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The Portuguese foreign fighters phenomenon: a preliminary assessment

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ABSTRACT
This paper analyses the phenomenon of a group of Portuguese citizens and Portuguese-descendants who went to fight alongside the Islamic State (IS) organisation and other extremist groups in Syria and Iraq. The article provides a new contribution to radicalisation by using a new dataset and an understudied case study: Portugal. It hosts a small Muslim community, which has not found itself under the spotlight of being a major concern, as regards the terrorist threat. Is it possible to find common underlying motivations driving young men and women to volunteer for jihad? Do young Muslims face different constraints that explain their involvement in militant activity, particularly being more vulnerable to factors such as socioeconomic marginalisation? Does socialisation in peer-to-peer ideological networks, and small-group recruitment within pre-existing radical milieus play a decisive role? By identifying biographical factors that stand out in two radicalisation theories – social network analysis, and the relative deprivation hypothesis –, it is possible to elicit what factors hold when applied specifically to the Portuguese case. The data provide support to socioeconomic explanations and group-level factors as the main mechanisms that lead converts to involvement in extremism and terrorism.

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Portugal; foreign fighters; jihadism; social network theory; Islamic State

Introduction

Drawing on open sources,[1] the article examines the phenomenon of Portuguese foreign fighters (FFs). Eleven[2] nationals or citizens of Portuguese descent[3] have joined jihadist organisations in Syria and Iraq. Using publicly available information, this article builds the profile and trajectories of Portuguese jihadists, thereby offering a new contribution to knowledge on the topic of European FFs. The existing literature on Portugal's jihadists is quite limited, both at national and international level.[4] Given the nature of the research, primary sources or official documents were difficult to obtain.

This study is an exploratory research: based on the best available knowledge, it provides empirical evidence from open-access sources that can help build an exploratory case study on radicalisation into violence in a European country, which, incidentally, has a small Muslim community. It relies on data from the biographies of

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Portuguese jihadists, in order to provide insights into background factors and eventual drivers of radicalisation. The conclusions reached so far are only preliminary, since more information is needed to come to more well-grounded generalisations. One of the handicaps of this study is related to the smallness of the sample. Another hampering issue is the gaps in jihadists' biographies. Acknowledging this is a small universe, and that the data are incomplete, some elements or themes stood out in the cases we looked into. A number of characteristics that make up the life stories of men and women who have joined jihadist organisations in Syria and Iraq are similar to FFs of other European countries, namely their young age, personal trajectories of failure, dynamics of conversion, and radicalisation. Those elements were teased out in order to highlight the commonalities among them, bearing in mind that information is not uniformly accessible for all subjects analysed. Variations across subjects in the variables analysed preclude any firm conclusions on causal paths.

In order to build an explanatory framework with more general relevance, theoretical contributions which focus on the driving role of social affiliations and socioeconomic conditions of FFs were explored. I have also compared and/or contrasted the findings in this case study with a batch of recent studies on other foreign fighter contingents from Europe. Thus, this article's findings can be situated, not only within the existing literature, but also against recent evidence.

The data help elicit certain patterns and dynamics, which have been borne out by some of the existing theories, with the aim of unlocking the triggers and drivers of violent radicalisation at individual level. Empirical data corroborate the central line of contention among radicalisation theories, namely the social network analysis, on the relative importance of social factors, and the integration deficit hypothesis, which focuses on the volunteers' disadvantaged economic and educational backgrounds, along with poor job prospects (Reynolds & Hafez, 2017, pp. 3 and ff.).

The analysis provides a useful point for further, more detailed, efforts at enquiring into how close personal bonds and interaction in small peer groups may be critical in radicalising individuals by hate preachers, friends, or relatives. It also points to the socioeconomic explanations, such as a sense of failure and the problems of individuals with an immigrant background.

The outline of the article is as follows: firstly, I propose two theories that might account for radicalisation: the social network analysis, and the poverty-terrorism hypothesis. This is followed by presenting some of the biographical factors of Portuguese FFs that are salient to two theories tested, comparing them to their European cohorts in order to highlight specific trends across EU foreign fighter contexts. I then proceed to draw inferences regarding the social network and socioeconomic background theories. I conclude by summarising the main empirical findings, and by highlighting empirical support to the social network approach and the relative deprivation theory.

The importance of social networks

The attempts by terrorism researchers to identify a terrorist personality or profile founded on certain conditions and root causes, have provided little in terms of accounting for radicalisation[5] based on a singular process or mechanism, a generally

applicable model of individual radicalisation (Atran, 2008; Bjørgo, 2005; Richardson, 2006; Sageman, 2014a; Sageman, 2014b, p. 568; Schuurman, Grol, & Flower, 2016; Silke, 2014, p. 61). Arguments that account for individual radicalisation run the gamut from the role of relative deprivation, ideology and religion, psychopathy, personal traumas, experiences with social injustice, and political repression, among others (Karagiannis, 2012; McAllister & Schmid, 2011, pp. 272–275; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Neumann & Rogers, 2007, p. 14).

As important as these personal factors may be, in becoming a terrorist, 'motive cannot be taken in isolation from opportunity' (Borum, 2004, p. 26). In other words, a person in a life crisis, or in a dissident or protest mood, is not likely to radicalise unless other radicals introduce the susceptible personality to radical messages. Additionally, in the context of a personal crisis, there must be a cognitive opening, that is, the convert must somehow be receptive to entertain new sets of beliefs and values previously considered extreme. And, as has now been firmly ascertained, for most jihadist recruits, their first approach or exposure to an extremist ideology 'comes from someone they know' (Borum, 2004, p. 58). Empirical cases studied by Nesser (2004), Bakker (2006), and Sageman (2004; Sageman, 2009, p. 19) show that, regardless of the analysed organisational level, group dynamics, relational processes, and interpersonal relations tend to be important for mobilisation.

