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## **Becoming a European homegrown jihadist: a multilevel analysis of involvement in the Dutch Hofstadgroup, 2002-2005**

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# 5. Structural-level factors: facilitating and motivating involvement<sup>399</sup>

## 5.1 Introduction

Following the multilevel analytical framework set out in chapter 2, this second part of the thesis begins by looking at the influence of structural-level factors. Terrorist groups are shaped by the social, political and economic environment in which they find themselves. How did such factors influence involvement processes in the Hofstadgroup? This chapter is organized using Crenshaw's division of structural-level factors into those that enable and those that motivate involvement in terrorism. Consequently, the analysis begins with a discussion of facilitating conditions such as popular support for terrorism and counterterrorism shortcomings. It then turns to motivational ones such as relative deprivation and political grievances before concluding with a brief look at the structural-level event that most likely triggered the murder of Theo van Gogh.

### 5.1.1 Structural-level factors influencing involvement in terrorism

The structural level provides an 'ecological' understanding of involvement in terrorism based on the relationship between terrorists and their surroundings.<sup>400</sup> There is no simple causal relationship between structural-level factors, such as illiteracy or political grievances, and terrorism.<sup>401</sup> After all, of the millions of people exposed to such factors, only a handful become involved in terrorism. That is why referring to such structural as 'root causes' of terrorism, as some politicians are apt to do, is misleading.<sup>402</sup> Structural conditions are not a 'special' category of explanatory variables. They must be complemented with insights from the group and individual levels of analysis to provide a holistic understanding involvement in terrorism. Their contribution to this understanding, however, is an important one. Structural-level factors influence the *opportunities* and *motives* for involvement in terrorism as well as potentially *precipitating* an actual attack.

This tripartite distinction is based on Crenshaw's classic work on the causes of terrorism. It distinguishes between '*preconditions*, factors that set the stage for terrorism over the long run, and *precipitants*, specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism.'<sup>403</sup> Crenshaw

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399 An amended version of this chapter has been accepted for publication as: Bart Schuurman, Edwin Bakker, and Quirine Eijkman, "Structural influences on involvement in European homegrown jihadism: a case study," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Forthcoming 2017).

400 Lia and Skjølberg, "Causes of terrorism," 40.

401 John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism* (London / New York: Routledge, 2014), 85-86.

402 James J.F. Forest, "Exploring root causes of terrorism: an introduction," in *The making of a terrorist, volume III: root causes*, ed. James J.F. Forest (Westport / London: Praeger Security International, 2005), 1-2; Edwin Bakker, "Zin en onzin van de zoektocht naar oorzaken van terrorisme," *Internationale Spectator* 58, no. 2 (2004): 542-547.

403 Crenshaw, "The causes of terrorism," 381. Emphases in original.

further distinguishes between preconditions that ‘provide opportunities for terrorism to happen’, and those that ‘directly inspire and motivate terrorist campaigns’.<sup>404</sup> This distinction usefully emphasizes that structural factors can provide *opportunities* and *motives* for involvement in terrorism, as well as *triggers* for an actual attack. Indicative of the staying-power of Crenshaw’s subdivision of terrorism’s structural factors, is that it has been maintained in more recent publications.<sup>405</sup> Consequently, it is used here to organize the discussion of the various structural-level hypotheses.

A review of the literature indicates a large number of potential structural-level factors relevant to understanding involvement in terrorism (Table 6). After undertaking an initial assessment of their applicability to the Hofstadgroup case study, it became apparent that several of them could be excluded as potential explanations at the outset. These omissions were based on one of two considerations: either the explanation’s applicability to the Netherlands as a country was too limited, or there was simply too little data to suggest relevance to the Hofstadgroup and its participants. Examples of the former include absolute poverty, sudden marked population growth and state collapse; conditions that have simply not existed in the Netherlands for decades. Neither was the country undergoing a process of urbanization or modernization, beset by war or violent social unrest or suddenly exposed to the vagaries of a globalized economy.

With regard to the Hofstadgroup, it rapidly became apparent that its participants did not attempt to manipulate the mass media for their own ends and there was no evidence that an overlap between criminal and terrorist networks exerted an influence on the group’s development. Furthermore, despite the Dutch involvement in the Iraq and Afghanistan interventions, the Hofstadgroup cannot be seen as ‘spillover’ from those conflicts as the group was predominantly Dutch, not Afghan or Iraqi in origin. Rather than introduce and discuss all of the structural-level factors listed in Table 6 in detail only to conclude their irrelevance, the discussion limits itself to those that are in theory applicable to the Netherlands as a country and for which there is at least some empirical support in the data. Those excluded from analysis have been struck through.

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404 Ibid.

405 Bjørge, “Conclusions,” 258; Newman, “Exploring the ‘root causes,’” 751.

Structural level explanations for involvement in terrorism		
Preconditions: opportunities	Preconditions: motives	Precipitants
The Internet	(Relative) Deprivation	Gov't's excessive use of force
Popular support for terrorism	Intergroup inequality	Government attempts reforms
External assistance	Political grievances	
Social / cultural facilitation of violence	Clash of value systems	
Ineffective counterterrorism	Economic globalization	
Political opportunity structure	Cultural globalization	
Modernization	Urbanization	
Population growth / youth bulge	Modernization	
Shifts ethnic/religious balance society	Spillover from other conflicts	
Urbanization	State sponsorship of terrorism	
Mass media	Power structure internat. system	
Organized crime = terrorism nexus	Failed / failing states	
	Armed conflict	

Table 6

## 5.2 Preconditions: providing opportunities for terrorism

The preconditions discussed in this section influence the *opportunities* for engaging in terrorist activities. The qualification is important. While the primary contribution of the factors discussed in this section was to enable involvement in the Hofstadgroup, they frequently also exerted an (indirect) motivational influence.

### 5.2.1 The Internet

The Internet can provide opportunities for involvement in terrorism in several ways. It can be used to gain knowledge about the construction and use of explosives. It can bring together like-minded individuals regardless of their physical distance from one another and it can link local militants to broader global movements, all of this while providing at least a degree of anonymity.<sup>406</sup> The web can also function as an easy-to-use propaganda platform, making a terrorist group's message instantly available to a potential audience of millions. By projecting images of war and injustice across the globe, the Internet invites some of its users to suffer vicariously.<sup>407</sup> As such, the Internet can have a crucial influence on what Egerton calls the construction of a 'political imaginary' in

406 Marc Sageman, "The turn to political violence in the West," in *Jihadi terrorism and the radicalisation challenge: European and American experiences*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Farnham / Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 122-123; Anne Stenersen, "The Internet: a virtual training camp?," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 2 (2008): 216-231.

407 Oleson and Khosrokhavar, *Islamism as social movement*, 28.

which young Muslims from Western countries establish common cause with ‘brothers and sisters’ they will most likely never meet.<sup>408</sup>

### 5.2.1.1 *The Internet and the Hofstadgroup*

All of these functions of the Internet facilitated the Hofstadgroup’s growth. By providing easy access to large amounts of information on Islam, jihadist groups and geopolitical affairs, the Internet first of all became a key enabler of participants’ adoption of radical and extremist views.<sup>409</sup> Data suggests that for some, the Internet became a source of answers to questions that parents and imams were unwilling or unable to discuss.<sup>410</sup> Questions such as: Does Islam condone terrorism? What is the cause of the Palestinians’ plight? Why had the United States and its allies intervened in Afghanistan and Iraq? Secondly, the World Wide Web made available information of a more practical sort. One participant was found in possession of photographs and maps of Dutch government buildings and critical infrastructure that he had downloaded from the Internet, possibly as part of a reconnaissance of potential targets.<sup>411</sup> Several others had downloaded bomb-making manuals.<sup>412</sup>

A number of participants met each other online before developing ‘real world’ connections.<sup>413</sup> In the fall of 2003, two participants used the web to reach out to other young Muslims in order to entice them to travel to Pakistan or Afghanistan.<sup>414</sup> From the summer of 2004 until early 2005, one member of the group’s inner circle in particular utilized online communication tools to instill the ‘right’ interpretation of tawhid and the necessity of takfir in aspirants.<sup>415</sup> Thus, the Internet also provided opportunities for the group’s organizational and ideological development and enabled its activities. Finally, the Internet served as a propaganda tool.<sup>416</sup> Hofstadgroup participants made and administered simple websites that expounded radical and extremist interpretations of Islam, advocated the rejection of democracy and glorified terrorism. Such sites also offered practical

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408 Egerton, *Jihad in the West*, 92, 94-96; Egerton, “The internet and militant jihadism,” 116, 124-125.

