Molenbeek and violent radicalisation: 'a social mapping'

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Foreword

How to explain that some places in a given country see more of its people leave for a faraway war zone to join an extremist organization than the rest of the country? Ask its inhabitants.

That is what the European Institute of Peace (EIP) did in Molenbeek, a municipality in the northwest of Brussels, that saw some fifty individuals leave for Syria between 2012 and 2016. Some of them were involved in large-scale terrorist attacks that shook France and Belgium. Molenbeek gained the ill-fated reputation of being the jihadi capital of Europe and a no-go war zone in the heart of Brussels where nobody dares to wander. How do the Molenbeekois cope with this relentless avalanche of reproaches directed at their municipality and how do they themselves explain the departures of so many of their youngsters?

The result of this quest for answers is contained in this report. EIP's research team was surprised to discover the willingness of the Molenbeekois to tell their own story and to explain how life in Molenbeek looks like in the eyes of those who effectively live there. The result is a honest and nuanced in-depth portrayal of the two poorest neighborhoods of Molenbeek that stands in stark contrast to the sweeping assumptions so often repeated.

This social mapping shows a Molenbeek that is the home of a diverse community with many diverse sub-communities, divided by language, neighborhood, family bonds, origins, religion, and generations. The closer one gets to reality, the harder is becomes to generalize about it. The investigation does not dodge difficult topics, such as the discrimination signaled by the 'belgo-belges', feeling overwhelmed by a majority of Moroccan heritage, but itself not a monolith; the prevalence of the drug scene; divergent views on the place of religion in the public sphere. At the same time however it also reveals a surprisingly high level of trust in the police; the absence of no-go zones; a broad feeling of insecurity among the Molebeekois for their children (or future children); and a clear demand for more dialogue and diversity in order to bridge communities and families.

Especially revealing for the reader unfamiliar with life in Molenbeek will be the widespread rejection of political and religious extremism. For many of its inhabitants, Molenbeek feels as a safe harbor sheltered from the larger hostile environment. True, Molenbeekois of Moroccan heritage often display conservative social and religious norms and conventions. As a consequence, social control is strongly felt by those Belgo-Moroccans that do want to abide by them. But this clearly does not equate with extremism or with Islamism actively pursuing a political project, seeking to impose their law on others, or convert other groups.

Perhaps to the surprise of some readers, there is no evidence of community-level support for extremism nor for foreign fighters. How then do the Molenbeekois themselves explain its pull on some of their youngsters? The answers to the survey and the in-depth interviews of Molenbeekois who have seen close acquaintances either leaving for Syria or getting involved in violent extremism on European soil, make for fascinating and sometimes perplexing reading into their hearts and minds.

Nuance is the spring of wisdom and the bedrock of wise action. Extremism is not simply a question of ideology as a conveyor belt to terrorism. It emerges in a wider conducive environment and takes root in specific local conditions. Knowledge of the local context thus deeply matters.

The EIP mapping of Molenbeek invites for a candid discussion beyond easy condemnation. It offers a window of opportunity for an open debate on the host of challenges European societies face. It also invites for parallel investigations into similar locations in Europe, in order to delve deeper into local social patterns as a prerequisite for adequately supporting communities, families and future generations to resist violent extremism.

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Preface

When we set up the European Institute of Peace in 2014, we knew from the outset that our efforts to resolve conflicts abroad must be complemented by similar efforts to resolve the conflicts inside our own societies, which in recent years, have become increasingly polarised. Terrorist attacks – in Paris, Brussels, and other European cities – have made clear that violent extremism is a real threat to European safety and security. Fear has captured the political debate and, amplified by an intense media coverage, there is an elevated sense of risk to the public space. Refugee movements and migratory flows, from inside and outside Europe, create less integrated, more transient European societies. Tolerance towards diverging political and religious views is declining, while crimes against minorities and refugees appear to be on the rise. Finally, there is a strong and growing support for far and extreme right political and social movements across the continent.

Molenbeek is no different from anywhere else in Europe where these tensions occur. Over the last years, the commune has unfortunately been faced with violent radicalisation, and authorities have been struggling to understand its processes. When we looked at ways to help them improve their prevention strategy against radicalisation, we designed an approach that focuses on community level engagement and the empowerment of local voices.

It is clear that without a granular knowledge of the local context, no targeted intervention is possible. So we went on assessing the ground, carrying out a social mapping to get a better picture of the social structures in which violent radicals had been known to operate. We looked into how this has affected different groups within society, analysing their socio- cultural context, sex and gender roles, age, education, and length of stay in Molenbeek. Data-collection was conducted up to August 2016, enriched by validations and feedback with the community, duty-bearers, and experts until end-December 2016.

And here is what the people of Molenbeek told us:

'Our main problem is finding a future for our family and our children; not a worry about

extremism but a worry about jobs and schools. We know that an absence of hope provides a place for radicalisation. We know that we need much more to be done to educate our children about religion to defend them against the offers of recruiters. We want more police and more dialogue, more connections not less if we can make a future for our children.'

What is surprising about this? Absolutely nothing. And we find it reassuring that our research reveals the obvious. Extremism is often the accidental product of living a life without hope and opportunities and false offers of a life with purpose from an organisation dedicated to anger. ISIS and the likes offer something that nobody else seems to offer – opportunities and purpose. It is important though that citizens proposed their own solutions to how cohesion, resilience to radicalisation and mitigation of violent extremism could be achieved.

Sharing views and perceptions with the Molenbeekois on the way violent radicalisation has affected their daily life has been a true privilege. As a mediator and dialogue convenor, bringing together parties that find it difficult to engage with each other without third-party assistance, the EIP has been recognised as a legitimate actor by the population and the authorities.

Working inside and outside Europe, it is clear that the world as a whole is grappling on identifying the best ways to prevent and resolve violent radicalisation. With the international coalition's fight against ISIS, Al Qaeda and related groups, more and more of those who joined the cause of these groups will want to leave potentially making their way home to Europe. Administrations and societies will want to know how to receive and/or reintegrate former supporters into society. At the same time, there are many forms of radicalisation. Their roots are highly localised. The Molenbeek study was an ideal test-case to see how local engagement might lead to policy change at different levels, and might ultimately contribute to societies that foster solidarity, inclusion and belonging.

As a follow-up to this research, the preliminary findings of this report have thus far been discussed with the Commune of Molenbeek, but also the Belgian state and regional authorities, the diplomatic community, European institutions, and some European and international partners. We now make the final version of the report available to all.

The social mapping reported here has already generated a great interest by institutional stakeholders and the civil society, reflecting the understanding that local voices need to be part of the equation in the prevention of radicalisation. Molenbeek authorities have taken on board some of the key findings of our study: an improved community policing, the promotion of community dialogues on controversial issues, as well as the need to identify bridge builders who can help their communities reengage with the political and civic debate. This study may also help Molenbeek authorities develop viable post-detention programs to reintegrate returning foreign fighters back into their communities.

We hope the methodology we suggest, as well as the recommendations we make, will also guide others. Molenbeek is indeed perceived as a sounding board and laboratory for many neighbourhoods in Europe and the phenomenon we have had the chance to explore is also a reflection about what is happening in countries affected by war or violent conflicts. Our inclusive and participatory approach has connected both worlds. We hope to show that peace is not just something for foreign lands and peoples; it is also a precious dream for Europeans. This is not just a sentimental axiom, it is an acceptance that we are equal in many things, including in evil.

We would hereby like to specifically thank the citizens and local associations of the Centre Historique and the Quartier Maritime of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, without whom this detailed understanding of the social drivers would not have been possible. We greatly appreciate the open and frank feedback we received while conducting our research; particularly given the trying times experienced by the community. We would also like to thank the Mayor of Molenbeek, Francoise Schepmans, and members of her team for their encouragement, support and sustained interest in the social mapping. We furthermore appreciate the methodological advice offered by the reference group of the Molenbeek project and the hints given by supportive Belgian academics.

Martin Griffiths, Director,
European Institute of Peace

Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of a nine-month long investigation by the European Institute of Peace (EIP) into the social structures and the root causes of violent radicalisation within two districts of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean ('Molenbeek'). The EIP has worked independently, but in close contact with the Molenbeek municipality and local actors[1], to analyse the factors shaping political and social behaviours, as well as the consequences the presence of violent radicals has had on the life of the citizens of Molenbeek – the 'Molenbeekois'.

The goal of the report is to provide data that can contribute to the design of an integral and integrated approach to the prevention of violent radicalisation at the local level. Additionally, this survey is intended to offer the 'Molenbeekois' the chance to speak up and share their stories in an anonymous and confidential manner.

For the sake of simplicity, whenever mention is made of 'Molenbeek', this should be understood as meaning the two Molenbeek district under survey, Quartier Maritime and Centre Historique. Similarly, whenever mention is made of the inhabitants Molenbeek or the 'Molenbeekois', this should be understood as meaning the residents of the Quartier Maritime and the Centre Historique.

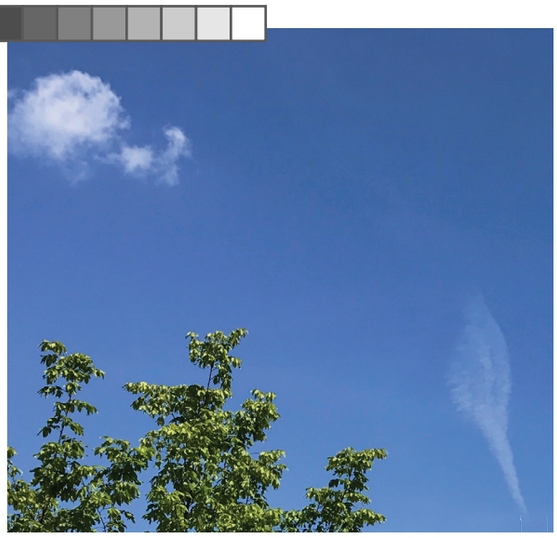
Molenbeek has a total population of 96,586 with the Quartier Maritime and the Centre Historique including a combined population of 36,436. These are also the two districts which score the poorest on a range of socio- economic indicators. Whereas Molenbeek is the second-poorest municipality in Belgium, incomes in the Quartier Maritime and the Centre Historique are far below the Molenbeek average[2]. Additionally, these two districts have a large population with a foreign background (between 71-81%) and are home to a large Muslim community – from North African, predominantly Moroccan, heritage – that established itself there over the last decades[3]. Regrettably, they are also the two districts where most of Brussels violent radicals have allegedly lived.

Authorities at the national and local level have struggled to understand the processes of violent radicalisation in Molenbeek. They have stressed they have insufficient data on the prevalence of violent extremism – understood as the ideologically-inspired willingness, training, preparation, and actual conduct of violent acts – in the community. This hampers their capacity to target their interventions against violent radicalisation.

To address this knowledge gap, this study aims to provide an analysis of the social structures of Molenbeek in which violent extremists have been known to operate. Analysing behavioural trends and perceptions that motivate behaviour, and focusing on the community-level motivations (the individual level is briefly addressed as well), the research asked:
'according to the Molenbeekois, what are the social patterns of the Molenbeek community that may have enabled violent radicalisation to take place?' whereby violent radicalisation is to be understood as socialisation to extremism which manifests itself in terrorism.

The report is based on a first round of 406 semi-structured, semi randomised survey interviews with inhabitants (149 women and 257 men), and on a second round of unstructured interviews (64 women and 36 men)[4], encompassing both quantitative and qualitative data.

The respondents of the semi-structured interviews were selected through a random probability sample supplemented by quota sampling to account for those individuals that are part of the social structures of Molenbeek[5], but do not live there.



A two-month process of unstructured interviews followed to complement the report with qualitative analysis. The interviewees were either long-term residents in Molenbeek or social workers in the community.

The long-term residents were randomly selected through invitations to dialogue events in the two surveyed districts, whereas the social workers were selected, through purposive sampling, for the in-depth knowledge they could provide.

Through these structured and unstructured interviews, the EIP established a representative 'social mapping' of the population of Molenbeek and an understanding of the social structures in which violent radicalisation takes place.

The research findings were subsequently validated with the citizens of Molenbeek, as well as with the local administration, prevention workers, social workers, and non-governmental organisations operating in Molenbeek. The main findings of the report are summarised below.

Unemployment and education outrank security problems on the list of Molenbeek's top problems

The most common problems are perceived to be unemployment (31%), education (15%) and general incivility in the neighbourhood (15%). Security and terrorism rank relatively low among concerns of the Molenbeekois, with security (5%) and terrorism (4%) ranking toward the low end of concerns.

Many parents, however, do report that they are very worried about the influences that their children are exposed to when not in school or at home, where there is a lack oversight.

Equally, asked about the most prominent security challenges in Molenbeek, drug dealing (27%) and theft (24%) outweigh extremist violence (religious extremism: 3%; far right extremism 1%). A 17% of the population – in particular

respondents of North African heritage – reports that there are no security concerns in Molenbeek at all.

There is a disconnect between education and employment

The high unemployment rates among the Molenbeekois lead them to the view that 'education is not useful'. For example, many young Molenbeekois, particularly from North African heritage, do not see the value in education, as they do not believe it will help them on the labour market. Half of them did not receive any post-secondary education: only 5% obtained a master's degree, compared to 33% of the group of Belgian heritage. In sum, those of North African heritage have significantly lower levels of education than their counter parts of Belgian heritage.

The Molenbeekois of Belgian heritage perceive to be discriminated inside Molenbeek, while those of North African heritage perceive to be discriminated outside Molenbeek

There is a difference between perceived discrimination inside and outside Molenbeek. For those of Belgian heritage, discrimination frequently occurs inside Molenbeek, whereas for those of North African heritage, discrimination occurs more frequently outside of Molenbeek. 16% of those from Belgian heritage reported having been discriminated against 'often' or 'very often' in the last year, while another 15% reports to have been discriminated against 'sometimes'. Of the group of North African heritage, 27% reports to have been discriminated 'often' or 'very often' outside Molenbeek in the last twelve months, and 32% reports to have been discriminated sometimes.

Women's perception of discrimination is more profound than men

Women feel significantly more unease about practising their religion than men. Wearing religious clothing, such as the hijab, was identified as one source of discrimination, in particular on the labour market. The fact of living in 'Molenbeek' has become another source of perceived discrimination: respondents observe that having a foreign name as well as Molenbeek as an address is a fundamental disadvantage that is very hard to overcome when applying for a job. This disadvantage has reportedly increased since the terrorist attacks in Brussels.

The community of North African heritage does not have many contacts with other population groups in Molenbeek

The North African heritage community engages more with people from their population group, and is less likely than Molenbeekois of Belgian heritage to have friends outside Molenbeek. This community reports that family is the most important aspects of their life and that they do not have any friends beyond their immediate relatives.

Similarly, the Molenbeekois of North African heritage are less likely to be part of civic organisations, or to have links to the local political establishment. For example, whereas 39% of those of Belgian heritage demonstrated and 30% contacted a politician, only 24% of those with a North African heritage demonstrated and only 19% contacted a politician. Additionally, while 59% of those of Belgian heritage is involved in one or more associations, only 34% of those of North African heritage and 37% of those of other heritage is.

There is a positive association between the level of education and the degree of social and political engagement

Many respondents of North African heritage recognised that their social ties lie within their community (bonding ties) and their links to other communities (bridging ties) and to local politicians (linking ties) have been lacking. There is a demand for more dialogue and diversity, through events that bring

together communities, but also through increased dialogue with the authorities. Education is perceived as the factor that can positively boost participation in politics, civic associations, as well as increase relationships with people from other communities. In short, the participation in civic affairs, and the linking to other communities and to those in power, are significantly better for those that have received higher education and those that are in employment.

The majority of members of the community of North African heritage in Molenbeek live by the socio-cultural norms accompanying Islam

It is evident that Muslims in Molenbeek place a premium on Islam and Islamic values, both in the religious realm and in the civic and cultural realm. Examples include the importance attached to religious education, religious celebrations such as the Ramadan, and the surprise of many that the religious dress code they observe is seen as controversial by non-Muslims. Within the community, there is a determination to conform to Islamic practices, and breaking the norms will be systematically disapproved. This can be seen in the few Moroccan atheists that we have spoken to, who reported maltreatment and excommunication by their peers after openly speaking about atheism.

This is not to say that Muslims in Molenbeek are Islamists in the sense that they actively pursue an Islamic political project, seek to impose their law on others, or convert other groups. Indeed, Christians and Muslims in Molenbeek respect each other and peacefully co-exist. However, there are various norms and social conventions, derived from Islam, that form and shape public life in Molenbeek.

Some tensions exist between Belgian norms and the everyday practice of Islam

There are more Muslims in Molenbeek that consider their religion as a 'very important' part of their life (68%) than Christians (29%). Additionally, 64% of Molenbeek Muslims report being 'very at ease' in practising their religion, as opposed to 51% of Molenbeek Christians. A majority of Muslims is very content with the general lifestyle offered in Molenbeek and reports that they live 'just like in Morocco' with no impediments at all to the practice of Islam.

Nonetheless, several tensions are mentioned. First, the recent terrorist attacks have increased suspicion toward Muslims, which report increased discrimination and 'suspicious looks' from non-Muslims, especially in a religious context, such as when entering a mosque. Second, many Muslims feel impeded in the practice of their religion by the Belgian state, because of specific demands on religious dress codes, for example in the workplace, where often the wearing of a hijab or other forms of ostensibly religious dress is prohibited by an employer. The ban on religious slaughter is another example that many Muslims perceive to be limiting their freedom to practice their religion. Finally, many Muslims surveyed point to the fact that they perceive society to be 'too individualistic' and thereby at odds with traditional family values that play a strong role in Islam.

Molenbeekois want a police force that is closer to the community

The report finds that trust in the police is relatively high – for example, higher than in social workers. While 57% of the respondents considers the police to be ineffective, the majority of the respondents does express a need for a better police force to address the security challenges of the neighbourhood. There is no evidence of the existence of no-go zones where the police are not able to operate; rather, the study finds a community that invites the police to come closer.

The Molenbeekois do not support the extremist cause

Inhabitants of Molenbeek highly disapprove of religious extremism, which is understood as a deliberate distortion of religion. 41% of the respondents expresses sadness and 29% anger and shock when asked to reflect upon the departure of someone from the neighbourhood to Syria, with 11% indifferent and only one respondent, out of the 406 surveyed, reporting to be proud. Within the community of Molenbeekois of North African heritage, there are conservative religious norms, but this cannot be equated with support for extremism. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of inhabitants of Molenbeek rejects any connection between religion and radicalisation, with the latter being described as the 'antithesis' or 'perverse manipulation' of religion.

Perceived lack of opportunities as the main driver of violent radicalisation

The lack of opportunities and social isolation is perceived as the main driver that permitted the emergence of violent radicalisation in Molenbeek. Its process was described as occurring in response to fundamental vulnerabilities, such as social isolation and the search for meaning of life. Whereas extremist groups offer this meaning to many young Muslims from Molenbeek, they have a much harder time in a society that they perceive as discriminatory and not offering them the opportunities to advance in life.

As for the importance of religion in the process of violent radicalisation, the results are ambiguous.

On the one hand, the report shows that many individuals who radicalised in Molenbeek were reported to undergo profound religious changes – becoming more puritanical. Often, this was facilitated by on line propaganda.

On the other hand, one cannot point to religion as the main driver behind violent radicalisation: many of the individuals who radicalised were described as not knowing anything about religion. Additionally, in many cases, the Molenbeekois who radicalised were former delinquents, and the sudden shift to extreme interpretations of Islam was described as a 'quick solution to eradicate past wrongdoings'.

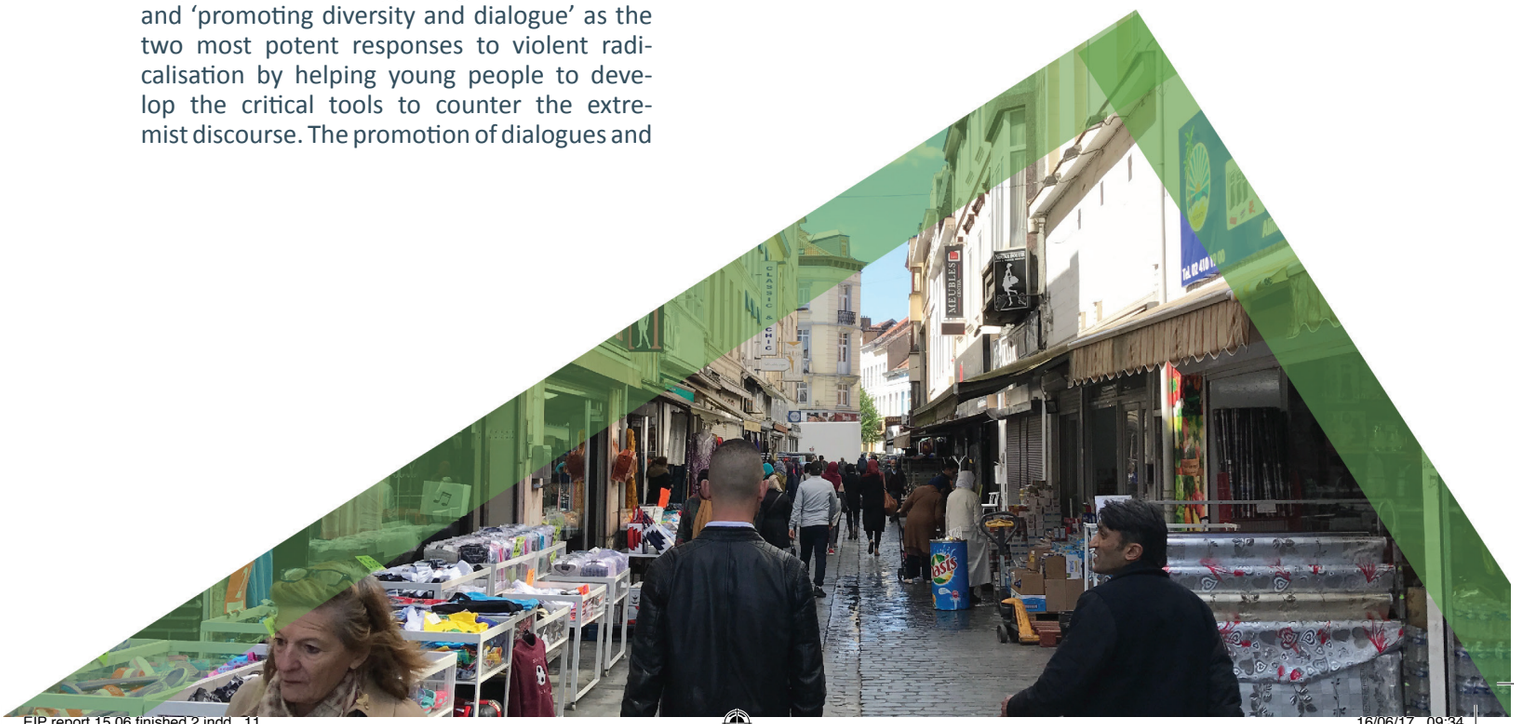
Credible dialogues and religious education identified as potentially effective responses to radicalisation

Respondents identify 'religious education' and 'promoting diversity and dialogue' as the two most potent responses to violent radicalisation by helping young people to develop the critical tools to counter the extremist discourse. The promotion of dialogues and diversity is a second important way to prevent violent radicalisation. Dialogues, however, need to be held on topics that live in the minds of the young Molenbeekois, especially those of North African heritage. This entails addressing controversial topics such as radicalisation, religion in European societies, and Western foreign policy in the Middle East. Many young Molenbeekois have profound questions about these issues, but currently find insufficient support from the authorities and community leaders to respond to them.

There is a lack of credible community leaders and role models

The Molenbeekois have very low levels of trust in journalists and politicians - the two institutions which, many respondents claim, have tarnished the image of the neighbourhood in the aftermath of the attacks in Brussels and Paris. 73% of the respondents 'fully disagree' with the media portrayal of Molenbeek and another 12% 'somewhat disagree'. Similarly, imams are described as 'outdated' and unable to hold sway over young Muslims.

The lack of credible community leaders can explain in part why the radical discourse was attractive to a disenfranchised youth, capturing the minds in ways the current leadership - politicians, religious leaders, and other opinion leaders - do not. At the same time, without been seen as trustworthy interlocutors, it becomes difficult for politicians, imams, as well as the police, to know what happens in the community and help to provide solutions for the problems many young people face.



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Introduction

Following the terrorist attacks that took place in France and Belgium over the course of 2015-2016, the Brussels neighbourhood of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean (hereafter 'Molenbeek') became a household name. Some spoke of it as 'the Jihadi capital of Europe'.[6] Many of the individuals who were implicated in these attacks were connected to Molenbeek. Most prominently, Salah Abdeslam, who escaped from the Paris assaults in November 2015 and was arrested in Molenbeek in March 2016, several hundreds of meters from where he grew up. The arrest came just days before the bombing of the Brussels' airport and metro. After the Paris attacks, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel said that 'each time there is a link with Molenbeek', and Interior Minister Jan Jambon said the situation in Molenbeek was 'not under control'.[7] In addition to those linked to violent radicalisation on European soil, at least 54 people from Molenbeek have travelled to Syria to join militant jihadist movements, which constitutes more than 10% of the total 480 foreign fighters presumed to have attempted to or have departed from Belgium.[8] And while the majority remains in Syria or Iraq, some of them have since returned to Belgium, including 14 from Molenbeek.[9] Molenbeek, in short, was deemed to be a security problem, not just for Belgium, but as events had shown, for all of Europe.

In its 2014 Annual report on Security and Prevention, the local administration ("commune") of Molenbeek pointed out violent radicalisation as its top priority.[10] Both in public and in conversations with the EIP, the commune had called for increasing knowledge on why violent radicalisation occurs in Molenbeek. From these initial conversations with the Molenbeek civil servants charged with prevention, it became apparent that there was a need for an in-depth analysis of the root causes of radicalisation into violent extremism in the community. This would then allow for the design of an integral and integrated approach that includes the training of first-line responders and the development of early-warning tools that detect radicalisation without discriminating large parts of the community.

The fact that the local administration of Molenbeek struggled to understand the process of socialisation to violent extremism ("violent radicalisation") was not surprising, as it is a highly complex, and thus contested phenomenon. To be sure, there is a general agreement over the severity of the problem of violent extremist acts from individuals that are linked to, or identify themselves with, Islamic extremist groups; however, there is no consensus on how the process of violent radicalisation occurs nor how to effectively prevent it. For some, the blame is placed with intolerant aspects of religion; for others, social injustice and the perceived lack of a future, or the opportunities to build one, are at the heart of the violent radicalisation process. Similarly, while much has been said and written about the characteristics of individual violent extremists that came from Molenbeek, there has been significantly less attention – beyond anecdotal accounts – to how the social patterns of the community have promoted or impeded the presence of violent radicals in the community.

In short, there is insufficient data on the prevalence of violent radicalisation at the community level in Molenbeek, which hampers the capacity of the authorities to target their interventions for addressing violent radicalisation. Importantly, this has relevance beyond Molenbeek, as there are many other Belgian and European municipalities that – although perhaps less known than Molenbeek – struggle with similar challenges to understanding violent radicalisation.

To address this knowledge gap, the objective of this report is to provide an analysis of the social structures of Molenbeek in which violent extre-mists have been known to operate, by analysing behavioural trends and perceptions that motivate the behaviour. Focusing on the community-level, the research question was defined as: what are the social patterns of the Molenbeek community that have enabled radicalisation towards violent extremism to take hold?

The benefit of focusing on the community-level is that it is the most useful level of analysis to create recommendations for the development of targeted interventions. As one expert recently observed, 'all radicalisation is local' and, inevitably, this means that local municipalities will bear a heavy burden in the work to prevent violent radicalisation.[11] This observation was affirmed in a recent OECD report that identified violent radicalisation as a challenge, first and foremost for the large metropolitan areas.[12] This can be an advantage: local levels

of governance have been described as 'more nimble and less averse to risk-taking than their national counterparts'.[13]

The EIP report is based on 406 survey interviews with inhabitants of Molenbeek, and a two-month long process of unstructured interviews with local actors in the community. Through these interviews, it provides a 'social mapping' of the population of Molenbeek, investigating how community members experienced radicalisation into violent extremism within segments of their community, and the repercussions it has had on their daily lives.

It is furthermore based on knowledge of radicalisation and the functioning of violent extremist groups, which the EIP has acquired in the execution of its mandate. The European Institute of Peace (EIP) is an independent organisation whose members are European states which share a common commitment to a European and EU global peace agenda. The Institute focuses on mediation, multi-track diplomacy and conflict resolution. It carries out operations inside and outside Europe and offers practitioner-driven advice on conflict resolution techniques. As an operational hub, the EIP undertakes direct mediation and facilitated dialogue, it engages in public diplomacy and provides capacity building in the field of conflict resolution, prevention and peacemaking. The EIP and its expert team have extensive experience dealing with individuals and factors related to violent extremism through its work in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, as well as in the Horn and West Africa.

Writing a report, however, is only the beginning. The EIP aims for these findings to contribute to the policy makers' understanding of the local environment of Molenbeek, to ensure that future local, national and European interventions are targeted and effective. Specifically, of course, this report intends to support the preventive work of the local government, but also to offer the possibility that parallels from this case can be cautiously and constructively drawn to other cities in Belgium and beyond that have struggled with the same issues.

Additionally, this report has given the opportunity for the citizens of Molenbeek – the 'Molenbeekois' – to tell their story to Belgian politicians, officials, and opinion leaders, but also to all those outside Molenbeek who heard in the media a story of Molenbeek, its inhabitants often do not recognise. By raising their perspectives, the EIP intends to promote a conversation on the prevention of violent radicalisation – a community-led conversation that brings together high-level government, civil society and representatives from the local community.

This analysis consists of four parts. The first entitled 'Overview of the research process', gives some background information of Molenbeek and outlines the conceptual framework in which the study is grounded and the methodology employed throughout the study. This includes an overview of the main hypotheses and the background of violent radicalisation in Molenbeek against which this study is conducted.