Several studies suggest that many young people are attracted to Jihadism through social networks, such as the relationship of kinship and friendship, and only when they are embedded in the environment, under peer pressure, do they acquire a sense of religious and ideological awareness (Club de Madrid, 2005, p. 36; Hegghammer, 2006, pp. 39–60). Sageman, a leading proponent of this theory, points out that 'social bonds are the critical element in this process and precedes the ideological commitment' (2004, p. 135). The same view was confirmed by Wiktorowicz's observation of the radical English group, al-Muhajiroun: 'one of the most consistent findings in research in social movements and cults is that personal relationships are the social pathways' to participation in a movement, especially where high-risk activism is required (2005, p. 15). The Portuguese jihadists study underlines these insights: they converted to Islam via friends or kins. Usually, friends or family relations bring persons into contact with radicalising milieus and mosques. Radicalising entrepreneurs, such as militant preachers, Anjem Choudary (Franco & Moleiro, 2015a; Gadher & Hookham, 2015) and Mustapha Mraoui (Franco, 2017; La Croix, 2017; Le Figaro, 2016) played a prime role in funnelling some of the Portuguese converts towards terrorism.

Much of the current work has pointed out that radicalisation is a collective rather than an individual process, built up around interpersonal ties, such as friendship and kinship. The fact that prospective terrorists are influenced to join under the influence or by solidarity with family and friends, was highlighted by Donatella della Porta in her research on left-wing groups in Italy and Germany (1995, p. 167). Martha Crenshaw's research on terrorist recruitment also shows that 'for the individuals who become active terrorists, the initial attraction is often to the group, or community of believers, rather than to an abstract ideology or to violence' (1998, p. 59).

Sageman has subsequently called this loose network of people a 'social blob', who come in contact with a radical version of Islam. The engagement with the radical message, often of born-again Muslims or youngsters with no prior religious education,

may range 'from low-level community activism to high-stakes militancy' (in Atran & Davis, 2009, p. 6). He further adds that

> Many people flirt with the blob, and only very few remain in it for a definite period of time. Internally, fluidity characterizes the activities of 'members' of the social blob, as many individuals experiment with various activities and personae linked with this blob. (Sageman, 2009, p. 19)

Atran also held this view on his 2008 article on adherence to Takfiri jihadism: 'It is the *social networks* and *group dynamics* of these networks that are critical to understanding how terrorist networks form and operate, not the demographic profiles of individuals and whole populations' (2008, p. 4). He adds: 'Those who seek out al-Qaeda do so in small groups of friends, and occasionally through kin. Almost all are schoolmates or workmates, and camp, soccer, or paintball buddies' (Atran, 2008, p. 7).

Hegghammer's studies on Saudi Arabian jihadists to Afghanistan are very much in line with these arguments: 'The available sources point to the extraordinary importance of social networks in mobilizing people to go to Afghanistan' (2006, p. 50). Group dynamics, such as peer pressure and intra-group bonding, seem to be crucial in gradually pushing an individual toward a predisposition to violence over time (2006, p. 50). When looking into the recruitment patterns of the militants who went to Afghanistan, he observed: 'Many had a relative or a friend who had gone previously. Most people made the travel preparations as well as the journey itself with friends or relatives' (2006, p. 50). Analysing the Palestinian suicide bomber phenomenon through a social network approach, Pedahzur and Perliger have also confirmed how family ties, long-term friendships, and earlier acquaintances, such as a person met at work, school or in prison. Recruitment of potential candidates is made based mainly on primordial ties related to family and friends (Pedahzur and Perliger, 2006, p. 1999). Research into mobilisation of Belgian and French FFs to Iraq, also evidenced the existence of networks of kins and friends from the same neighbourhoods or schools in Paris, aged in their late teens to early twenties, (Holman, 2015a, pp. 605, 607–608).

Neumann and Rogers (2007, p. 16) provide additional empirical evidence in support of Wiktorowicz and Hegghammer's emphasis on the importance of social networks and personal relationships in the radicalisation and recruitment process (Bakker, 2006). Like Wiktorowicz, the authors show how social bonding within small peer groups can facilitate the adoption of more extreme worldviews. They also point out the role of the group as a 're-socialising agent', and the enormous social pressures that are brought to bear on the members to align with the group consensus (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 803; Neumann & Rogers, 2007, pp. 71, 74). They emphasise how being part of an isolated tight-knit community of like-minded believers provides them with a sense of belonging, of community, and makes them feel appreciated, important, and wanted (Borum, 2011, p. 21). In line with Sageman and Wiktorowicz, Bakker stresses the key role of social connections, to understand the circumstances in which individuals adhere to Jihadism (2006; p. 52. Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 805).

A recent study on patterns of jihadist radicalisation of 178 individuals detained in Spain between 2013 and 2016 also bears out the importance of prior social links, particularly the relevance of local networks built on interpersonal ties, in facilitating jihadist radicalisation and recruitment. Jihadist radicalisation leading to involvement with terrorism is closely

associated with social interactions through which individuals learn and endorse ideas that justify terrorism.

> The importance of contact with one or more agents of radicalization underlines the relevance of ideology in the process through which attitudes and beliefs of a violent Salafism are acquired. The extent of previous social links indicates that affective ties within local networks facilitates the processes of radicalisation and jihadist recruitment. (Reinares, Garcia-Calvo, & Vicente, 2017, p. 1)

For Belgian and Dutch jihadist FFs, Bakker and de Bont also ascertained that many were connected through friendship, kinship, or both (2016, pp.845, 847). Jihadist networks also played an important role, including charismatic figures, who are able to attract recruits to its ranks by suggesting that joining the jihad will make young people part of a group that fights for a cause, providing a sense of belonging to a strong social network, as well as a sense of purpose to their life.