409 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, “Personal interview 2,” 12; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, “Personal interview 3,” 1; A[.], “Deurwaarders,” 3-9; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, “Personal interview 1,” 1; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 21; Benschop, “A political murder foretold”.

410 A[.], “Deurwaarders,” 3-4, 10; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, “Personal interview 3,” 1; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, “Personal interview 1,” 7-9; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, “Personal interview 2,” 11-12.

411 Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/01: 40, 42.

412 Ibid., 01/01: 42, 144, 160-161, 171; 101/113: 102-104; Dienst Nationale Recherche, “PIRANHA,” 163-166; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 43-44.

413 Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/01: 33; 01/17: 4002, 4084, 4114; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, “Personal interview 1,” 7; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 22.

414 Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/01: 123-126; 101/113: 134-136.

415 Ibid., 01/17: 4002-4003, 4026-4027. 4048-4053, 4084-4087.

416 Ibid., AHD08/37: 8771-8772; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, “Personal interview 1,” 5; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, “Personal interview 2,” 18-19, 30.

advice on preparing for jihad, advertized materials published by participants, in particular Van Gogh's to-be murderer, and threatened the group's enemies in texts and videos.<sup>417</sup>

The Internet was thus an essential enabling factor for the Hofstadgroup's emergence. It provided an easy way for (future) participants to meet each other, propagate their views and gain access to ideological and practical information that fueled their increasing radicalism. That is not to say the group was entirely dependent on this medium. For instance, as later chapters will show, pre-existing ties of friendship, introductions and chance encounters were also crucial group formation mechanisms. Nonetheless, it is hard to imagine that the group's participants would have experienced the same degree of exposure to extremist's ideologies, terrorist propaganda and vicarious experiences of injustice had they not had access to the Internet.

## 5.2.2 Popular support for terrorism

The importance of popular support for groups who violently challenge a state's power has long been recognized in the context of guerrilla warfare and, more recently, counterinsurgency operations.<sup>418</sup> Popular support can be seen as a vital resource for terrorist and insurgent groups, providing them with the weapons, finances, recruits and intelligence information necessary to carry out a prolonged campaign of violence.<sup>419</sup> Conversely, when such non-state actors lose the support of the people they claim to represent, they are frequently unable to persevere against the materially stronger government forces that hunt them.<sup>420</sup>

### 5.2.2.1 Popular support for the Hofstadgroup

Leiken has claimed that the Hofstadgroup enjoyed far more popular support than 'marginal' terrorist groups such as the Italian Red Brigades (BR) or the German Red Army Faction (RAF).<sup>421</sup> However, the truth is that both these groups could count on substantial support, especially among students, while there simply is no evidence that the Hofstadgroup was receiving similar support from the Muslim community in the Netherlands.<sup>422</sup> Unlike the BR and RAF, the Hofstadgroup did not inspire imitation; no follow-up generations of terrorists materialized after the October

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417 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/01: 163, 200-203; 101/113: 165-167; AHA104/121: 1326-1327, 1423-1443; AHA1305/1322: 2021; AHA1306/1323: 1339; AHD1303/1332: 6440-6442; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 18-19, 32; Benschop, "A political murder foretold".

418 Mao Tse-Tung, *On guerrilla warfare*, ed. Samuel B. Griffith (Mineola: Dover, 2005); David H. Petraeus and James F. Amos, "FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency," (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters Department of the Army, 2006).

419 Ross, "Structural causes," 324.

420 Bart Schuurman, "Defeated by popular demand: public support and counterterrorism in three western democracies, 1963-1998," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 2 (2013): 152-175.

421 Leiken, "Europe's angry Muslims," 126.

422 Christopher Hewitt, "Terrorism and public opinion: a five country comparison," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2, no. 2 (1990): 145-170.

2005 arrests.<sup>423</sup> The group's extremist stance on what constituted 'true' Islam and the (implied) allegations of apostasy that it leveled against the majority of (Dutch) Muslims, effectively ruled out the possibility of it acquiring broad support among Dutch Muslims.<sup>424</sup> The Hofstadgroup was not a popularly supported vanguard movement but a fringe group that intimidated its potential supporters almost as much as it threatened declared enemies.<sup>425</sup> Popular support was therefore not a factor that meaningfully enabled participants' involvement processes.

### 5.2.3 External assistance

External sources of support, whether other terrorist groups, state sponsors, transnational private support networks or communities that back militancy, can significantly increase opportunities for engaging in terrorism.<sup>426</sup> These parties can make available funding, weapons and access to paramilitary training camps. They can also provide guidance or even outright operational leadership that can facilitate preparations for a terrorist attack.<sup>427</sup> The next two sections assess whether the Hofstadgroup was subject to external guidance and whether external sources of support provided practical benefits conducive to involvement in terrorism.

#### 5.2.3.1 *The Hofstadgroup's external connections*

The police files make numerous suggestions that the Hofstadgroup was under some form of external guidance. At one point the Dutch intelligence service AIVD claimed that the group's religious instructor belonged to a group that 'could be seen as a successor or branch of the Bin Laden organization'.<sup>428</sup> The files contain no information of any kind to support this claim, however. Another intelligence report held that a second participant had links to unspecified foreign terrorist organizations.<sup>429</sup> Although this individual did have an uncle who was detained in Guantanamo Bay, there is nothing to suggest that this had any bearing on the events surrounding the Hofstadgroup.<sup>430</sup> The absence of factual evidence to corroborate claims such as these suggests that they should be treated as highly speculative.

The Hofstadgroup was also acquainted with three middle-aged Syrian men who like its religious instructor, held fundamentalist views. At least one of them had been involved with the Muslim

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423 Peter H. Merkle, "West German left-wing terrorism," in *Terrorism in context*, ed. Martha Crenshaw (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 173-190; Leonard Weinberg, "The Red Brigades," in *Democracy and counterterrorism: lessons from the past*, ed. Robert J. Art and Louise Richardson (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), 32-37.

424 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, "Personal interview 1," 2-3.

425 Peters, "De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 7-8, 10-11, 15, 21-24, 29-30, 42-53; NOVA, "Videotestament Samir A. - vertaling NOVA".

426 Lia and Skjølberg, "Causes of terrorism," 18-21, 53-56; Ross, "Structural causes," 324; Susanna Pearce, "Religious sources of violence," in *The making of a terrorist: recruitment, training and root causes, volume three, root causes*, ed. James J.F. Forest (Westport / London: Praeger Security International, 2006), 121.

427 General Intelligence and Security Service, "Violent jihad in the Netherlands," 22-23.

428 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA01/18: 82.

429 Ibid., AHA01/18: 106.

430 A[.], "Deurwaarders van Allah," 51; AIVD Employee 1, "Personal interview 1," (The Hague 2013), 1.

Brotherhood before he fled Syria in the 1990s.<sup>431</sup> Yet, once again, there is nothing to actually suggest that these men provided leadership or that there was a connection between the Hofstadgroup and the Muslim Brotherhood. Then there is the Chechen man whose fingerprints were found on the farewell letter of Van Gogh's killer and whose uncle the American Federal Bureau of Investigation suspected of being an illegal arms dealer involved with Chechen terrorist groups.<sup>432</sup> This individual was arrested in early 2005, together with a countryman whose fingerprints had also been found on the murderer's belongings. Both were quickly released for lack of evidence of involvement in the Van Gogh murder. While it has remained a mystery how the fingerprint got on the letter, the absence of evidence to suggest they had a role in the murder is another argument against the notion that the Hofstadgroup was under external guidance.<sup>433</sup>

Of all the possible ties between the Hofstadgroup and foreign extremists or even terrorist organizations, the most plausible are those that came to light in October 2003. Intelligence information and the behavior of the participants concerned bore out that there were contacts between the travelers to Pakistan or Afghanistan and an unnamed 'emir', as well as with a Moroccan man in Spain who was suspected of involvement in the 2003 Casablanca bombings.<sup>434</sup> Yet there is no concrete evidence to suggest that these ties amounted to outside operational guidance. The 'emir' most likely tasked the Hofstadgroup participants in question with convincing other Dutch Muslims to travel to Pakistan or Afghanistan and the Moroccan man appears to have solicited the group's help in order to remain at large.<sup>435</sup> Beyond speculation, there is little to suggest these men were instructing the Hofstadgroup to carry out acts of terrorism.