The second part entitled 'Violent radicalisation and the Molenbeekois' provides an analysis of the social patterns of the community of Molenbeek, mapping the social milieu in which individuals could develop into violent radicals. This part shows what trends such as isolation, discrimination, and the lack of opportunities look like through the eyes of the community of Molenbeek. The study finds a diverse community that is highly dismissive of extremism, struggling with many of the same structural problems that the violent extremists struggled with, but with a profound dismissal of the actions of those that turned to violence.

The third part 'Stories of Violent Radicalisation: in depth interviews of violent radicalisation' presents insights from ten Molenbeekois, who know someone who went through the process of violent radicalisation.

Some clear trends coming out of the whole research process are presented in the fourth and final part 'Conclusion', where results are discussed in the context of other existing research on violent radicalisation.

This allows us then to draw some policy recommendations compiled per topic and addressed to any duty-bearer responsible to make them achievable or to implement them in Molenbeek.

Annex One puts together the most noteworthy quotes gathered during the fieldwork.

Annex Two provides a detailed literature review and the rationale behind the research hypotheses.

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

With the overall aim of the study to investigate the social patterns of the Molenbeek community in which violent radicalisation could take hold, it is necessary to understand and unpack contested concepts such as 'violent radicalisation' and 'violent extremism', as well as 'social patterns' and 'community'. To do so, this first Part discusses the key concepts used and outlines the methodology of the study.

Part one is divided into three chapters. The first introduces the case of Molenbeek and provides depth on the connections of individuals from Molenbeek to violent extremism. The second focuses on the existing research on violent radicalisation, defining the key concepts and formulating the hypotheses tested in the study. The third and final chapter describes the mixed-methods methodology and the operationalisation of key concepts.

A. Snapshot of Molenbeek

The prevalence of violent radicalisation in Molenbeek has been widely reported and commented on. Molenbeek was frequently pictured as a *'terrorist hotbed.'*[14] Others referred to it as *'a largely Muslim area that has become one of the world's main breeding grounds of violent Islamist extremists'* or a *'ghetto of misery'*.[15] And in November 2015, days after the assailants of the Paris attacks were linked to Molenbeek, Belgian Interior Minister Jambon vowed to 'clean up Molenbeek' and 'eradicate [the problem] once and for all'.[16]

It is worth briefly considering here the connection between the neighbourhood under study and the violent extremists. Molenbeek has seen many of its inhabitants depart to Syria. The total number of registered departures of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) from Belgium is 480[17], which has made Belgium the biggest per capita contributor in Europe to fighters in Syria and Iraq with around 40 individuals per one million inhabitants.[18] This includes 90 women and 45 children. Out of the 480 FTF 54 have come from Molenbeek,making the municipality the highest nominal source for Syria travellers in the Brussels region, and the second highest in Belgium overall.[19] Of the total of 210 foreign fighters the Brussels Capital Region, 56% is estimated to still be in or in his/her way to Syria, while 30% is known to have returned to Brussels (the national figures are respectively 57,7% and 25%).[20]

While the figures for Molenbeek are high, its notoriety is primarily caused by being implicated in attacks carried out by violent extremists on European soil. Connections with Molenbeek exist in at least seven cases:

First, the perpetrator of the Jewish Museum of Belgium shooting that killed four in 2014, Mehdi Nemmouche, rented a room in Molenbeek in the months leading up to the attack.[21]

Second, Ayoub El Khazzani, who was only just prevented from attacking the Thalys between Amsterdam and Paris after boarding the train from Brussels Gare du Midi in August 2015, lived for over one year in Molenbeek and was reported to frequent a mosque there.[22]

Third,the ringleader of the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015, in which 130 people were killed, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, grew up in Molenbeek. He was briefly imprisoned, known for hanging around bars that attracted drug dealers, and befriended Salah and Ibrahim Abdeslam before moving to Syria in 2014.[23] The attacks in Paris brought Molenbeek pejoratively into the spotlight of the global media.

Fourth, also implicated in the Paris attacks were the brothers Abdeslam, who grew up in the Centre Historique and owned a cafe on Rue des Beguines in Molenbeek that was shut

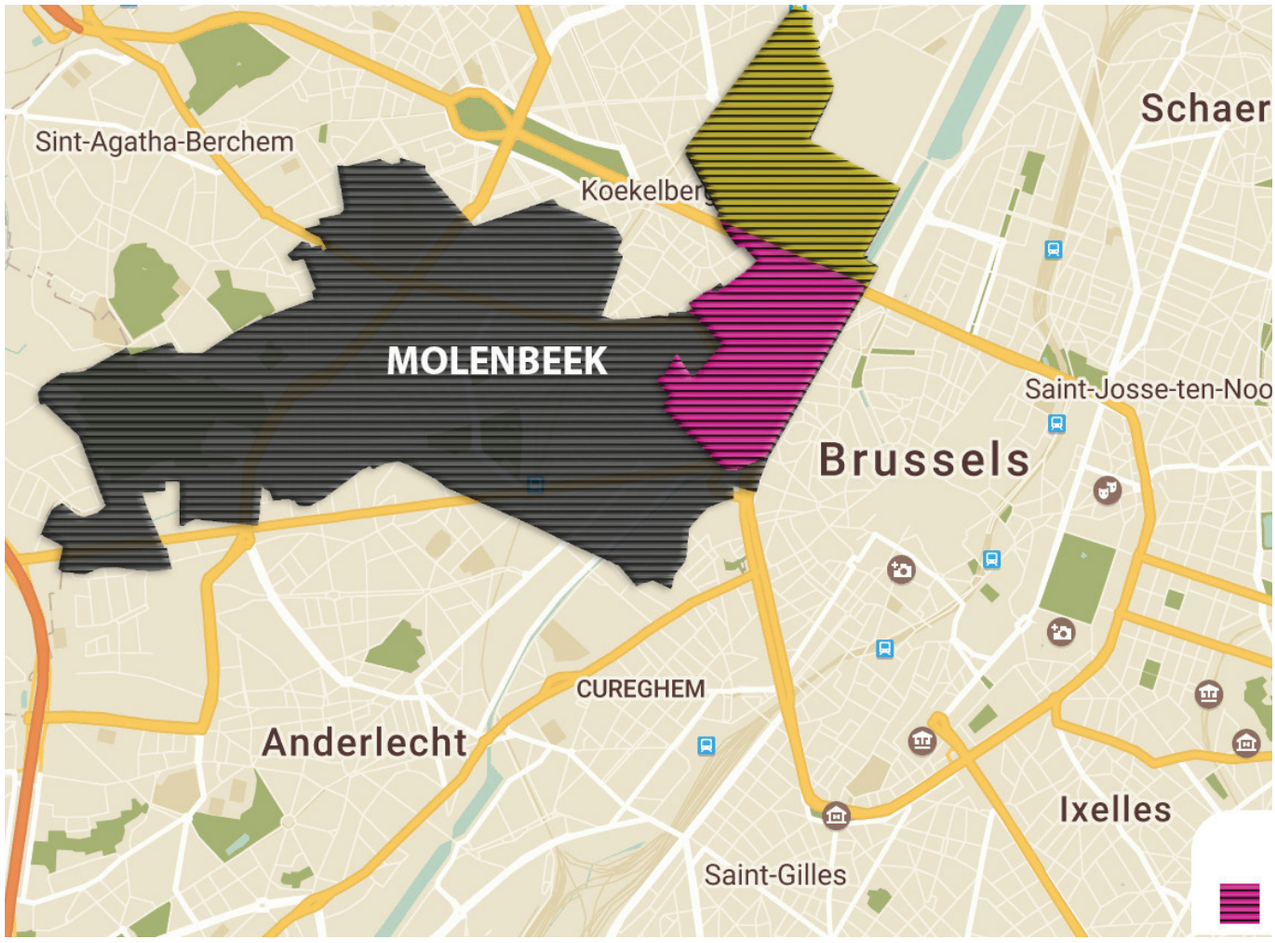
down shortly before the Paris assaults. Ibrahim Abdeslam died during the attack. On Friday 19 March 2016, law enforcement officers shot and captured the third brother, Salah, after a raid in the Centre Historique – only meters away from where the police believed he had hidden directly after the Paris attacks, and very close to his maternal home.[24] After the Paris attacks, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel said that 'each time there is a link with Molenbeek', and Interior Minister Jan Jambon said the situation in Molenbeek was *'not under control'*.[25] The perpetrators of the Brussels attacks on 22 March 2016, had strong connections to Molenbeek, although these attacks were planned from Schaerbeek, another Brussels municipality. Salah Abdeslam, for example, had helped Najim Laachraoui travel from Budapest to Brussels after the latter had returned from Syria.[26]

Finally, working from behind the scenes, Khalid Zerkani was reported to have close ties with several violent extremists from Molenbeek who travelled to Syria or committed crimes on European soil. Examples include Najim Laachraoui and Abdelhamid Abaaoud, but also Souleymane Abrini - the younger brother of Mohamed Abrini ('the man with the hat') who was arrested for the Brussels attacks - whom Zerkani helped to travel to Syria. Zerkani was apprehended by the authorities in 2014, but had, in the words of Belgian federal prosecutor Bernard Michel, already 'perverted an entire generation of youngsters, particularly in the Molenbeek neighbourhood'.[27]

1. Understanding the neighbourhood

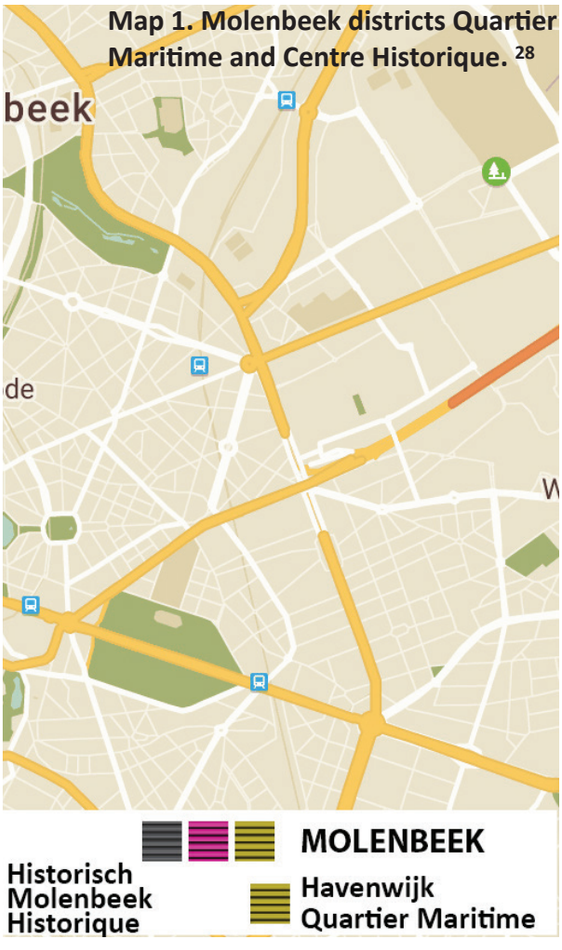
Molenbeek, of course, is much more than these individuals. But while the connection to violent radicalisation has been widely discussed, data about the community of Molenbeek remains scattered. How, then, to describe Molenbeek as a neighbourhood? Molenbeek is one of the nineteen municipalities in the Brussels-Capital Region in Belgium: it is not a suburb, but embedded in Brussels inner city circles, located to the east of the City of Brussels. It has a territory of 5.9 km^2.

Molenbeek consists of five districts with considerable differences. Following discussion with the local authorities, the EIP decided to



focus the study on the two disctricts which seem to be the ones the most affected by violent radicalisation: the Centre Historique and the Quartier Maritime (see map below).

Situated alongside the canals in Central Brussels, the Centre Historique lies in between the Gare de l'Ouest and Boulevard Léopold II; the Quartier Maritime is confined to the south by Boulevard Léopold II, and to the north by the industrial site of Tours & Taxis. Most of Molenbeek became populated after the Second World War, but the Centre Historique – in particular the area around Chaussée de Gand – is significantly older.[29] The two districts are densely populated, and made up by old, small working class houses and small buildings, sometimes mixed with more recently constructed social housing.



Map 1. Molenbeek districts Quartier Maritime and Centre Historique. [28]

2. Population and economy

The combined population of Quartier Maritime (17,462) and Centre Historique (18,974) is 36,436. The age group of 12-29 years old makes up 28% of the population, and men (52%) are slightly more numerous than women (48%). Overall, the proportion of young age groups is significantly higher in these two districts than in the rest of Brussels.[30]

In 2013, the estimated number of foreigners (non-Belgians) in these two districts was 31% for Centre Historique and 34% for Quartier Maritime[31]. However, the total number of people with a foreign background is 81% for the whole of Molenbeek, while 71% of the Belgian nationals living in Molenbeek have foreign origins. Of this 71%, up to 40% is Moroccan, 6 % is Italians and 4% is Turkish.[32]

Over the past four decades, a substantial Muslim community of mainly Moroccan origin has established itself in Molenbeek. The number of Muslims – nearly all from the Sunni denomination – is estimated at 41% in the overall commune. As for the Centre Historique and Quartier Maritime, there are no official figures available, but these numbers are estimated to be significantly higher, based on both conversations with civil servants of Molenbeek and the fieldwork in the two districts.

Whereas the net income of Molenbeek, in 2013, was €10,069 per inhabitant per year – which already placed Molenbeek in the 588th place out of 589 Belgian municipalities – the net income per inhabitant of the Centre Historique (€6,671) and the Quartier Maritime (€8,083) was far below the Molenbeek average.[33] The two districts have a population that mainly consists of working-class and migrant communities; the other districts of Molenbeek are considered more affluent, green and residential.

Similarly, the youth unemployment rate in Molenbeek is 41%.[34] While there are no official figures on unemployment of the individual districts, the rate is estimated to be significantly higher in the two districts under

study here, than in the more affluent districts of Molenbeek. The poor socio-economic conditions of many of the inhabitants also negatevely affect public health and the infrastructure of the neighbourhood.[35]

In addition, there is a difference in educational level between Molenbeek and the rest of Brussels. For example, in Molenbeek, 8.8% of the inhabitants possesses no diploma and 68.4% has completed secondary education or less; by contrast, in Brussels, only 5.1% does not have a diploma and 57.2% possesses only secondary education.[36] Over the course of their education, many students – in particular boys – are forced to redo educational years, and accordingly, the amount of students progressing to higher education is well below the national and regional average. Furthermore, it has been documented that students from Molenbeek, when compared with students with equal degrees, experience more problems to enter the labour market.[37]

Molenbeek is a community that faces considerable socio-economic challenges. It is also a highly diverse community, with the two districts most affected by violent extremism – the Quartier Maritime and the Centre Historique – being the poorest districts and the districts most heavily populated by a population from various foreign origins. From these figures, as well as from conversations with the officials of the local government, it was decided to focus the analysis on these two districts rather than the whole of Molenbeek.

For the sake of simplicity, and unless otherwise specified, throughout the rest of this study we refer to the two districts Quartier Maritime and Centre Historique as 'Molenbeek'; whenever mention is made of the inhabitants of Molenbeek or the 'Molenbeekois', this should be understood as pertaining to the inhabitants of the Quartier Maritime and the Centre Historique, not to the inhabitants of Molenbeek as a whole. This survey does so, while recognising that the commune of Molenbeek is more diverse and that the findings of the study only speak for the Quartier Maritime and the Centre Historique, and not for the districts of Molenbeek as a whole.

B. Concept and related hypotheses

After briefly introducing the raft of definitions employed in the study, this section sets out to present the research hypotheses against the backdrop of a thriving literature.

1. Definitions

It is clear that concepts such as terrorism, radicalisation, and extremism are contested concepts that can have different meanings depending on how they are used; this section defines them.

During the decades and since the emergence of terrorism studies as a research field, scholars have devised intricate models to explain radicalisation into violent extremism – often involving 'pathways', 'staircases' or 'trajectories'.[38] This study uses the following definitions of radicalism, extremism, and violent extremism:

Radicalism challenges the legitimacy of established norms and policies. It does not lead, in itself, to violence. This includes communities that reject the values of European society, but adhere to the law and attempt to bring about change through political dialogue. Whether radical communities are brewing grounds for violent radicalisation or important partners to prevent it, is currently the topic of much political debate.

Extremism is far more reaching than radicalism. Extremists accept violence as a legitimate means for obtaining political goals, without necessarily exercising violence themselves. Extremism involves categorical us-versus-them thinking, often fuelled by a dense, closed-off environment of like-minded individuals. Approving of the use of violence, including against civilians, can further alienate an individual from society; it also marks an important stage in which the individual can become psychologically prepared to use violence him/herself.

Violent extremism encompasses violent behaviours originating from an ideology shared at least by a limited group of individuals. Violent extremism is considered as the willingness, training, preparation, and actual conduct of violent acts, often involving the killing of innocent civilians. This demands a severe disconnect from society and a devaluation or dehumanisation of the victims.

Violent radicalisation process is the socialisation process into violent extremism. Therefore, individuals who went through this process to espouse violence are perceived as violent extremists.

Terrorism is the creation of fear, through the use of violence or threat thereof, with the aim of political change, is often employed as a tactic by violent extremists.

Throughout the report, when mention is made of violent radicalisation, this should be understood as radicalisation towards violent extremism; in other words, the willingness, training, preparation, and actual conduct of violent actions.

While many respondents voiced concerns about the rise of far-right movements and the extreme violence it engender, this form of extremism was not reported in Molenbeek. Therefore, it is not treated at length in this research. The violent extremism studied here is the religiously-inspired violent extremism.

Before delving into that topic, it is important to describe the different thinking about its connection to different streams of ideology, namely Islamism. First, the belief that public life and government should be reordered in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam is understood as Islamism.[39] The term is broad enough to encompass different brands of Islamism, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Second, Salafism binds together the Salafis, who claim to follow the righteous group by virtue of temporal and physical proximity to the prophet. Salafists strive to practise what they perceive as the 'true Islam', and for this, it is imperative to emulate the Salaf – not only in the realm of spirituality but also in the literal sense of copying their acts, for example through the wearing of traditional clothing.

Jihadism, finally, is best defined as the struggle to promote Islam – which can be both internally, in the form of overcoming internal doubts, and and externally, by struggling with the opponents of Islam. Contrary to the majority of Islamic scholars, several modern-day proponents of jihadism decouple the jihad from the specific set of circumstances in which violence was sanctioned by the Prophet or his entourage. These will be further explained in the next section.

Lastly, Political Islam[40] is defined broadly as the belief that the Qur'an and the Hadith (Traditions of the Prophet's life) have something important to say about the way society and governance should be ordered.

2. Research hypotheses

The research hypotheses revolve around the debate on the role of religion and social exclusion in the process of violent radicalisation. While exploring these different pathways toward violent radicalisation, the concept of social capital is vastly drawn upon.

a. The role of religion social exclusion in the process of violent radicalisation

The current debate about why violent radicalisation occurs is broadly split between two schools of thoughts: the first focuses on the role of Islam in violent radicalisation; the other school of thought stipulates that amid socio-economic hardships, young individuals already in search for a sense of identity and belonging fall prey to radicalisation. According to the latter, it is not merely the identity crisis or the lack of prospects, rather the confluence of the two together. In such a case, religion can play a role but is not the main factor. For the former, the religious devotion precedes violence; for the latter, a propensity to violence comes before the adoption of a religious cause.

The **first hypothesis** of the study is therefore formulated as follows: *practising Islam as a religion is the main factor that permitted the emergence of violent Islamist extremism in Molenbeek.*

The **second main hypothesis** of the study: *the perceived lack of opportunities for young people is the main factor that permitted the emergence of violent Islamist extremism in Molenbeek.*

b. Social capital

To delve deeper into the social patterns of Molenbeek and understand the ability or inability of a community to regulate or resist violent extremism, the concepts of social capital and community resilience can be used. For the sake of this study, we will examine networks, trust and norms and derive the hypotheses for the Molenbeek community from these examinations.

Various studies that have investigated community resilience in the face of violent extremism have pointed to the importance of bonding, bridging and linking relationships[41] across different community groups in preventing violent extremists from taking root in a community.[42] Ashutosh Varshney, in his account of community resilience to violence between Hindus and Muslims in India, described how communities had institutionalised systems for conflict resolution. These systems can be both organised and quotidian; however, the organised associational forms prove more durable in times of conflict.[43] It should, however, be noted that these studies have almost exclusively focused on areas where open conflict has broken out.

Hypotheses related to social capital are thus formulated as follows:

For the network aspect of social capital:

- *Groups are more resilient against radicalisation into violent extremism when they have strong social capital, in particular strong bonding ties, bridging ties and linking ties.*

For the trust aspect of social capital, and closely related to it, discrimination:

- *Low level of trust in governmental institutions such as the police is a common sentiment among the Molenbeekois.*
- *The Molenbeekois, regardless of their origins, are victims of high level of perceived discrimination inside and outside Molenbeek.*

For the norm aspect of social capital:

- *The Muslim community in Molenbeek observes strong norms derived from their Muslim heritage.*
- *The Belgian norms related to the practice of religion pose difficulties for the everyday practice of Islam by the Muslims in Molenbeek.*

C. Method and data analysis

The findings and analysis presented in this report are based on a six-month fieldwork in Molenbeek and on a three-month desk research. The EIP employed a mixed-method

approach that included three focus groups, a semi-structured survey with 406 respondents and a three-month process of unstructured interviews with local actors. The study is intended to give an overview, as representative as possible, of the Molenbeek community. Ultimately, this shall allow a better understanding of the violent radicalisation process at the community-level.

1. Methodology

This study is best understood as a case study[44]: It provides an in-depth exploration of the social conditions in Molenbeek in which violent radicalisation could arise. The research has been designed accordingly, to study a single community, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. More specifically, the case of Molenbeek can be considered an 'extreme case' as the community has been unusually affected by, both the presence of violent extremists, as well as the subsequent media coverage and security response. The natural interest that the case of Molenbeek holds allows for an intensive analysis of the community's social structure on the one hand, and the community response to the unusual circumstances that befell it on the other[45].

The choice of a case study research design has its implications, most prominently on the generalisability or the external validity of the findings[46], which means it is not certain that the presented understanding of the community in this study holds true for other communities in Belgium and beyond, in particular, because there was no control group. This limitation is recognised.

Nonetheless, the study allows for an intensive analysis of the social structures in a community with a large concentration of foreign heritage residents, as well as the bottom- up formation of a theory on how communities deal with radicalisation that can be explored in further research outside of Molenbeek.

2. Comprehensive survey on social patterns in Molenbeek

The analysis presented in Part two describes the results from a semi-randomised and semi-structured survey. A team of enumerators conducted the survey interviews on the basis of a questionnaire that included both closed and open-ended questions[47].

The World Bank and the UN have developed comprehensive tools for conducting household surveys (including in challenging circumstances) with a focus on social capital and community-level engagement[48]. A first version of the questionnaire was modelled on these existing social mapping methodologies. Subsequently, during the process of designing the survey, three focus groups were conducted with inhabitants of Molenbeek, local government officials, social workers as well as other community representatives[49]. The aim of these focus groups was to obtain an understanding of the realities and sensitivities of the community in which the fieldwork would be conducted[50], as well as to ensure that the survey would be targeted, and the questions phrased, in a socially and culturally appropriate manner.[51]

Based on the feedback from the focus groups, the initial approach adopted was highly reserved to minimise the risk of alienating residents during the fieldwork. Topics addressed in the original questionnaire included identity and religion, trust and confidence, problems in the neighbourhood, solutions to those problems, and a small section on violent radicalisation. This initial questionnaire was composed of 59 questions out of which 14 were open-ended questions for comments and suggestions on specific areas. For most of the closed questions, the questionnaire used a satisfaction measurement scale of 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum). A score of 4 or 5 indicated a satisfied response, while a score of 1 or 2 indicated dissatisfaction. A score of 3 can be regarded as neutral.

As the fieldwork progressed, however, it became apparent that the participants were highly receptive to questions on violent radicalisation, and often wanted to say more than the closed-ended questions allowed. After the completion of 52% of the total

fieldwork, the decision was taken to include an additional three closed and eight open questions on the community perception of violent radicalisation and both political and religious extremism in the survey to capture more in-depth the opinions of the participants on violent radicalisation[52].

To add more nuances to the analysis, a series of unstructured interviews (64 women and 36 men) were conducted, with residents, local actors and community representatives from Molenbeek, from mid-October to mid-December 2016.

Over the course of this report, reference will be made to the sources of the data, whether it was acquired through the semi-structured interviews, or through the process of unstructured interviews. The data collected through unstructured interviews were used for qualitative purposes only and did not impact, supplant or overwrite the data gathered during the semi-structured interviews.

Adjusting the research methods to fit particular circumstances, and encourage the community engagement, has been the priority for the EIP. For more details on the methodology, such as data collection methods, and variable used for data analysis, kindly refer to Annex Two. It seems this survey is a first of its kind, since it was essentially conducted, among other things, because the Molenbeek commune has called for increasing the knowledge on the social patterns that might present an opportunity for violent radicalisation to develop. By its large sample size and the qualitative precision that compensated any quantitative stretch, the EIP flexible approach allowed to present a representative and scientifically-relevant 'social mapping' to understand, from the community - level perspective[53], the social patterns in which violent radicalisation could emerge. At the same time, it revealed potential for reducing vulnerabilities to radicalisation, and opportunities for strengthening resilience within the community of Molenbeek.

In parallel to this research process and validation exercises with the local communities, the EIP presented preliminary findings of this report to European stakeholders at a few public events which gave the opportunity to reflect on the work undertaken[54].

Individual interactions, during the full social mapping process, with key stakeholders strongly interested in the EIP approach, have also allowed to nurture and improve the thinking and presentation of the present findings[55].

PART TWO: VIOLENT RADICALISATION AND THE MOLENBEEKOIS

The results are presented around four broad topics: the diversity of Molenbeek residents; religion and social relations; violent radicalisation and how it has affected the community; and solutions proposed to the problems in Molenbeek. Where possible, linkages between these topics are explored. For each topic, the quantitative analysis is supported by qualitative analysis. Also, the perspectives of the Molenbeekois are presented as quotes from the field and constitute a reflection of their lives and stories. They are meant to inject a sense of 'reality-proximity-tangibility' into the analysis.

A. Diversity in Molenbeek

The first section of this 'social mapping' focuses on Molenbeek and its inhabitants, describing how they see the community of Molenbeek and reflecting on safety and security.

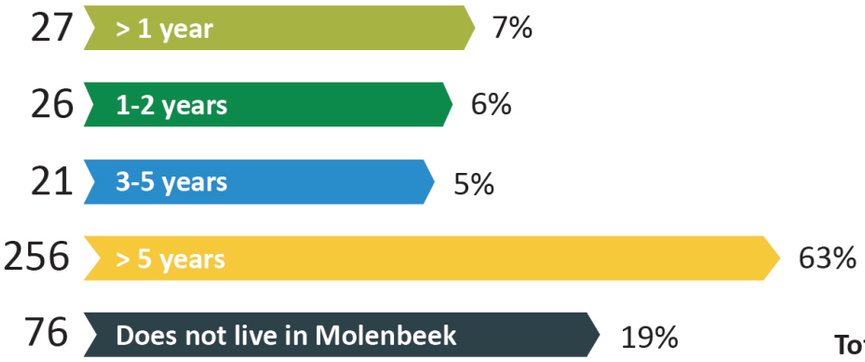
Most respondents have been living in Molenbeek for a long period of time, as can be seen from Table 1, with an overwhelming majority of respondents (63%) for over five years. Many respondents have even lived in Molenbeek since they were born and have never lived anywhere else. It is worth pointing out that 19% of the respondents live outside Molenbeek. As described in the methodology[56], this includes business owners and employees that come to Molenbeek to work – and often have done so for many years – as well as youth that frequent bars and cafés and meet their friends in the street. While not residing in Molenbeek, these respondents are part of the community's social framework.

1. Different communities in Molenbeek

The quantitative analysis allowed for the emergence of three broad categories of respondents. However, from the unstructured, in-depth interviews, there was room for more nuance.

Broadly speaking, the three categories are those of Belgian heritage, of North African

Table 1. Time in Molenbeek



Total participants: 406

heritage, and those with other origins. The Molenbeekois of Belgian heritage – or as they are called by many in Molenbeek, the 'Belgo-Belges' – constitute a minority inside Molenbeek. This is not without difficulty for many of them. One respondent captures the spirit when saying that *'I don't feel at home anymore, surrounded by all these Moroccans that live like in Morocco'.* For others, they feel like *'the Belgian rules are no longer respected. Those in charge – the mayor, the local government – did not do anything about it'.*

In the perception of the group of Belgian heritage, street life in the two Molenbeek neighbourhoods is heavily dominated by the large community of North Africans from Moroccan heritage.

Outsiders perceive this Moroccan sub-group as a close and tied-knit community, with strong socio-cultural norms and beliefs, which shapes and defines everyday life in the neighbourhood. Examples that are mentioned include the high quantity of mosques, the prevalence of shops and restaurants selling traditional products, and the religious dress code observed by many of the inhabitants of Molenbeek.

As one long-term inhabitant observed, *'Molenbeek has changed profoundly over the last twenty years. One does not feel in Belgium anymore, as there are many Moroccan cafés and shops of Moroccan origins. Over the last decade, this has intensified'*. Indeed, when asked about 'what works' in Molenbeek, many of Moroccan heritage precisely point to those components that, to others, is the source of the changes in street life, such as the availability of shops, cafés, and praying spaces. This availability allows the Moroccan community to live in much a same man ner as would be the case in Morocco.

Whereas the Moroccan community appears to the outside world as a closed population group, many inside it point to internal divisions. Language is an important difference, with those having their origins in the Rif – a mountainous area in North Morocco - and speak Amazigh, while those that came from other parts of Morocco speak Arabic. For the younger generations - those that grew up in Belgium – French is their mother tongue, which can make it difficult to communicate between the generations and, at times, even within families.