As far as the mobilisation process is concerned, existing data lend some support to online mobilisation, a primary vector of radicalisation. The Internet seems to play a contributing role, but is does not overcome the role played by peer-to-peer and social networks recruitment (Reynolds & Hafez, 2017, pp. 21–22). The 2016 German security report finds that as far as radicalisation is concerned, the Internet is an important contributing factor, although it remains to be verified whether 'Internet propaganda can initiate radicalization, or whether the Internet simply accompanies other radicalization factors' (Federal Criminal Police et al., 2016, pp. 20–21). In the case of Spain, researchers concluded that only 35.3% of the detainees were radicalised basically within an online environment, while 40.3% were radicalised in a mixed environment, both online and offline (Reinares et al., 2017, p. 3).

Arguably, radicalisation takes place through direct personal contact with like-minded persons, be them part of a jihadi aspirant's social ties or a radicalising agent. Some research has born out patterns of bloc or collective recruitment (Reynolds & Hafez, 2017, p. 845), or chain migration (Bakker & de Bont, 2016, p. 848). Those terms capture the phenomenon that recruits tend to travel to combat area in groups, including family and friends. The German report points out that FFs travelled all, or part of the way, with friends or family members (79%) (Federal Criminal Police et al., 2016, p. 25).

The German security report elicits that for 54% of its sample, friends are the most important factor in initiating the radicalisation process. Other relevant factors were contacts at mosques (48%), and the Internet (44%) (2016, p. 19). The Internet plays a key role, but direct contact with peers and like-minded persons is more important for later stages of radicalisation (Federal Criminal Police et al., 2016, p. 55). Actually, for a large part of this sample, connection to Salafist circles and personalities seem to have played a determinant role (Federal Criminal Police et al., 2016, p. 54).

Based on the available documentary evidence, the case study of Portuguese jihadists shows that the theories laid out above stand up to empirical scrutiny. As underlined by the social movement and network theories, jihadists are formed in small groups of friends, with more or less the same age. They are drawn by the 'pull of romantic and comradely love' (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008, p. 421). Basically, they come from the same neighbourhood or environment, they knew each other before, they lived together, and/or had a common meeting place.

The relative deprivation theory

Much of the post-9/11 literature on terrorism showed that socioeconomic explanations of radicalisation were flimsy. Gradually, scholars have evolved into a more nuanced position: the roots of terrorism do not lay in poverty or socioeconomic deprivation. A more sound understanding of the root causes of the problem has led to the understanding that the issue is not absolute, but rather relative deprivation, that is, 'the absence of opportunities relative to expectations' (Taşpınar, 2009, p. 78).

Research conducted during that period ascertained that socioeconomic factors were not a major causal factor to explain involvement with terrorism, in particular in the aftermath of the publication of Krueger and Malečková's (2002) paper on the causal connection between education, poverty and terrorism; and of Krueger's (2007) book, *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism*. Sageman's (2004) book also looked at the profiles of 173 al-Qaeda linked militants, and found that 'three fourths of the global salafi mujahidin were solidly upper or middle class' (Sageman, 2004, p. 74). In 2011, a study conducted by Gassebner and Luechinger on the causes of terrorism, also found no support for the poverty hypothesis: 'economic development as measured by GDP per capita does not matter for the amount of terrorism' (2011, p. 254). There is thus little evidence to support the contention that the typical terrorist is poor (Hegghammer, 2016, pp. 2–3; Piazza, 2006).

Some authors do not entirely rule out the failed integration hypothesis, as there is evidence of relative deprivation (Alonso & Reinares, 2006; Sarah Dornhof, 2009, pp. 75–82). Other studies have shown that radicals come from educated and well-to-do families, demonstrating the ideological appeal of extremist groups to all strata of Muslim society (Bhatia & Ghanem, 2017, p. 3). The study conducted by the CPDSI in France, an institution which tackled prevention and de-radicalisation of French jihadist recruits, posited that over 84% of jihadists belonged to middle or upper classes, with a strong representation of teachers and of the educational environment (50% of 84%) (Bouzar, Caupenne, & Valsan, 2014, p. 9). The problem with the representativeness of that study was that the data might be skewed, as the centre received requests for help from parents from more likely well-to-do backgrounds. All this suggested caution in generalisation.

Regarding the socioeconomic background of converts, in particular, Simcox and Dyer's study on trends between convert and non-convert al-Qaeda-related offenders in the United States, found the former were more likely to be employed, attending school and, in particular, to be engaged in skilled occupations (Simcox & Dyer, 2013). Mullins concluded that, particularly after the 9/11, American converts constitute a particular 'jihadi underclass' that is markedly disadvantaged, a situation that does not differ significantly from that of British converts, or from American converts (Mullins, 2015).

However, a number of recent studies on European jihadists have begun to challenge the post-9/11 conventional wisdom that refutes the rooted-in-poverty thesis. Holman determined that Belgian and French FFs in Iraq, in the period 2003–2005, tended to be on the fringes of society, as evidenced by high rates of unemployment, lower levels of education, and involvement in criminality (Holman, 2015, pp. 605–606). In studying FFs who went to various jihad theatres from 2000 until 2013, de Bie, de Poot, and van der Leun (2015), underlined that many were secondary school dropouts, had low-paid, temporary jobs, received a monthly state benefit, and had a criminal history (pp. 425–426).

In analysing the background of Belgian and Dutch FFs, Bakker and de Bont, state they originate from lower and middle strata of society. Dutch FF individuals have a middle or low educational level, originate from lower- or lower-middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds, with many being unemployed (2016, p. 843). They were raised in relatively bad neighbourhoods (Weggemans, Bakker, & Grol, 2014, p. 107). As for Germany, FFs' unemployment rates are consistently higher than national averages, their educational level is lower, and tend to be marked by residential segregation into ethnically homogeneous neighbourhoods (Reynolds & Hafez, 2017, pp. 3–4).