There are also numerous pieces of information in the police files which suggest that external parties provided the Hofstadgroup with practical benefits conducive to carrying out acts of terrorism. Several intelligence reports raise the possibility that the group received funding. Possible donors were Saudi-Arabians, Dutch Muslim extremists who wanted Hirsi Ali and Van Gogh killed and a leading participant's criminal associates.<sup>436</sup> Given the absence of any supporting evidence, these claims should once again be treated as distinctly speculative. Investigations also failed to support the idea that the group's weapons were externally supplied.<sup>437</sup> A Hofstadgroup participant did claim that the hand grenades were provided by an AIVD informant. These accusations led to the

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431 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/01: 32, 37; VERD: 19669, 19675, 19684, 19693, 19703, 19708, 19703-19704, 19740-19741, 19754, 19820; GET: 18349.VERD: 19669, 19675, 19684, 19693, 19703, 19708, 19703-19704, 19740-19741, 19754, 19820; Commissie van Toezicht betreffende de Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdiensten, "Toezichtsrapport met betrekking tot Mohammed B.," 11.

432 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/01: 93-96; NCTV Employee 1, "Personal interview 1," 6; Derix, "Hoe kwam toch?"

433 Derix, "Hoe kwam toch."

434 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/01: 23-25; AHA01/18: 80-81; RHV01/66: 18846.

435 Ibid., 01/01:23-27; 01/13: 134-136, 140-146; RHV101/166:18791-18879; Police Investigator 1, "Personal interview 3," 1.

436 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA01/18: 82; AHA03/20: 1188-1189; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "PIRANHA," REL00: 40-42.

437 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/01: 38, 89-90; 01/13: 95-98; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "PIRANHA," 62, 13157; Police Investigator 2, "Personal interview 1," 3; Public Prosecutor 1, "Personal interview 1," 18.

alleged informant's arrest in late 2005, but charges were dropped in March 2006 due to lack of evidence.<sup>438</sup>

Another instance of possible external support stems from September 2005. At that time, the Piranha group's main protagonist met a Belgian national at a train station in The Hague. Accounts of what transpired differ. The Dutch police believe that the Belgian man asked his Dutch counterpart to participate in a suicide operation while investigative journalists claim that the Belgian offered three female suicide terrorists to the Hofstadgroup participant but was turned down.<sup>439</sup> As neither of these scenarios materialized, there is little basis to assume this meeting had any actual influence on the Piranha group's possibilities for engaging in terrorism.

The most plausible claim of external assistance concerns the possibility that two participants underwent paramilitary training during their 2003 trip to Pakistan or Afghanistan. A trip that may have been facilitated by an individual who some participants later claimed had been working on behalf of the AIVD.<sup>440</sup> Although the paramilitary training hypothesis is similarly based on intelligence information, it is corroborated by at least some circumstantial evidence; a participant's statement that he heard one of the travelers claim as much and this same traveler's repeated online bragging about his proficiency with weapons.<sup>441</sup> In November 2004, the latter also threw a hand grenade at the police officers that came to arrest him and used a mirror to peek at them while remaining behind cover.<sup>442</sup> Both of these actions may be further hints that he had received at least some basic training.

In short, the Hofstadgroup's emergence does not appear to have been enabled by either external guidance or support. The one possible exception being that the two participants who traveled to Pakistan or Afghanistan may have undergone some basic paramilitary training. Several participants clearly had the desire to travel to foreign jihadist battle zones and they would probably have reveled in the chance to receive guidance from actual jihadist militants or ideologues. Why such connections did not materialize remains grounds for speculation; perhaps the trips to Pakistan or Afghanistan were simply too short to make meaningful connections, perhaps their youth and lack of experience with militancy made the Hofstadgroup's travelers unappealing to potential foreign handlers. Whatever the case, the inapplicability of external support underlines the group's homegrown status.

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438 Janny Groen, "Saleh B. blijft leveren granaat ontkennen," *De Volkskrant*, 13 December 2005; "Saleh B. niet meer verdacht van terroristische daden," *NRC Handelsbad*, 9 March 2006.

439 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "PIRANHA," 151-152, 191-192; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 144-146. Erkel, *Samir*, 195; Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 33.

441 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/01: 123-126; 101/113: 140-145; AHD108/137: 8595, 8774-8775; 8880, 8919, 8928-8929.

442 *Ibid.*, AGV01/62: 17978; Public Prosecutor 1, "Personal interview 1," 37-38.

#### 5.2.4 Social or cultural facilitation of violence

Individuals exposed to cultural or social values that convey a negative attitude towards out-groups or glorify violence may be more likely to see the use of terrorism as justifiable.<sup>443</sup> Several empirical studies indicate that Muslims *in general* are not more likely than non-Muslims to commit or suffer from political violence.<sup>444</sup> At the same time, research also suggests that *fundamentalist* and *militant interpretations* of Islam can inculcate intolerance, hatred and a positive disposition towards the use of force as a means of dealing with perceived enemies.<sup>445</sup>

A 2015 study by Koopmans indicates that fundamentalist views are widespread among Sunni Muslims in a variety of European countries, including the Netherlands, and that these views correspond with hostility toward out-groups.<sup>446</sup> For instance, more than fifty percent of Muslims polled believed that the West was out to destroy Islam, a figure that rose to more than seventy percent among 'very religious fundamentalist Muslims'.<sup>447</sup> The data for this particular study were collected in 2008 and it presents an aggregate of several countries, meaning that the findings are not directly applicable to the situation in the Netherlands as encountered by the Hofstadgroup's participants. However, it seems reasonable to assume that these views did not suddenly develop and thus that many participants grew up in a social environment in which similar views were prevalent. All the more so since numerous participants attended mosques in which the fundamentalist Salafist brand of Islam was preached.<sup>448</sup>

Koopman's study is not the only one that provides insights into the attitudes and beliefs of Dutch Muslims. A 2004 report commissioned by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) concluded that there was a trend towards secularization among Dutch Muslims of Moroccan and Turkish origin.<sup>449</sup> This finding seems to contradict Koopman's work, however the SCP report also noted that close to 100 percent of respondents indicated that Islam was very important to them, 57 percent of respondents with a Moroccan background felt individuals should follow Islamic

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443 Crenshaw, *Explaining terrorism*, 94-96; Mira Noor Milla, Faturochman, and Djameludin Ancok, "The impact of leader-follower interactions on the radicalization of terrorists: a case study of the Bali bombers," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 16, no. 2 (2013): 93-95; Seth J. Schwartz, Curtis S. Dunkel, and Alan S. Waterman, "Terrorism: an identity theory perspective," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 6 (2009): 540-542.

444 Justin Conrad and Daniel Milton, "Unpacking the connection between terror and Islam," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 4 (2013): 316, 331; M. Steven Fish, Francesca R. Jensenius, and Katherine E. Michel, "Islam and large-scale political violence: is there a connection?," *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 11 (2010): 1328, 1342.

445 Wagdy Loza, "The psychology of extremism and terrorism: a Middle-Eastern perspective," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 12, no. 2 (2007): 144, 149.

446 Ruud Koopmans, "Religious fundamentalism and hostility against out-groups: a comparison of Muslims and Christians in Western Europe," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 33-57.