In addition to the population groups of Belgian and North African heritage, there are also more transient communities such as recently arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe, Middle Eastern individuals, who oftentimes come as refugees. Molenbeek– the Quartier Maritime and the Centre Historique – is indeed reported as the only Brussels areas in which it is possible to rent without having to sign a stringent Belgian tenancy contract.

From the in-depth interviews, however, there are sub-categories for each heritage group. Since the North African heritage is the majority group in the two surveyed districts, these sub-categories are investigated among the North African community. Other populations groups, however, are not covered in this study, as mentioned earlier, and constitute a valid topic for further research.

Upon arrival in Belgium, some members of the North African community reside and work in Flemish areas before relocating to Molenbeek. This group, while considered from the North African community, differs from the majority of the francophone North African community. Most of them send their children to Flemish schools and affiliate to Flemish associations in Molenbeek, which does not mean they avoid other associations.

Another sub-category within the same community is determined by the geographic location of the North African community is determined by the geographic location of the North African community living in Molenbeek, with those living in 'high Molenbeek', with a higher socio-economic class than those living *in 'lower Molenbeek'. There are thus two different social classes, in the perception of the* Molenbeekois, with different socio-cultural norms shaping their social life.

During the unstructured interviews, respondents from the North African and the Belgian heritage acknowledged that there are many different communities in Molenbeek. Nonetheless, they admitted that 'inter-community exchange' is minimal. The difference between the idea of 'diversity' and that of 'inter-community mixing' was thus made clear.

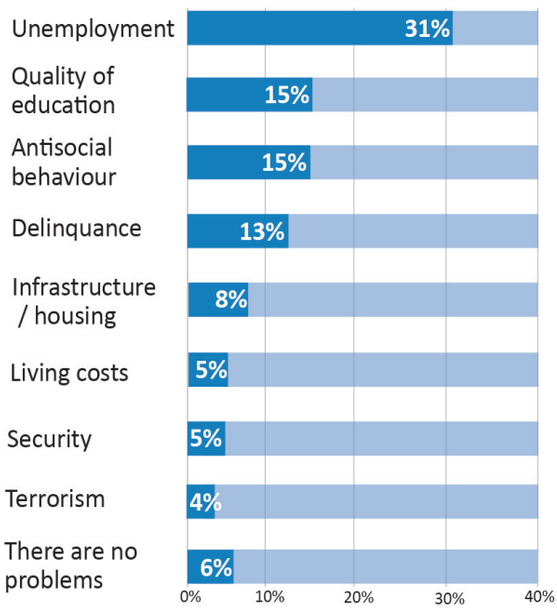
From the perspective of one 'Belgo-Belge' with roots running deep in the social life of the Molenbeek community, this minimal exchange however, *'is the fault of the Moroccan community because they are the dominant community that should make the first step towards the other'.* He continued, *'they feel empowered among themselves and don't want to open up to other communities'.*

Speaking about who should take the 'first step' toward the other, a long-time resident from the North African community stated that it is the North African community duty to take the first step. He stated:

'Because it is the community that arrived in Belgium, it is also a religious duty upon Muslims to integrate into the community where they live'.

A female worker and a long-time resident of the 'Belgo-Belges' community disagreed, saying that women especially, interact across communities. They do not, however, exchange visits or attend each other's parties. The reason behind that, according to her, is alcohol. The majority of the North African community would not like to be present in parties where alcohol is served.

Figure 1. Problems in Molenbeek (n=212)



In a women-only dialogue event in which the majority came from the North African community, a slight disagreement with the previous view was reported. The respondents indicated that it is normal to have less interaction across communities since all population groups will favour interaction among themselves, which is human nature.

However, the views on how to create this 'inter-community mixing' were different. Some pointed to 'children and schools' as a means to create mixing between the various communities, while others highlighted 'jobs' as a means toward that end. To conclude with one long-term resident quote on the divides within the population, he summarised:

'Molenbeek is split in two by the Gare de l'Ouest. In the western part, there are many familial residences where the population is much better remunerated. The Quartier Maritime is poorer, but ongoing improvements in the quality of housing are taking place there for the purpose of gentrification and to attract a richer populace. The Centre Historique harbours a much older and more impoverished population. Traditionally, there were many Spanish and Italians living there, but for the last twenty years there has been an influx of North Africans, and the older people, from the former population group, have left the neighbourhood. This district has now become a multicultural area, but heavily dominated by a Belgian population with a foreign heritage that intends to stay in Belgium much more than their parents did'.

2. Problems in Molenbeek

The respondents were interviewed on what they perceived to be the most important problems in Molenbeek. As Figure 1 shows, employment is identified as the most salient (31%), followed by the quality of education (15%), antisocial behaviour[57] (15%) and the problem of delinquency (13%). On the one hand, the fact that unemployment is seen as the most important problem, should not come as a surprise: as seen above, Molenbeek has very serious unemployment rates. In light of the continuous coverage of Molenbeek pictured as a hotbed for radicalisation[58], it is worth noticing that terrorism (4%) and security (5%) score rather low.

In the minds of many respondents, there is a disconnect between employment and education. Education, for instance, *'is not believed to be useful'* because *'there are so many stories of people who didn't find a job with good diplomas'*. So, when presented with a job opportunity, the Molenbeekois often leave school to take up a low-skilled job rather than pursuing further education.

As can be seen in Table 2, there is a statistically significant association between heritage and highest completed education. For those from Belgian heritage, only 3% of those interviewed did not finish secondary school, and 22% did not receive any post-secondary education. For those of North African heritage, half of the respondents did not receive any post-secondary education. Indeed, only 5% obtained a master's degree, compared to 33% of the group of Belgian heritage and 17% with another origin. In sum, those of North African and other heritage have significantly lower levels of education than their counterparts of Belgian heritage.

Commenting on the low levels of education, as well as the high rates of absenteeism and drop-out from the secondary schools in Molenbeek, one respondent observes that:

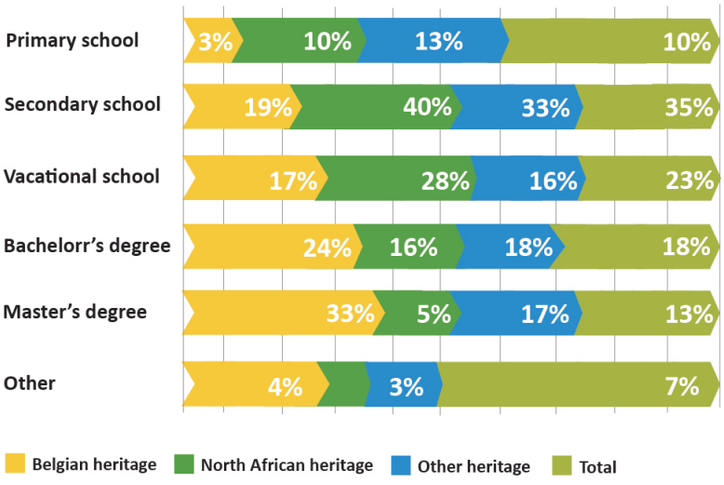
'[Youngsters] simply don't see the opportunities. Why would one pursue education if it doesn't help? Parents are also not involved in their education'.

To further explain the 'nexus' between education and unemployment, the unstructured interviews offer some insights: it is a vicious circle, as described by a group of young Molenbeekois coming mostly from the North African community. They said, *'the school system is bad and its quality low. Discrimination not only happens in schools but when we get out of Molenbeek to go to school, we feel like in a different world'.* They concluded by saying, *'the drop-out is, for the most part, an attempt to conform to an older brother or a group of friends'.*

In this survey, the youngsters' perception has been key to understand the intensity of the education problem, since they are the ones who experience this 'reality' on a daily basis. According to them, the low quality of the education significantly impacts their lives.

Statistically speaking, the lack of perspective offered by education (16%), the lack of motivation from teachers (16%), as well as delinquency (14%), are frequently mentioned as important drivers for school drop-outs. Even more mentioned is the reference to the lack of parental supervision (33%), i.e. the parents' incapacity to make their children commit to pursuing their education. One respondent told us his own story of not finishing secondary school:

Table 2. Highest completed education [59]



'You are looking at one example. I started working in markets when I was very young to have pocket money. I could taste my work coming to fruition as I received a salary that was good for that age, so I didn't see any reason to continue with school. My parents were not too happy when I decided to drop out of high school, but supported my decision'.

According to most of the interviewees, the perceived lack of quality of education and the prevalence of unemployment are two very important problems. Safety and security are, on the contrary, divisive topics for many Molenbeekois.

3. Safety and security in Molenbeek

Safety and security in Molenbeek have been widely discussed. As noted above, security and terrorism were not identified by the Molenbeekois as the most salient issues. Figure 2 shows that a substantial part of the respondents (17%) puts forward they do not experience security problems in the two surveyed Molenbeek districts. Many – in particular, the respondents of North African heritage– opine they feel safer in Molenbeek than anywhere else in Brussels.

At the same time, the concern about violence from religious extremist groups, as well as from extreme right groups, is minimal. To some extent, this is not surprising, as many of the respondents do not think that religious extremist groups would be targeting Molenbeek, but rather other locations in Brussels and beyond.[60] Thus, concern over radicalisation does not focus on the risk of attacks occurring in Molenbeek, but on the potential bad influences it may have on the youth. One parent typified this thinking, observing that:

'While you can be sure about how you educate them at home and relatively sure about what they learn in school, you have no control over what happens in the street'.

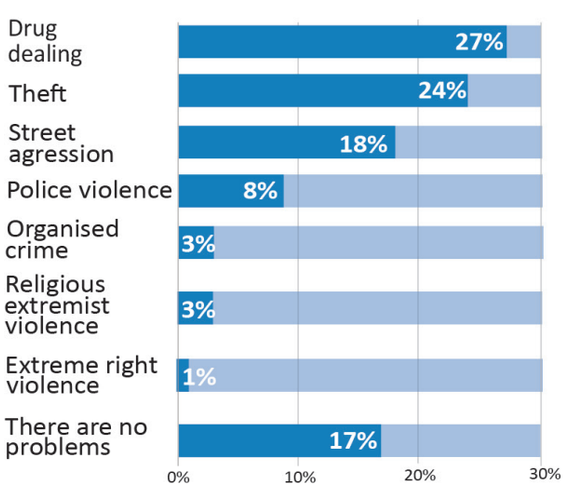
It is for this reason that many parents report that they feel safe for themselves, but often not for their children. And it is not just radicalisation that they worry about, but a broader sense of insecurity for their children (or future children). Young people that do not have a family often say that they would move out as soon as they get children, because they do not want them to grow up there. As one interviewee remarked:

'I don't feel safe for myself and my children. There are young people who hang out in the streets, and many drug dealers'.

Indeed, according to 27% of the respondents, drug dealing is the most pervasive security issue in Molenbeek, followed by theft (24%) and aggression in the street (18%). The drug problems are mainly centred around the Ribeaucourt metro station, located at the crossing of rue de Ribeaucourt and boulevard Léopold II where, at any time of the day, there are small crowds, mainly men, hanging around in the street. And while the drug use is a thorn in the eye of the Molenbeekois, many respondents are convinced that the police *'does not seriously address it'* and *'is happy to keep it confined to Molenbeek',* rather than having the drug dealing moved to Central Brussels. Yet the prevalence of drugs and related drug and petty crime has effects on the inhabitants of Molenbeek. One Moroccan man remarked:

'It's very hard for people to stop smoking drugs. In Morocco, this was not the case. Here you can find it at every corner of the street, in all the cafés. This is why I do not want my children to grow up here. Women, even children of 14-15 years old, smoke weed and do coke'.

Figure 2. Security problems (n=389)



4. The Molenbeekois and the police

The enumerators asked the inhabitants to evaluate police responses to these security challenges. Paradoxically, respondents consider the police to lack efficiency and in particular, within the community of North African heritage, in which many recount negative experiences with the police. At the same time, respondents have trust in the police as an institution and want the police to take an active role in promoting security and safety in Molenbeek, as long as this is done in an inclusive and considerate way.

According to a majority of respondents (57%), the police is ineffective, whereas a minority (22%) sees the police as effective in their approach. A significant part of the community has had bad experiences with the police and claim that *'it arrives too late or does not show up'* (8%) or responds aggressively (14%). Another important theme is that many Molenbeekois do not always feel safe with the police. 18% of the respondents with North African heritage (as opposed to 3% of the Belgian heritage) lack confidence in the police. Paradoxically, those of North African heritage also have the highest rates of confidence in the police (19%) of all groups. This shows that this group, is either strongly in favour or strongly unconfident in the capacity of the police forces. The problem, as identified by the respondents, is the lack of understanding and the miscommunication between the police and *'the community'*, by which most often respondents mean the community of North African heritage. One interviewee observed that the police *'don't know Molenbeek, they think it's a war zone here'.*

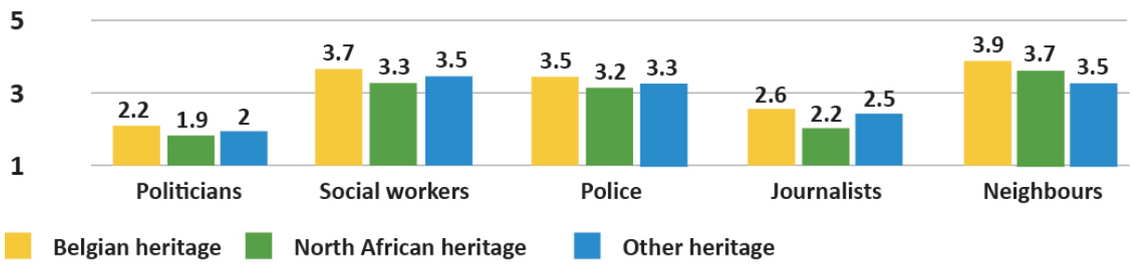
Others, however, claim that the policemen are always in their cars, which means *'they can't do much. There should be more 'proximity' agents to create a better relationship'.* This means a *'more inclusive'* police force, including having more people from the neighbourhood – in particular, Moroccans – in the force, because *'only they understand the community'* and know how to engage with the locals. Outsiders cannot help the Molenbeekois address their problems, '*because they don't know what is going on in the mosques, parks, and coffee shops'.*

Others recognise that the police are fighting an uphill battle:

'They are desperate. They don't know how to react to the violence against them. When it comes to the drugs, it is an endless problem. The commune tries to put social workers on the streets to take care of the problem'.

The mandate of the social workers – for example, the gardiens de la paix – is to augment the sense of security by their dissuasive presence and by providing information on security and prevention to inhabitants. However, they are often seen as lacking credibility because they do not have the status of the police which, in the eyes of the Molenbeekois, means they *'don't get to tell us what to do'.* Nonetheless and across all population groups in the community, trust in the police is relatively high, as can be seen from Figure 3. Trust in the police is on par with trust in social workers and only slightly lower than trust in neighbours, while considerably higher than trust in politicians and journalists. Whereas some of these difficulties are found to exist,

Figure 3. Trust in .. (n=399)



in general, there seems to be a call for a more active, embedded, and inclusive police force that can respond to the needs of the community.

To delve further into this topic, the unstructured interviews asked participants to further reflect upon the current tensions with some elements in the police force and the relatively high trust in the police. The questions were addressed to social workers and residents before comparing it with the results that emerged from the quantitative analysis. The shared idea is that most of the police force in Molenbeek not only live outside Molenbeek, but - in many cases - even outside Brussels. According to the Molenbeekois, outsiders, including the police, do not know the neighbourhood and thus lack the appreciation of the particular context linked to it. They are sometimes perceived as not acting properly towards the population and thus experienced as offensive. It is deemed a structural problem that ought to be answered by the authority.

For women, the trust in the police is much more complex; they recall times when there was a proximity police, who would know, and closely work with, residents. This is no longer the case.

For youngsters, with no fond memories of this proximity police, it is all about discrimination. They perceive the police to be discriminating against them based on their origin. They recount stories of police forces executing identity checks on them while excluding others. One youngster, from the North African community, recounted:

'I was going home with friends at night, and they only stopped me and asked to see my ID. After that, they accompanied me all the way to where I live, so I don't make troubles'. He added, 'now if I found a bag in the streets, I don't know if I should call the police or not because they will always suspect me'.

In discussions with local social workers, they acknowledged that there might be an added value of having the police force from the North African heritage community, but underscored at the same time, that this would be conflicting with the idea of diversity and would make the neighbourhood exclusively North African.

It is instructive to look at the impact of gender, education, employment, and residency in Molenbeek to further analyse the confidence in the police and social workers (Table 3). Trust in journalists and politicians is discussed further below.

The levels of trust in the police, from the qualitative analysis, differs according to the gender, however, the same could not be discerned from the quantitative analysis. The only statistically significant result for the police is a positive relationship with unemployment, which means that unemployed are more likely to have high confidence in the police than those that do have a job. There is no discernible difference for those living inside and outside Molenbeek, e.g. shop owners, employees, and youngsters visiting Molenbeek.

Table 3. OLR models for confidence in social workers and police

	Social workers		Police	
	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.
Gender (2=man)	-.48 *	.20	-.10	.19
Education	.16 *	.08	-.05	.08
Unemployed	.29	.20	.52 **	.19
Resident (2=not)	.09	.24	-.19	.23
N	389		393	
Pseudo R2	.0116		.0097	
*=p<.05, **=p<.01, ***=p<.001				

Concerning the trust in social workers, there is a negative association (Exp = -.48) between being a man and having confidence in social workers; in other words, women are more likely to have trust in social workers than men.

No such relationship exists for the police.Likewise, education is positively associated (Exp =.16) to confidence in social workers: as education goes up, confidence in social worker increases.

5. The Molenbeekois and the media

Respondents were first asked about their most important source of information. As can be seen from Figure 4, internet (28%) and Belgian television (27%) are the two most common sources of information. International television remains an important source for segments of the non-Belgian heritage population (15%), also visible through the multitude of satellite dishes on the roofs and walls of many apartment buildings in Molenbeek.

The media portrayal of Molenbeek in the aftermath of the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and, subsequently, the attacks in Brussels in March 2016, proved to be a topic on which many Molenbeekois had very outspoken views. One respondent from the Moroccon heritage observed:

'My cousin's wife has died in the metro attack on March 22nd. My family and I felt a tremendous pressure from both sides. The whole world targeted us through the media because of Salah Abdeslam. But they did not say a word about the victims from Molenbeek.'

The views of most of the respondents on the media coverage of Molenbeek were negative or outright dismissive, describing the media as *'inaccurate'* and refraining from *'checking their sources'*, or worse, as *'sensationalist'*, *'spreading lies'*, and *'magnifying facts'*.

Figure 4. Information sources for Molenbeekois (n=392)

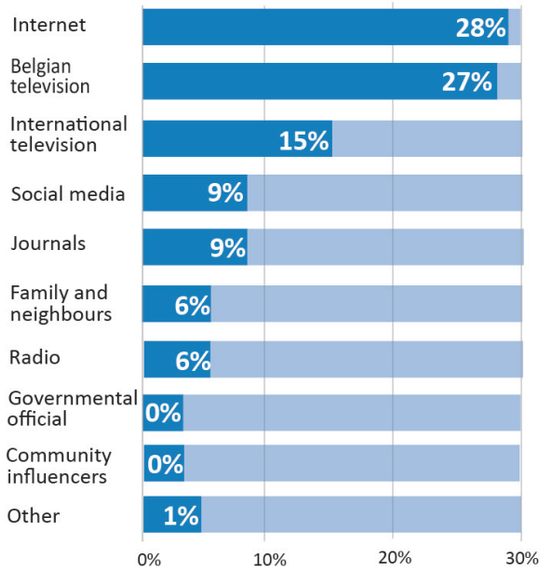
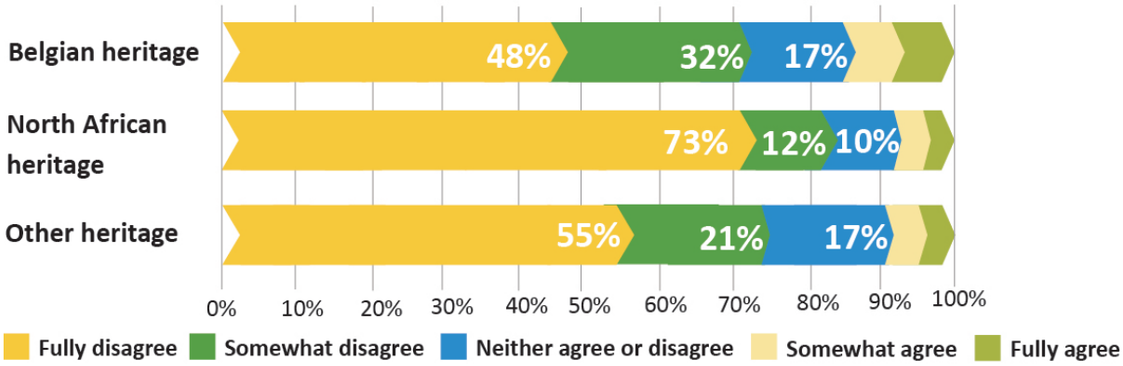


Figure 5. Media portral of Molenbeek (n=404)



The community of North African heritage feels most targeted with 73% fully disagreeing with the media portrayal of Molenbeek, while an additional 12% somewhat disagreeing, as shown in Figure 5.

According to one shop owner, this has had tremendous consequences on businesses in Molenbeek. Molenbeek used to be known for its local furniture shops. He testified:

'They showed a bad image of Molenbeek. They exaggerated, they put everybody in the same basket. This all had an impact on businesses. Moroccans that used to come from Flanders and France for shopping do not come to Molenbeek anymore'.

Another business owner said his *'business had lost 70% of the profit since the attacks. Our clients come mainly from outside of Molenbeek, so we are thinking of moving our business to Ghent'.*

While reporting on the terrorist attacks, the media implicated the community of North African heritage which raised mistrust for journalists. In particular, the reporting on the role of the community in hiding Salah Abdeslam after the Paris attacks struck a nerve.

Many felt that they have unjustly been lumped together with a small group of extremists.

One respondent reflected on his experience after the capture of Salah Abdeslam on rue des quatre vents, in the Centre Historique:

'I saw what happened when they captured Abdeslam. The journalists were behind the perimeter. They didn't look for information directly, but only interviewed some neighbours. Afterwards, they buy the info or repeat what the authorities, the politicians say. They don't represent the reality and have no desire to do so'.

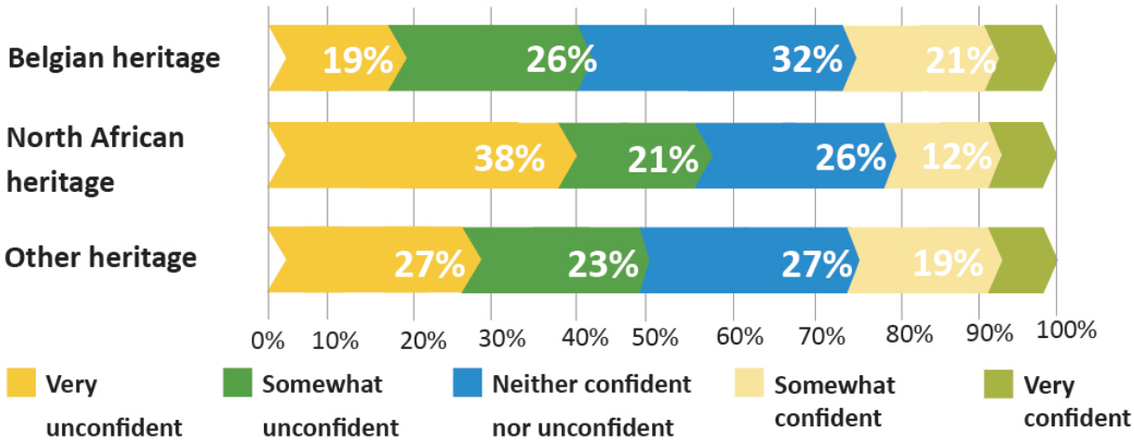
For many respondents, the issue is that as a result of the intense focus on terrorism other problems get swept under the rug and do not get the coverage they deserve. One respondent observed that:

'The media talk only about terrorism, but Molenbeek is a poverty-stricken commune. They do not talk about other problems, such as cleanliness or housing. Before, they never talked about Molenbeek; now, it's all exaggeration. Journalists tarnished its reputation. They did, not the inhabitants of Molenbeek'.

Others emphasise that *'journalists keep forgetting that there are other people in Molenbeek, not only Moroccans or Muslims'.*

As for the confidence in journalists, displayed in Figure 6, the group of North African heritage is most negative, with 58% claiming to be either somewhat or very unconfident

Figure 6. Trust in journalists



in journalists, whereas the group of Belgian heritage reaches 45%.[61] The differences are not statistically significant; nonetheless, the trend is in line with the respondents' perceptions of the media portrayal of Molenbeek.

Whereas the Molenbeekois put forward unemployment and education as the most important problems, media focus first and foremost on violent radicalisation. Most of the respondents understand this: many say the journalists are *'only doing their job'.* The effects on their lives are, however, that they see themselves as the victims of generalisation. As one respondent put it strikingly, *'they accentuate islamophobia'.* In the mind of the youngsters of Moroccan heritage, this image is very much alive. As outlined above, when someone has the perception of being discriminated against because the address on his CV is listed as Molenbeek, it is often the media that is blamed for the creation of that image.

It should be noted that there are smaller elements in the community who agree with the media portrayal.

In a similar manner, there are individuals of Belgian heritage or Southern Europeans living in Molenbeek for decades, who state concern about their commune. One old Italian man proclaimed that the media coverage:

'Reflects reality – in 10 years Belgium will no longer exist, there will be only Muslims. Crosses on the church towers will be replaced by crescents'.

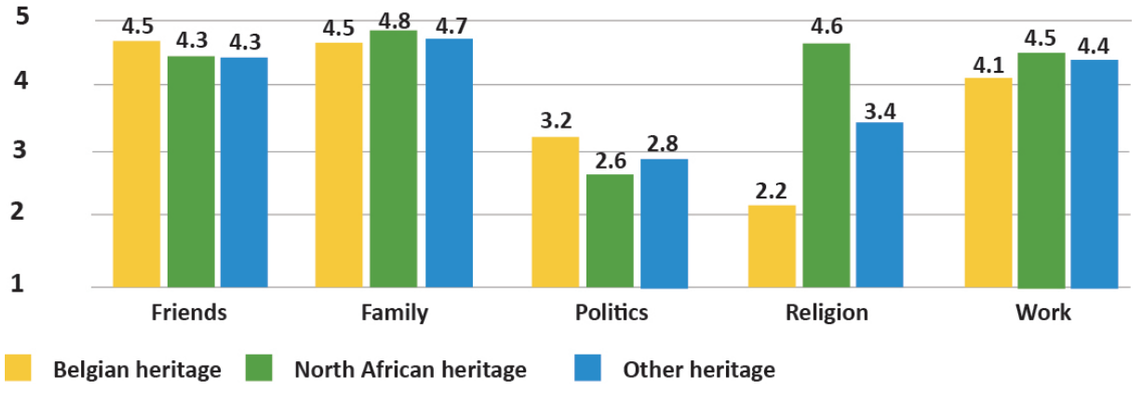
But those who agree with the negative media portrayal of Molenbeek are a minority. The majority of the Molenbeekois disapproves of the media portrayal of Molenbeek and holds it responsible for the unjustly negative image of Molenbeek in Belgium and beyond.

B. Religious and social aspects of life

In this part, the focus is on the importance of various social factors in everyday life of the Molenbeekois, including friends and family, religion, associative life, and political engagement. Furthermore, attention is paid to the problems and impediments experienced in the exercise of their everyday routines. The EIP asked the Molenbeekois of the two surveyed districts to evaluate the importance of friends, family, politics, religion, and work, as can be seen from Figure 7.

While all groups of respondents consider family and friends to be of very high importance, 80% of those with North African heritage and 90% of those with Belgian heritage mark it as very important. Work is rated similarly by all groups whereas politics takes a significantly less important place in the the lives of the Molenbeekois, albeit those of Belgian heritage are the only group to rate politics as slightly more important than unimportant (3.2 out of 5). Religion,

Figure 7. Importance of.. (n=400)



one of the aspect that is perceived to be the most important in life is treated at length later in this report. The ordered logistic regression is used to test the effects of different indicators on the importance of various aspects of life. The results of which are presented in Table 4 below, show, first, that there are no differences between men and women in the importance they attach to these aspects of life; second, and for unemployment, there is a negative effect (-.64) on the importance of family.

Third and last, education matters most. It has a significantly positive effect (.30) on the importance of politics, but a significantly negative effect on the importance of family (-.33), religion (-.47), and work (-.25). In other words, the more educated someone is in Molenbeek, the more likely he or she is to think that politics is important in life, and the less likely he or she is to think family, religion, and work are important in life. This is in line with the theory[62] that education plays a crucial role in promoting civic participation.

a. Importance of religion

Regarding differences between the population groups of Belgian, North African, and other heritage, Table 5 showed that the importance of the religion is where there are significant differences between the population groups. Whereas 92% of those of North African heritage rate this as important or very important [63], only 24% of those of Belgian heritage do so. At the same time, many of Belgian heritage (25%) or other heritage (45%) are non-religious individuals, and thereby inevitably less likely to rate religion as a very important part of their lives.

When comparing Christian and Muslim respondents, regardless of their origin, the Muslims rate religion as significantly more important than the Christians, as can be seen from Table 5. For example, whereas only 3% of Muslims considers their religion to be very unimportant or somewhat unimportant, 31% of Christians do so.