As stated above, more recent studies have highlighted that the poverty-terrorism nexus must be analysed from a different angle. One thing is the lack of material resources, the other is the lack of more general opportunities for self-betterment and improvement in life prospects (Bhatia & Ghanem, 2017, p. 1; Gassebner & Luechinger, 2011, p. 250; UN, 2017, p. 31). The issue at stake in the case of FF is a specific type of relative deprivation linked to access to labour market opportunities and education. Verwimp argued that, in the case of Belgium, one cannot say immigrants are poor, due to the state benefits they get as health coverage, child benefits, unemployment benefits, pensions, access to free or almost free of charge education. However, he detected larger differences in terms of immigrants' performance at school, which actually correlate with larger gaps in employment (Verwimp, 2016, p. 74). He concluded that 'a pattern emerges across much of Europe that links the number of FFs to low labour market participation and lack of educational achievements among immigrant populations' (2016, p. 80).

As a caveat, it is important to note that the integration deficit hypothesis does not account for the statistically significant number of converts joining the jihad, nor does it explain why Portuguese-descendants with another European citizenship make them any less likely to become FFs. In this case, radicalisation does take place as the result of the typical frustrations of an immigrant Muslim community. Although being from a native European background, Portuguese FFs were not subject to the whole array of immigrant communities' frustrations in terms of cultural assimilation and discrimination. This does not preclude the fact that Portuguese volunteers could be as disadvantaged economically and educationally, and face lack of prospects at home.

Profiling jihadists

This section will examine the data on Portuguese FFs by focusing on three key themes, such as conversion experience, socioeconomic profile and social networks. It will also provide an introductory baseline assessment of FFs that frame the Portuguese FF contingent, as well as providing a useful overview against which to compare data on similar cohorts of different nationalities.

There are a few features that tie together the Portuguese who have enlisted in the jihadist ranks. Indeed, their profile matches some of the stereotypes of Western converts, highlighted so far by policy-oriented and academic research focused on terrorism. Apart from one individual (Sadjo Turé), all jihadists were converts to Islam. Indeed, the most remarkable feature of the Portuguese case study is that almost all individuals are recent converts to Islam. They are part of a larger trend of European individuals converted and radicalised into jihadist Islam, and drawn to the jihad in Syria and Iraq.

Most of them converted to Islam within a few years to months, before travelling to the conflict zone. The Portuguese volunteers have no family, cultural or ethnic links to Syria or Iraq, and are in their twenties, although a few are well over 30. They come from European metropolitan and suburban areas, and have no previous record of involvement with extremism, and no significant records of criminal or other markedly anti-social behaviour. They have a low-to-medium level of education, and come from low or lower-middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds.

Most of the Portuguese recruits to jihad were brought up as Catholics. A group of them has family roots in former Portuguese African colonies, including Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, and Angola (the brothers Nelson and Celso Rodrigues, Luís Carlos Almeida, Nero Saraiva, Sandro Monteiro Ribeiro, Sadjo Turé, and Fábio Poças). This group – the so-called Leyton or London group (Nero, Sandro, Sadjo, Fábio, and the brothers Nelson and Celso) – is composed of six men who emigrated to east London on different dates, starting from the early 2000s. They are descendants of families of immigrants that settled in the region of Greater Lisbon after decolonisation in the late 1970s. They moved to London where they converted to Islam (Moleiro, Franco and Beleza, n.d.). The second group lived in other European countries (France – Mikael Baptista, José ('Joni') Miguel Parente, and Mickaël dos Santos, Luxembourg – Steve Duarte, and the Netherlands – Ângela Barreto), for longer than they lived in Portugal, and many also hold dual nationalities. They are thus homegrown, second-generation immigrants (Figure 1).

Figure 2 with some biographical data on European FFS was compiled from official government reports or by academic studies with the aim of serving as a baseline assessment of common FF issues across Portugal, France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, The United Kingdom, and Spain. Most of the information was gleaned from the report drafted for the Netherlands National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism on the occasion of the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU (Van Ginkel & Entenmann, 2016, pp. 25–41).

Although there is not one typical profile of a European FF, some key characteristics can be identified from Figure 2. Certain particularities or emerging trends of the current FF cohorts are reflected there. FF today are mostly young men between the mid-twenties and mid-thirties. The number of converts is significant in most cases, although Portugal stands out having a disproportionally higher rate. As regards the socioeconomic factors, most FFs originate from lower- or lower-middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds, and have low-to-medium levels of education. Regarding the recruitment dynamics, there is a prevalence of cases of kin and peer recruitment, as well as based on already existing extremist networks.

The radicalisation process

As has been evidenced by this study, radicalisation involves circles of friends or relatives radicalising as a group and, in some cases, deciding to leave jointly for IS territories. The Leyton group was partly composed of childhood friends, who met and grew up in the Lisbon suburbs (Celso and Edgar, plus Sandro and Sadjo), and kins (brothers Celso and Edgar). In London, the group of six eventually came together. Sandro was the last of Leyton's cell to leave Sintra for London, where he joined the brothers Costa, of whom he had been a schoolmate. He was also a friend of Sadjo. Kins Edgar and Celso had in