447 *Ibid.*, 43, 45.

448 A[.], "Deurwaarders.;" Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 14; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA03/20: 860; 801/817: 4019, 4084, 4159; VERD: 19652, 19853, 20004, 20114, 20234; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, "Personal interview 1," 8; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 239.

449 Karen Phaet, Jessika Ter Wal, and Carlo Van Praag, "Moslim in Nederland: een onderzoek naar de religieuze betrokkenheid van Turken en Marokkanen," (The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2004), 11, 13, 17.

rules and 30 percent of this same group thought Islam and ‘modern life’ were incompatible.<sup>450</sup> Additionally, a majority of Moroccans adhered to an orthodox interpretation of their faith.<sup>451</sup>

Interestingly, a 2012 follow-up study by the SCP criticized the ‘secularization’ thesis, finding instead that mosque attendance was no longer declining and that there were relatively few differences in the strictness of religious attitudes between first and second generation Muslim immigrants.<sup>452</sup> Neither the 2004 nor the 2012 SCP report directly supports Koopmans’ conclusions. However, by providing indications of the prevalence of orthodoxy among Dutch Moroccan Muslims and the great importance this group attached to its Islamic identity, they do lend further credibility to the findings presented by Koopmans.

#### 5.2.4.1 Social facilitation for violence and the Hofstadgroup

The above discussion leads to the tentative conclusion that, by instilling a sense of hostility towards the Western world, social facilitation of fundamentalism likely lowered Hofstadgroup participants’ threshold to seeing the use of violence as legitimate. This is anecdotally supported by the finding that family members of the murderer who resided in Morocco, together with some of the other residents of their village, showed support for the murder.<sup>453</sup>

However, it would go too far to argue, on what is circumstantial evidence, that exposure to fundamentalist Islam facilitated the *use* of violence. After all, with so many Dutch Muslims exposed to similar attitudes, how can it be explained that only the Hofstadgroup displayed such outspokenly militant views and behavior? Furthermore, the fundamentalist Salafist variety of Islam to which the Hofstadgroup by and large subscribed, comes in at least three varieties of which only the Salafi-Jihadist one openly advocates the use of force.<sup>454</sup> Explaining some participants’ (intended) acts of violence therefore necessitates broadening the analysis beyond structural-level factors to incorporate social dynamics and personal backgrounds, as the next chapters will do.

### 5.2.5 Ineffective counterterrorism

According to Crenshaw, one of the most important permissive causes of terrorism is a government’s ‘inability or unwillingness’ to prevent it.<sup>455</sup> The various police investigations into the Hofstadgroup’s activities and the AIVD’s monitoring of the group indicate the Dutch authorities were certainly not unwilling to address the threat posed by this group. But can hindsight indicate areas where the response was ineffective or counterproductive?

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450 Ibid., 18.

451 Ibid., 19.

452 Mieke Maliepaard and Mérove Gijsberts, “Moslim in Nederland 2012,” (The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2012), 12, 16.

453 Chorus and Olgun, *Broeders*, 33-35.

454 Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi movement,” 208.

455 Crenshaw, “The causes of terrorism,” 382.

### 5.2.5.1 Counterterrorism lapses as enablers for the Hofstadgroup

After Van Gogh's death, the Dutch Review Committee on the Intelligence and Security Services (CTIVD) concluded that the AIVD had incorrectly dismissed the filmmaker's murderer as a peripheral member of the Hofstadgroup.<sup>456</sup> A conclusion shared by the Service's acting director at the time.<sup>457</sup> Although the AIVD had possessed information that the to-be killer fulfilled a central role in the Hofstadgroup, had a history of violent outbursts and was writing increasingly extremist tracts, this data had not been analyzed in its totality before the murder.<sup>458</sup> The CTIVD was careful to stress that the AIVD did not possess information indicating that Van Gogh's murderer was planning to commit an attack.<sup>459</sup> Whether extra attention from the AIVD would have prevented Van Gogh's killer from striking therefore remains highly speculative. But at the very least, the AIVD's misdiagnosis benefited the killer by allowing him to carry out his preparations largely unnoticed.

What clearly did enable Van Gogh's killer to strike was the fact that his target was easily accessible. As a public figure, Van Gogh was easily recognized and because he cycled to his work in Amsterdam he was also easy to find. Crucially, he had steadfastly refused the Dutch authorities' offer of increased personal protection in the wake of the negative fallout produced by the airing of *Submission, part 1* in August 2004. By contrast, the film's co-author Hirsi Ali had been under round-the-clock protection since November 2002.<sup>460</sup> This difference probably explains why the killer chose Van Gogh over Hirsi Ali, whose status as an apostate would otherwise have made her the more attractive target.<sup>461</sup> Arguably, Van Gogh's decision not to accept personal protection provided a larger opportunity for his killer to strike than the AIVD's misdiagnosis. The attack on the filmmaker cannot simply be put down to 'counterterrorism failure'.

On 10 November 2004, five police officers were wounded when a Hofstadgroup participant threw a hand grenade at them during an arrest attempt. The AIVD had wired the apartment sometime prior to the raid and, read after the fact, one of the recorded conversations strongly hints that the occupants possessed grenades and planned to use them against the police; 'you wait until they enter and then you throw one, yes?'<sup>462</sup> Having gotten hold of this text during the spring of 2005, the Dutch television program *Netwerk* reported that the AIVD could have known grenades were present in the apartment, implying that the service had failed to properly alert the police.<sup>463</sup> In October 2005, the Hofstadgroup participant who threw the grenade told *Netwerk* that he had

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456 Commissie van Toezicht betreffende de Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdiensten, "Toezichtsrapport met betrekking tot Mohammed B.," 21-22.

457 "AIVD geeft verkeerd taxeren van B. toe," *NRC Handelsblad*, 2 May 2005.

458 Commissie van Toezicht betreffende de Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdiensten, "Toezichtsrapport met betrekking tot Mohammed B.," 27-28.

459 *Ibid.*, 14.

460 Chorus and Olgun, *In godsnaam*, 123-124, 171-176; Van Straelen, "Requisitoir in de strafzaak tegen Mohammed B.," 9.

461 Chorus and Olgun, *Broeders*, 20.

462 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA07/24: 3047.

463 J.W. Remkes, "Kamerstukken 2, 2004-2005, 29754, nr. 22," (The Hague: Sdu Publishers, 2005), 1-3.

gotten the weapon through an acquaintance who, he claimed, worked for the AIVD. His lawyer and those of other Hofstadgroup participants shared these suspicions, leading to the alleged AIVD agent being heard in court as a witness.<sup>464</sup>

As previously mentioned, charges against the alleged informant were dropped in early 2006. There was no forensic evidence tying him to the hand grenades. Neither could it be proven that he had been the elusive second perpetrator of the supermarket robbery conducted by a Hofstadgroup participant in early 2004; one Hofstadgroup defendant claimed the individual in question only 'got away' because he was already working for the AIVD.<sup>465</sup> Other than the testimony of an individual with a stake in alleging that the AIVD had enticed his use of violence by supplying him with grenades through an informant, and a wiretapped conversation that makes an implicit reference to the weapons, there is no concrete evidence to support the notion that the AIVD could have forewarned their police partners. On the whole, ineffective counterterrorism does not appear to have been a major enabler of the Hofstadgroup's activities. However, had the Service not misdiagnosed Van Gogh's killer, it might arguably have made it more difficult for the latter to plan and prepare his attack.

### 5.2.6 Political opportunity structure

The 'political opportunity structure' concept essentially bridges the gap between preconditions that provide opportunities and those that supply motives for involvement in terrorism.<sup>466</sup> Adherents of the 'strategic school' posit that the openness of democratic societies can enable violent acts of resistance.<sup>467</sup> Institutions such as a free press and an independent judiciary limit the power of the government over its citizens; basic rights such as freedom of assembly and the largely unrestricted movement of people and goods make it easier to prepare acts of violence.<sup>468</sup> By contrast, because autocratic regimes lack such freedoms and suffer no restraints on their executive power, the opportunities for engaging in terrorism are fewer.<sup>469</sup>

With regard to motive, the 'political access school' argues that democracies discourage terrorism because they provide avenues for the non-violent resolution of conflicts and afford citizens influence in the political process.<sup>470</sup> Here it is the autocratic regimes that are at a disadvantage,

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464 Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 61; "Saleh B. niet meer verdacht van terroristische daden."