Table 4. OLR models for importance of friends, family, politics, religion and work

	Friends		Family		Politics		Religion		Work	
	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.
Gender (2=man)	-.25	.21	-.25	.29	-.31	.19	.01	.20	-.04	.21
Education	.07	.08	-.33 **	.11	.30 ***	.07	-.47 ***	.08	-.25 **	.08
Unemployed	-.27	.21	-.64 *	.29	-.32	.19	.12	.20	-.23	.21
Resident (2=not)	-.46	.25	-.53	.32	-.27	.24	.11	.06	.07	.25
N	394		394		394		395		392	
Pseudo R2	.0078		.0310		.0214		.0376		.0122	
*=p<.05, **=p<.01, ***=p<.001										

1. Norms and religion in Molenbeek

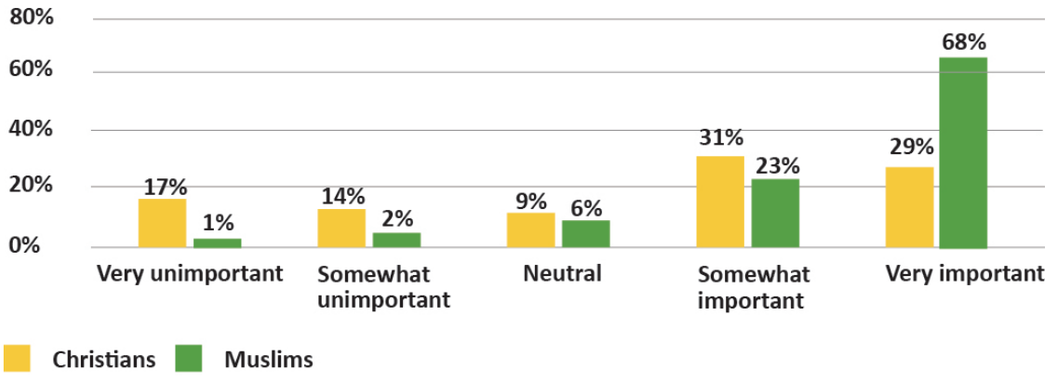
There are various norms and social conventions, derived from Islam, that form and shape public life in Quartier Maritime and Centre Historique. example, whereas only 3% of Muslims considers their religion to be very unimportant or somewhat unimportant, 31% of Christians do so.

Most strikingly, 29% of Christians, as opposed to 68% of Muslims, considers their religion to be 'very important'.

b. Practising religion

Additionally, Muslims appear to be more at ease than Christians with the practice of their religion. 89% of the Muslims reports being either somewhat or very at ease with the practice of Islam, while 79% of the Christians does so (see Figure 8). For most, there appears to be no immediate

Table 5. Importance of religion [64]



problems in practising their religion. As one Christian respondent observed, *'Muslims respect religious people'.* In general, Muslim respondents in the survey appear to be more tolerant of Christians than of those without religion.

In line with the idea that the North African community is not monolithic[65], as explained in the diversity of Molenbeek section, the Muslim component of this community is not either. During the unstructured interviews, some of the interviewees were from the Muslim community, but Islam was perceived for them more as a cultural identity than as a practised faith. In the words of one social worker from the North African community, who dismissed the fact that religion is the most important aspect of life:

'We are evolving towards an Islam that is compatible with our lifestyle. While I consider Islam as my religion, I am not restricted by its rules. I don't wear the veil, my family don't sacrifice during Al-Eid, but we observe Ramadan. It is a festivity rather than a religious ritual'.

And this is not only the case for women. Indeed, one social worker of Moroccon heritage identified himself more with the Belgian or other heritage groups than with the North African community. He said:

'Individuals in the street during the Friday prayer, expect me to conform to their practices. Or whenever I feel like having a beer, sometimes I get mean comments'.

While it should be recognised that practising your religion does not only happen in Molenbeek but in society at large, most people relate the practice of their religion to their immediate surroundings. This can contextualise the finding that Muslims are more at ease in the practice of their religion: essentially, most Christians who live in the Centre Historique or the Quartier Maritime practice their religion in a Muslim-majority area.

At times, this can lead to a sense of unease, with many Christians reporting their unease stems from the large number of Muslims living in Molenbeek. One respondent phrased her concerns as follows:

'I am an Orthodox Christian, and although I would like to do so, I don't wear a cross around my neck because there are a lot of Muslims here. I don't feel comfortable, and I'm afraid of being attacked'.

Another Christian interviewee said:

'I don't feel comfortable when the priest holds part of the mass outside of the church because there are a lot of Muslims there. With recent events, it's even worse'.

At the same time and during field work, enumerators encountered on several occasions proselytisers from different confessions, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses, who could walk around Molenbeek free and unimpeded. Another interviewee was a 58-year-old Nigerian priest of an evangelical church who expounded how easy it was for him to practise his faith, how he was invited by Muslims to undertake visits to mosques in the neighbourhood, as well as to participate in Islamic activities inside Molenbeek.

In the survey sample, only one respondent who identified himself as Jewish, shared his experience in Molenbeek:

'I am not at ease to practice Judaism here in Molenbeek. I cannot put on my kippah without getting beaten up by people. Neither can I enter into the synagogue in Brussels Centre, because I do not look Jewish enough. They are afraid of everyone'.

His experience, of course, is too small to generalise. It is, however, the only mention of actual violence connected to religious practice that was observed during fieldwork.

Feelings of unease, however, do not only exist among Christians and Jewish practitioners; they are also prevalent within segments of the Muslim community in Molenbeek. When asked whether they experience any difficulty in the practice of Islam, many Muslims mentioned the recent terror attacks – in Paris, and in particular, in Brussels – As one respondent observed:

'Since the attacks, the non-Muslims around the mosques give me strange looks. At work, things have also changed: before, we used to have discussions about Islam, but since the attacks, we avoid that topic'.

Some Muslims reported that after the attacks *'they were scared to even leave the house because of possible repercussions and that their religion has been tarnished: before, going to the mosque was like a walk in the park because it was safe, but now I get funny looks'.* Indeed, many respondents mentioned that since the attacks, they fear repercussions, specifically *'revenge attacks'* for example, the fear of being bombed when going to the Mosque.

As Table 6 shows, there is a difference between the ease with which men and women practice their religion in Molenbeek: men are significantly more at ease than women. This is supported by the fact that a substantial amount of the problems related to the practice of religion are about *'clothing'.* Women, in particular, report problems when wearing a hijab or other forms of religious dress. For many Muslim women, these problems precede the recent attacks. One young woman shared the following story:

'Two years ago, I switched schools because I put on a veil. And then, in the new school, a teacher put pressure on me because I started wearing a longer jellaba, even though I was allowed to do so. I stopped going to school for a year. Psychologically, it was difficult for me. I had to stay in a separate room, so the school administration could check if I was radicalized. This was ridiculous – these were people that have known me all my life!'

Figure 8. Ease practicing religion (n=248)

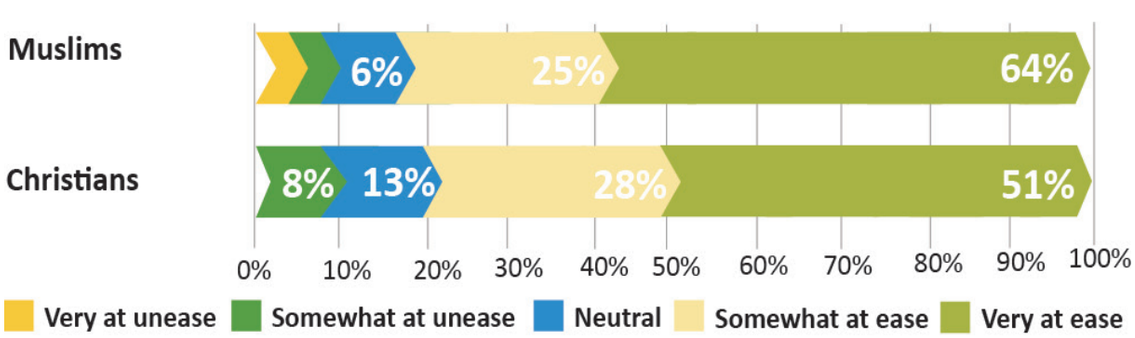


Table 6. OLR model for the ease of practising religion

	Ease practising religion	
	Exp (β)	S.E.
Gender (2=man)	.51 *	.23
Education	.01	.10
Unemployed	.27	.24
Resident (2=not)	-.16	.30
N	325	
Pseudo R2	.0083	
*=p<.05, **=p<.01, ***=p<.001		

C. Islamic social norms

On the basis of the interviews conducted with Muslims, it becomes clear that Islam does not only play an important role in their personal life, but that they also feel Islam has things to say about public life and the organisation of the society. At times, this can be at tension with Belgian society at large which, in general, has an entrenched secular attitude towards religion in the public space.

One example of the norms and conventions is the Islamic dress code and, in particular, the wearing of the hijab by women. A large majority of Muslim women in the two surveyed Molenbeek districts attaches great importance to wearing the hijab in public, even though, as explained below, they are aware this can cause problems with finding a job. At times, when the demands of employers and the personal religious conviction are at loggerheads, the latter prevails. For example, one female Muslim respondent, working in healthcare, stated the following:

'I lost my job because I was wearing a heads-carf. My employer did not want me to show religious symbols'.

There is, however, no consensus on the notion of wearing the hijab. While some women report being discriminated by the fact of wearing it, whereas some women of North African heritage who do not wear hijab spoke of 'social' or 'familial' pressure within the community to wear it. In that case, they concluded, 'we can not speak of hijab as a clear-cut religious practice'.

In discussion with local actors working on women-focused projects, the emerging consensus was that, as much as some women are discriminated for wearing the hijab in the workplace outside Molenbeek, others are discriminated, at times inside Molenbeek, for not wearing it. Women's dress code, from all population groups, is widely debated, as this will be examined in the next Part.

For men, especially elder Muslim men, there is a similar pattern with wearing the jelabba or growing a long beard. In their perception, there is no anomaly in such practices; it is just a continuation of old habits that are perpetrated here because, to a large extent, *'they live in Molenbeek as if it is Morocco'*. These men are often surprised to find that non-Muslims inside and outside Molenbeek can feel offended, or viewed with suspicion, because of a dress code or a beard which are to them such a normal expression of their identity. As a result, one 45-year-old man from Moroccan heritage said that he feels at ease practising his religion *'as long as I am not wearing a jellaba; then I would not feel comfortable'.*

It is important to emphasise that the survey did not find any indication of members of the North African community being forced to wear religious clothing. Rather, this emerges from both a personal conviction coupled with cultural and traditional religious conservatism. One further manifestation of this strong social Islamic norms is the importance the Muslim

community attaches to the family. In the Islamic value system, the family takes precedence over the individual. Many Muslims fear the infringement of the Western value system on that mainstay of their own culture, and see a society which is too individualistic. This was epitomised by a 35 year-old-man of Moroccan heritage:

'The bottom line is the excessive freedom offered in the West. If the parents try to 'discipline' their children, the latter can go to the police and file a complaint against their parents'.

The family, not the state, is seen as being at the heart of the process for solving problems. For example, the lack of family supervision, as discussed above, is therefore seen as a fundamental reason why some youngsters lost their path in life and succumbed to lawlessness. Similarly, respondents emphasise the importance of religious upbringing for their children and often praise the fact that residing in Molenbeek provides them with this opportunity. Because their children are in a community that is dominantly of North African heritage, they encounter Islamic features and have access to a parallel school system in their day-to-day life, such as the programs to teach the Islamic precepts in mosques during weekends.

Another important component of the public life in Molenbeek are the cafés and tea houses that mark the corner of virtually every street. Indicative of traditional relations between men and women, these tea houses are frequented only by men. Almost without exception, these are cafés that do not sell alcohol, but where Moroccan mint tea and coffee are preferred.

It is not that women are not allowed in these establishments; however, culturally it is perceived as 'not done' for women to frequent cafés such as these. Visiting these cafés with a female team of enumerators -which consisted of three women - was, therefore, no problem, although there would be occasional comments about this unusual practise. Similarly, while these establishments would have female bathrooms it was clear that they were not often used, and the doors would even be locked only to be opened upon request.

The manifestation of Islamic norms in the Muslim community of the two surveyed districts reaches a zenith during the holy month of Ramadan. The usually crowded cafés and restaurants remain closed, like many shops, with more people frequenting the mosques. Within this community, there is a clear determination in observing the fasting and conforming to the wider community's practices. Also, whilst there is no effort to impose these Islamic practices on non-Muslims, breaking the norms will be systematically frown upon. For example, many non-Muslims reported that they do not feel comfortable smoking in the street during Ramadan.

Similarly, later in the year, Muslims celebrate the feast of El Eid al-Adha, which happens against the background of a festive atmosphere. There are several religious practices that are commonly observed for this occasion, such as the requirement to sacrifice sheep and share it with the poor. Many of the Muslim respondents, however, reported unease on the restriction of slaughtering sheep outside the slaughter house[66]. For that reason, a considerable part of the North African Muslim community preferred to spend El-Eid al-Adha in the land of their ancestors to evade these limitations.

A final observation can be made about the relationship between Muslims and people of other convictions. By most Muslims, Christians are held in high esteem: for example, it is a common scene to see a Muslim woman in her traditional Islamic dress embracing her Christian neighbour on the Thursday market. One anecdote to demonstrate that amity is the story of the Christian lady running short on cash while buying bread: her request was denied in all shops, except for an old Muslim man who refused to take money and asked her to pay later. She described this kindness as an essential element of the Muslims in Molenbeek.

This is very different for atheists, in particular, the few atheists interviewed of the North African heritage. Atheism is little understood by the Muslim community, and as can be seen by the importance attached by parents to a religious upbringing, it is considered natural – even without question – that their children will become Muslim. Those individuals of Moroccan heritage that gave up their religion and publicly spoke out about their apostasy reported receiving very hostile treatment from the community, as well as being ostracised.

Taken together, it is evident that the Muslims in Molenbeek place a premium on Islam and Islamic values, both in the religious realm and in the civic realm. This is not to say that they are Islamists in the sense that they actively pursue an Islamic political project, seek to impose their law on others, or convert

other groups; however, there are various norms and social conventions, derived from Islam, that shape public life in the two sur veyed Molenbeek districts.

d. Perceived discrimination

The survey asked the respondents about their experiences inside, as well as outside of Molenbeek. It is important to emphasise that these findings are about perceived discrimination, which is very hard to objectively measure, and are therefore by necessity grounded in the subjective perceptions of the respondents. Indeed, it is possible to argue that with discrimination, whether it is actually true or not, is often less relevant than whether respondents believe it to be taking place. The results are presented in Figure 9.

The overwhelming majority of respondents reported not to have been discriminated inside Molenbeek in the last twelve months; however, 16% of those from Belgian heritage reported to have been discriminated against 'often' or 'very often', while another 15% reports to have been discriminated against 'sometimes'. One man of Belgian heritage captured the feeling among many Belgians who do not feel not at home in their own neighbourhood any more:

'The Moroccans feel discriminated, but at the same time, they discriminate those who are not Arabs. Previously, it was us that needed to integrate the Arabs, but today we are struggling to be accepted. I am not a racist: I have never had problems with newcomers, and I like to be invited for dinner. But these days, it is us that need to adapt our life, as everything is becoming halal. I have the impression to be a nuisance, just because I am white. They have already shouted 'dirty Flemish' at me – even though I'm not Flemish. But I can't begin to imagine what would happen if you'd say 'dirty Arab': you'd get beaten up pretty bad'.

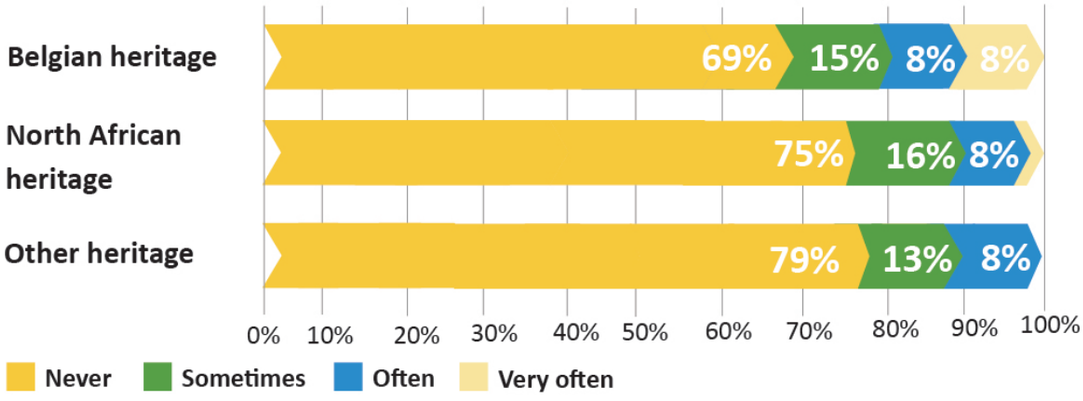
Concerning the group of North African heritage, only 1% reports that they 'very often' have perceived discrimination inside Molenbeek, while 8% claims to have been discriminated 'often'. When asked to explain further how this discrimination would occur, frequent reference was made to comments made by their neighbours in Molenbeek (28%), the local administration or police (22%), and to the search for a job (17%). One Moroccan man, for example, claimed that *'to change an ID card at the commune takes longer for the Moroccans than for the others, such as Belgians or Albanians'.*

As one Belgian man of Moroccan heritage, who has lived in Molenbeek most of his life, shared on his experience with discrimination in Molenbeek:

'I have always experienced this in Molenbeek. When I was younger, there were adverts in cafés saying 'Forbidden for North Afrikaners'; at school teachers told me 'Allez le terroriste'. And now – after the events of 22 March – it's worse than before'.

For many of the foreign heritage communities, the problems have become worse since the Brussels bombings of March 2016; but the real problem with discrimination, according to them, lies outside, not inside Molenbeek.

Figure 9. Perceived discrimination inside Molenbeek (n=127)



27% of the group of North African heritage reports having experienced discrimination 'often' or 'very often' outside of Molenbeek, with a very substantial group experiencing discrimination sometimes (32%). For those of other heritage – which includes a substantial group of people with sub-Saharan African heritage – 30% of the interviewees reported having experienced discrimination 'very often' or 'often' in the past year. For the 'Belgo-Belges' the rates drop considerably in comparison to the discrimination they have experienced inside Molenbeek.

In response to a follow-up question to describe the experienced discrimination outside of Molenbeek, 45% of the respondents says that it relates to their name, origin, or religion, and another 10% says that it simply has to do with coming from Molenbeek.

A substantial group reports that they feel that:

'If you have an Arab name and Molenbeek as the address listed on your CV, you are automatically disqualified from the job market'.

As reported above, women that wear a headscarf or veil report to experience additional discrimination and as one Moroccan woman said, there are great *'difficulties finding a job when wearing the veil. More than once they've asked me to remove it'.* Geographically, several respondents recalled their experience in Brussels to be more positive than in Flanders. As one respondent remarked:

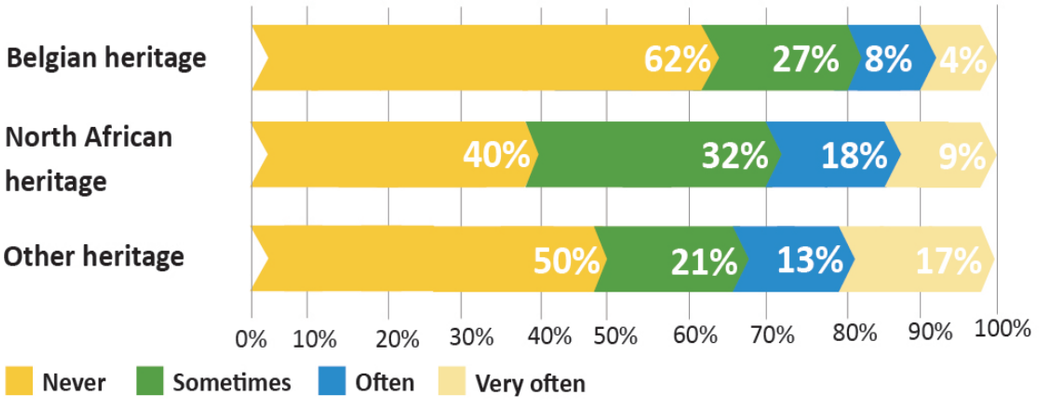
'In Brussels, people remind you that you wear a headscarf, and there is discrimination at work. In Flanders, however, there used to be open cultural discrimination. They would tell you, straight up, 'go back to your country'. I grew up in Bruges – where am I supposed to go?'

Youngsters of the North African community mostly ascribe discrimination to the way they perceive the way they are treated by the police. An example of this was already provided above. For others, discrimination happens at schools, not only between students, but as a high school student puts it:

'We have to do much more effort to get what other students would get. For me, I would do my homework with my 'Belgo-Belges' friends, and they would get higher grades than I do, even if they did the same'.

A final topic raised is the '*suspicious', 'strange',* or *'funny'* looks that many of North Africans report receiving, for example when wearing the Islamic dress such as the jellaba or the veil, or when entering a mosque. Especially after the attacks, those with an Arab appearance say they feel that others see them as *'radicals',* and even as '*dangerous'* or a *'terrorist'.*

Figure 10. Perceived discrimination outside Molenbeek (n=127)



2. Social life

This section explores how the Molenbeekois engage with friends in the community, as well as the possibility to participate in associative and political life, thus providing an indication of the social capital available to the community.

Table 7. OLR model for friends of different ethnicity, class & religion (1=no, 2=yes)

	Ethnicity		Class		Religion	
	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.
Gender (2=man)	.24	.23	-.09	.23	.11	.23
Education	.33 ***	.09	-.06	.09	.30 ***	.09
Unemployed	.34	.23	.02	.22	.31	.23
Resident (2=outside)	.49	.28	-.08	.28	-.20	.28
N	361		361		359	
Pseudo R2	.0328		.0013		.0231	
*=p<.05, **=p<.01, ***=p<.001						

a. Friends outside Molenbeek

A test for the effects of gender, education, unemployment, and residency in Molenbeek (see Table 7) reveals that it is only education that significantly impacts the number of close friends. For example, this study finds that education increases (Exp = .33) the likelihood that someone has friends from a different ethnicity, as well as from a different religion (.30).

No statistically significant effects are found for the other variables. In short, this means that an increase in taking part in the education system augments the likelihood of having friends of different ethnicities and different religions. However, there are no statistically significant differences in the likelihood of having friends between different genders, as well as between the employed and unemployed, or between those living in Molenbeek and those who are not.

Additionally, a measure can be designed to analyse, for each respondent, the proportion of close friends living outside of Molenbeek as follows: 100% means that all the respondents close friends live outside of Molenbeek, and 0% means that all of a respondent's close friends live inside of Molenbeek. Comparing the test means (the average) of the group of Belgian heritage, North African heritage, and other heritage, there is a significant difference between those of North African heritage and the other two groups (see Table 8).[67] The respondents of North African heritage reported that just over half of their friends lived outside of Molenbeek, while those of Belgian heritage and those of other origins report rated close to 80%.

Within the North African community however, a difference could be discerned in the perception of having friends outside Molenbeek. For youngsters, they agreed that North African youngsters socialise among themselves, feel more at ease being inside Molenbeek, and with friends from Molenbeek. For middle-aged female participants, they disagreed, citing stories of having friends from outside Molenbeek. In most cases, they cited they had formed this friendship with acquaintances they made at the *'Thursday market'* or with other mothers they meet when accompanying their children to schools.

Further to these results, there was a high number of Moroccan respondents who claimed they *'had no close friends apart from their family'*. This lack of strong cross-cutting ties can be considered as an important indicator of isolation which is identified as an important social component of those who underwent the process of violent radicalisation. Of course, this is not to say that the lack of cross-cutting ties is a precursor the radicalisation, but it may point to the vulnerability of some within the community.

Exploring further the relationship between friends, Table 9 shows the results for three contingency tables that examine whether or not the respondents had friends belonging to a different ethnicity, socio-economic class,

and religion. While none of the associations crosses the threshold to become statistically significant, the trend that can be witnessed is that those of North African heritage appear to be less likely to have friends that belong to a different ethnicity and a different religion. This indicates that the group of North African heritage possesses less bridging ties than the other two communities in Molenbeek in particular, in relation to cross-cutting ties with people from other ethnicities and religions[68]. It should be noted that this tendency might be explained by the fact that the population of persons of North African heritage is significantly larger than that of the groups of Belgian and Other heritage. As such, the need for cross-cutting ties may be less among the group of North African heritage that for the other two.

In the unstructured interviews, the views of the female participants are somewhat different. They referred to schools as the place where having friends from other ethnicities and religions could take place. They however highlighted that in Flemish schools having friends from other communities is for the North African heritage students, whereas in the French schools, most students come from the same community.

b. Family ties

Even though there are many of North African heritage who report family to be the most important aspect of life, there are several problems when it comes to family life within the two surveyed Molenbeek districts. Most importantly, there is a divide between parents and children. To many respondents, this is the result of the fact that parents have not enjoyed an education themselves. A majority of respondents (54%), however, thinks the basis of the divide between parents and their children, is a profound cultural and generational gap between those that came to Europe as immigrants, and those that grew up here. A minority blames the lack of parental supervision (20%) and external bad influences (13%). As one respondent told us:

'Some parents try to impose the rules that were imposed on them when they were young, but they come from remote regions in Morocco, and they didn't go to school there. So they are ignorant, and don't want to integrate into modern society'.

Table 8. Comparison of friends living outside Molenbeek

	Belgian heritage	North African heritage	Other heritage
Mean	79.6%	57.4%	81.6%

Table 9. Friend of different ethnicity, class and religion

	Belgian heritage	North African heritage	Other heritage	Total	X2	p-value
Different ethnicity	53%	46%	61%	50%	5.902	0.052
Different class	32%	38%	45%	38%	2.696	0.26
Different religion	56%	43%	49%	47%	8.525	0.074

One female participant, from the North African community, recounted a personal story:

'When I was at school, I was the only student from an immigrant background. Now it is different; the majority is from immigrant background'.

This amounts to difficulty parents experience to help, understand, and talk to their children, who often grapple with profoundly different problems than their parents faced during their own youth.

As this was a case study, we have not analysed whether the perceived divide between parents and their children - which can be particularly prevalent in any community during teenage years – is different to that in other locations.

C. Participation in associations

The Molenbeekois of Belgian heritage are statistically more likely to engage in associations and professional groups, as shows Figure 11 below.[69] Whereas 59% of the group of Belgian heritage takes part in associations, only 36% of those with other origins, and 34% of those of North African heritage do so.

Furthermore, the associations that those of Belgian heritage are part of, more likely to often (72%) engage with other organisations outside of Molenbeek, for example in the form of sports competitions, but also institutional exchanges or professional conferences. For those organisations that the respondents of North African heritage engage in, only 47% engages often with associations based outside of Molenbeek.[70] Sports organisations (43%) are the most prominent form of associative engagement in the Molenbeek community, followed by cultural and artistic organisations (18%).

Testing for the effects of general demographic markers of associative membership (see Table 10), the study finds a positive relationship with education (.28), and a negative relationship with unemployment (-.75). This signifies, in line with earlier findings, that as education increases, the likelihood of membership in associations increases. Equally, the likelihood of participation in associative life decreases when someone is unemployed.

The survey did not find a difference between men and women in group membership. It cannot be empirically proven that women, of both North African and Belgian heritage, are more inclined to participate in associations or events than other groups. However, based on discussions with social workers active in residents' initiatives and associations, it was found that the likelihood of women to be engaged in the associative life is higher than for men. As one social worker of the Belgian heritage community explained:

'Because women are tasked with their children education. Sometimes they engage in association so that their children can benefit from it. Sometimes, while they are there with their children, they learn of new courses or activities, and they sign up'.

The same social worker added another dimension to the female group dynamics:

'In our French classes, we leveraged our connection with a group of women to attract more participants to the classes.

Figure 11. Associative life (n=404)

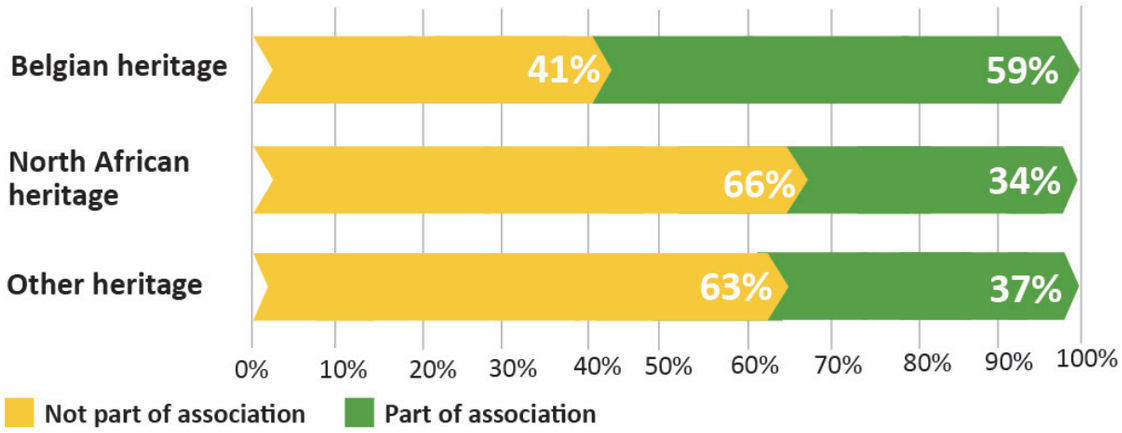


Table 10. OLR model for association membership

	Group membership	
	Exp (β)	S.E.
Gender (2=man)	-.20	.23
Education	.28 **	.09
Unemployed	-.75 **	.23
Resident (2=not)	.16	.27
N	395	
Log Likelihood	-256.55	
Pseudo R2	.0535	
*=p<.05, **=p<.01, ***=p<.001		

They would go door-to-door to encourage women they knew to come to the French classes'.