	Age at Time of Departure	Conversion Experience	Socio-economic profile	Social Networks
Nero Saraiva	27	Converted when he emigrated to London. Radicalised in the Forest Gate mosque	Lived on welfare and collected an unemployment subsidy	Forerunner of the Portuguese group of immigrants in London. Radicalised under the influence of Anjem Choudary, the former leader of the extremist organisation Islam4UK and al-Muhajiroun
Celso Rodrigues da Costa	27	Converted in 2006 under the influence of his brother and Sadjo. Radicalised in the Forest Gate mosque	Enrolled at university in London, but was expelled after failing to attend lectures. Lived on menial, temporary jobs	Part of the group of Portuguese immigrants in London. Radicalised under the influence of A. Choudary
Edgar Rodrigues da Costa	30	Converted in 2006 after emigrating to London. Radicalised in the Forest Gate mosque	Had a degree in Management and Marketing. Enrolled at university in London, but was expelled after failing to attend lectures. Lived on menial, temporary jobs	Part of the group of Portuguese immigrants in London. Radicalised under the influence of A. Choudary
Fábio Poças	25	Converted in 2013 after emigrating to London. Radicalised in the Forest Gate mosque	Lived on menial, temporary jobs. Failed to enter University and was a failed, aspiring footballer	Part of the group of Portuguese immigrants in London. Radicalised under the influence of A. Choudary
Ângela Barreto	19	Converted to Islam at the age of 18 through Moroccan friends when she attended a professional school	Professional school dropout	Radicalised through the Internet
Steve Duarte	27	Converted in 2010 in Algeria, where he married an Algerian woman	Highschool dropout	Radicalised at the Esch-sur-Alzette prayer hall in Luxembourg. He is part of a group of six Luxembourg nationals who travelled to Syria to join the IS

Figure 1. Biographical factors of Portuguese FFs.

Mickaël dos Santos	21	In 2009, during a professional internship when he befriended a Muslim	Professional school dropout	Radicalised by the self-proclaimed imam Mustapha Mraoui and Karim Assani of the Villiers-sur-Marne mosque. Left for Syria with another 10 recruits.
Mikael Batista	23	na	University dropout	Radicalised by the self-proclaimed imam M. Mraoui and K. Assani of the Villiers-sur-Marne mosque. Left for Syria with another 10 recruits.
Sandro Monteiro	36	Converted when he emigrated to London. Radicalised in the Forest Gate mosque	He had a number of low-level jobs	Part of the group of Portuguese immigrants in London. Radicalised under the influence of A. Choudary
José Miguel Parente	23	Converted at 17 through Arab friends	High-school dropout	Opened a construction company in Nîmes that went bankrupt within a few months. Borrowed money from the bank, which he used in the jihad. Lived on dead-end jobs.
Sadjo Turé	34	He was already a Muslim. Became a revert in London.	Lived on temporary, menial jobs	Part of the group of Portuguese immigrants in London. Radicalised
				under the influence of A. Choudary
Luís Carlos Brito Almeida	27	Through his Tunisian brother-in-law and wife	Low class origin; from a troubled Lisbon neighbourhood.	He left to Syria from Nice with a group of family members

Figure 1. Continued

common with Sadjo the fact that they attended the same school in the Lisbon suburbs of Massamá and were part of a hip-hop band. The Leyton group rented joint apartments or lived in a close-by area. They were radicalised by a notorious 'hate preacher' who inspired dozens of young people to turn to terrorism. Nero, Celso, and Edgar, travelled to Yemen

	Average Age at Time of Departure	Converts	Socio-economic profile	Social Networks
Portugal	26,5	90,9%	Stem from the low socioeconomic strata of society, Most have not completed secondary education and/or are school droputs	In most cases, through circles of friends
France	na	23%	Radicalisation is related to a number of factors, such as socioeconomic problems (unemployment, financial difficulties, social mobility closure), social exclusion, history of petty delinquency, dysfunctional families with domestic violence and separated or absent parents often with father figure lacking (Pietrasanta, 2015, p. 13)	Loose clusters and networks (Holman, 2015b, p. 6 and 2015a, p. 604). Many of them were connected through friendship, kinship, or both
Belgium	25.7	6%	Mostly stem from the lower and middle class backgrounds.	Most of the Belgian foreign fighters were mobilised around three main clusters: Sharia4Belgium; Resto du Tawhid – The Jean-Louis Denis Network; and the Zerkani network (Van Ostaeyen, 2016). Many of them were connected through friendship, kinship, or both. During the early stages of the Syrian conflict, a number of jihadist networks played an important role, especially Sharia4Belgium. Phenomena of 'chain migration' or peer recruitment (Bakker & de Bont, 216, pp. 847-848)

Figure 2. Biographical factors of European FFs.

Germany	25.9	12%	47% originate from lower socio-economic strata (Bakker & de Bont, 2016, p. 843)	Friends are the most important factor in initiating the radicalisation process, followed by contacts at mosques. Direct contact with peers and like-minded persons is more important for later stages of radicalisation. Connection to Salafist circles and personalities plays a determinant role (Federal Criminal Police et al., 2016, p. 55, 54)
The Netherlands	Mostly under 25 years old	6% (Bakker & de Bont, 2016, p. 842)	67 percent of Dutch foreign fighters originate from lower socio-economic strata (Bakker & de Bont, 2016, p. 843).	82 of the 99 profiled fighters had preexisting peer-to-peer relationships with at least one fighter, recruiter, supporter, or Salafist scene leader (Reynolds & Hafez, 2017, p. 17).Only a small fraction completed education before departure (Federal Criminal Police et al., 2016, p. 16)
United Kingdom	Most 18-30; The average age for men was 24 (Lyall, 2017, p. 64)	11% (Lyall, 2017, p. 68)	Most abandoned their studies to travel to Syria (Lyall, 2017, p. 66). Range of occupations great diversity. Very few people with established careers or professions. The overall tendency was towards underemployment–individuals with degrees working in jobs below their skill level (Lyall, 2017, p. 67). The British contingent is often better educated than their European counterparts (Lyall, 2017, p. 69)	Travelled with a family or in a group of three or more (Lyall, 2017, p. 66). Fifteen percent of the people in the database had links with radical groups, such as al-Muhajiroun and its spinoffs, like Sharia4 (Lyall, 2017, p. 66)

Figure 2. Continued

Spain	The average age for men is 35, while for women it is 22 (Gustafsson & Ranstorp, 2017, p. 59)	One in 10 of the detainees is a convert (Reinares, Garcia-Calvo & Vicente, 2017, p. 2)	Those who studied secondary education are the triple of those who, did not pass primary school. Mainly individuals who work in the service sector or as unskilled workers, are unemployed or lack a known occupation, which often means that they combine jihadist activities and petty crime. At least a quarter had criminal records for petty crimes (Reinares, Garcia-Calvo and Vicente, 2017, p. 2)	86,9% was radicalised through kin, acquantainces and networks (Reinares, Garcia-Calvo & Vicente, 2017, p. 2). 95.4% of all those detained in Spain were involved in cells, groups or networks (Reinares & Garcia-Calvo, 2016, p. 110) (64% of which were newly formed jihadist networks) (Reinares & Garcia-Calvo, 2016, p. 112)

Figure 2. Continued

and Somalia in early 2012, where they received military training. They shared resources, went to the same mosque, and practiced sports together. They took care of one another under trying conditions, in a context of professional and personal hardship.

