods more prone to foster radicalization?
  2. Why do you think radicalization has happened here in western Aarhus? Keep discussing until it's clear where you agree and disagree.
- Story regarding radical behavior:  
**7. Exercise/instructions and questions:** I will now present a hypothetical example, which I would like you to discuss afterwards. Imagine a scenario: A group from your neighborhood—let's say a group of five boys and two girls in their teens (about your age) are planning to travel to Syria or Iraq to take up arms. You hear about the group and their plan. OK, that was the scenario. I give you four options to choose from:  
A: Talk to the group about their plans to leave for Syria and Iraq, and tell them that it is a bad idea.  
B: Talk to their parents or somebody from the neighborhood about what you know and what to do.  
C: Call the police or the municipality and let them resolve the issue.  
D: Do nothing.  
Now it's up to you—what do you recommend should be done? Keep discussing until it's clear where you agree and disagree.

*[Note: The scenario is tailored to youth and young adults without children. If the target group is parents, the example is quite similar: A group from your neighborhood—let's say a group of five boys and two girls in their teens (not your children) are planning to travel to Syria or Iraq to take up arms. You hear about the group and their plans. Now it's up to you—what do you recommend should be done?]*

*If the target group are grandparents, the scenario goes: A group from your neighborhood—let's say a group of five boys and two girls in their teens (not your grandchildren) are planning to travel to Syria or Iraq to take up arms. You hear about the group and their plans. Now it's up to you—what do you recommend should be done?*

## **Closure**

The focus group is now complete. Thanks for participating. I hope this was pleasant and fun for you. Thank you for your time.

## Appendix C:

### Nodes\\ former members of a radical Salafist-inspired milieu\\closed coding, PhD-project, Mikkel J. Hjelt

Name	Description	Files	References
<b>Activities</b>	Statements about ordinary, non-violent activities	20	226
Everyday activities		16	69
Group activities		12	35
Camping trips		7	24
Religious contemplation		16	36
Religious training		16	62
<b>Coping strategies</b>	Statements about which coping strategies are used in the radical milieu	16	75
Find a wife		2	2
Not too conspicuous (incl. clothing)		10	38
Lie, hide		9	24
Turn off your phone and put the phone away when speaking with others		4	5
Be calm, get good grades in school		4	6
<b>Description of the companionship</b>	Statements about background factors in the radical milieu	21	288
Age		12	29
Numbers		13	32
Work		6	9
Residence, postal number		19	50
Nationality		4	5
Former criminals		9	14
A certain <i>Salafi</i> -inspired interpretation		19	115
Welfare benefits		7	9

Name	Description	Files	References
Education		11	19
Active period (years)		3	6
<b>Double life/distance to society</b>	Statements about how the participants balance the two roles; being part of a radical milieu and being a part of society (incl. family and school)	18	156
Inwardly – clichés, reservations towards new members in the beginning		15	50
Outwardly - perception of society and the reactions from the broader surroundings (neighborhood community members, teachers, parents)		14	106
<b>Exit</b>	Statements about how members get out of the milieu	19	94
Exclusion		2	3
Disintegration of groups		6	7
Withdrawal		14	83
<b>Expectations to each other</b>	Statements about internal expectations	19	110
Advocate for an Islamic state and the rejection of man-made laws		9	26
Loyalty		17	56
Reminders		13	28
<b>Physically 'closed' settings</b>	Statements about closed spaces where the participants meet and spend time together	20	125
A certain mosque in western Aarhus		20	85
Apartments		10	25
An old biker clubhouse		4	15
<b>Physically "open" settings</b> <b>Fysiske åbne steder</b>	Statements about open spaces where the members meet and spend time together Udsagn om åbne steder, hvor medlemmerne mødes og tilbringer tid sammen	16	82

Name	Description	Files	References
The city center/down-town		6	9
Neighborhoods		8	21
Schools		12	28
Explore the mosque milieu		8	22
<b>Fellowship and "brotherhood"</b>	Statements about the radical milieu being a positive place to be	20	123
Acknowledgement and understanding		13	41
Safe haven/nice place		17	62
Using one's competences		9	20
<b>Actions</b>	Statements about discussing possible actions and internal conflicts	21	218
Discuss actions in smaller groups		16	68
Encouragements		15	71
Internal disagreements and conflicts		14	67
Martyrdom		7	12
<b>High-risk activism</b>	Statements about high-risk activities aimed at creating social and religious change	17	152
Attacks in Denmark		2	2
Humanitarian relief work		11	55
Burglaries		2	2
Travelling to and from the conflict zone		10	36
Fighting/outer jihad		17	57
<b>Influential figures</b>	Statements about influential figures in the radical milieu	17	129
Age		16	49
Skills, qualities		14	34

Name	Description	Files	References
Personality		12	46
<b>Individual susceptibility</b>	Statements about individual identity-seeking, dissatisfaction, humiliation	21	245
Relationship to parents		8	38
Life-changing events		7	36
Experiences of discrimination and injustice		15	81
Identity seeking		19	90
<b>Low-risk offline activism</b>	Statements about low-risk activities aimed at creating social and religious change	20	142
Dawah		13	56
Physical appearance		9	25
Inner jihad		15	40
Fundraising		6	9
Preaching to parents		4	12
<b>Low-risk activism online</b>	Statements about use of social media	17	106
Receive and share material (texts, videos and images) via social media		12	32
Outreach/recruitment		11	26
Create network		8	16
Foreign ideologues		6	27
Virtual jihad		4	5
<b>Reception upon return from conflict zone</b>	Statements about homecoming from conflict zones	11	46
Local neighborhoods/communities		6	16
Media		2	2
Authorities		9	21
Schools		2	7
<b>Networks</b>	Statements about relations to other groups within and outside of Denmark	17	97

Name	Description	Files	References
Groups in Denmark		13	59
Groups outside Denmark		11	38
<b>Online and Offline interaction</b>	Statements about the online-offline interplay	14	90
Engaging in online activities alone while being physically alone		4	8
Interacting together online while being separate physically		6	14
Interacting together online while present physically		8	20
Contact to Syrian volunteers in and around conflict zone on social media		4	7
Watch and discuss news on Danish and satellite TV in smaller groups		4	5
Watch and discuss videos accessed on social media in smaller groups		9	36
<b>Organization</b>	Statements about how the groups within the radical milieu organize themselves	19	119
Leaders		14	45
Logistics		10	12
Role division		16	62
<b>Selection processes</b>	Statements about social processes and factors that influence the individual's preferences and have influence in the specific places sought out by the individuals or to which they are exposed	20	293
Authoritative and charismatic figures		7	34
Mosques		12	45
Neighborhoods		10	27
Online		3	7

Name	Description	Files	References
Upbringing		15	57
Pre-existing ties		18	89
Recruitment		12	34
<b>Systemic factors</b>	Statements about structures and events in society	21	201
Conflict zones		19	71
Muhammed cartoons		4	12
Political trajectory and rhetoric		13	59
TV, social media, surface websites, dark web and encryption		16	59
<b>Time consumption</b>	Statements about time spent together and development of social relations	19	112
Establishment of role models		11	25
Time together		14	52
Development of friendships		15	35