In a similar manner, when asked about their close friends, many of North African heritage responded that they did not engage in associations because they considered their family as their most important obligation. One familiar response to the question on why there is a lack of youngsters' participation in activities (Figure 12), is that youngsters are depicted as either 'indifferent' (28%) or that the proposed activities 'don't match their interests' (18%).

As summed up by one participant:

'Activities and events in Molenbeek are organised by people from elsewhere, for people from elsewhere. They reject youth from the neighbourhood and don't let them feel welcome'.

Clearly, young people from the two surveyed districts often do not feel welcome when attending activities, either because these do not match their interests, or because their organisers are out-of-touch with the community.

Many respondents – young people of North African heritage – expressed the desire to engage in debates on controversial topics such as *'religion in society','Western foreign policy in the Middle East'* or *'radicalisation'.* But as one respondent said, *'authorities are often hesitant to engage in these questions, and therefore the youngsters find their answers online'.*

This is also a phenomenon of the absence of credible role models in the community who can tease out the topics many young Molenbeekois are interested in, and who can motivate the young audience to participate.

Figure 12. Reasons for lack of participation

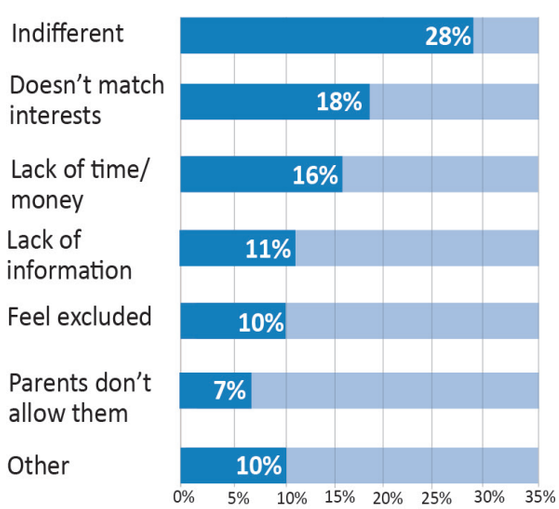


Table 11. Political participation

	Belgian heritage	North African heritage	Other heritage	X2	p-value	N
Demonstrated	39%	24%	27%	5.553	0.062	390
Called police	37%	16%	16%	16.95	<.001	390
Signed petition	52%	31%	28%	12.65	0.002	389
Contacted poilitician	30%	19%	15%	6.124	0.047	390
Donated to charity	66%	48%	43%	9.089	0.011	389

d. Political participation

These findings on group participation and associative life point to a strong form of 'bonding' social capital within the community of North African heritage, whereas Molenbeekois of Belgian heritage possess more 'overlapping' social capital that connects them to other communities in Brussels and beyond. As can be seen from Table 11, there is also a considerably smaller 'linking' social capital available – the connections to those in power.

To understand these linkages, the EIP measured five components of political, as well as civic participation. In both, respondents representing those of Belgian heritage were more active in the civic and political sphere than the ones of non-Belgian heritage (only for 'participation in a demonstration' there was no significant relation with the origin). For example, 37% of those of Belgian heritage called the police in the past year, while only 16% of those of North African heritage and those of other heritage did. Also, those of Belgian heritage were, for example, twice as much in contact with politicians than those with a North African heritage.

The low level of political participation of North African heritage can – at least in part – be explained by the low level of confidence in politicians. As can be seen in Figure 13, over half (53%) of this group is 'very unconfident', and another 18% is 'unconfident' in politicians, as opposed to respectively (35%) and (26%) for the group of Belgian heritage. Similarly, the group from other heritage reports very low rates of confidence in politicians, on par with the group of North African heritage.

Figure 13. Trust in politicians

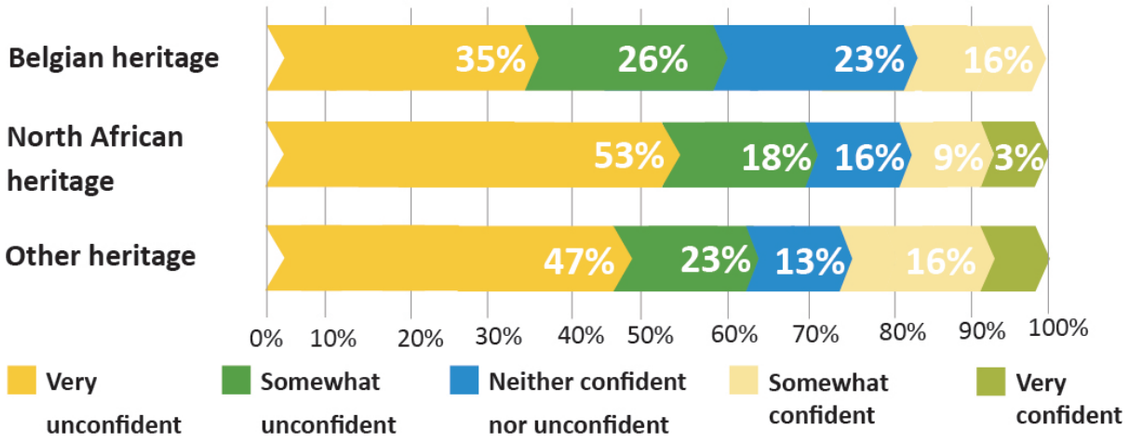


Table 12 shows the results as analysed by different demographic groups. There are several interesting points to make. Increases in education are positively connected with four out of the five variables: calling the police, signing petitions, contacting politicians, and donating to charity.

In terms of gender, donating to charity is also more likely done by men than by women; there is a strong association (1.06). It may be linked to the fact that in many families of North African heritage, men are more likely to have control over finances than women. Some respondents of North African heritage also remarked that they have stopped giving to charity since Molenbeek has come under intense scrutiny. They cited fear that in the current climate a donation to a cause they care about – Syria or Palestine – could easily be identified by security services as supporting extremist organisations.

Unemployment has strong significant negative effects on participation in demonstrations (-.67), signing of petitions (-.50), and contact with politicians (-.60), which points to a decrease in civic participation for those that are not on the labour market. Charity donations also decrease with unemployment (-.47), which can likely be explained by the fact that unemployed have less financial means to donate.

Similar to the measurement of bridging ties, there are strong indications that higher education promotes increased linking ties and political participation. Education improves the likelihood for Molenbeekois to have contact with the police (.34), to sign petitions (.38), to contact a politician (.22), and to donate to a charity (.25). In short, the participation in civic affairs and the linking to those in power are significantly better for those that have received higher education and those that are in employment.

Taken together, the previous analysis painted a pattern of a low social capital of the North African community. This low social capital is due to weak bridging and linking ties (low level of participation in politics and association) and strong bonding ties (staying within the family and having friends only from the same community).

In the framework of validation events that took place in November and December 2016, these trends were put to the test and presented to random residents of the two surveyed districts as well as to social workers.[71]

Table 12. OLR model for political participation in the past year

	Demonstrated		Called police		Signed petition		Contacted politician		Charity donation	
	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.	Exp (β)	S.E.
Gender (2=man)	-.03	.25	-.46	.27	-.42	.23	-.00	.27	-1.06 ***	.23
Education	.17	.09	.34 **	.11	.38 ***	.09	.22 *	.10	-.25 **	.09
Unemployed	-.67 **	.25	.10	.28	.50 *	.23	.60 *	.28	.47 *	.23
Resident (2=not)	-.31	.31	-.49	.37	-.19	.29	.00	.32	.05	.27
N	382		382		381		382		381	
Pseudo R2	.0308		.0419		.0585		.0314		.0641	
*=p<.05, **=p<.01, ***=p<.001										

Many of the participants disagreed with these trends. Those who agreed, however, came up with the same explanation as the one used when asked about the low participation levels in political life and associations that is the socio-economic situation.

As one participant captured it in words:

'People here are in survival mode. Their energy goes to providing for their families if they have a job or trying to find one in most cases. If you want them to be engaged in politics and association, provide them with jobs'.

Others, while agreeing, cautioned the fact that low participation in politics and low level of trust in politicians is a universal sentiment and not only confined to Molenbeek. One participant voiced words of scepticism in politics which can be said of any political entity:

'Politicians tell lies, they make promises they know they cannot keep. After elections, we never see them again. Their names change, but they are all the same'.

Furthermore, those who disagreed with the results cautioned the fact that political participation and participation in association patterns differ even within the same population group. As a social worker of Belgian heritage put it:

'It depends on the 'generation', and the 'cultural milieu' one comes from. For the older generations, they come from countries where there are no political outlets, so they are just no accustomed to participating in politics. The other factor is the milieu which refers to the family you belong to. Some families are just more active and engage more than others'.

e. Pro-activeness versus the ability to have an impact

Finally, making an impact seems hard to the Molenbeekois of the two surveyed districts. As one respondent remarked:

'I wouldn't be able to do that all on my own. It's difficult to find the same opinions – I'm not around the youth here often, we don't have the same mentality'.

There is little confidence in the impact they can have on improving the quality of life in Molenbeek: 44% of the respondents think they have no impact on everyday life, and another 44% thinks their impact is only small, with no significant differerence between the different groups.

C. The process of violent radicalisation in Molenbeek

The EIP also strived to assess the perceptions of the Molenbeekois on violent radicalisation; their analysis of why it could take place in their community; the responses to frequent departures to Syria; how the Molenbeekois view extremism and its intensity in the neighbourhood; and the consequences the Molenbeekois have experienced as results of the intense media coverage after the attacks.

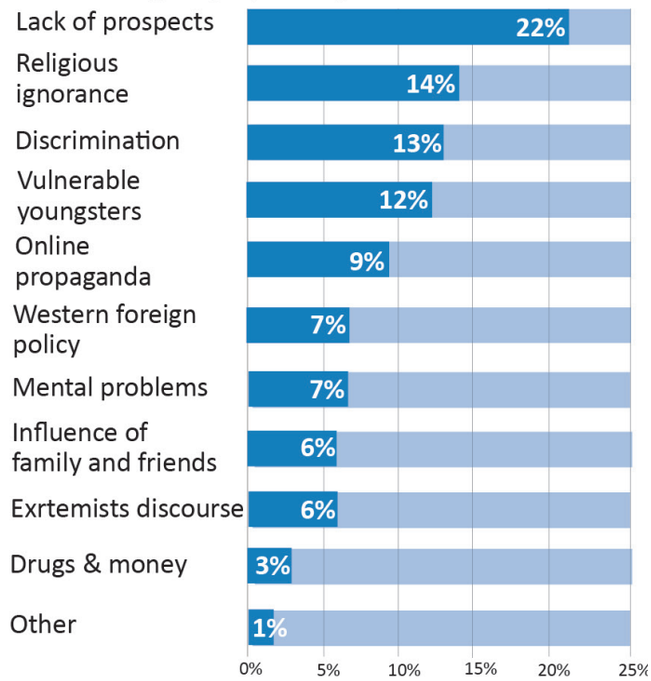
1. Why violent extremism developed in Molenbeek

Before reviewing the results of the analysis, it is worth highlighting that the term 'extremism' in the collective mind of the Molenbeekois is interchangeable with the term 'violent radicalisation'. As explained earlier, the term violent radicalisation refers to the socialisation process that leads people to espouse violence in order to reach their goals. This term, therefore, is very specific and its usage confined to experts. For the majority of the interviewees, it is very difficult to understand what violent radicalisation means. According to them, radicals are not necessarily violent -which is true[72] -, but extremists are radicals who condone violence. For that reason, the questionnaire asked about 'extremism' to gain an in-depth understanding of extremism as the ultimate destination of the violent radicalisation process. Also, using the term extremism allowed the interviewees to touch upon the right-wing extremism.

As the study focused on exploring the social patterns in which the process of violent radicalisation could take place, the EIP wanted to hear from the Molenbeekois their perceived reasons of some individuals joining extreme movements, their conception of religious extremism, as well as how they depict the intensity of extremism in their community.

On the reasons given to join extreme groups, many participants had great troubles specifically identifying only one or two factors.

Figure 14. Reasons for joining extreme religious groups (n=377)



For many, all reasons (Figures 14 & 15) were important, because the act of joining an extreme group was perceived to be highly context specific. However, concerning extreme religious groups, the most mentioned reasons were the lack of prospects (22%), religious ignorance (14%), discrimination (13%), and the vulnerability of youngsters (12%). A possible connection can be made between the lack of prospects and discrimination: both can give an individual the feeling that there is no place for him/her in society. As one participant observed:

'Young people have nothing to do. There is no work for them, and they drop out of school, and young people are discriminated by society. Activities are usually full – even those that help with homework – so they don't take part. There is nobody to guide them, so they can get manipulated very easily by street recruiters.'

When asked to identiy why individuals would join extreme right movements, interviewees would most frequently mention 'fear of the unknown' (21%) and 'anti-Muslim discourse' (18%), and would also state as of comparable importance 'frustration with society' (17%) and 'the lack of prospects' (19%). Commenting on extreme right movements, one mother observed:

' I fear for my kids. What would happen if those people arrived in power? We fear exclusion and conflict between communities in the same country. Extreme right propositions are more and more socially acceptable and their supporters disinhibited'.

To conclude, and according to the respondents, the lack of prospects is mentioned as a reason for joining both kinds of extremist groups, and frustration or discrimination plays a role in both. As for the ideological reasoning, whereas many see anti-Muslim discourse as an important motivator for extreme right movements, the notion that religion is a driver behind religious extremism is broadly dismissed: instead, it is *'religious ignorance'* that leads individuals to fall prey to religious extremist movements as they are purportedly not equipped to question the religious discourse presented by recruiters and violent extremist messaging.

2. Why violent radicalisation happened in Molenbeek

Responding to the open question on why violent radicalisation could happen in Molenbeek (see Figure 16), one respondent adds that *'nobody cared about Molenbeek – therefore it is a good place for radicalisation to develop'.* The vulnerability of youngsters was created by the youth's *'lacks a future'* (33%) as many participants phrase it.

At the same time, according to them, the vulnerability stems from the fact that many of the youngsters do not possess the tools to defend themselves against re-

Figure 15. Reasons for right wing extremism (n=367)

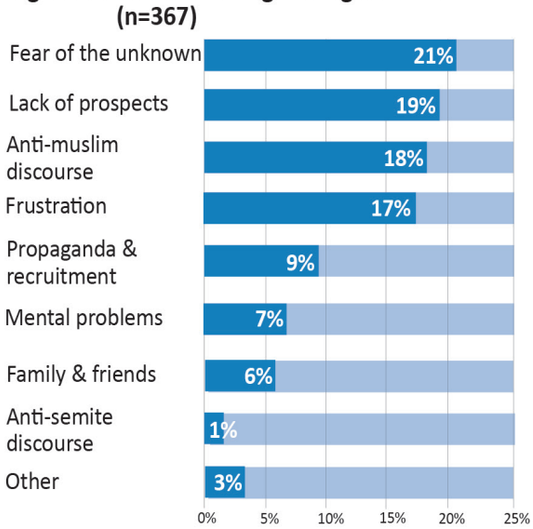
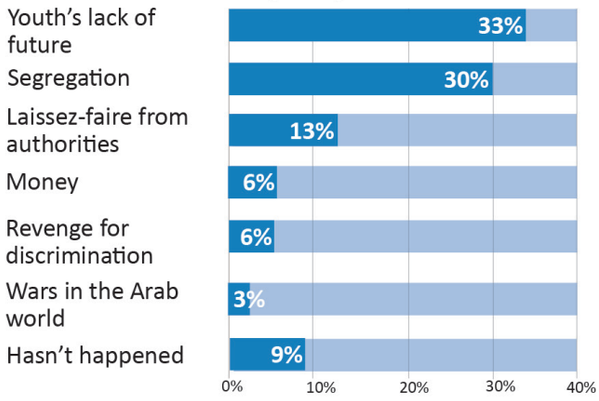


Figure 16. Why radicalisation happened in Molenbeek (n=63)



ruiters, who approach them with religious arguments they are not equipped to refute.

Referring specifically to Molenbeek, respondents identify the '*segregation*' (30%) as a strong factor for why radicalisation could develop. There is a '*high quantity of Muslims*' who '*seek to maintain their culture of origin, which is linked to religion*'. Another respondent observes that:

'It's been going on for years; at a certain point, 'pseudo mosques' saw the day with the intent to preach radicalism'.

Two more interesting observations can be made from Figure 16. First, it is worth noting that 13% of the respondents consider the 'laissez-faire' attitude of the authorities as the main reason for the occurrence of violent radicalisation. Authorities are seen as ineffective in penetrating the community, which corresponds to earlier results presented on the relationship between the community and the police and politicians.

Second, 9% of the respondents – primarily of North African heritage – are convinced that violent radicalisation, as presented by the media, has not actually taken place. These perceptions of media exaggeration, and other conspiracy theories are plenty in Molenbeek's cafés and tea houses, where men convene to talk politics and world affairs.

When asked how it was possible that so many parents did not notice the changes their children underwent during their radicalisation process, close to half (47%) of the respondents pointed towards the *'lack of communication'* between parents and children, with parents *'overlooking their children'.*

One respondent argued:

'I am the mother of two teenage boys, so I know very well that for a child to leave for Syria, there must be a really big disconnect between the child and its family. To go as far as deciding to go to Syria means that the child feels really detached from its family'.

Another respondent observed:

'It's like the drugs – it's hidden. Children know they are doing something wrong and want to protect their parents. This was the case for Abdeslam, for example. It's like when teenagers mess up; they don't want to tell their parents'.

Often *'violent radicalisation happens too fast for parents to notice it'* as *'children effectively hide it from their parents'.* The role of the internet - social media in particular - is often identified as making it easier for children to hide their activities from their parents. As one woman summarised:

'It is increasingly difficult to assume the task of parents, especially with social media and smartphones. Parents don't know how to guide their children, and they don't see what their children do. It is easier for the children to speak with other people across the world'.

Social media, symptomatic of the divide between parents and children, makes it much harder for parents to shield their children of the influence of violent radicals; but also, by all, pervasive misleading information (including propaganda) makes it harder for children to steer clear of the extreme discourse.

3. Departing for Syria

It is not very hard to find someone in Quartier Maritime and Centre Historique who knows someone who left for Syria. Many Molenbeekois interviewed during the fieldwork – often individuals from Moroccan heritage – stated they know multiple people that left. To illustrate this, one of the interviews, conducted in a café in the Centre Historique, was frequently interrupted because the intervie-wee kept talking with a cousin of Salah Abdeslam.

However, the fact that many in the community know someone radicalised does not mean they support this behaviour. Figure 17 displays a coding of the most common responses given to the open question on people's reaction to someone leaving for Syria. While only one respondent declared to be '*proud for them doing the real jihad*', the overwhelming majority expressed a deep sadness (41%), anger or shock (29%). It was clear that there was extra emotional significance for them when they would personally know someone who had departed for Syria or had become involved in the attacks in Brussels or in Paris.

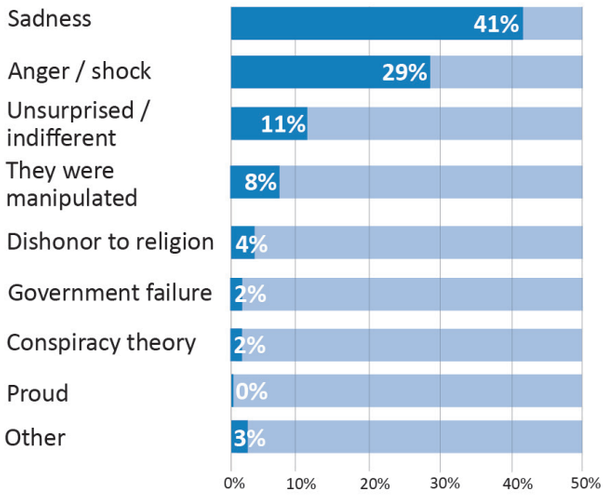
One interviewee expressed the overall sentiment stating that:

'At the beginning, I didn't believe it. It shocked me when I learned that they were people I knew – I didn't know they were so stupid!'

Another respondent said that while she personally knew someone that left for Syria and felt very bad for his family that had stayed behind in Molenbeek, she, at the same time, *'felt relieved that [her] grandchildren didn't leave'*. Many parents expressed great concern for their children, whom they fear at risk of violent radicalisation.

A second important aspect of the departures to Syria was the comment that 'it was no surprise' (11%) or that 'they were manipulated' (8%). It is worth quoting the following respondent to explain this line of thinking:

Figure 17. Reaction to departure for Syria (n=310)



'It didn't even surprise me. These are people that are frustrated; they don't have a job and follow the wrong people. Especially those without a degree, those that are in the streets, are easily influenced. Furthermore, there is a real problem inside the Muslim community: if we question anything about Islam, we're seen as an unbeliever, and therefore people take the info as it comes. They don't have the instinct of verifying it. Especially people that don't have studies, miss the critical spirit, whereas those that have studies will question and look for the truth – which isn't bad'.

There are two interesting trends described here. First, education is seen as essential to being able to understand and analyse the discourse that is put forward by violent radical recruiters. Second, and as seen above, Muslims consider their religion to be very important in their life; but in the words of some of them, this is often more about *'proving their identity'* than about a genuine belief. As a result, there is a community with strong social norms about religion, but with significantly less religious knowledge, thus making some youngsters susceptible to manipulation. Indeed, one respondent claimed that *'parents are happy when they see their children go to the mosque and become more religious, but they do not pay enough attention to realise that underneath the surface violent radicalisation is happening'.*

4. Intensity of extremism

Respondents were asked about the meaning of religious extremism in Molenbeek. The overwhelming majority described *'extremism (as) the opposite of religion'*, stating that these are '*people who misinterpret the Qu'ran and who look at people with different religions or with no religion with hostility'.* The role of critical thinking is once again emphasised:

'A person who doesn't understand anything: none of the religions are extreme. It is someone that doesn't find solutions to their problems, so instead, it uses religion as an excuse'.

Many Muslims expressed their concerns over the rise of religious extremist actors for two broad reasons. First, because it can lead up to violence, and as one respondent puts it, *'extremist Muslims see moderates and non-Muslims as inferior'*. Second, because there is the risk of escalation which, while reli-

gious extremism rises, far right movements will continue to rise as well. One respondent voiced her concerns as follows:

'What worries me is that I'm a Muslim, and those who are religious extremists are not Muslims, but they have Muslim names and family; therefore, Muslims are stigmatised.'

Again here, *'religious extremists are the opposite of religion'* – Islam is broadly understood as a religion of peace – but there is a real fear of personal repercussions. This corresponds with earlier findings of the consequences of negative media portrayal and the increase in perceived discrimination after the Brussels bombings.

Respondents were also asked about the intensity of religious extremist discourse in Molenbeek. While disturbed by right-wing extremism and broadly dismissive of religious extremism, the Molenbeekois of the two surveyed districts do perceive religious extremism to be occurring in Molenbeek, as shown in Figure 18.[73] Of the total sample, 5% perceives religious extremism to be 'very strongly' present in Molenbeek, and 14% believes it to be 'strongly' present.

Respondents of Belgian heritage are more concerned of the intensity of extremism than other communities. With 10% experiencing a 'very strong' presence, and 24% experiencing a 'strong' presence. Of those with North African heritage, 4% experiences religious extremism as 'very strongly' present, while 10 percent perceives a 'strong' intensity.

D. Suggested solutions

The final section of the survey focused on solutions envisaged by the Molenbeekois themselves within four areas: first, how to improve social cohesion (or "vivre ensemble") of the different communities; second, how to increase security in the community; third, how to prevent radicalisation; and fourth, how to handle the problem of foreign fighters. All of these items are based on the coded analysis of open questions asked during the fieldwork.

1. Social cohesion ("vivre ensemble")

When asked how to improve the quality of life to improve the communities' cohesion, 39% of the respondents identified measures to improve dialogue and diversity as the most important solutions (see Figure 19). This is followed by cultural and sports activities (19%) and religious and civic education (12%).

The need to improve dialogue and acceptance of diversity directly stems from the difficulties different population groups have had in understanding each other and in broaching difficult topics such as discrimination, radicalisation, and religion. Enhancing dialogue was deemed especially important since the terrorist attacks in March 2016. One respondent illustrates this:

'Everybody needs to talk to their neighbours, facilitate contacts through 'neighbours' reunions' and 'get-togethers', and simply get to know each other. We should also develop youth houses'.

Figure 18. Intensity of religious extremism in Molenbeek (n=168)

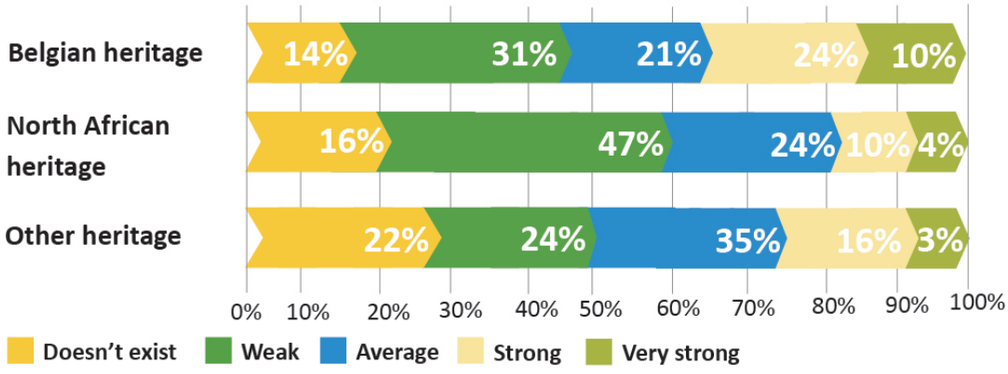
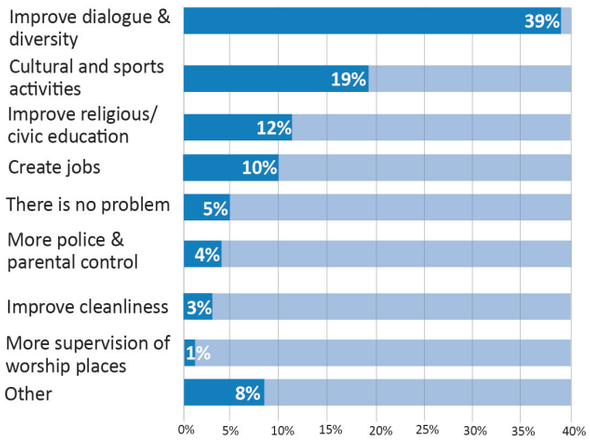


Figure 19. How to improve 'vivre ensemble' in Molenbeek (n=325)



According to the respondents, what is important is *'not to shy away from the difficult topics'* – especially if one wants to reach the young, disenfranchised people that currently do not express the intention to participate in any of the events. The 'Maison des Cultures et de la Cohésion Sociale'[74] is generally seen as relatively successful, with the key being *'getting people to communicate'* across the boundaries of their communities.

Another method proposed to increase interaction and mutual understanding is by improving sports and cultural activities. This directly links to the need for providing youngsters with a means to direct their energy; sport activities have previously had good success in giving hope and purpose to those that felt lost[75].

Others point to the positive influence of social media messaging, as a way to counteract the negative image that existed of Molenbeek. They encouraged everyone to 'speak positively' about Molenbeek, and to spread images that called out stigmatisation and discrimination.

Education, finally, has been mentioned before as an important topic for the Molenbeekois, and mentioned here again as an important way to improve relationships across communities. As seen above, education is positively associated with political and civic engagement, as well as with the building of cross-cutting ties with individuals from different ethnicities and different religions. It is important that for many Muslims – and when referring to education - mention is made of both civic and religious education[76]. Many children of North African heritage already have access to weekend schools at the mosque where they are taught Islamic precepts. Yet, many parents would like to see more importance given to religion in civic education which, according to them, is a topic that is currently not addressed by many teachers, as it is considered a private matter. As for the education system, most respondents comment that the overall quality of the education could be improved, including by creating school classes with more students from mixed backgrounds (rather than classes dominated by children from North African heritage) and avoiding a high turnover of teachers.

2. Increasing security

Figure 20 shows the results for the coded ans-wers to the question on how to improve security in Quartier Maritime and Centre Historique. Three lines of thinking stand out.

First, in much a similar fashion as previously observed, 15% of the respondents thinks there is no need to improve security in the community; they already feel perfectly secure.

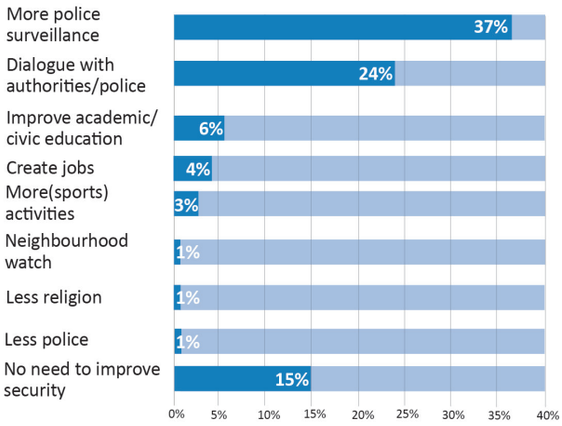
Second, most respondents (37%) advocate for stronger surveillance and a *'stricter'* police. Often, a comparison is made to Morocco, where the security services are much stricter and would address more firmly problems such as the drug crime and delinquency. Reference is also made to an increase in *'undercover policemen',* but a specific problem is pointed out here: there are too few Moroccans on the police forces. As a result, many respondents call for increased dialogue and a more inclusive police force (24%). This is commonly understood as a police force that includes more Arabic speakers and more people with an in-depth understanding of Molenbeek, as opposed to policemen from other parts of the country that get posted in Molenbeek.

Furthermore, many respondents express this as a need for police that is *'closer to the population'* or a system with policiers de proximité. One respondent explains:

'A 'pre-police' system, with advice from experts and community leaders. Citizens from different areas should be in constant contact with the police. A safety mediator would humanise security forces, and this would improve the problems between the young people and the police'.