465 Groen, "Saleh B. blijft leveren granaat ontkennen," 62-63; "Saleh B. niet meer verdacht van terroristische daden."; Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 63.

466 Oleson and Khosrokhavar, *Islamism as social movement*, 21-22; Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and grievance in civil war," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 587-588.

467 Joe Eyerman, "Terrorism and democratic states: soft targets or accessible systems," *International Interactions* 24, no. 2 (1998): 151-152.

468 McAllister and Schmid, "Theories of terrorism," 251-252.

469 William Eubank and Leonard Weinberg, "Terrorism and democracy: perpetrators and victims," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 13, no. 1 (2001): 156; James A. Piazza, "Draining the swamp: democracy promotion, state failure, and terrorism in 19 Middle Eastern countries," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 6 (2007): 522-523.

470 Eyerman, "Terrorism and democratic states," 152.

as their lack of freedoms, frequent human rights abuses and the absence of opportunities for peaceful political participation make violent opposition the only option for people wishing for change.<sup>471</sup> While this seems to put democracies ahead on paper, there is considerable empirical evidence that democratic states are no less vulnerable to terrorism.<sup>472</sup> This may at least in part stem from the fact that, while democratic states are less likely to experience domestic terrorism, their frequently assertive foreign policies increases their exposure to international or transnational terrorism.<sup>473</sup>

#### 5.2.6.1 Political opportunity structure and the Hofstadgroup

The Hofstadgroup benefited from the democratic freedoms available to it. Arguably it would have been far more difficult in an authoritarian regime to hold frequent private meetings, use the Internet to espouse extremist views and attract like-minded individuals and to travel abroad to Belgium, Spain and even Pakistan or Afghanistan. At the same time, the Dutch authorities did not stand idly by. Tempering the opportunities provided by the Dutch political system was the fact that group participants were effectively under AIVD surveillance from mid-2002 onwards. Combined with numerous rounds of arrests between 2003 and 2005, this proved a considerable impediment to its ability to operate.<sup>474</sup> One former participant described the October 2003 arrests as having a paralyzing effect on the group, leading to such a preoccupation with personal safety that group meetings became less frequent and attempts to reach foreign conflict zones ceased altogether.<sup>475</sup>

The second conclusion is that access to the political system had little dampening effect on the Hofstadgroup's more committed participants' motivation to use violence. Initially, some participants appeared to have a modicum of faith in democratic forms of protest. Two attended rallies; one in support of Palestine in 2002, and one against the Iraq war in 2003.<sup>476</sup> One of these individuals was also temporarily a member of the Arab European League (AEL) in 2003, but quickly disowned it because '[they] want everything via democracy'.<sup>477</sup> Other participants never even considered such avenues. One interviewee argued vehemently that the AEL had never held any appeal for himself or the others because its leader was a Shiite, a denomination they

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471 Quan Li, "Does democracy promote or reduce transnational terrorist incidents?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 2 (2005): 278; Piazza, "Draining the swamp," 523.

472 James A. Piazza, "Do democracy and free markets protect us from terrorism?," *International Politics* 45, no. 1 (2008): 83-84; Eubank and Weinberg, "Terrorism and democracy," 160; Kristopher K. Robison, Edward M. Crenshaw, and J. Craig Jenkins, "Ideologies of violence: the social origins of Islamist and Leftist transnational terrorism," *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (2006): 2019.

473 Burcu Savun and Brian J. Phillips, "Democracy, foreign policy, and terrorism," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 6 (2009): 879, 886, 893-894; Lia and Skjølberg, "Causes of terrorism," 35-36.

474 Commissie van Toezicht betreffende de Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdiensten, "Toezichtsrapport met betrekking tot Mohammed B.," 8; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, "Personal interview 1," 5-6.

475 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, "Personal interview 1," 4-5.

476 A[.], "Deurwaarders," 10; Community Policing Officer 1, "Personal interview 1," (Amsterdam 2012), 4-5; Erkel, *Samir*, 119-120.

477 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHD09/38: 9201. See also: A[.], "Deurwaarders van Allah," 31.

considered heretical and worse than unbelievers.<sup>478</sup> More generally, data suggests that the group saw democratic means for voicing dissent or achieving change as ineffective and even illegitimate as it meant working with and within a man-made democratic system rather than a divinely-inspired one.<sup>479</sup>

Civil liberties and constraints on the executive enabled the Hofstadgroup's emergence, yet not to the degree that the authorities were powerless. As the multiple arrests and prison sentences indicate, the authorities were still able to mount an assertive response. Despite access to the political system, the country's political opportunity structure also motivated involvement in militancy because democratic laws and institutions were seen as unpalatable and illegitimate. The net effect of these various influences cannot be quantified, yet it seems clear that the Netherlands' political opportunity structure both enabled involvement in the Hofstadgroup and helped bring about the adoption of radical and extremist views.

### 5.3 Preconditions: providing motives for terrorism

Opportunities alone are unlikely to lead to terrorism unless groups or individuals with the *motive* to carry out acts of violence make use of them. It is to this second category of structural-level preconditions that the discussion now turns.

#### 5.3.1 (Relative) deprivation and intergroup inequality

A common-sense assumption frequently voiced by politicians is that poverty and lack of education are causes of terrorism.<sup>480</sup> Scholarship on the issue provides a more nuanced picture. Some studies lend support to this view, finding that countries experience less terrorism as they become economically more developed<sup>481</sup> and that increased personal wealth is linked to decreased support for political violence.<sup>482</sup> For instance, in research based on opinion polling, Fair and Shepherd found that the moderately poor were more likely to support terrorism.<sup>483</sup> Looking

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478 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 29; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 1," 2.

479 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 28-30; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHB02/26: 3776-3777; AHD3702/3731: 5611; De Koning, "We reject you," 98-99; Peters, "De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," 4.

480 See the examples in: James A. Piazza, "Rooted in poverty?: Terrorism, poor economic development, and social cleavages," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 1 (2006): 159-160.

481 Quan Li and Drew Schaub, "Economic globalization and transnational terrorism: a pooled time-series analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 2 (2004): 254; Carlos Pestana Barros, João Ricardo Faria, and Luis A. Gil-Alana, "Terrorism against American citizens in Africa: related to poverty?," *Journal of Policy Modeling* 30, no. 1 (2008): 56, 66; Mete Feridun and Selami Sezgin, "Regional underdevelopment and terrorism: the cause of south eastern Turkey," *Defence and Peace Economics* 19, no. 3 (2008): 229.

482 Robert MacCulloch, "The impact of income on the taste for revolt," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4 (2004): 843; Ayla Schbley, "Torn between god, family, and money: the changing profile of Lebanon's religious terrorists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 23, no. 3 (2000): 182.

483 C. Christine Fair and Bryan Shepherd, "Who supports terrorism? Evidence from fourteen Muslim countries," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 1 (2006): 52, 71.

specifically at homegrown jihadism, Bakker's study shows that most individuals in his sample came from a relatively low socioeconomic background.<sup>484</sup>

Conversely, Piazza finds no significant relationship between low economic development and terrorism.<sup>485</sup> Various scholars posit that terrorists are less likely to come from impoverished backgrounds than their peers.<sup>486</sup> In contrast to the Bakker study, the jihadists in Sageman's sample mostly enjoyed a relatively well-off middle-class existence.<sup>487</sup> Although Sageman looked at internationally operating jihadists and Bakker focused on European jihadists, the differences are still striking. A similar dichotomy emerges with regard to the relationship between education and terrorism. Some studies encourage the idea that terrorism attracts the uneducated.<sup>488</sup> Others fail to support such hypotheses or reach diametrically opposed conclusions.<sup>489</sup> Given these conflicting findings, it is unclear whether poverty and lack of education *as such* can function as motives for terrorism.