Parente, the son of Portuguese immigrants in the south of France, converted to Islam when he was at school. Ângela converted to Islam at the age of 18 through Moroccan friends when she attended a professional school. Luís de Almeida converted when he married a Tunisian woman (Franco & Moleiro, 2016). In the Paris suburbs, childhood friends, Mickaël and Mikael left to Syria after being radicalised by the imam of the local mosque.

The Portuguese jihadists underwent a quick radicalisation process, a trend that has been identified as a typical feature of this generation of jihadists (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 799). As elicited by Roy in the context of conversion and radicalisation of newborn Muslims, almost all Portuguese jihadists share the pattern of a sudden conversion, immediately followed by political radicalisation (Roy, 2015; Federal Criminal, 2016, p. 23; Weggemans et al., 2014, p. 103). After arriving in London in 2011, Fábio converted to Islam in a two-year time span. That happened after he moved into an apartment in Leyton, where he met the other group of Portuguese immigrants. In March 2013, he was already radicalised, and, by October, he left to Syria (Franco & Moleiro, 2015b, p. 36) Radicalisation took place over a very short time span due to their involvement with militant Islamist milieus, be it preachers or the Internet.

Portuguese jihadists slide towards violent extremism occurred within a radical environment: in the Forest Gate mosque, in the case of the Leyton group. Edgar and Nero, the first Portuguese in the group to become a Muslim (and also the first to settle in London), went on to influence Edgar's brother, Celso, and the other friends (Franco & Moleiro, 2015b, p. 92). However, who influenced them first? Why did they go over to the more radical side of Islam? The northeast London suburbs of Leyton, Leytonstone, and Walthamstow are considered 'plural' districts, that is, made up of large Muslim populations, if not overwhelming Muslim minorities. Self-proclaimed vigilantes – who call themselves Muslim

London Patrol – have declared Waltham Forest one of the first Sharia law zones in Britain. It is believed that the Portuguese jihadists may have come under the influence of Anjem Choudary, the former leader of the extremist organisation Islam4UK and al-Muhajiroun (Franco, 2017; Franco & Moleiro, 2015a; Gadher & Hookham, 2015; Moleiro, Franco & Beleza, undated; Kern, 2014a).

Those London peripheries are the birthplace to some of the most wanted radical Islamists in the United Kingdom, emanating from groups such as al-Muhajiroun – banned under the UK Terrorism Act 2000 in January 2010 –, and Sharia4UK – equally proscribed –, and its subsequent aliases, which have carried on under a number of guises in order to avoid prosecution. The network has been linked to a number of plots and attacks carried out both in Britain and abroad since 2000 (Eleftheriou-Smith, 2015; Kern, 2014a): 'It is highly probable that the Portuguese group became involved in or had at least crossed London's hard core of extremists and recruiters' (Franco & Moleiro, 2015a; Gadher & Hookham, 2015; Moleiro, Franco, and Beleza, n.d.).

Steve was radicalised under the influence of the Association de l'Ouest Multiculturelle, which has a street prayer hall in Esch-sur-Alzette, the second biggest in the country, and a meeting place for radical Islamists in Luxembourg (Luxemburger Wort, 2014b). According to authorities, he is one of six Luxembourg nationals who went to Syria to join the IS by the end of 2014. The French-born, Mickaël and Mikael, were radicalised in the Villiers-sur-Marne by the imam Mustapha Mraoui. Ângela was radicalised online. She spent quite a lot of time online in extremist websites, even managing a site of her own. She rejected her friends, and changed her dress and diet (Franco & Moleiro, 2015b, p. 45). Fábio recruited her while browsing the Internet, using extremist online sites and Facebook. The Internet was a second, parallel radicalisation gateway, reinforcing bonds, and group dynamics: after converting, the new Muslim devotees purposely sought for radical sites and forums. The Portuguese-descendants also spent a lot of time online, watching radical videos, such as is reportedly the case of the London group and Mickaël (Franco & Moleiro, 2015b, p. 92, 71).

In most cases analysed herein, the time span from conversion to radicalisation was about two to three years. Simultaneously, as it often happens when converts join an extremist movement, there is a sudden break with old ties – especially with the family – as some converts face rejection from their parents and most leave home, eventually travelling to Syria in secret, unbeknownst to the family. Completely breaking away from their families, and drawing apart from friends or girlfriends, is usually part and parcel of the process.

After converting to Islam, the mother of Mickaël reported to the police the radical behaviour of her son. Mickaël asked his girlfriend to wear the Islamic veil in school, but as she refused, they eventually broke up. Progressively, the young man moved away from the family, even refusing to have dinner at the table, preferring to dine alone in his bedroom, where he prayed for long periods of time (Franco & Moleiro, 2015b, p. 71). He was at odds with the Catholic customs of his family, and that was when the problems started between the young man and his mother, who did not accept his conversion nor the new ideals advocated by Mickaël (Pinto, 2015, p. 240).