One such way could be through the use of social media, i.e some respondents praise the security

Figure 20. How to improve security in Molenbeek (n=302)



measures on the social media, such as 'Like Molenbeek' campaigns[77], or prevention advice offered by the local authorities through social media interactions.

In short, there are various avenues for improving security identified by the Molenbeekois, mostly centred on improving relations with the police, an institution perceived as too far detached from the community to be effective.

3. Preventing violent radicalisation

To prevent violent radicalisation, the most frequent answer of the respondents (24%) is the use of religious education (see Figure 21). In other words, arm people with Islam so they cannot be harmed by Islam. As one respondent says:

'Educate the youth properly about Islam. Young people who grow up in Morocco are well equipped against radicalisation'.

Other respondents – in line with the dominant thinking about the reason why people radicalise – suggest that the youth should be given the means to 'create common goals' and a 'positive identity' for themselves. This can help to break the isolation that makes young people vulnerable to violent radicalisation. According to the Molenbeekois, the most prominent way of breaking isolation is by providing opportunities, either through the creation of jobs (14%) or the increase in cultural and sports activities (12%). One respondent explains how we need to help adolescents:

'Listen to them more. Help them with life projects. Give them more opportunities to find jobs. There should be more non-profit organisations with competent people to help young individuals. Mosques are doing a great job to help young people, but they don't have enough funds for that'.

Finally, 19% of the respondents suggested investing in the promotion of dialogue and diversity. It is emphasised that this should not just be *'dialogue on anything':* there is a real need to address the issues and topics that young people struggle to cope with:

'Invest in good social workers that speak to them about their problems, wars, immigration [...] Train the social workers so that they know how to speak to the youth. These can be external people, but definitely also from Molenbeek, so that they can speak to the people and understand the problems they face'.

The Molenbeekois, however, were adamant on emphasising that preventing violent radicalisation in the community should not be an admission that the Molenbeekois are implicated in violent radicalisation.

As one young respondent, from the North African community, explained:

'Why are we placing a piece of art in tribute to the victims of the attacks in Molenbeek? Why are we, Molenbeek, offering apologies to the families of victims? Those who carried out the attacks cannot represent Molenbeek, and they do not even represent Muslims. I

Figure 21. Preventing radicalisation (n=310)

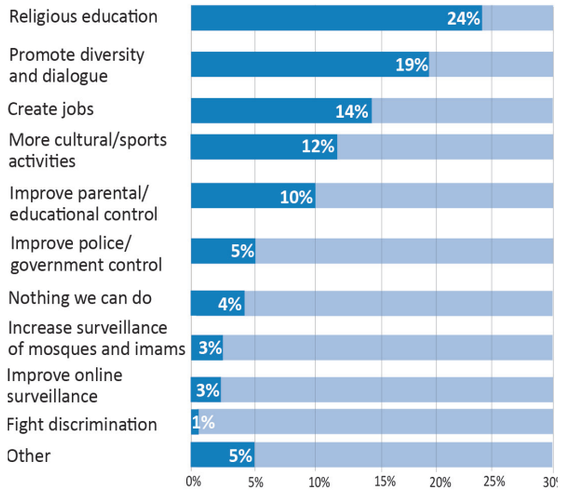
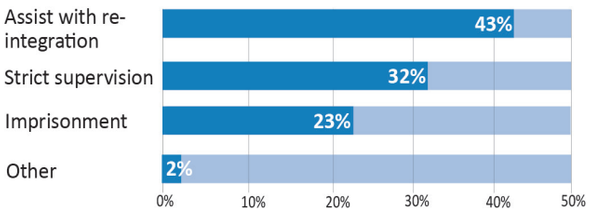


Figure 22. Returned foreign fighters



am saddened by the attacks, but it is not the Molenbeekois to blame for it'.

According to the Molenbeekois, it is necessary to avoid generalising and tarnishing the image of Molenbeek, while pursuing the goal of addressing violent radicalisation among a minor group of the Muslim community.

4. Molenbeek and the returnees

The final item in the survey focused on the preferred approach to returning foreign fighters. This is a very real issue for Molenbeek: as outlined above, only 30% of the individuals that joined extremist groups from the Brussels region have returned. Interestingly, and as can be seen from Figure 22, re-integration, coupled with psychological assistance (43%), is the most frequent answer to this open question. Imprisonment ranks last (23%), after strict supervision (32%). For some, however, incarceration remains the only solution *'as they will never change and will always remain indoctrinated'.*

Many, however, agreed that:

'Incarceration is not a solution – it creates radicalisation. The returnees should follow the professional training and should be followed by psychologists specialised in terrorism'.

That is not to say, that the majority of respondents wants to let everyone back into Belgian society, regardless of the gravity of crimes they have committed in Syria. It would be more accurate to say that they are aware of the hate that is often fuelled by imprisoning someone.

As one respondent remarked:

'Not everybody that goes to Syria is a terrorist. Supervise them well; prison doesn't serve for anything, and they come out worse than they entered'.

A cautious approach, with re-integration where possible, and strict supervision where needed, is what most of the Molenbeekois support as the way forward concerning the returnees.

5. Social workers' perspectives on Molenbeek issues

It is also important to take into account the perspective of the social workers, as they are the ones working on the ground to address these problems, and who mostly favour a whole-of-society approach toward addressing Molenbeek problems. They agreed that each actor has a role to play: the local government, the civil society and above all the community itself.

From their perspective, they are doing whatever they can to address these problems. Nevertheless, they highlighted certain hurdles to the accomplishment of their work: a need for an increase in the funds allocated to social projects; coordination between different local actors as key to the successful implementation of projects; and since education was identified as the factor that can enhance social capital, it should be given more attention regarding funds and training to teachers.

They also highlighted one practical point that violent radicalisation is a generational challenge and the success of its prevention cannot be assessed over the short-term. It is sometimes the case that funds are given with a caveat, with the continuation of funds being dependent on showing positive results. If local actors cannot show concrete results that their approach is yielding dividends, the fund, and thus the project, will be terminated. Although not mentioned by the social workers themselves, priorities changes with changes of administration. In most cases, the new government has different priorities from the preceding one. Once in power, ongoing approaches can be replaced by new initiatives.

Finally, authorities do not accord due importance to the training of social workers which they consider necessary to address the prevalent problems in their community.

PART THREE: STORIES OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION

Listening to individuals who witness the process of violent radicalisation up close was imperative. This part is dedicated to ten in-depth interviews, conducted with people from the Molenbeek community that have experienced this process. As a research method, in-depth interviewing is an established way for offering deeper insights into a specific topic – in this case, on the conditions that allowed violent radicalisation to occur in the community.[78] As close witnesses to the process of radicalisation to violent extremism, the selected interviewees have that deep knowledge, and in-depth interviewing allows the interviewer to approach such a sensitive, controversial topic. The goal is not to provide an 'objective' description of the process of radicalisation to violent extremism in Molenbeek, but rather to document the perceptions of the inhabitants and their understanding and explanations of that behaviour.

The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling: through local contacts developed during the fieldwork, inhabitants of Molenbeek that were relevant because of their knowledge of extremism were hand-picked for the in-depth information they could provide.[79] And while it is not hard to find individuals in Molenbeek that know someone affected by violent radicalisation, it is hard to find individuals that have both the knowledge and the willingness to speak about it.

All respondents interviewed have seen at least one, but often many of their close acquaintances, either leaving for Syria or getting involved in violent extremism on European soil. Interviewees include, for example: the son of a Molenbeek imam; a man that stopped his cousin from going to Syria the day before he was supposed to travel there; an adolescent that suddenly came across his former classmate in a propaganda video of ISIS.

These interviews allow for a detailed description of the process of violent radicalisation in Molenbeek. For all interviews, the responses have been anonymised in order to facilitate openness and avoid desirable social answers by the respondents. Although some people remained very reluctant to speak about this topic, others were very keen to raise awareness on a topic they considered of great importance.

The responses to these interviews were analysed and coded on the basis of the interview transcripts. This generated four broad categories in which the stories are told: first, the vulnerability and isolation that makes individuals susceptible to violent radicalisation; second, the changes that occurred during the violent radicalisation process; third, the role of recruitment; and fourth, the extent to which there was a relation between religion and violent radicalisation.

The first part of the interview presented below focused on how the process of violent radicalisation occurred, including where it took place and how long it took, and how individuals changed during this process.

A. Vulnerability and isolation

When asked to describe the people that radicalised, the respondents identify them as isolated and not able to apply critical thinking. In the words of one respondent:

'They are like empty USB-keys: you can upload anything you want onto it'.

According to the respondents, it starts with a situation of hopelessness, or the *'search for a path in life'*. A good example is provided by one Moroccan man that

recently moved to Molenbeek from Vilvoorde, another Belgian area that witnessed many departures to Syria. He is 19 years old, knows around fifteen youngsters from Molenbeek (and outside) that left for Syria, and described the hopelessness of the situation in which many individuals find themselves:

'These were youngsters without liberty, without money, and that feel intensely discriminated. They change their mindset. Often, they experience strong isolation: prison makes the hate against the system increase and isolates an individual from his/her family and society. These are the people recruiters look for: they promise them a better life, a more comfortable life with more money, and more freedom'.

Other respondent affirmed the importance of isolation and the impact it has on young individuals, making them feel '*disenfranchised*' or *'lost in life'.* One of our respondents – a Belgian man in his early twenties – explained to us about how his former classmate radicalised and, suddenly, appeared in a propaganda video of ISIS:

'He was super isolated in school. When we travelled in high school, he was all alone, rejected by everyone – even by those of Moroccan origins. But he didn't have a violent nature at all. In his case, his condition as a young, isolated teenager made him very susceptible. On top of it, he came from a culturally very poor environment. As soon as he got captivated by the radical ideology online, he was a lost cause. In his case, that happened really quickly'.

A similar message came from a Moroccan man in his late thirties, who was the neighbour of Salah Abdeslam, and also knew five individuals that had left for Syria. In his perception:

'They have lost faith in the system. So, it is very enticing once you offer them something – financial resources, weapons, a cause to live for, a cause to die for... anything, really. They would take it and leave for Syria'.

That is, because ISIS, or other extremist groups, can offer them exactly what they feel they are lacking in the society they are living in: an identity, a goal, and a promise of a better life. In the words of one respondent, *'self-confidence, power, and respect'.* This was perhaps best summarised by a Belgian respondent who saw his classmate depart for Syria. What ISIS can give them, he elaborated, is:

'The feeling of being known and valued. This is what I have seen in the video of propaganda where my former classmate appeared: in all these years, it was the only time I saw him smile. It's all these promises of a good life, a paradise, that are very tempting'.

This '*good life',* for men, also includes a very specific gender component. As one woman saw it:

'The part of the discourse that most attracts them is the promise to be 'made into an important man': obtaining revenge, money and women by fighting for Allah'.

This type of 'achievement' is something enticing to many youngsters, but wholly unachievable in the situation they find themselves in Molenbeek.

In sum and according to this analysis, with youngsters living in a state of isolation and with no faith in the system, violent radicalisation could take hold in Molenbeek. The next section, the respondents recount how that process of violent radicalisation took place, and what changes were apparent in those that fell victim to it.

B. Changes during violent radicalisation

When asked to describe the changes respondents witnessed during the process of violent radicalisation, they reported two different trajectories. In some, there is no apparent physical change to be seen, apart from the fact that there is a gradual turn inward and withdrawal from society, potentially 'contemplating their new life in Syria'. For others, the change is mostly to be found in the discourse, which becomes a discourse of hatred and rejection of the society they live in.

Describing the first trend – the gradual withdrawal from society – our 19-year-old Moroccan respondent observed:

'What happened is that they became calmer. They kept more to themselves, with groups of people that did not come from here in Molenbeek. Others. They isolated themselves among 'real' friends, and started frequenting a mosque in Vilvoorde. Eventually, they could not speak or give more explanations to their previous group of friends'.

According to several respondents, the internet plays a crucial role, as it provides the opportunities to limit the interaction with physical society and provides opportunities to find the content that the individuals, on the path toward violent radicalisation, are interested in. One respondent, a 31-year-old Belgian man from the Moroccan heritage community, who grew up in Molenbeek, saw around ten of his close acquaintances leave for Syria. He said he tried to convince them not to go, because *'he is like them, with the same education, culture, and from the same neighbourhood'.* He recounted to the importance of the internet in the process of violent radicalisation:

'I did not see any physical change. Out of these ten that left, not one frequented the mosque. They were radicalised on the internet, and there was a snowball effect, so as soon as one radicalised, he would start to convince others. There was no clear change in clothing or in them wearing a beard. I saw my cousin the day before he was supposed to leave for Syria. He called me to try and see me to say goodbye; I then tried to talk to him out of going. Two friends of him that wanted to leave with him left, and I thought his call was a cry for help. So I did just that - I talked him out of it.'

While physical changes are not always evident, they do occur in some of the individuals that left for Syria. What is more obvious, however, is that there is a change in their thinking, which becomes narrower, and dominated by hatred against the society they live in. The son of an imam, in his early twenties, described the change that he witnessed in some of the twenty people he knows that left for Syria:

'You can see the hate in their face. They develop an anti-Belgian rhetoric, and proclaim that 'we will turn Europe Muslim'. At the same time, many showed a simplification of discourse and habits: everything must be haram or halal. They start to talk about the prophecy of the 'end of times'.

This change in discourse – the second important trend identified here – was emphasised by a Moroccan man in his early twenties, who had just finished a prison sentence when we interviewed him in his home: he still wore an ankle bracelet. Ten of his friends left for Syria, and out of those, six have now been confirmed dead. Reflecting on the change they underwent when they radicalised, he expounded:

'Their discourse changed overnight and became filled with so much hatred. They were really fed up with their life here. Another notable change was the way they addressed girls: before, they would show interest and try to flirt, but after their radicalisation, they would just tell all the girls that they are on the wrong path, and how wrongly they acted and behaved'.

Similarly, an Iraqi woman who lived in Molenbeek for many years, witnessed the son of a close friend radicalise. She described the gradual change, which did manifest itself in physical changes:

'He was a normal boy. Suddenly, he started spending a lot of time in his room, on the internet, and didn't want to go out with his friends anymore. Everything in his life changed. He increasingly went to the mosque and didn't want to speak to his family anymore. He asked his sister why she would dress how she did, and why she didn't wear a hijab. His parents tried talking to him and asked why he didn't respect them anymore. Even his ea-ting habits changed, and he started eating only the necessary for survival, and as a result, he lost a lot of weight. He would tell his parents that women shouldn't dress like Europeans and he told them he rejected his parents and sister. He became very angry and aggressive: for him, everything was black'.

Gradually withdrawing from society and hardening the discourse, which are the two dominant trends mentioned by respondents, will in many cases be mutually reinforcing: as the individual withdraws, he or she will be exposed to fewer alternative opinions; similarly, as the discourse hardens, it will become harder to sustain relationships with individuals of other convictions. This trend can become more pervasive when there are recruiters specifically targeting people, as will be explored in the next section.

C. Recruitment

When discussing recruitment for religious violent extremist groups, the respondents stressed that a clear change had taken place. A couple of years back, recruiters would openly visit mosques in the neighbourhood. Several respondents recount how members of Sharia-4Belgium handed out flyers on the streets in Molenbeek. As one respondent had experienced it:

'They came in groups of four, and were young, in their early twenties, who don't work. They wore jellabas, so they were visible. Those who recruit women are young women, but they do it in the house, not in the streets'. But this was before recruitment was on the radar of the authorities. Since then, according to the respondents, any recruiters still active in Molenbeek have moved behind closed doors, to *'clandestine places'* and '*private apartments'*. One of the respondents claims that he *'knows someone on rue des quatre vents that recruits people'.* And while the recruitment for men often happens *'in the streets'*, those who focus on the recruitment of women focus on doing so *'behind closed doors'.*

Increasingly, however, the focus is also on online recruitment, which is much harder for the authorities to control. The recruiters often help their targets to avoid detection from their parents or from the authorities. One woman, from the Moroccan heritage community, spoke of how she witnessed that recruiters advised their targets to:

'Hide things from their families and install passwords on their mobile phones, so no one can access their messages. Often through Facebook [or other social media networks] recruiters start drawing them to the jihad by showing them videos from Syria and Iraq. And this is not only how they target boys: they also approach girls, to be good wives for jihadists'.

Young boys and girls thus face similar challenges from online recruitment, although with men the focus appears to be more on joining the fight in Syria and Iraq than for women, for whom a more subservient role is proposed. For women, the call to become *'comfort wives'* is often accompanied by persuasive religious justifications that young girls are ill-equipped to counter: in the case of one respondent, despite having a degree in Islamic studies, it was very hard to convince the girl that '*this has nothing to do with Islam'.*

Among men, however, the extremist discourse can spread fast through friends and family. One respondent who stopped his cousin from going to Syria remembers:

'The first ones get radicalised over the internet. Then there's a snowball effect. My cousin started watching videos on YouTube with the word Islam in the title, and after a couple of videos, he automatically came to some very radical videos – the real propaganda. These days there is no need for recruiters. My cousin decided himself that he wanted to leave, and he wanted to finance his trip to Syria himself'.

This is what has become known as 'home-grown' extremism: the notion that individuals, without external influence, can become violent extremists. In some cases, there is no need for the interference of a recruiter necessary, but in others, the presence of a recruiter can work as a catalyser. The methods are the same, as described by one man, from the Moroccan heritage community, in his late forties, who knew a boy that was recruited:

'First, the recruiters make an identification of someone's vulnerabilities. They target the young, gullible groups, and separated families. They use extremist discourse and videos, but focus on the politicians and those in power. It's anti-establishment discourse, and not religion per se'.

Another respondent adds to this:

'They establish a relationship and then speak about injustice, especially related to the Middle East, Syria, and the conflict between Israel and Palestine. They become friends and are found trustworthy. Then the recruitment discourse starts'.

Western foreign policy is frequently mentioned as one of the structural factors that help to render the discourse of recruiters credible. Many young Muslims feel like *'the West attacks Muslim countries unjustly*' and speak of '*real hate because the West can kill as it pleases in the Middle East*'. In particular, the relationship with Israel is often seen as *'creating a real animosity'*. But as the respondents explain, there are also many lies and conspiracy theories circulating; and without critical thinking and adequate education, these take on a life of its own in the minds of the youngsters.

In these days, with widespread access to social media and messaging apps, recruiters can be operating from outside Belgium just as easily as from inside Molenbeek. They will often send videos and recite verses from the Qur'an, while at the same time teaching individuals how to hide things from their families, for example by installing passwords on their phones and computers. Nonetheless, there are some advantages to physical proximity, as it becomes easier to create and carefully manage a dependency relationship with the targeted individuals:

'They approach vulnerable young people, those that are angry over discrimination, and that don't have a job. They tell them they can help and make them feel better by offering a better life full of money/women. They start giving them anti-depressive pills that make them happy, and once they get addicted, youngsters don't have the money to pay for them. At that point, the recruiters give them the money but ask for some work in exchange. They become brainwashed, a different mind is put in their head by recruiters'.

Six out of the ten interviewees said that they themselves had been approached by recruiters or, alternatively, by friends that aimed to sway them to travel to the Middle East. For some, it came under the pretext of *'studying Islam in Iraq'*; others witnessed how young women in her environment received messages on Facebook that told them to come to Syria as *'comfort women for jihadists'.* Our respondent who had recently left prison described it as follows:

'After I left prison, I was told several times that 'I had to take matters into my own hands'. If they had approached me earlier, I might have been convinced, but I had read the Qur'an when I was in prison, and I understood that the right jihad is to fight within yourself and be a better person'.

This observation about '*the right jihad*' that differs from the violent jihad for which recruiters seek obedient souls, brings us to a widely-discussed topic: the relationship between Islam and violent radicalisation.

D. Religion and violent radicalisation

When it comes to the connection of Islam and the violent radicalisation of their acquaintances, most respondents recognise that Islam is used for the purpose of violent radicalisation. As the son of the imam told us:

'There is a number of Qur'anic verses and Hadiths that are used. But the extremists practice religion in a different way: they do not want to do the intensive study anymore, but only talk to their own. They stay in conflict with the others'.

The respondents, however, put the blame not on Islam, but on the lack of knowledge of Islam. It is not the devotion, but the absence of devotion and religious understanding that allowed violent radicalisation to take place in Molenbeek. A respondent that recently left prison described how his friends approached religion during their preparations to leave for Syria:

'Religion is a pretext. I am certain that those guys don't know anything about Islam; they misinterpret Islam to find the answers that suits them. They read the translation of Qur'an, whereas it should be read and understood in Arabic. Moreover, it should be put it in the context of the time and the age when it was written'.

Another respondent met Salah Abdeslam frequently in his father's cafe and confirms that it *'has nothing to do with religion'.* According to him, ten days before the attacks in Paris, in November 2015, Salah was in Italy, where he engaged in his business of drugs trafficking. This corresponds to the observation of our respondent that prevented his cousin from going to Syria:

'It's often former delinquents – those ignorant in all domains – that fall victim. The proposal to go to Syria is attractive to them, because it offers them the possibility to make a new start and a new life. It's as if it's a miracle solution to their past, which wipes the slate clean'.

Joining the extremist cause, in that sense, seems to be an extreme confession, a way of wiping away all past sins. The image is not that of the pious Muslim that is at risk of falling prey to the discourse of violent extremists; instead it is those that lack an adequate understanding of Islam that can fall victim to those preaching a perverted version of Islam. All those that left, as one respondent puts it, *'had a disrupted relationship with the mosques'.* The problem, however, is that there are not many role models for young individuals that can help them develop the critical analysis needed to arm themselves against this discourse. Imams do what they can and, according to some respondents, they have been crucial in preventing many more from leaving for Syria. But for others, the fundamental problem is that young, isolated individuals, will not listen to old imams. One respondent, the son of an imam, observes:

'They need to continue to do what they can, and spread knowledge about Islam. But they speak not a lot about politics, or extremism, because they need to be neutral. But if they stay neutral, they are not credible: the youngsters will say that he never has anything meaningful to offer'.

Other respondents describe imams as *'outdated'* and not holding sway over young people from Molenbeek, who perceive the imams as *'old and irrelevant',* and like their parents, they won't feel at ease speaking with them. This points to the problem of lacking credible leadership in the community, in particular, on the part of religious authorities that struggle to keep pace with the technological challenges – online propaganda – and to address exactly those questions that the Muslim youth in Molenbeek grapples with. In the absence of credible role models that can shape and influence the community, there is a risk that recruiters can manipulate the vulnerable youth with a simple, coherent message.

Finally, reflecting on how violent radicalisation is dealt with in Morocco one respondent praised the cooperation between the state and imams

and volunteered that *'at least they took the problem seriously'*, whereas in Belgium the issue has been left to fester. Others, however, describe the Moroccan security services as much more intrusive, and not a system that Belgium should try to emulate. As the respondents agree, there are no easy solutions: any solution has to be supported by the community and take into consideration the local context.

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

This final part evaluates the hypotheses of the study against the findings of the social mapping.

A. Two Molenbeek districts and radicalisation

The broad debate over what causes violent radicalisation is split between the importance of social exclusion and lacking opportunities on the one hand, and the importance of religion on the other. On this basis, the two following hypotheses were tested: a) practising Islam as a religion is the main factor that permitted the emergence of violent Islamist extremism in Molenbeek and b) the perceived lack of opportunities is the main factor that permitted the emergence of violent Islamist extremism in Molenbeek.

Where to locate the survey findings? From the accounts of violent radicalisation given by respondents, it is clear that isolation and vulnerability of many young people in the community constitute a fertile breeding ground for violent radicalisation. Many of the respondents, echoing Scott Atran's[80] analysis, pointed out the search for a life meaning as a factor of violent radicalisation – precisely, of males, described as *'disenfranchised'* and *'lost in their lives'* and lacking opportunities – mainly jobs. ISIS or other extremist groups are then able to offer them what they lack in Molenbeek: an identity and the promise of a better life, *'self-confidence, power, and respect'* which, for many, is in short supply in Molenbeek. Recruitment often focuses first on these perceived social inequalities, as well as profound socio-political questions that Muslim youth struggles with, such as Palestine and Israel, or the war in Syria.

Whereas nearly all respondents agreed that the lack of opportunities created a vulnerability in the individuals who radicalised, they disagreed on the influence of religion. Whereas, some mentioned that those who radicalised were not religious at all or *'knew nothing about religion',* others did speak about the profound religious change that their friends or relatives underwent during their process of violent radicalisation. Often facilitated through the use of online propaganda, they would gradually become more and more puritanical in their religion, while denouncing those around them that did not espouse the puritanical religious structure.

The lack of opportunities – the sense of 'no future' in Molenbeek – seems to be the most powerful cause of violent radicalisation, which created a fertile breeding ground extremist organisations have exploited. The impact of religion is more ambiguous: for some, it appears to play a strong role at the start of the violent radicalisation process, while for others it is only a minor component or becomes much stronger when an individual is in the later stages of the process. In essence, just like there are two theories of why violent radicalisation seems to occur, the study finds two pathways of how violent radicalisation occurred in Molenbeek.

Analysing the opinions of the inhabitants of Molenbeek, 22% sees the lack of prospects as the driving force behind violent radicalisation, and 14% of the respondents argues that it is the absence of religious knowledge in today's youth that makes them susceptible to a radical discourse in the first place. When, in many youngsters' perception, there are high levels of discrimination, or there is no place in society for them due to high levels of unemployment and school drop-out, they might be susceptible to a radical discourse. According to respondents, youngsters without an education have not developed the critical skills to defend themselves against the propaganda thrown at them – either in the neighbourhood or by friends, or increasingly by online recruiters. It is

important to emphasise both civic and religious education, which are deemed by the community as crucial tools in the fight against violent radicalisation.

Indeed, terrorism and security rank fairly low as concerns among the Molenbeekois. The most salient problems are perceived to be unemployment (31%); education (15%); and general incivility in the neighbourhood (15%), with security (5%) and terrorism (4%) ranking very low. Equally, drug dealing (27%) and theft (24%) outrank religious extremist violence (3%), with 17% of the population – in particular, respondents of North African heritage – saying that there are no security concerns in Molenbeek at all.

Moreover, there is no evidence of community-level support for extremism. Indeed, inhabitants of Molenbeek, including – and often foremost – those of North African heritage, are highly dismissive of religious extremism, which is understood as a deliberate distortion of religion. Similarly, there is no support for foreign fighters: 41% of the respondents expresses sadness and 29% anger and shock when asked to reflect upon the departure of someone from the neighbourhood to Syria, with 11% indifferent and only one respondent reporting to be proud.

The fact that many reject the connection between Islam and violent radicalisation should be seen in the context of the overwhelmingly negative media coverage that Molenbeek received after the attacks in Paris and Brussels. This has left a deep impact on its inhabitants, who have had to constantly defend themselves from different allegations. The community of North African heritage feels most targeted: 73% fully disagrees with the media portrayal of Molenbeek, while 48% of the population of Belgian heritage and 53% of those with other origins disagree.

Paradoxically, in the aftermath of the attacks, the inhabitants from the North African heritage were expected – by media and politicians in the public debate – to prove their allegiance to the Belgian society. Meanwhile, the inhabitants had the feeling that this was a society that did not accept them for who they were and where their origins lay. Many Muslims, for example, reported the increasing unease in practising their religion, or in perceived discrimination after the attacks, and had particularly negative opinions about politicians and the media for painting everyone living in Molenbeek with the same brush. And while this can never be a legitimate reason for a violent response, it will hardly help to improve the living conditions of the many young people that already feel disenfranchised or treated as a 'suspect community' at imminent risk of violent radicalisation – a stigma that so many respondents of the North African heritage community wholeheartedly reject.

B. Weak networks fuelling isolation?

Social capital has been identified earlier as the networks, norms, and trust that a community has at its disposal. In this section, networks were examined.

First, there are strong indications of bonding social capital among the Molenbeekois of North African heritage. A large number of respondents proffered that family is the most important aspects of their life and that they do not have any friends beyond their immediate relatives. Similarly, when asked about associative life, many respondents of North African heritage report that their family is the only group they belong to. Furthermore, respondents of North African heritage reported that just over half of their friends lived outside of Molenbeek, while those of Belgian heritage and those of other origins report rates close to 80%. All of these are in line with our hypothesis that there is a strong bonding social capital for the Molenbeekois of North African heritage.

Second, the study finds strong indications that the Molenbeekois of North African heritage possess weaker bridging than average, in particular to their counterparts of Belgian heritage. They are less likely to have friends from different ethnicities and different religions. There is a positive effect here for the education, with the higher educated Molenbeekois being more likely to have friends from a different ethnicity and a different religion. These weaker cross-cutting ties point to a weaker bridging social capital among the non-Belgian heritage population.

Similarly, there is strong evidence that linking social capital among the population of North African heritage is weaker than linking social capital among the population of other communities. For example, whereas 39% of those of Belgian heritage have participated in demonstrations and 30% contacted a politician, only 24% and 19% respectively did the same from the North African heritage community. Additionally, while 59% of those of Belgian heritage is involved in one or more associations, it is only the case for 34% of the North African heritage group and 37% for the other he-ritage group. Again, education is found to offset this effect:the more educated are more likely to participate in associations. These weaker indicators on political and civic participation point to the fact that the population of non-Belgian heritage in Molenbeek possesses less linking social capital.

In short, the North African – predominantly Moroccan – heritage community, engages more with people from their own population group, and is less likely than Molenbeekois of Belgian heritage to have friends outside Molenbeek, to be part of civic organisations, or to have links to the local political establishment.