Research suggests that deprivation's ability to contribute to the onset of political violence is particularly pronounced when it is experienced *relative* to other individuals or groups. Gurr defines relative deprivation as the perceived discrepancy between the 'values' people expect to achieve, such as political influence or material well-being, and their actual capacity for doing so.<sup>490</sup> When groups perceive that they are unfairly economically disadvantaged or politically disenfranchised vis-à-vis another class, religious group or ethnic minority, relative deprivation can become a powerful motivation for political action and, potentially, violence.<sup>491</sup> Poverty or

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484 Edwin Bakker, "Characteristics of jihadi terrorists in Europe (2001-2009)," in *Jihadi terrorism and the radicalisation challenge*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Farnham / Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 140.

485 Piazza, "Rooted in poverty," 170-171.

486 Claude Berrebi, "Evidence about the link between education, poverty and terrorism among Palestinians," *Peace Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy* 13, no. 1 (2007): 17-18; Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleková, "Education, poverty and terrorism: is there a causal connection?," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003): 131, 135; Robert A. Pape, *Dying to win: the strategic logic of suicide terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2006), 215.

487 Sageman, *Understanding terror networks*, 73-74.

488 Ana Bela Santos Bravo and Carlos Manuel Mendes Dias, "An empirical analysis of terrorism: deprivation, Islamism and geopolitical factors," *Defence and Peace Economics* 17, no. 4 (2006): 337; Jerrold M. Post, "The socio-cultural underpinnings of terrorist psychology: when hatred is bred in the bone," in *Root causes of terrorism: myths, reality and ways forward*, ed. Tore Bjørgo (London / New York: Routledge, 2005), 64; Karin Von Hippel, "The roots of terrorism: probing the myths," *The Political Quarterly* 73, no. Supplement 1 (2002): 28-30.

489 Krueger and Maleková, "Education, poverty and terrorism," 125-126, 131-132, 135; Bakker, "Characteristics of jihadi terrorists," 140; Berrebi, "Evidence about the link between education," 17; Pape, *Dying to win*, 214; Sageman, *Understanding terror networks*, 74-77; Abdelaziz Testas, "Determinants of terrorism in the Muslim world: an empirical cross-sectional analysis," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, no. 2 (2004): 262-263.

490 Ted Robert Gurr, *Why men rebel* (Boulder / London: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), 13, 25-26.

491 Ted Robert Gurr, "Why minorities rebel: a global analysis of communal mobilization and conflict since 1945," *International Political Science Review* 14, no. 2 (1993): 166-167, 188-189; Gurr, *Why men rebel*, 9, 13, 33-34, 37; Frances Stewart, "Crisis prevention: tackling horizontal inequalities," *Oxford Development Studies* 28, no. 3 (2000): 252-253.

socioeconomic disadvantages become markedly more potent motivational preconditions for terrorism when they overlap with intergroup inequality.<sup>492</sup>

Relative deprivation has become a frequently encountered explanation for involvement in political violence and terrorism. However, it should be noted that the theory has also attracted considerable criticism. As a form of deprivation that exists primarily in the *perception* of individuals or groups, objectively assessing its presence can be difficult. Furthermore, most people are bound to experience relative deprivation, albeit to varying degrees, at various points in their lives.<sup>493</sup> As the vast majority of those individuals never even consider turning to political violence, the theory can by itself not provide a sufficient explanation for involvement in terrorism or extremism.

A 2005 report on the integration of minorities in the Netherlands indicated that non-Western immigrants and their children were socioeconomically disadvantaged compared to the indigenous population. For instance, they had lower educational qualifications, were more likely to be unemployed, earned less income, underperformed at school and were disproportionately represented in statistics on crime.<sup>494</sup> Another report showed that Dutch Muslims also faced discrimination on the labor market.<sup>495</sup> Given the predominance of Dutch Moroccans in the Hofstadgroup, it is interesting to note that the Moroccan community is frequently cited as the one most strongly affected by these problems.<sup>496</sup> Researchers have also argued that the increasingly vituperative debate on Islam and multiculturalism in the Netherlands has engendered feelings of alienation among (young) Dutch Muslims.<sup>497</sup> Was such relative deprivation also a factor underlying involvement in the Hofstadgroup?

### 5.3.1.1 Relative deprivation and the Hofstadgroup

Perhaps surprisingly, there are virtually no indications that income inequality, lack of access to educational opportunities, political representation or other examples of intergroup inequality played a role in the adoption of radical or extremist views or motivated involvement in the Hofstadgroup. Admittedly, one individual's involvement began when he failed to obtain an internship through what he believed was discrimination because of his Moroccan heritage.<sup>498</sup> However, this person was quick to emphasize that this experience did not *motivate* his involvement

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492 James A. Piazza, "Poverty, minority economic discrimination, and domestic terrorism," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 3 (2011): 348-350; S. Mansoob Murshed and Scott Gates, "Spatial-horizontal inequality and the Maoist insurgency in Nepal," *Review of Development Economics* 9, no. 1 (2005): 132-133.

493 Victoroff, "The mind of the terrorist," 19; Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, 54-56.

494 *Jaarrapport integratie 2005*, (The Hague: SCP, WODC, CBS, 2005), 45, 50-51, 75-76, 83, 85-86, 89, 90-91, 98, 100-101, 132-144, 148-162.

495 Iris Andriessen et al., *Liever Mark dan Mohammed? Onderzoek naar arbeidsmarktdiscriminatie van niet-westerse migranten via praktijktests* (The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2010), 11-22.

496 General Intelligence and Security Service, "Violent jihad in the Netherlands," 35-36; *Jaarrapport integratie 2005*, 45, 83, 148-162.

497 Edwin Bakker, "Islamism, radicalisation and jihadism in the Netherlands: main developments and counter-measures," in *Understanding violent radicalisation: terrorist and jihadist movements in Europe*, ed. Magnus Ranstorp (London / New York: Routledge, 2010), 169-170; De Koning and Meijer, "Going all the way," 223-224.

498 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 3.

but indirectly *facilitated* it. Without an internship to go to he simply had more time to spend on other pursuits, one of which turned out to be a growing interest in radical Islam that in time would lead him towards the group.<sup>499</sup>

There are, however, several indications that participants experienced a sense of being second-rate citizens because of their faith. It is here that emphasis must be placed on the polarizing influence of the debate on Islam and the integration of (Muslim) minorities that had been waged in Dutch society since the late 1990s. Politicians such as Pim Fortuyn, Rita Verdonk and later Geert Wilders led a debate that was increasingly critical of Islam and immigration. Moreover, it was often voiced in crude or harsh tones; Theo van Gogh's writings being a case in point. These developments not only had a polarizing influence on Dutch society by seemingly setting Muslim immigrants and their children against the 'autochthonous' population, but also strengthened feelings of exclusion amongst young Muslim citizens in particular.<sup>500</sup> Keeping this socio-political context in mind, several findings stand out.

Particularly telling is the reaction of one Hofstadgroup participant to news that a Dutch prisoner who murdered an Iraqi man was released from jail; 'your blood is blood, but our blood is water.'<sup>501</sup> Several encountered (verbal) aggression aimed at their religious convictions or Moroccan heritage.<sup>502</sup> During police questioning, one suspect lamented that the murder of Van Gogh would only increase the gulf between Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>503</sup> Another told officers that Dutch society had become more intolerant and callous towards Muslims after 9/11.<sup>504</sup> Others spoke out angrily against what they saw as the media's unfavorable portrayal of Islam, its perceived tendency to under-report Muslim suffering around the globe and its vilification of men like Bin Laden as terrorists.<sup>505</sup> In some of his writings, Van Gogh's to-be murderer criticized the Dutch government's integration policies, which he saw as thinly veiled attempts to encourage Muslims to abandon their faith.<sup>506</sup>

Such experiences with discrimination strengthened participants' convictions and fed their hatred for unbelievers. But, one potential exception notwithstanding,<sup>507</sup> there is little to suggest that these experiences triggered or motivated involvement or that they were central to planned and

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499 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 3," 1.