Ângela was a liberal girl in every way: she smoked, liked to have fun, drank, wore heels and make-up. She converted at the age of 18 through Moroccan friends when she attended a professional school (Pinto, 2015, p. 222), and was radicalised through the Internet (Moleiro & Franco, 2014). A feud with her father over her apparent radicalisation and

her use of the niqab, led to her refusal to visit him in Portugal in the summer of 2014. During her mother's absence on a weekend in August 2014, she travelled to Syria, where she would become the bride of Fábio, a Portuguese IS fighter. Family and social isolation renders these young men more easily 'fast-tracked' into an extremist ideology. As Roy has pointed out, 'Having done so, they usually became urban nomads of sorts, often changing places and even countries. Thus, these terrorists are largely supranational and socially atomized' (Roy, 2007, p. 79).

The failed integration hypothesis

Most jihadists originate from suburban areas that have above average migrant/foreign populations. The London boys group grew up along the Lisbon-Sintra urban-train line, in Lisbon's ungraceful peripheral neighbourhoods and shanty towns – where immigrants, especially those from former African colonies live, in overcrowded, anonymous, high-rise housing projects, in areas of vast government-built social housing, with limited resources and infrastructure. The migrants living there are mostly from Lusophone countries, mainly from Cape Verde, but also from Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Brazil. Those are the Lisbon suburbs inhabited by vulnerable, low-income populations, in poor housing conditions (Fonseca, McGarrigle, Esteves, & Malheiros, 2008, p. 7). Many are citizens from third countries, who are more likely to find themselves at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and that lack opportunities for economic, social, and educational advancement.

Immigrants suffer from a higher rate of unemployment, have low-qualified and poorly paid jobs, and, overall, are more likely to suffer from failing living standards (Malheiros & Mendes, 2007). In general terms, there is a disparity between the situations of immigrants and the majority population in Portugal: citizens with an immigrant background, especially from the former African colonies, have a higher propensity to find themselves in situations of poverty or social exclusion. This is reflected by the fact that they have lower levels of educational achievement and school attendance rates, suffer from a higher rate of unemployment, have low-qualified and poorly paid jobs, are more likely to live in socially deprived and stigmatised areas (Fonseca et al., 2008, p. 7). The ICCT report also underlines that one of the most consistent findings is that 'over 30% of the total contingent … originate from large metropolitan areas or peripheral suburbs' (Van Ginkel & Entenmann, 2016, p. 52). This piece of information must be reflected in policies and measures aimed at preventing and countering violent Islamist extremism and FFs.

Portuguese jihadists, such as the Leyton group, come from those areas, and left the country in search for better living conditions and prospects. Most Portuguese jihadists share the same problems as young Muslims in other European countries beset by issues like unemployment, and lack of opportunities for advancement. All have personal stories of failure and unsuccess. Most of them did not complete their high school studies, have a medium level of education, and come from low or low-middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds. Only one of them (Edgar) had a University degree.

In London, the two brothers Edgar and Celso, enrolled at a London university, but were expelled because of failing to attend classes. Edgar was the only of the group who managed to complete his university studies in Portugal, before emigrating to London. Both men enrolled at a London university, but were expelled after failing to attend lectures. They lived on welfare hand-outs (Pinto, 2015, pp. 149–150). Fábio moved to

London allegedly to get a degree in Arts, but never mustered the will to do so. Mikael also never completed his degree in Physical Education, at a university in the Paris region. Angela dropped out of school, even with her mother insisting that she take a technical course, instead of pursuing a higher degree. After quitting school in the Nîmes region, Joni established a company of his own in the construction business, which went bankrupt in a matter of months, and became heavily indebted.

The London group lived on temporary, low-level jobs to survive, such as working in restaurants, cleaning, and driving. Some, such as Fábio, had no jobs and lived on social security. Others, such as Sandro, worked very hard at a number of menial jobs typically held by newly arrived immigrants, and then slid into a mental state of inertia, hopelessness, and muted inner revolt (Franco & Moleiro, 2015b, p. 63). They had only intermittent jobs.

The second group of Portuguese jihadists are the children of Portuguese couples who emigrated to European countries, such as France, Luxembourg, and The Netherlands as emigrants. Several of them also come from impoverished suburban peripheries that surround a more cosmopolitan, affluent, European urban core, such as the Paris suburbs. Many of these immigrants ended up in areas in the fringes of major European cities, where they grew up amongst people of Arab or Muslim background. Some of the Portuguese-descendants grew up in large Muslim inner-city areas where they came in contact with Islam, converted, and were radicalised.

The phenomenon of geographic clustering and pre-existing ties among FFs that predates their departure to the jihad theatres (Reynolds & Hafez, 2017, p. 5) was avowed in most recent studies on European FFs. Places of residence often coincide with the presence of jihadist networks in certain towns and urban regions (Bakker & de Bont, 2016, pp. 844, 847). The central role of certain mosques and circles explains why they act as privileged gateways to recruitment. The Villiers-sur-Marne was responsible for the radicalisation of Mikael and Mickaël, as well as another 10 recruits (Le Point, 2016). Steve Duarte was recruited at the Esch-sur-Alzette, along with other five individuals (Luxemburger Wort, 2014a). The geographical clustering of volunteers for jihad is 'indicative of a network effect' (Reynolds & Hafez, 2017, p. 3). In the case of the Netherlands, the majority of them lived in the greater The Hague area. As regards the Belgian cases, many came from Antwerp, Brussels and the city of Vilvoorde in Flanders (Bakker & de Bont, 2016, p. 841).

FFs residence frequently overlaps with concentrations of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in some European countries (Verwimp, 2016, p. 79). FFs to Iraq French FFS in Iraq came mostly from the 19th Arrondissement in Paris (Holman 2015, p. 605)). More than 70% of Swedish FFs were residents of an exposed area, that is, socially deprived areas affected by high criminality and experiencing low socioeconomic status (Ranstorp & Gustafsson, 2017, pp. 23 and ff).