To some extent, these findings can be explained by cultural differences: in Morocco (and other North African countries), the family often plays the role that associations in Western societies play. In much of the developing world, formal associations do not exist, but this does not mean that civic interconnections or activities are absent. Instead, what matters is that individuals connect with other families and individuals beyond their homes, and talk about matters of public relevance. It is the purpose of the activity, rather than the forms of organisation, that is the defining factor in improving community resilience.[81]

In Molenbeek these discussions about matters of public relevance are conducted, in an informal setting rather than the formal setting; yet this difference in networks between different population groups does matter. With a lower number of cross-cutting ties – for example, acquaintances of different religions or ethnicities, as well as people from outside Molenbeek – there is a risk of confirmation bias or 'group think' when engaging in debate. This is likely one of the reasons why, in the interviews, conspiracy theories were frequently mentioned – for example, the theory that the Brussels attacks had never happened.

Additionally, these forms of day-to-day associations have been shown to be less durable as 'conflict resolution systems' than formal associations.[82] This would indicate that, due to its more limited associational life, the North African heritage community would be less equipped to deal with the shock of the emergence of violent radicalisation. However, as there is no control group in this study, this is only a hypothesis that can be put forward for further research.

Another reason for the significant lack of ties is because bridging ties have been shown to be very important on the job market. Social capital has been shown to have an impact on immigrants' chances of obtaining a job, as well as leading to a more effective job search and higher wages.[83] In that sense, the lack of bridging ties could partly explain the lack of opportunities many individuals perceive to have. Coincidentally, the lack of opportunities is also identified as a major driving force for those who radicalised. Similarly, the absence of bridging and linking ties can be perceived as a concrete example of isolation, which is another component described as making someone vulnerable to violent radicalisation. The availability of democratic options for the expression of one's opinion has been identified as key to the prevention of violent radicalisation.[85]

This is of course not to say that the whole community of Molenbeek is at risk of violent radicalisation because it lacks bridging and linking ties. Instead, this is merely proposed to paint a picture of what causes the lack of opportunities and the social isolation that was highlighted, by the majority of the respondents, as the primary drivers of violent radicalisation.

Many respondents of North African heritage recognised that these bridging ties have been lacking. There is a demand for more dialogue and diversity, through events that bring together communities, but also through increased dialogue with the authorities.Similarly, many respondents expressed the desire to address controversial topics such as *'religion in society', 'Western foreign policy in the Middle East'* or *'radicalisation'.* These are difficult questions that young individuals from North African heritage often grapple with. Oftentimes, au-

thorities are seen as reluctant to address these topics, which for many youngsters means that they do not have anything meaningful to say.

A final point worth making is on the importance of education. Identified by the Molenbeekois as one important antidote to violent radicalisation, this research finds strong statistical evidence that participating in secon-dary and tertiary education improves bridging ties, as well as participation in the political and associational life. There is a general desire for the improvement of the overall quality of education, the creation of school classes with more students from mixed backgrounds (rather than classes dominated by children from North African heritage) as well as avoiding a high turnover of teachers.

C. Trust and discrimination

The second component of social capital is trust, deemed to be crucial for the smooth functioning of the democratic system. Discrimination, which is closely related to trust, was also examined and through the same prism as trust. Based on existing research, two hypotheses were formulated: a) Low level of trust in governmental institutions such as the police is a common sentiment among the Molenbeekois; and b) The Molenbeekois, regardless of their origins, are victims of high level of perceived discrimination inside and outside Molenbeek. The result shows that there are very low levels of trust in journalists and politicians. The media, in particular, are singled out by many Molenbeekois as *'having tarnished the image of the neighbourhood in the aftermath of the attacks in Brussels and Paris'.* However, trust in the police was found to be relatively high– on par with social workers, and just below trust in neighbours. To be sure, 57% of the respondents considers the police to be ineffective, but this does not appear to stem from a structural fundamental distrust in the police. Rather, the perceived ineffectiveness of the police is understood as the result of the fact that they are too distant from the population. According to the Molenbeekois, this could be remedied by improving dialogue between the police and the community, as well as having a police force that is a better representation of the community it works in, which includes putting more Moroccans and Arab speakers on the force.[84] There is no evidence of the existence of no-go zones where the police are not able to operate; rather, the study finds a community that invites the police to come closer. The hypothesis about trust in the police shall thus be dismissed.

Overall, there is not a considerable amount of trust in community leaders. As mentioned, trust in politicians is very low, especially among those of North African heritage. 53% of this group is 'very unconfident', and another 18% is 'unconfident'. Similarly, imams are described as *'outdated'* and often unable to influence young Muslims. Without credible alternative options, this can explain at least in part why the extremist discourse gained traction with the disenfranchised youth. Often, this extremist discourse is sharp, edgy, and succeeds in capturing and captivating the minds in ways that the current leadership does not. There are community-led initiatives that are praised as providing leadership, but these often lack resources and cannot take over the public position that imams and politicians have.

The lack of trust also creates more problems: without being seen as trustworthy interlocutors, it becomes very difficult for politicians, imams, and other community leaders to know what happens in the community, and to play their role as duty bearers, brokers, and opinion-leaders. The same goes for the police: without having close relations with the community, it will be much harder to operate effectively.

Concerning discrimination, 16% of those from Belgian heritage reported to have been discriminated against 'often' or 'very often' within Molenbeek, while another 15% reports to have been discriminated against 'sometimes'. As some respondents observed, the dominant Moroccan community often complains about discrimination, but it can be discriminatory as well. Non-Belgian heritage groups report very low levels of discrimination inside Molenbeek, but high levels outside. Of the group of North African heritage, 27% reports to have been discriminated 'often' or 'very often' outside Molenbeek in the last twelve months, and 32% reports to have been discriminated sometimes. Furthermore, 30% of those with other origins reports perceived discrimination outside Molenbeek 'often' or 'very often'. The hypothesis about discrimination of the group of North African heritage within Molenbeek, therefore, has to be dismissed, while acknowledging that the real problem lies outside Molenbeek.

Religious dress – in particular the hijab – is very frequently mentioned as a source of discrimination. The name 'Molenbeek' has become another source: respondents observe that having a foreign name, and Molenbeek as an address – especially since the terror attacks in Brussels – is a fundamental disadvantage that is very hard to overcome when applying for a job. Discrimination, although hard to measure objectively, lives strongly in the minds of many non-Belgian heritage groups of the Molenbeekois. And in the end, this perception of discrimination may matter more than whether or not the society is objectively discriminative, for it is the perception of discrimination that individuals act upon.

D. Norms and religion in Molenbeek

Norms are the final form of social capital that holds relevance to our study. Based on the understanding of the development of Muslim communities across the European continent, two hypotheses were formulated: a) The Muslim community in Molenbeek observes strong norms derived from their Muslim heritage; and b) the Belgian norms related to the practice of religion pose difficulties for the everyday practice of Islam by the Muslims in Molenbeek.

For the Muslims interviewed in the two districts under survey, Islam is deemed not only to be important in their private lives: many feels that Islam has things to say about how politics should be conducted, but also about the way other people – not just themselves – should behave morally in public life. Within the North African community, there is a clear determination to conform to Islamic practices, and breaking the norms will be systematically frown upon.

One example of these norms includes the strong traditionalist attitudes towards the positions of men and women, which can be witnessed in the male-only cafés; another example is the strong social control that was witnessed during the month of Ramadan. Many Muslim respondents place great importance

on the family life, which is considered to take precedence over the individual, and advocate the religious education of their children – as explained above, they also identify this as a key component in the prevention of violent radicalisation. Perhaps the clearest example of the existence of strong conservative norms is the treatment of outspoken atheists of North African heritage: as they are individuals that break with the social norms – someone from North African heritage is considered by the community to be Muslim by default – they report very harsh treatment and excommunication.

Centre Historique and Quartier Maritime, as a majority Muslim neighbourhoods, are comfortable locations for many Muslims to practice of their religion. 64% of Molenbeek's Muslims reports being *'very at ease' in practising their religion, as opposed to 51% of Molenbeek's Christians. While there are no figures available for Belgium as a whole, it was presupposed that in non-Muslim-majority parts of Belgium these figures are much different. Indeed, a majority is content with the options for practising religion – for example, the large number of mosques – which is offering them the same possibilities 'as in Morocco'.*

It is important to note that there is a gender difference in the ease with practising religion, with women significantly less at ease than men. There are, however, also problems with the practice of Islam that are frequently mentioned. The first is a general increase in *'suspicious looks'* that Muslims receive, especially when entering mosques or wearing religious dress, such as a hijab or jellaba. At times, Muslims observe how the demands of their religion clash with the demands of the Belgian secularism: examples include the ritual slaughter, observing Ramadan and the difficulties that wearing religious clothing often pose for finding a job in the public sector. Overall, however, most Muslims are content with the opportunities that the Belgian system offer them for the practice of their religion, which they can practise more or less unimpeded.

The fact that strong socio-religious norms were found in these two districts is not to equate Molenbeek Muslims with Islamists: there is no active political project to impose the religion of Islam upon others. There are, however, various strong norms and social conventions that regulate public life within the community of North African heritage. Indeed, Christians and Muslims in Molenbeek respect each other and peacefully co-exist.

How, then, does this matter for the processes of violent radicalisation in the two surveyed Molenbeek districts?

First, many Muslims in Molenbeek do strongly sympathise with fellow Muslims abroad. They are often concerned with the fate of the Ummah, and through it, with fellow Muslims in countries such as Syria and Palestine. These are issues that many young Muslims in Molenbeek have questions about – even if they are not well-informed – and, in the absence of credible dialogue led by the government or civil society, there can be a breeding ground for recruiters and online propaganda spread by violent radicals. Indeed, many Molenbeekois think that exactly because they are ill-informed, these issues can be used by individuals with bad intentions to detach a vulnerable youngster from the society she/he lives in.

Second, the focus on religion as the main driving force behind violent radicalisation risks turning communities such as Molenbeek into 'suspect communities' because they are religiously conservative. As mentioned earlier, the inhabitants of Molenbeek overwhelmingly dismiss the acts of extremist individuals and fear of them tarnishing their religion. As a policy response to this, many, across the European continent, are proposing a European Islam to combat violent radicalisation. This proposal is a controversial debate which shall, in any case, stem exclusively from within the Muslim community (ies). Any external role 'if any' should be limited to fostering the conditions for this debate to take place in a constructive manner.

In Molenbeek, a part of the Muslim community does struggle with the dilemma of what it means to be a Muslim in Western society. Many seek to reassert their Islamic identity and embrace it as their predominant identity. This is happening against the backdrop of a largely secular state approach. Evidently, this leads to clashes of value system. As the stories about violent radicalisation pointed out, shying away from a conversation on Islam in a Western society will leave many individuals search

ing for the latter on the internet, where extremist narratives often dominate the waves. Similarly, to offer credible solutions to the youngsters in Molenbeek, it means addressing issues that are often deemed too sensitive to touch upon – religion, radicalisation, Western foreign policy, profiling by intelligence services, and many more. Only a credible conversation can be the basis for an effective, inclusive solution.

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, the European Institute of Peace would like to suggest the following policy recommendations compiled per topic and addressed to any duty-bearer responsible to make them achievable or to implement them in Molenbeek.

On civic participation

1. Develop dialogues on controversial topics between:

a. authorities, elders-community leaders (men and women) and youngsters on the social contract (religion, identity and citizenship discrimination, polarisation, communitarianism, integration, victimisation), western foreign policy, media

b. citizens i.e. on gender equality, racism, cultural and/or intergenerational differences

2. Improve opportunities for participation and consultation as well as political participation at the local level (outreach and information events, as well as associative or community-organised events)

3. Identify insider mediators, local intermediaries, bridge-builders trusted by the inhabitants, who can help them build their own local projects and can help relay their ideas, grievances but also recommendations to the political sphere

4. Empower positive role models and let community leaders take a leading role in local decision-making process and activities

5. Ensure windows of dialogue with most radical/non-official local leaders

6. Maintain information and develop knowledge on the prevention of radicalisation through networks of practitioners

7. Support and amplify the work of associations promoting social cohesion; free them from any political interference, thus make them legitimate in the eyes of citizens, who have lost faith in their politicians

8. Ensure strong communications strategy 1) to develop positive messaging to citizens and media on inclusive projects, but also 2) to clearly state the local authority's position/policies on the prevention as well as on the repression of violent radicalised behaviours/activities

On education, youngsters and their families

9. Develop religious and civic education in and outside school

a. Encourage education programmes that foster critical thinking in order to enhance youngsters' resilience against violent extremist messages

b. Promote the knowledge and principles on which democracy and the rule of law are based (incl. gender equality; non discrimination, tolerance...)

10. In schools, impose mixed ethnic origin and mixed socio-economic backgrounds in primary and secondary schools; address school drop-out

11. Increase family support on youngsters' education; offer assistance to family whose children have left foreign fighters or whose children are at risk of conducting violent extremist activities

12. Support and promote visibility of local initiatives/projects made and designed for and by youngsters (sports and culture)

13. Develop the use of Internet as a positive source of knowledge and information and as a way to reach out to the most isolated citizens

14. Ensure tailored support and advice is provided to young women and men in their struggle for employment

On public services/management

15. Manage population flow/residency to avoid geographic discrimination in specific neighbourhoods

16. Ensure discrimination, incivilities, non-civic behaviours, as well as petty crime and drug dealing are systematically sanctioned

17. Develop community policing and post police officers who have a good local knowledge of the area and who are presentative of the existing human resources of the local population

18. Improve basic services and infrastructure

19. Strengthen role of social workers (better training, more competences and responsibilities) to earn and develop respect at local level

On (violent) radicalisation

20. Develop community policing and post police officers who have a good local knowledge of the area and of its inhabitants

21. Under the Mayor's auspices, set up a cell where representatives of all relevant communal services (security, prevention, social cohesion, housing, youth, health, mediation) but also from the civil society and the local business sector, can build trust among each other, regularly share information on individual cases and suggest constructive, tailored and holistic solutions

22. Develop multi/agency prevention strategy that involve families, community leaders and social workers

23. Work closely with families and ensure tailored support to mothers and fathers

24. Set up trusted information sharing 'houses' where the community anonymously can share and discuss information on radicalisation

25. Build on role models

a. Identify mentors with the relevant knowledge and skills to challenge hard-line perceptions (knowledge of Islamic doctrine) in order to deter radicalised individuals from joining Islamist fighters

b. Develop mentoring schemes for mentors to help young people find constructive social alternatives to extremist groups before they go and once they return ensuring that attention is focused not only on detecting violent radicalisation, but also on reintegrating people into society

26. Train front-line and field workers, faith leaders, teachers, social service providers, police, and parents on how to recognize the early signs of extremism and on how to deal with extremist behaviours

27. Design viable post-detention programs to reintegrate returning foreign terrorist fighters back into their communities, based on local granular knowledge and a strong collaborative approach between all relevant stakeholders, in cluding officials, civil society actors, as well family members.

ANNEX ONE: QUOTES FROM THE FIELD

This Annex is dedicated to quotes gathered during the fieldwork. These quotes are best understood as a reflection of the Molenbeekois' sentiments, perceptions and needs.

Q. Do you feel that people perceive you to be part of a certain group?

'Yes, in the tram or the subway. Sometimes people hide their purses when they see me. This has been ongoing for 6 years meaning the problem does not come from me'.

'Yes, I was told off during Ramadan for smoking in the street. All of a sudden I felt as if I was being told 'if you want to stay in this neighbourhood you have to be like us'. That's when I felt different'.

'Yes, Moroccan people look at me more than Belgians. It's because of the religion not because of the colour of my skin. People know that I'm the only non-Moroccan in my street'.

Q. Is there, if any, difficulties you experience in the practice of your religion?

'Wearing a headscarf minimizes chance to get a job. I lost my job because I was wearing a headscarf (healthcare/medical line of work). My employer did not want me to show religious symbols. In other places, where I could wear a headscarf, I was being exploited, even though my employers were Muslims. I was disgusted'.

'Many times no problem. But journalists tend to exaggerate towards Muslims. They mix up a lot of things. E.g. If somebody affiliated with a different religions does something bad, newspapers do not specify which religion that person belongs to'.

'There is no problem in Molenbeek or Schaerbeek. It is more difficult in Flanders because we have strange looks when we enter mosques'.

'After the attacks, I was scared of going out of the house because of possible repercussions and it was more difficult for me to go to the mosque. I was allowed to wear a head scarf during my 3 years at work, but if I had been asked to take it off I would have quit my job'.

'It is better here than in Morocco because here there's a mix and it's good for the kids' education. There's a lot of respect for the different religions'.

'Yes, people try to change my religion to Islam but I haven't converted'.

'Orthodox. I don't wear a cross around my neck because there are a lot of Muslims here. I don't feel comfortable and I'm afraid of being attacked'.

'The opposite, dialogue with other religions is easier in Molenbeek'.

Q. Can you participate in all the events proposed in Molenbeek?

'Generally speaking: the people here are different from me, I don't feel I can participate in any activity with Muslims or Moroccans because they are different from me'.

Q. Have you been discriminated inside Molenbeek?

'For Moroccans, I am Belgian and for Belgians, I am Moroccan'.

'It worsened since the attacks, I get discriminated because of my name on the job market, especially by Belgo-Belges'.

Q. Have you been discriminated outside Molenbeek?

'Yes, I can feel people's looks (headscarf), my children less because they don't wear it. I live in a Flemish commune; my neighbours are biased. My daughter is discriminated by her professors in university. She received a bad mark for a group work (everybody else received a higher mark) and she doesn't even wear a headscarf'.

'My cousin's wife has died in the metro attack on March 22nd. My family and I felt a tremendous pressure from both sides. The whole world targeted us through the media because of Salah Abdeslam. But they did not say a word about the victims from Molenbeek'.

Q. Do you trust the police?

'My opinion doesn't count, the society doesn't listen to me. E.g. I went to the police after my son got almost killed by a car and they told me they weren't going to do anything and that I should write to the mayor. E.g. An old lady got beaten up at Comte de Flandres and the police said to go to Rogier to press charges. I told myself that the police wouldn't help if something like that happened to me one day'.

Q. Do you trust journalists?

'Journalists don't simply report. Their employers have political affiliation. It is impossible to be an impartial/neutral journalist'.

Q. Why you don't agree to the media portrayal of Molenbeek?

'No credibility - Internet is like Swiss knife, it depends on how you use it and no verification of sources'.

'Too much generalizations, they speak about the exceptions as if it was the rule. Islam = religion of peace'.

'In a recent report on Molenbeek, they talked about a mosque in Evere. Even though there was nothing special about it, they presented it as the most radicalized mosque of the country (in Molenbeek). They also used a hidden camera as though something criminal was going on. They talk about us, tell lies, we cannot trust them. They keep forgetting that there are other people in Molenbeek, not only Moroccans or Muslims'.

'Too generalist. Don't believe them especially when they speak about Muslims because that's all they focus on, never speak about extremists of other religions as much as they exist'.

Q. How can we explain the high rate of school drop-out in Molenbeek?

'Due to the lack of education from parents, they don't supervise their children. They need more support during early childhood so that they continue and don't give up when becoming teenagers'.

'Because of the parents and their way of life. Parents don't care about their children, they hang out in coffee shops. Parents are uneducated'.

'Feeling of being excluded from the society. It starts with a specific person who feels that way, discriminated. This person is usually a bad student and influences others who have the same nationality'.

Q. Why youngsters don't participate in events organised in Molenbeek?

'They are going to say that they are discriminated but they just hang out in cafes and smoking shishas'.

'They feel excluded and don't believe in the future. People who take part really have the feeling that the activities can help them in the future. Those who don't take part don't believe in the future anymore'.

'Because they don't perceive these activities as relevant. They are isolated. It's a long way for them to come back from isolation. But many problems can be solved through sport activities'.

Q. How can we explain the chasm between parents and children?

' That's the biggest problem. Parents are very busy so either they have very little time to take care of their children or they don't take care of

their children or they don't take care of them at all. Their brothers are either in prison, or are living their life elsewhere or gone to Syria. They don't trust their parents. They listen to nonsense on TV and video games. It's because of the individualistic culture we live in. Therefore the religion is important! It teaches you to be happy with what you have and that you need to work to earn your living'.

'Yes. Often, the father is simply not there both emotionally and physically. Children need to be guided because the consequences can be intra-generational. On top of this, the Belgian state is composed of extremely conservative political actors that have preconceived opinions'.

'It depends. Some families have no problems at all. The bottom line is the excessive freedom offered in the West. If the parents try to 'discipline' their children, the latter can go to the police and file a complaint against their parents'.

Q. How was your reaction when you knew that someone from Molenbeek left to Syria?

'I have seen this, I am surprised. I came from there by boat. Life here in Europe is beautiful. Why would they go out and look for problems? I want to help people in Syria, not cause problems'.

'I was under shock. The guy from the airport, I know him! How is this possible? Abdeslam is the nephew of one of my daughter's friend'.

'A young guy used to live in a youth centre (Maison d'accueil) where I was employed. When he left for Syria, we were scared. Before that we used to hear stories, but it was not affecting us directly'.

'At first, it wasn't clear. Then, the media reported about it. I feel sorry for them because they are being manipulated. These are young people who have not been taken care of, who keep wandering the streets. The State did not commit to solve these problems'.

'It is their religion that teaches them that. They think they need to struggle to impose their religion. I'm not surprised because Islam is like that'.

'Some people say they leave with good intentions. I can understand that, if you look at all the violence, the war, it's understandable they want to fight for their people. But when I saw the news I couldn't believe they killed innocent people! I used to go to school with Abdeslam'.

Q. Do you think that the rise of extreme groups is a menace to the society?

'Yes, the more you have extreme politics, the more you have extremist groups'.

'It's a form of radicalism like any other: Fear of what is different, it's disturbing because this is the exact aim of the terrorists. They don't bomb in order to kill, they bomb in order to make change and lead the general public opinion in Europe towards islamophobia. They want to increase hate between different communities'.

'Yes, especially after the attacks. My husband runs a business in Flanders and in order to work there I had to take off my headscarf because Flemish people would stop coming. I cannot go and live in Flanders because I don't speak Flemish and they don't like us'.

'Yes, also because extremist Muslims see moderates and non-Muslims as inferior. Also because these movements lead up to violence which is something I hate. Dirties Islam's image which is a religion of peace'.

'No, this is just nonsense. They are not Muslims, they are just crazy. When a Muslim kills people we say he's an extreme religious, but when it's a Swedish guy (for example) we just say he's crazy'.

Q. How would you define religious extremism?

'Extremism is everything anti-religion. For me, extremism is antithetical to religion'.

'It's a person who didn't understand anything. None of the religions are extreme. These people didn't find solutions to their problems so they use religion as an excuse'.

Q. Why extremism could develop in Molenbeek?

'Basically because there are a lot of Arabs here and they are more like minded people so you can hide more easily. Also, Moureaux's

'laissez faire' has an impact. The more you identify with someone, the less probable you will rebel against them. Turkish culture is closer to the European one so inhabitants of Schaerbeek and Molenbeek are not that hostile'.

'It all relates to politics. They thought Molenbeek was ideal for that. They give you EUR 50,000 to go and fight, commit suicide. For young people who have nothing, that have debts and/or that have a criminal record it is very appealing. However, it is truly religion that saved Molenbeek because it prevents people from being violent'.

'The main religion in Molenbeek is Islam but there is a lot of Islamophobia in the world. Molenbeek is poor, there is a low level of education, and many young people hang out in the streets. Nobody cares about Molenbeek, therefore it is a good place for radicalization to develop. There are a lot of mosques here and radicalization develops in mosques'.

'It's been going on for years. At a certain point, 'pseudo mosques' (illegal mosques) saw day with the intent to preach radicalism. It is not Moureaux's fault, the political atmosphere has been tough for a long time'.

'There is a strong concentration of immigrants who seek to maintain their culture of origin which is linked to religion. There is an exclusion feeling of the world outside of that religion which pushes their religion more and more towards extremism'.

Q. Why violent radicalisation happened in Molenbeek?

'People radicalize because they see Syrians being bombed on TV (unfair). ISIS/ISIL showed up later. Less problems in Molenbeek than in France'.

'Mosques obey to the orders of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. They recruit people. They are paid to do so and young people are paid to go'.

'There is profound lack of sense of belonging. On top that there are not enough future prospects (job related or others)'.

Q. Why parents couldn't notice their children process of violent radicalisation?

'Radicalization is well hidden. Recruiters pay a lot of attention to make sure young people don't talk to their parents. Parents are happy when they see their children go to the Mosque and become more religious. On top of that, some parents simply don't pay enough attention to their children'.

'They didn't notice because it all happens so fast. To begin with, the young people are extremely fragile so they hold on to what they know even if it's very little'.

Q. How can we improve 'Vivre ensemble' in Molenbeek?

'Improve housing (cleanness, accessibility, quality) and ensure more cultural mix. More investment in public services, cultural activities and associations'.

'More education in schools (a lot of children don't go to school). Education at home should also be controlled because there are a lot of slipping happening there. Buildings should be renovated so there is more mix between the upper and lower Molenbeek. We should also take care of the cleanliness and 'garage Mosques' where a lot of things happen'.

Q. How can security be improved in Molenbeek?

'Non-compliance with law should be firmly handled. More Moroccans should be integrated in security services'.

'Not doing enough to stop drug dealers. State is paying for drug dealers to remain in Molenbeek and not go to central city to avoid harming tourism'.

Q. How can violent radicalisation be prevented?

'Invest in good social workers that speak them about the problems, wars, immigration...Train the social workers so that they know how to speak to the youth. External people but also from Molenbeek so that they can speak to the people'.

ANNEX TWO: ELABORATION OF CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGY

A. Drivers of radicalisation into violent extremism

The current debate about why violent radicalisation occurs is broadly split between two schools of thoughts: the first focuses on the role of Islam in violent radicalisation; the other school of thought stipulates that amid socio-economic hardships, young individuals already in search for a sense of identity and belonging fall prey to radicalisation. According to the latter, it is not merely the identity crisis or the lack of prospects, rather the confluence of the two together. In such a case, religion can play a role but is not the main factor. For the former, the religious devotion precedes violence; for the latter, a propensity to violence comes before the adoption of a religious cause.

1. Religion in relation to violent radicalisation

The argument for the religion as the culprit suggests that a specific ideological aspect of Islam draws people towards violent radicalisation. In essence, this is similar to the theory of the staircase. It describes the notion that a perceived affiliation to the Sunni Ummah, while definitely not ominous on its own, can place an individual on the slippery slope toward joining a violent vanguard of militant Islamist jihadists. Mark Sageman observed the process as follows:

'This gradual isolation of new converts or reverts intensified their loyalty to their new comrades and their beliefs that they were the true vanguard protecting the Ummah, the Muslim community. They developed a collective identity that they were not just the vanguard of Muslims fighting back, but that they might be the only true Muslims on earth. They started living in their own world, trying to imitate the heroism of the Salaf, who waged constant war against tribal enemies in the seventh century'.[85]

This draws many young individuals from Europe to Syria to fight Muslim 'apostates' – as Sageman observed, the vanguard considers itself to be the only true Muslims, which makes all others kafir or unbelievers – but also pushing its supporters to conduct or support violence against the societies where they grew up. Muslims in Western countries were encouraged by Sheikh Abu Muhammed al-Adnani, for example, to find an infidel and *'smash his head with a rock'* or *'run him over with a car'.*[86] The terrorist attacks in Nice and Berlin, proved a morbid example of how effective the latter technique could be.[87]

When Sageman was writing, al-Qaeda was seen as leading that vanguard and fuelling 'home-grown' violent extremism, often in diaspora. Since then, the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (hereafter: ISIS) has taken over the place previously occupied by al- Qaeda as the most prominent proponent of global jihad. The analysis of religion as the main driver of violent extremism, however, has remained and, on the European continent, is perhaps nowhere stronger than in France. For example, the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls has claimed after the Charlie Hebdo attacks that *'France was at war with radical Islam'* and French President Francois Hollande called the November 2015 Paris attacks an *'act of war'* from ISIS.[88]

The Islamologist Gilles Kepel, one of France's leading scholars on violent extremism, argues that it is Islam itself that contains the seeds of violent radicalisation.[89] Explaining, Kepel observed that

'Behind the jihadist eurption, lies the entrenchment of Salafism... the most radical elements of which, their eyes fixed on Syria and Daesh [ISIS], are aiming for the destruction of Europe through civil war'.[90]

In his view, Salafism emerged as an '*irrepressible identity marker*' for many people from North African heritage in France, often living in conditions of economic and social hardship.[91]

It is the ultraconservative discourse that drives individuals to commit acts of violent extremism.

This analysis was also applied to Molenbeek in the aftermath of the recent terrorist attacks. Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel, for example, threatened to close *'certain radical mosques'.*[92] Some reports identified the Al-Khalil mosque on rue Delaunoy 40 – in the Centre Historique of Molenbeek – which would-be Thalys attacker El Khazzani frequented as instrumental in the process of radicalisation in Molenbeek due to ties to Islamist organisations such as the Syrian arm of the Muslim Brotherhood.[93] Finally, writing about Molenbeek, Dutch author Leon de Winter condemned *'the religious and cultural concepts with which terrorists poison their own minds'.*[94]

The first hypothesis for the study was therefore formulated as follows:

Practising Islam as a religion is the main factor that permitted the emergence of violent Islamist extremism in Molenbeek.

2. Lack of opportunities in relation to violent radicalisation

The argument of the other side focuses less on the role of religion, and more on the role of the identity crisis as a defining factor that drives violent radicalisation in Muslim communities. One proponent of this theory is Scott Atran, who, in his address to the U.N. Security Council, pointed out that '*about 3 out of every 4 people who join Al Qaeda or ISIS do so through friends, most of the rest through family or fellow travellers in search of a meaningful path in life'.*[95] According to Atran's field work in the Middle East, the search for an identity matters more than religion in determining what makes a violent radical.