500 De Koning and Meijer, "Going all the way," 223-224.

501 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA05/22: 1876.

502 Ibid., 01/17: 4145, 4198; AHD4108/4137: 8569-8570, 8574; Groot Koerkamp and Veerman, *Het slapende leger*, 24; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 5, "Personal interview 1," 4.

503 Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," VERD: 20105.

504 Ibid., VERD: 20456.

505 A[.], "Deurwaarders," 3, 9-10; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," AHA05/22: 1876; AHB1802/1826: 3776-3777; AHD1808/1837: 8614-8617, 8733-8734; Erkel, *Samir*, 215; Peters, "De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 18-19, 22; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 5, "Personal interview 1," 4.

506 Peters, "De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 15, 22, 48.

507 A[.], "Deurwaarders," 3.

perpetrated acts of terrorism. In fact, various findings *disavow* this line of reasoning. Several participants spoke positively about their experiences as Muslims in the Netherlands, praising the country's religious freedom.<sup>508</sup> More importantly, the Hofstadgroup's extremist elements advocated violence not because they felt alienated or discriminated, but as punishment for those who insulted Islam.<sup>509</sup> Although the Dutch 'debate on Islam' had been gaining momentum since the 1990s, it did not really become a topic of conversation within the group until the release of the Islam-critical film *Submission* in August 2004.<sup>510</sup> As one former participant put it, the debate on Islam was 'secondary'; while Hirsi Ali and Van Gogh deserved to be killed, this individual was primarily focused on supporting Islamist insurgents in places such as Afghanistan.<sup>511</sup>

As the example given above illustrates, Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali became hated public figures because of how they spoke about Islam and its prophet, not because they engendered or exacerbated feelings of exclusion from Dutch society.<sup>512</sup> Which is not to say to experiences of exclusion, or feelings of being second-rate citizens did not exert an influence on the group's development. They contributed to the drawing of sharper boundaries between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in the Netherlands and increased participants' antagonistic views of the latter. The available data on the Hofstadgroup, however, does not allow relative deprivation to be ascribed more than such a supportive role when explaining how its participants became involved. Although the Dutch debate on Islam certainly had its influence on the Hofstadgroup, and despite the emphasis frequently placed upon it when explaining involvement in homegrown jihadism, it does not appear to have been a particularly important explanatory variable.

### 5.3.2 Political grievances

The perception that governments or their policies are unjust and lack legitimacy can provide a powerful impetus for participation in political violence.<sup>513</sup> From this perspective, people turn to terrorism because they see it as a tool they can use to redress such grievances and exert political influence through violence.

#### 5.3.2.1 Political grievances among Hofstadgroup participants

The data reveals that numerous participants reacted strongly to armed conflicts involving Muslims. News about the suffering of co-religionists in places like Palestine or about terrorist

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508 Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 68, 94-95, 195; Dienst Nationale Recherche, „RL8026,“ AHA04/21: 1633; VERD: 20229; 20201/20217: 24004.

509 Dienst Nationale Recherche, „RL8026,“ 01/17: 4131.

510 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 23-24.

511 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 4, "Personal interview 2," 5.

512 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 1," 1; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 23-24.

513 Gary LaFree and Gary Ackerman, "The empirical study of terrorism: social and legal research," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 5(2009): 360-362; Crenshaw, "The causes of terrorism," 383-384; Ehud Sprinzak, "The process of delegitimation: towards a linkage theory of political terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 1 (1991): 50-68.

attacks carried out by Muslims had a range of effects. As vicarious experiences of injustice and shock, they helped bring about an interest in Islam and geopolitics, triggering searches for information that contributed to the adoption of radical and extremist interpretations of Islam.<sup>514</sup> As an interviewee recalled his reaction to the 9/11 attacks: ‘At first you think like “terrible, what happened there (...) No religion can justify that.” So you investigate. (...) And then I found a fatwa by [Hamoud al-Aqla al-Shuebi] (...) in which he approved of [the attacks] (...) and I thought it was nice to see how he explained all that and actually also presented evidence [of its permissibility]’.<sup>515</sup>

These geopolitical events also helped shape a Manichean outlook in which ‘true’ Muslims were assaulted by both external and internal enemies; principally, the United States, its Western-European allies, Israel and what participants considered apostate or heretical Muslim regimes.<sup>516</sup> Particularly influential in this regard was the U.S.-led ‘War on Terror’, which many participants saw as a war against Islam.<sup>517</sup> As one wrote, ‘I gained feelings of hate towards anyone who supported Bush in his crusade, not just the Netherlands, but also Arabic apostate leaders’.<sup>518</sup> Another important effect of these geopolitical grievances was their ability to justify violence by portraying it as a defensive and righteous response to Muslim suffering.<sup>519</sup> One of the travelers to Pakistan or Afghanistan wrote his mother explaining that he had left because the ummah was under attack; he had gone to help expel the unbelievers from the land of jihad.<sup>520</sup>

In early 2003, the desire to help Muslims in conflict zones led one of the group’s most committed extremists to attempt to reach Islamist insurgents in Chechnya.<sup>521</sup> Later that year, three others traveled to Pakistan or Afghanistan, likely with a similar purpose in mind. By late 2003, however, the focus of the Hofstadgroup’s militant core began to shift towards possible actions within the Netherlands. This transition was partly practical; by this time the group had clearly attracted the attention of the police and AIVD, making foreign travel much more difficult. It was also influenced by political grievances; as a loyal ally of the United States and Israel, and as a contributor to the

514 A[.], “Deurwaarders,” 3, 5-9; Erkel, *Samir*, 48-49, 69; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 19, 79; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, “Personal interview 2,” 10-11; De Graaf, *Gevaarlijke vrouwen*, 249-250; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 5, “Personal interview 1,” 1; Vermaat, *Nederlandse jihad*, 163.

515 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, “Personal interview 2,” 11.

516 A[.], “Deurwaarders,” 4-5, 7, 9; Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/13: 163; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, “Personal interview 1,” 6-7; Peters, “De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling,” appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 33.

517 A[.], “Deurwaarders,” 4, 7, 9; Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/13: 173; GET: 4127-4128; Erkel, *Samir*, 74-75; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 3, “Personal interview 1,” 6-7; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 4, “Personal interview 2,” 5; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 19; Peters, “De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling,” appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 33.

518 A[.], “Deurwaarders,” 9.

519 *Ibid.*, 3, 5-8; Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/01: 131; AHA104/121: 1666; 1601/1613: 1163; AHB1601/1625: 3166-3168; GET: 4128, 18116; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, “Personal interview 1,” 6; Erkel, *Samir*, 65-67; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 68-70, 169-170; Peters, “De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling,” appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 33.

520 Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/13: 163.

521 A[.], “Deurwaarders,” 10.

interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Dutch government was increasingly seen as sharing responsibility for the harm that had befallen Muslims. In the eyes of some participants it had become a legitimate target.<sup>522</sup>

Geopolitically-inspired grievances formed key explanatory factors. They were crucial to understanding how and why many participants came into contact with radical and extremist interpretations of Islam. The vicarious sense of outrage and injustice that images of their co-religionists' suffering induced were key to the establishment of a common cause between the Hofstadgroup's (future) participants and the global ummah. For some, these grievances motivated and justified a desire to strike back, to avenge perceived injustices against fellow Muslims. Indeed, the Dutch role in the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq motivated some participants to pursue plans for terrorism in the Netherlands. In the absence of geopolitical events involving the perceived victimization of Muslim populations, the Hofstadgroup would arguably not have existed or developed in the way it did.