The radicalisation of Portuguese FFs may signify that difficulties with cultural integration into European societies are not only experienced by Muslims, but also by populations of European stock. Today, in major western European cities, which are all multicultural by definition, second-generation immigrants to Europe may not feel completely at home. The search for an alternative identity and community may be the result of deep-seated feelings of disaffection and alienation. Feelings of unease may be the hallmark not only of young Muslims, but also of their fellows with a European background. Europe may have issues assimilating Muslim immigrants, as well as its second-generation

European communities. De-assimilation and the failure to fit in, may well be the result of socioeconomic aspirations that remain unfulfilled.

In the case of Portuguese jihadists, socioeconomic factors may have proven to be a primary causal factor in their slide towards terror: in the sense that lack of professional fulfilment and their search for integration led them into individual crises as a mirror of social/ economic malaise. A combination of personal crisis and low economic prospects may have interplayed in different ways to account for the London group radicalisation. Sandro for one left his underprivileged home in the Lisbon suburbs to emigrate to London because he could not find a satisfactory job in the hotel and restaurant industry, and because he never recovered from the heart-breaking experience of the brutal murder of his girlfriend (Franco & Moleiro, 2015b, pp. 59–60). This does not necessarily mean that his particular form of personal crisis triggered and drove the whole radicalisation process, but it certainly impelled him to leave the country, to face the challenge of integrating a new environment, and to struggle with a semi-subsistence way of living.

Some jihadists nurtured aspirations to become football or music stars. Fábio a narcissistic, thrill-seeker young man, who boasted on social media of his military prowesses and posed with machine guns on Facebook, claimed being talented in drawing and football, yet he did not succeed in either area. While in London, Fábio expressed his sense of alienation and lack of a project in life, such as on a Twitter post in early March 2013 when he acknowledged needing a change in life, only to admit, barely a week later: 'the marathon to become a legend continues (…) The decision of my life' (Pinto, 2015, p. 155).

Conclusion

This case study can provide some insights into background factors and drivers of the radicalisation process. Thus, the article contributes to the discussion on the issue of FFs that afflicts most European countries, but by focusing on an understudied case. The limitations of the arguments made here are due to the limited dataset, and the lack of more detailed information on the individual cases analysed. Two key literature theories surrounding foreign fighter radicalisation and recruitment have been reviewed, namely the social network and the socioeconomic deprivation theories, from which inferences for the Portuguese study case were drawn. Our preliminary research on the case of Portuguese jihadists lends some support to those theories, although more data are needed to be able to offer more conclusive support.

The social network theory is particularly appropriate for explaining these processes. Instead of analysing organisations in a hierarchical perspective, it highlights the social relations of individuals who comprise such organisations, as well as the group's role and dynamics in the mobilisation for terrorism, establishing that people are radicalised through the influence of individuals, and within their social relations. Although the decision is based on an individual choice, relational processes and the development of informal networks are important to understand the membership to groups that resort to political violence. This translates into an investment, in terms of creating a militant common identity and the social construction of a new moral framework.

In terms, of socioeconomic background, this study highlights a correlation between joining an extremist ideology, and economic status and education level. In the Portuguese case, most of the individuals analysed tend to be from underprivileged backgrounds: they

originate from immigrant backgrounds, both in the Lisbon suburbs, or in the European countries where they grew up as immigrants' children; they came from humble families with a modest income; most never completed high school or their university studies; were jobless or temporarily employed and had no particular prospects of advancement. This context resonates with many young people of immigrant background, beset by social problems like unemployment, and seeking better prospects in life.

Most lived personal situations of hardship, as well as social and economic marginalisation. Isolation and adversity were certainly experienced by the Leyton group, as testified by friends and acquaintances. Being disaffected, aimless, and lacking a sense of identity or belonging, they fall prey to acquaintances or imams that offer a totalising answer to their quest for identity and belonging. Such situations of vulnerability might have rendered them receptive to the extremist message.

Certainly, the role of group dynamics as a re-socialising agent is important in explaining recruitment and radicalisation, but questions remain about the developmental process leading to the acquisition of extremist beliefs by individuals who come from a totally different cultural and religious background. The present study is meant to be a preliminary contribution to understand the manifold pathways of converts' radicalisation in the West.

Notes

1. Most of the information data used in this article was obtained from the research conducted by journalists Hugo Franco, Sara Moleiro, and Nuno T. Pinto, published in two books, as well as from several news articles they wrote. It was collected primarily from Pinto's (2015), and Franco and Moleiro's (2015b) books, and also from some of their articles. As they themselves state, much of the data disclosed in their works on Portuguese fighters were unofficially confirmed to them by intelligence and security sources. As regards data provided in those books, it was collected through interviews with relatives, friends, police, and intelligence sources, as well as a thorough gleaning of data on social media outlets used by the jihadists, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Hi5, Ask.fm, Tumblr, and YouTube. Those journalists were able to interview some of the Portuguese recruits and, in some cases, to engage in regular talks with them on social networks and on Skype (notably with Fábio, Mikael Batista, Mickaël dos Santos, and Ângela). The timeframe for the data collection process was between 2014 and early 2015. I also used a diverse array of Internet and newspapers news and articles. As regards international sources, see: The Soufan Group (2015, p. 9), Dodwell, Milton, and Rassler (2016, p. 9), Boutin et al. (2016, p. 47), Kern (2014b).
2. The number is not exact, as authorities do not provide updated information.
3. Five of which have reportedly died: Boutin et al. (2016, p. 47).
4. The noticeable exceptions are: The Soufan Group (2015, p. 9), Dodwell et al. (2016, p. 9), Boutin et al. (2016, p. 47), Kern (2014b).
5. Sageman differentiates between radicalisation as the acquisition of extremist opinions, and the actual 'turn to violence.' The first step in this process is radicalisation, by joining a political protest community; the second is mobilisation to violent action (2014b, p. 575; see also Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 798).

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