### 5.3.3 A clash of value systems?

Several authors have argued that European homegrown jihadism arose out of a fundamental incompatibility between radical Islam and liberal democracy.<sup>523</sup> It is a line of reasoning that resembles Huntington's thesis that the dominant source of post-Cold War conflict would be '[t]he fault lines between civilizations.'<sup>524</sup> The broader literature on political violence is, however, equivocal on the matter. For instance, while Senechal de la Roche argues that greater 'cultural distance' is positively associated with a higher probability of collective violence,<sup>525</sup> Fearon and Laitin find no clear link between ethnic or religious diversity and the outbreak of civil wars and insurgencies.<sup>526</sup>

#### 5.3.3.1 The Hofstadgroup as a clash of value systems

At first glance, the Hofstadgroup's radical and extremist views and its participants' rejection of democratic laws, values and institutions certainly made them incompatible with Dutch liberal democracy. Furthering this divide, many participants did not see themselves as Dutch.<sup>527</sup> A crucial

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522 Ibid., 4-5, 9; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 1," 6; De Graaf, *Gevaarlijke vrouwen*, 256-257; Dienst Nationale Recherche, "RL8026," 01/01: 131; 101/113: 161; 101/117: 4069; AHA4001/4018: 4100; AHA4005/4022: 2228; Erkel, *Samir*, 74-75, 118-119; Groen and Kranenberg, *Women warriors*, 20-21; NOVA, "Videotestament Samir A. - vertaling NOVA"; Peters, "De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling," appendix: Overzicht teksten geschreven of vertaald door Mohammed B., 32-34; Van San, Sieckelincx, and De Winter, *Idealen op drift*, 47-48.

523 Spruyt, "Liberalism and the challenge of Islam," 318-324; Cliteur, "De lankmoedige elite," 232-234; Leiken, "Europe's angry Muslims," 121-122; Leiken, "Europe's mujahideen," 3.

524 Samuel P. Huntington, "The clash of civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22.

525 Roberta Senechal de la Roche, "Collective violence as social control," *Sociological Forum* 11, no. 1 (1996): 108-109.

526 James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75-76, 78, 83-84.

527 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 2, "Personal interview 1," 2.

point to make, however, is that these attitudes do not appear to have *motivated* involvement in the Hofstadgroup but rather to have *stemmed* from it. Prior to their involvement in the group, most participants led apparently well-integrated lives; attending school, holding (part-time) work and enjoying recreational activities like other Dutch citizens their age. Several individuals did not become practicing Muslims until contact with Hofstadgroup participants led to a reorientation on their faith.<sup>528</sup> Others were converts to Islam.<sup>529</sup> Even among those who had had a religious upbringing, clear signs of hostility towards Western culture and politics did not manifest themselves *until after* they had adopted radical or extremist interpretations of Islam.<sup>530</sup>

These findings underline the importance of distinguishing between Islam and radical or extremist interpretations of the religion such as Salafi-Jihadism. The available data provide little to suggest that the Hofstadgroup was a manifestation of an inherent incompatibility between Islam and Western democracy. They do, however, show that such an adversarial relationship developed once radical and extremist views were adopted. This speaks to the power of the Salafi-Jihadist ideological narrative to instill or sharpen pre-existing in-group / out-group distinctions and thus lay the basis for intergroup hostility and violence.

#### 5.4 Structural-level precipitants: *Submission, part 1*

Precipitants are ‘specific events that immediately precede the occurrence of terrorism.’<sup>531</sup> Given that Van Gogh’s murder was the only terrorist attack to actually be carried out by a Hofstadgroup participant, can a precipitant event be identified in the time period leading up to it? It seems highly likely that the killer was triggered by the broadcast of the short film *Submission, part 1* on 29 August 2004 on Dutch national television.<sup>532</sup> Although Van Gogh’s assailant never explicitly referred to the film in his writings or in court, he chose to murder its director and he left a note on his body threatening Hirsi Ali, who came up with the idea for the film in the first place.

Additional, albeit circumstantial, corroboration for the conclusion that *Submission* triggered the murder of Van Gogh is that other Hofstadgroup participants also reacted strongly, if only in words, to the film. Death threats were posted on Hofstadgroup-administered forums,<sup>533</sup> at least one individual told another participant that he wanted to see Hirsi Ali and Van Gogh killed because of *Submission*<sup>534</sup> and several, while disagreeing with the murder, believed Van Gogh had asked for it.<sup>535</sup> One interviewee claimed that the film helped swing the group’s focus towards

528 Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/17: 4002, 4047, 4051, 4061; GET: 18157, 18215; VERD: 19917, 19935, 20012, 20225, 20131; Former Hofstadgroup Participant 2, “Personal interview 1,” 7.

529 Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/17: 4084, 4145, 4177; VERD: 20461, 20518.

530 Chorus and Olgun, *In godsnaam*, 44-53; A[.], “Deurwaarders,” 1-3.

531 Crenshaw, “The causes of terrorism,” 381.

532 Public Prosecutor 1, “Personal interview 1,” 28; Public Prosecutor 2, “Personal interview 1,” 4; NCTV Employee 1, “Personal interview 1,” 4.

533 Dienst Nationale Recherche, “RL8026,” 01/13: 165-166.

534 *Ibid.*, 01/13: 74.

535 *Ibid.*, 01/17: 4231; VERD: 20226-20228, 20231, 20319, 20462.

waging jihad in the Netherlands.<sup>536</sup> Despite the shared antagonism, however, it was only Van Gogh's killer who acted.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on structural-level factors relevant to understanding how and why involvement in the Hofstadgroup materialized. It did so by utilizing Crenshaw's distinction between 'preconditions' that enable or motivate involvement in terrorism and 'precipitants' that spark an actual attack.<sup>537</sup> Structural factors not only provided *opportunities* for the Hofstadgroup's emergence, but also *motivated* some of its participants' to engage in violence and contributed to a change in those motives from becoming a foreign fighter to waging violent jihad in the Netherlands. Structural factors also played a key role in triggering the terrorist attack on Van Gogh.

With regard to facilitation, the role of the Internet was especially important. It exposed Hofstadgroup participants to geopolitical developments, militant interpretations of Islam, practical knowledge on the use of weapons and explosives and formed an easy-to-use communications tool and propaganda platform. Another facilitating factor was the openness of Dutch society, which afforded the group considerable freedom to organize, travel and propagate their views. Thirdly, it is likely that growing up in a social environment in which Islamic fundamentalist views were prevalent lowered at least some participants' threshold to seeing the use of violence as a legitimate by instilling a sense of out-group hostility directed at the Western world. Finally, the AIVD's misdiagnosis of Van Gogh's killer as a peripheral group participant and, in particular, Van Gogh's refusal to accept police protection increased the attacker's opportunities to strike.

Looking at motivational preconditions, geopolitical grievances stand out. Conflicts involving Muslims populations, the U.S.-led 'War on Terror' and terrorist attacks such as those orchestrated on 9/11 had several influences. They triggered searches for answers that contributed to group participants' eventual adoption of radical and extremist views, instilled the conviction that a war against Islam was being waged and made retaliatory violence seem both justified and necessary. Political grievances also motivated some participants to start thinking about conducting a terrorist attack in the Netherlands.

Perhaps surprisingly, there are no clear indications that socioeconomic inequality, the harsh tone of the Dutch integration debate or lack of access to the democratic political system directly motivated involvement in the Hofstadgroup. Experiences with discrimination did, however, strengthen participants' convictions and feed their hatred of unbelievers. Finally, the precipitant event that likely triggered the murder of Van Gogh was the broadcast of *Submission*, a short Islam-

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536 Former Hofstadgroup Participant 1, "Personal interview 2," 23-24.

537 Crenshaw, "The causes of terrorism."

critical film that he had directed and which caused considerable offense among Hofstadgroup participants.

Structural level factors were crucial to understanding how and why involvement in the Hofstadgroup's emerged. Yet the present analysis falls short in that the factors described are experienced by many more people than those that actually become involved in the Hofstadgroup. Why, with so many other Dutch Muslims exposed to images of war and conflict involving their co-religionists, and with similar opportunities for engaging in violence, did only the Hofstadgroup's participants react by embracing radicalism and militancy? The inability of the structural level of analysis to account for the variable influence of factors such as political grievances or relative deprivation points to the need to utilize other analytical perspectives. This chapter has hinted at the importance of group dynamics on numerous occasions. It is to this topic that the discussion now turns.