In addition, a survey of Arab youth across the Middle East showed that the lack of jobs and opportunities are seen as the most prominent factor that facilitates the recruitment of extremist groups.[96] Somewhat qualifying the notion that objective lack of opportunities fuel radicalisation, a report issued by Mercy Corps *pointed to grievances due to experienced injustice, discrimination, corruption, and abuse by security forces – in other words, the subjective or comparative experience of those that radicalise.*[97]

Closer to home, a similar argument has been made. Referring specifically to the Belgians that have travelled to Syria, Rik Coolsaet, Professor of Ghent University and the Egmont Institute, argued that they are part of a 'no future' generation:

'Two categories of Syria travellers can be [..] identified. The first group combines pre-existing kinship and friendship gangs. For them, joining ISIS is merely a shift to another form of deviant behaviour, next to membership of street gangs, rioting, drugs trafficking and juvenile delinquency. Whereas most individuals of the first group are known to the police, this is not necessarily the case for the second group. Before suddenly deciding to leave for Syria, the youngsters in this group show no sign of deviant behaviour [..] but they frequently refer to the absence of a future, to personal difficulties faced in everyday life, to feelings of exclusion and an absence of belonging, as if they didn't have a stake in society'.[98]

Violent religious radicalisation, according to this reading, becomes violent before it becomes imbued with religious streak; pointedly, various Syria travellers that have been apprehended with copies of the 'Islam for Dummies' guide at the Turkish-Syrian border.[99]

In Molenbeek, it has been suggested that many of the perpetrators were petty criminals that were described as 'gangster-jihadists'.[100] Pointing to the subjectivity of the experience, Molenbeek alderman Sarah Turine observed that in addition to the socio-economic context, *'[r]egular stigma and discrimination targeting many young people are arguments often used by jihadist rectors'.*[101]

This second school of thought on radicalisation led to the second main hypothesis of the study:

The perceived lack of opportunities for young people is the main factor that permitted the emergence of violent Islamist extremism in Molenbeek.

B. Social capital

To delve deeper into the social patterns of Molenbeek and understand the ability or inability

of a community to regulate or resist violent extremism, the concepts of social capital and community resilience can be used. Some of the best-known work on social capital has been done by Robert Putnam, who defined social capital broadly as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation and action for mutual benefit.[102] It is the amount of participatory potential, civic orientation, and trust in others that communities have at their disposal: thus identified, social capital is a public good. Unlike financial capital, however, social capital increases as it is used more.

1. Networks

First, the study examined networks, which can be split out in bonding, overlapping, bridging, and linking types.[103] Bonding social capital corresponds to the emotional connections between individuals. This form of social capital creates tight bonds within a particular group and often occurs between individuals that display the same demographic characteristics or hold the same attitudes and perceptions, potentially as a result of having the same sources of information. Examples of bonding social capital include friends and family, but also an individual's ethnic or religious group.[104] Closely related to bonding ties are the overlapping ties, which refer to the strong feelings of connection felt towards members of the same sub- group living in another community. Diasporas are often characterised by their overlapping ties: for example, it can be expected that, by their shared heritage and experience, immigrants or descendants of immigrants from Morocco in Belgium will identify and have links with Moroccan immigrants in other European countries.

Bridging social capital, by contrast, describes those connections that exist across different social groups within the same community. Bridging ties can be cross-cutting ties across demographic features such as socio-economic class, religion, and ethnicity. There can be a 'strength of weak ties', as bridging ties supply an individual with greater potential in his/her job search than bonding ties.[105] Bridging engagements can be associational, through charity groups, sports clubs, or professional associations, but also quotidian or occasional, through incidental or spontaneous forms of association.

Various studies that have investigated community resilience in the face of violent extremism have pointed to the importance of bridging relationships across different community groups in preventing violent extremists from taking root in a community.[106] Ashutosh Varshney, in his account of community resilience to violence between Hindus and Muslims in India, described how communities had institutionalised systems for conflict resolution. These systems can be both organised and quotidian; however, the organised associational forms prove more durable in times of conflict.[107] It should, however, be noted that these studies have almost exclusively focused on areas where open conflict has broken out: not in Western cities affected by violent radicalisation.

Linking social capital, finally, describes the norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between ordinary citizens and political decision-makers. These relationships are different from bridging ties, as they affect the ability of individuals and groups to exact influence over the formation of public policies that affect them. According to Wallace and Anderson, one key factor allowing communities to curtail the spread of extremism is legitimate leadership. Leaders that had effective networks in the community and that valued engagement and problem-solving with community members were critical in preventing a community from falling prey to violent extremism.[108]

Social capital, it should be noted at this point, has been shown to work differently within communities of immigrants or minorities, such as African-American populations in the United States.[109] Often, these communities compensate for the absence of bridging and linking ties by developing very strong bonding ties with those of similar origins. In a multi-gene-rational study of Moroccans in London, Myriam Cherti showed that the strong bonding social capital developed by first-generation immigrants often explained why they remained isolated from society and that some of this persisted even in the younger generations.[110]

Molenbeek, in addition, has often been described as a *'transient'* community, in particular in relation to the non-Belgian heritage residents.[111]Indeed, Molenbeek alderman Ahmed El Khannous has said that Molenbeek is a *'transit zone'* due to high turnover rates in the working population.[112]

The transience of the non-Belgian heritage population would make it harder to build up ties with other population groups, as well as with politicians and decision makers, while relying strongly on in-group bonding ties. Another claim to the strength of bonding ties within the community of North African heritage in Molenbeek was made in relation to the capture of Salah Abdeslam. According to Belgian federal prosecutor Frederic Van Leeuw, Abdeslam relied on a vast network of friends and relatives in Molenbeek: his ability to stay hidden for so long after the Paris attacks *'was about the solidarity of friends, neighbours'* – a direct reference to the existence of very strong bonding social capital among the Molenbeekois of North African heritage.

From this theoretical consideration of network component of social capital, the main hypothesis that can be derived for the case of Molenbeek was:

Groups are more resilient against radicalisation into violent extremism when they have strong social capital, in particular strong bonding ties, bridging ties, and linking ties.

2. Trust and discrimination

Trust is the second component of social capital that is investigated in the study. As Almond and Verba observed,

'The role of social trust and cooperativeness as a component of civic culture cannot be over-emphasised. It is, in a sense, a generalised resource that keeps a democratic polity operating.'[113]

Trust in public institutions, such as politicians and police, is frequently characterised as essential for the smooth functioning of the democratic system. Research has shown, for example, that political trust is boosted in immigrant communities by opening the political system to foreigners and by stimulating the participation of immigrant communities in civic organisations.[114]

In Molenbeek, however, there have been various reports of low trust in government institutions, in particular the police. Reports have spoken of the problems that police have faced in operating in the community; for example, a security adviser to then-Prime Minister Guy Verhofstad was quoted as saying that *'[w]e don't officially have no-go zones in Brussels, but in reality, there are, and they are in Molenbeek.'*[115] Reportedly, this increased further after the attacks in Brussels in March 2016 and the subsequent intense police activity in Molenbeek, with locals pointing to *'a growing feeling of alienation'* and 'increasingly tense relations with the police'.[116]

In relation to trust, the main hypothesis was:

Low level of trust in governmental institutions such as the police is a common sentiment among the Molenbeekois.

Closely related to trust is discrimination: research has shown that many immigrants and their des-cendents often face racism and discrimination. For example, a study by the University of Leuven identified racism by the police as the biggest problem facing youth in Brussels.[117] Similarly, there has been considerable research on the challenges faced by immigrants across the European continent in accessing the labour market. A recent experiment conducted in France demonstrated this. Researchers sent similar résumés to French firms, applying for a middle-class job, but found employers two-and-a-half times more likely to invite the person with a Christian name for an interview than the person with a Muslim name.[118]

In relation to discrimination, the main hypothesis was:

The Molenbeekois, regardless of their origins, are victims of high level of perceived discrimination inside and outside Molenbeek.

3. Norms and identity

The final part of social capital examined here are norms existing in the community. To understand the prevailing norms in the Molenbeek commune, it is worth considering briefly how the role of Islam has developed in immigrant communities across the European continent.

Since the arrival of North African immigrants to Europe, Islam has served an important role as a source of inspiration and stability. Gradually, at the end of the Cold War, the imaginary bond of the Ummah – the global Muslim community – started to fill the ideological void after the demise of the Pan-Arab ideologies and the apparent twin success of Islamic causes first the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Soviet defeat at the hands of mujahedeen in Afghanistan. This is not to say that before that

point Muslims were abandoning their conviction rather this identity, but rather that being Muslim became the primary identity that, for many, superseded other ideological projects such as nationalism and pan- Arabism.[119]

The concept of the Ummah proved very appealing to the immigrant communities in Europe. Faced with the challenge of a society that remained alien and undiscovered to them, the Islamic conviction offered a respite of the everyday agony and the recurrent question: 'who am I?'[120] In the ensuing search for another form of solidarity, the notion of a Muslim identity was offered inspiration, and Muslim communities across the European continent increasingly started frequenting mosques, making the pilgrimage to Mecca, and watching Islamic shows, in order to rediscover the Islamic component deeply buried within them. Gradually, for the children of the first-generation immigrants – the second and third generation – cultural difference took on increasing importance, despite the fact that these generations were more westernised than their parents in some aspects.[121] For example, second generation immigrants would speak the language of the country they grew up in (often contrary to their parents) but at the same time develop a strong Muslim identity.

Paradoxically, Islam thus provided an identity, but at the same time, it gave many a sense of alienation. With the proliferation of the media channels, the plight of Muslims across the world were brought into close proximity to their daily life. The violence in Bosnia, Palestine, and after the turn of the century, in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as rhetoric such as the 'war on terror' and increasing levels of xenophobia in Europe, coupled with the sense of alienation reinforced the idea of discrimination and fed a perception of Islam being under attack.[122]

For the immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East, whereas in their countries of origin Islam had been an everyday factor of life, in Europe they found themselves as a minority, which begged the question of how to reconcile Islam with a modern, individualised society. Furthermore, later generations born in Europe at times find themselves not perceived as a national in Europe – e.g. Turkish rather than Belgian – and not seen as Turkish in the country of their parents or grandparents. This can lead to an identity crisis. Islam, in cases, provided an alternative sense of social belonging, not based on physical proximity or national identity. These can be compared with the 'overlapping ties' of social capital that were described above.

The ensuing hypothesis was:

The Muslim community in Molenbeek observes strong norms derived from their Muslim heritage.

At the Belgian national level, however, the relationship between religion and the public space is characterised by a system of 'pillarised' secularism. The relationship between the state and religion in Belgium is rooted in the principle of state-recognition of religions and world views. The Belgian state can be described as a neutral and non-secular State. This does not allow the state to intervene in the nomination of any type of religious or atheist leader, but it can fund religious movements. Islam was recognised as one of the six pillar religions in Belgium in 1974. While not as rigid as the French system of laïcité – in which religion is strictly part of the private sphere, and there is no religious involvement in government affairs –Belgium does show signs of convergence with the French model, as indications of Muslim identity in the public space have been difficult to be accepted, such as minarets of mosques or wearing the headscarf.[123]

Some scholars have argued that there is a link between the political structure of laïcité and the proclivity toward Sunni militancy.[124] This line of thinking does not put the religion of Islam itself, but the perceived difficulties in practising Islam, at the root of the process of radicalisation, as it caused increasing alienation among populations with immigrant roots and in turn, has led to the rise of violent radicalisation. While there is no reason to expect this to be the case in Molenbeek, the research did hypothesise that:

The Belgian norms related the practice of religion pose difficulties for the everyday practice of Islam by the Muslims in Molenbeek.

C. Sample selection for the semi-structured interviews

In order to obtain a representative picture of the community, a random probability sample was constructed from all registered addresses

in the two surveyed districts, the Centre Historique and the Quartier Maritime[125]. A probability sample[126] is a sample that has been selected using random selection, so that each unit in the population has a known chance of being selected. It is assumed that a representative sample is more likely to be the outcome, when this method of selection from the population is employed. A random on-site selection was made in the event of more households occupying one residence – which occurred frequently. For the Centre Historique and Quartier Maritime, 4,984 addresses are listed, whereas the total number of households within these two areas is 13,763, which roughly corresponds to three households per address, considering that during the fieldwork many addresses on the list were found to be abandoned, uninhabited, or not residential.

The field work, however, was marred by very high non-response rates. 199 interviews were conducted out of a total sample of 1,400 addresses randomly selected from the sampling frame, which is a response rate of 14.2% (199/1400 * 100 %). All addresses were visited multiple times, at different hours, including weekends, to ensure participation of as broad a segment of the population as possible. Also, there were high rejection rates, as many Molenbeekois were wary of opening their front doors, and initial communication was almost always conducted over the doorbell intercom, with specific difficulties in talking to female respondents, especially when they were alone at home.

At any response rate below 50%, there is a serious risk of nonresponse bias[127], which can affect results due to the data not being representative of the community. A decision was, then, taken to complement the random probability sample with a quota sample[128]. By conducting additional interviews using quota sampling in public spaces around the two surveyed districts, the EIP ensured that specific groups were accounted for in the study. This sample specifically focused on business owners and employees in Molenbeek – who would be at work during the hours of the door-to-door survey – and, despite often living outside of Molenbeek, constitute nonetheless an important part of the social fabric of the community. This sample also included youngsters (between 18-28 years old) and women, two crucial population groups for this study: youngsters (residents under thirty years old), as they are indeed most prone to violent radicalisation; women, because they were found to be less likely to open the door or participate in an interview than males.

The quota sample is a reliable and tested non-probability sample technique. While it is not favoured by social researchers, quota sample is undeniably cheaper and quicker than probability samples[129]. Since the EIP relied on its own resources to fund this survey, a semi-random sample was used, by complementing the random sample with the quota sample.

To determine the margin of error, a basic universal formula based on the sample size and the total population (of the two districts)

Table 13. Sample of the semi-structured interviews

	n	%
Women	149	36.70%
Men	257	63.70%
15-25 years	84	20.7%
25-40 years	145	35.7%
41-65 years	155	38.2%
>65 years	22	5.4%
Married	216	53.2%
Single	188	46.3%
Employed	219	54.21%
Unemployed	185	45.79%
Total	406	100%

was employed[130]. In this research, the margin of error is calculated at ±4.84% with 95% confidence level. This margin indicates that if the research found that 70% of the sample reported being happy to live in Molenbeek, one can be 95% confident that if the survey were to encompass the whole population, the population choice would be between 74.84% and 65.16%.

Despite the fact that questionnaire interviews minimise measurement error, the training of the enumerators was crucial to equip them with the necessary tools to conduct successful interviews. The eight enumerators (three women, five men) thus received two full days of training on interview techniques for open-ended interviews, existing research on radicalisation, conflict sensitivity, and cultural awareness. They were all (graduate) students or recent graduates and together spoke eight languages.[131]

D. Data collection

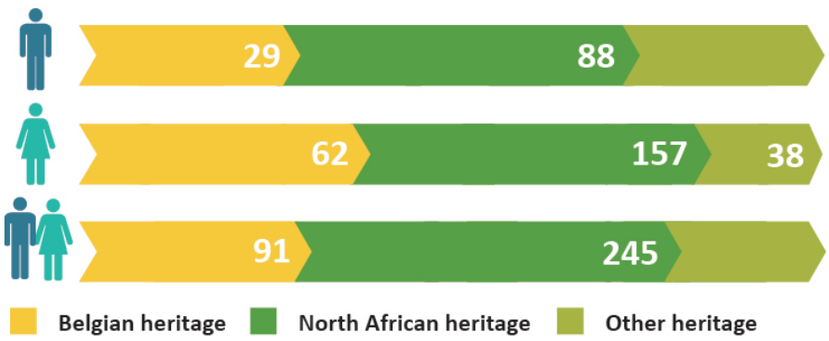
Data collection for the survey began in May 2016. Names and addresses at which the interviews were conducted were kept confidential to protect the security and privacy of the respondents, but also to allow the respondents to speak openly about the effects of violent radicalisation on their community. There were no security incidents while conducting the survey, although a high number of respondents declined participation, at times in a less than friendly manner. Only once, however, was there a report of an aggressive at titude toward some of the enumerators. In general, respondents were keen on participating and telling their story. Additionally, respondents commented on the survey as useful, although a large part observed that it remained to be seen if it would amount to something or their voices will continue to be unheard.

E. Data analysis

While this research is interested in identifying the social patterns of the whole community in Molenbeek, it is useful to distinguish between different communities on the basis of natio-nality and heritage. On these two categories, a variable has been created to distinguish between the community of Belgian heritage, the community of North African heritageand those communities of other heritages, as shown in Figure 23.

It is recognised that these distinctions are deterministic: for example, many individuals of Moroccan heritage would consider themselves as Belgian first and Moroccan second. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of other respondents of North African heritage would identify themselves as being part of the North African – not the Belgian – community in Molenbeek. For the purpose of analysing social patterns, this distinction is useful and justified. Whenever reference the report makes to a 'community', it is contextualised when speaking, either about the whole of the population of the two Molenbeek districts under study, or about a specific group within these districts, such as the group of North African or Belgian heritage.

Figure 23. Different communities in the sample



The group of North African heritage is made out of a minority of respondents from Algerian (10) and Tunisian (4) heritage, with the majority (231) being of Moroccan heritage. The group with 'other heritage' includes predominantly Southern Europeans such as those with Italian (10), French (13), and Spanish (6) heritage, as well as people from various heritages in African countries such as Congo (5) and Guinea (5).

It is noteworthy that some communities remain beyond the scope of this research, such as Tur-kish, Roma and South Asian communities. It is due either to language barriers, or the wish of some communities to keep a low profile. It is, indeed a shared perception among some communities that avoiding exposure to journalists or researchers is the wise course of action, as speaking up might draw the ire of other communities, notably the dominant ones. This view is the EIP's perception that emerged from dialogues with local actors. Investigating the social patterns of these less represented communities is thus a very ripe topic for further research. And as explained before, the Moroccan community was overly more represented within the North African community, due perhaps to the fact that they are the community targeted the most by the media accusation and capitalised on the opportunity presented by this research to tell their own views. It is imperative to underscore, however, that North African community is much wider than the Moroccan community. The umbrella term of North African community was utilised for strictly academic reason and not meant to neglect the fundamental differences between these groups. Using the term other heritage follows the same reasoning, this research endeavoured to be as representative as possible and not meant to highlight one group at the expense of other groups.

1. Quantitative data analysis

The ultimate goal of data analysis is to discern associations and investigate relationships between variables; put simply, it is about testing relations between variables. The data that emerged was thus divided into variables for the quantitative analysis. Going beyond a mere opinion poll, the quantitative data generated through the closed-ended questions of the semi-structured interviews has been analysed to investigate relationships between variables with the use of Stata statistical software[132]. Two types of variables are used in this research: ordinal and categorical.

Ordinal variables

A majority of the variables are ordinal: a ranking between 1 and 5, such as 'trust in various institutions', or the ease with which a respondent practises his/her faith.

The relationships between ordinal variables have been analysed with ordinal logistic regression (OLR). OLR is a form of predictive analysis that explains the relationship between one dependent variable, which is ordinal, and the independent variables that are either continuous or ordinal. In the outputs of these models, the exponent (exp. or β) indicates the strength and direction of the association. For example, a positive exponent indicates a positive association between two variables, while a negative exponent indicates that as the independent variable increases, the dependent variable decreases. Also, the standard error (S.E.) is reported, as well as the Pseudo R2 measure, which indicates the goodness-of-fit of the model, ranging from 0 to 1 (1 being a perfect fit).

(Table 14) offers a simple explanation of what that means. For a sample of (N = 394) and (P<.001), this analysis found a significant positive relation between the level of education and the importance accorded to politics. This relation is significant because P is far smaller than .05 and is also positive because the exponent or β is not negative. This means the more educated the person is, the more he/she will think that politics is important.

The independent variables for the OLR are gender, education, employment and residence in Molenbeek. The dependent variables are the importance of family, friends, religion and politics and trust in the police, journalists and politicians.

Categorical variables

The other variables are categorical, there are variables that cannot be ranked, such as nationality or origin. The appropriate way to test associations between categorical variables is through contingency tables. Contingency tables are a cross-tabulation of variables with a measure that shows if there is a statistically significant relationship between the two variables, of which at least one is categorical. If there is no 'contingency', the two variables are independent: if there is a contingency, it can be said that there is a relationship between the two.

For both OLR and contingency tables, a result is understood to be statistically significant, if the probability that it was due to chance, is smaller than 5%. This is reported as having a p- value smaller than .05, the smaller the p-value is, the stronger the evidence of an association between two variables.

2. Qualitative data analysis

The open questions in the semi-structured interviews have been coded through a framework of grounded theory. In short, this signifies that the data have been broken down into specific categories (corresponding to the items in the survey questionnaire). Also, the data has been coded as it emerged, which serves to label, separate, organise and compile data. Coding categories were revised as the data emerged and theoretical saturation was often reached after around 100 interviews. Many of the open questions had very high response rates, but some of the controversial questions were often not answered. Verbatim comments were noted with quotes and used throughout the research to provide depth and explanation of the internal processes that lay behind the trends quantitatively identified.

Table 14: example

Independent variables	Dependent variables	The exponent (exp. or β)	Standard error (S.E.)	Pseudo R2
Education	Importance of politics	+ 0.30	.07	.0214

[1] Local actors refer to community representatives, business owners and social workers.

[2] FOD Economie – Statistics Belgium, Fiscale statistiek van de inkomens - 2005-2013, available online at http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/modules/publications/statistiques/arbeidsmarkt_levensomstandigheden/Statistique_fiscale_des _revenus.jsp (last accessed 10 January 2017).

[3] Registre National de la Belgique, available online at http://www.ibz.rrn.fgov.be/fr/registre-national/.

[4] In the framework of dialogue events with residents and interviews with social workers in Molenbeek.

[5] Such as business owners, employees, and young people who come to spend their leisure time in in Molenbeek.

[6] Matlack, C. (2016) 'Brussels: Europe's Jihadi Capital', Bloomberg, 24 March, available online at http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-03-24/brussels-europe-s-jihadi-capital (accessed last 23 August 2016)

[7] Both men quoted in 'Things "not under control" in Molenbeek' (2015) deredactie.be, 15 November, available online at http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws.english/News/1.2496884 (last accessed 30 August 2015).

[8] Referenced in 'Voici le nombre de djihadistes en Belgique', 2017 La Libre Belgique, 25 April, available online at http://www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/voici-le-nombre-de-djihadistes-en-belgique-58fee758cd70e805130fe095 (last accessed 11 May 2017).

[9] Information obtained in confidence from a reliable source close to the Belgian security services.

[10] Commune Molenbeek-Saint-Jean (2015) Rapport Annuel 2014-2015, Receveur Communal, p. 84, available online at http://www.molenbeek.irisnet.be/fr/publications/Rapport%20annuel/rapport-annuel-2014-2015-fr.pdf (last accessed 30 August 2016).

[11] Coolsaet, R. (2016) All Radicalisation is Local: The Genesis and Drawbacks of an Elusive Concept, Egmont Paper 84, Egmont – the Royal Institute of International Affairs, June, available online at http://egmontinstitute.be/wp- content/uploads/2016/05/ep84.pdf (last accessed 24 August 2016).

[12] OECD (2016) Trends Shaping Education 2016, Paris: OECD Publishing, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/trends_edu-2016-en

[13] Rosland, E. & Klaus, I. (2016) 'It happens on the pavement: putting cities at the heart of countering violent extremism', Brookings Institute, 1 June, available online at http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2016/06/01-cities- countering-violent-extremism-rosand-klaus (last accessed 24 August 2016).

[14] De Visser, N. (2015) 'How Belgium Became a Terrorist Hotbed', The Daily Beast, 15 November, available online at http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/11/15/how-belgium-became-a-terrorism-hotbed.html (accessed last 23 August 2016).

[15] Mufson, S. (2015) 'Molenbeek: The Belgian neighbourhood indelibly linked to jihad', The Independent, 16 November, available online at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/molenbeek-the-belgian-neighbourhood-indelibly- linked-to-jihad-a6736636.html (last accessed 30 August 2016) and Mevel, J.-J. (2015) 'Molenbeek, plaque tournante des réseaux djihadistes', Le Figaro, available online at http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2015/11/15/01016- 20151115ARTFIG00005-molenbeek-plaque-tournante-des-reseaux-djihadistes.php (last accessed 30 August 2016).

[16] Dallison, P. (2015) 'I'm going to clean up Molenbeek', Politico, 15 November, available online at http://www.politico.eu/article/attack-on-paris-what-happened-im-going-to-clean-up-molenbeek/ (last accessed 30 August 2016).

[17] Referenced in article in Le Soir = 'Un djihadiste belge sur trois est une femme ou un enfant' (2016) Le Soir, 12 July, available online at http://www.lesoir.be/1264891/article/actualite/belgique/2016-07-12/un-djihadiste-belge-sur-trois-est-une-femme-ou-un- enfant (last accessed 30 August 2016).

[18] Ibid. Figures as of early July 2016, according to the report by OCAM ('Organe de Coordination de l'Analyse de la Menace').

[19] NP Data (2016) Provincie Namen levert grootste aantal Syriëgangers, 24 February, available online at http://www.npdata.be/BuG/310-Syriegangers/ (last accessed 23 August 2016).

[20] Ibid. Article 'Voici le nombre de djihadistes en Belgique', La Libre Belgique, 25 April 2017.

[21] 'Museum shooting suspect lived in Molenbeek before attack' (2014) De Redactie.be, 25 July, available online at http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws.english/News/1.2042901 (last accessed 23 August 2016).

[22] Balboni, J. (2015) 'Molenbeek: la discrète étape belge d'El Khazzani', DH, 25 August, available online at http://www.dhnet.be/actu/belgique/molenbeek-la-discrete-etape-belge-d-el-khazzani-55dcc2b13570b546537c63ac (last accessed 31 August 2016).

[23] Graham, D.A. (2015) 'The Mysterious Life and Death of Abdelhamid Abaaoud', The Atlantic, 19 November, available online at http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/who-was-abdelhamid-abaaoud-isis-paris/416739/ (last accessed 31 August 2016).

[24] Chrisafis, A. (2016) 'Paris attacks suspect Salah Abdeslam shot and arrested in Brussels', The Guardian, 18 March, available online at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/18/paris-attacks-suspect-salah-abdeslam-wounded-in-brussels- terror-raid-reports (last accessed 23 August 2016).

[25] Ibid. Article 'Things not under control in Molenbeek' (2015), deredactie.be, 15 November

[26] Crowford, O. (2016) 'Brussels attack: Inside the Isis cell that has brought death and destruction to Europe', International Business Times, 23 March, available online at http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/brussels-attack-inside-isis-cell-that-has-brought- death-destruction-europe-1551250 (last accessed 23 August 2016).

[27] Higgins, A. & De Freytas-Tamura, K. (2016) 'A Brussels Mentor Who Taught 'Gangster Islam' to the Young and Angry',The New York Times, 11 April, available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/12/world/europe/a-brussels-mentor-who- taught-gangster-islam-to-the-young-and-angry.html?_r=0 (last accessed 30 August 2016).

[28] The map on the districts in the Brussels Capital Region is produced by Le Monitoring des Quartiers, Bruxelles and can be accessed online at https://monitoringdesquartiers.brussels/partition-region-de-bruxelles-capitale-quartiers/.

[29] Fiche Communale d'analyse des statistiques locales en Région bruxelloise, Fiche no. 12, Commune de Molenbeek Saint- Jean, February 2010, p. 5, available online at http://www.observatbru.be/documents/graphics/fiches-communales/2010/12_molenbeek_fr.pdf (last accessed 23 August 2016).

[30] Ibid. p. 5

[31] BISA, FOD Economie – Statistics Belgium, available online at http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/statistieken/cijfers/. 34 NP Data (2015) Moslims in België per gewest, provincie, en gemeente, 18 September, available online at http://www.npdata.be/BuG/286-Aantal-moslims/Aantal-moslims.htm

[32] Ibid. NP Data (2015) Moslims in België per gewest, provincie, en gemeente, 18 September.

[33] FOD Economie – Statistics Belgium, Fiscale statistiek van de inkomens - 2005-2013, available online at http://statbel.fgov.be/nl/modules/publications/statistiques/arbeidsmarkt_levensomstandigheden/Statistique_fiscale_des _revenus.jsp (last accessed 31 August 2016).

[34] Ibid. NP Data (2015) Moslims in België per gewest, provincie, en gemeente, 18 September.

[35] Ibid. Fiche Communale d'analyse des statistiques locales en Région bruxelloise, February 2010, p. 7.

[36] Williams, A. et al (2016) 'How two Brussels neighbourhoods became 'a breeding ground' for terror', Washington Post, 1 April, available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/world/brussels-molenbeek-demographics/ (last accessed 23 August 2016).

[37] Ibid. Fiche Communale d'analyse des statistiques locales en Région bruxelloise, February 2010, p. 7. February 2010, p. 6.

[38] See, inter alia, McCauley, C. & Moskalenko, S. (2008) 'Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism', Terrorism and Political Violence, 20 (3), pp. 415-433; Moghaddam, F.M. (2005) 'The staircase to terrorism: A psychological explanation', American Psychologist, 60 (2), pp. 161-169.

[39] Hamid, S. & Dar, R. (2016) 'Islamism, Salafism, and Jihadism: A Primer', Brookings Institute, 9 July, available online at https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/07/15/islamism-salafism-and-jihadism-a-primer/ (last accessed 23 January 2017).

[40] Fuller, G. (2003) The Future of Political Islam, Palgrave Macmillan US.

[41] For detailed accounts on bonding, bridging and linking social ties, please refer to Annex Two.

[42] Varshney, A. (2001) 'Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond', World Politics, 53 (3), pp. 362-398; Carpenter, A. (2014) 'Havens in a Firestorm: Perspectives from Bagdad on Resilience to Sectarian Violence', Civil Wars, 14 (2), pp. 182-204.

[43] Ibid. Varshney (2001) 'Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond', pp. 362-398.

[44] Stake, R.E. (1995) The Art of Case Study Research, Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage.

[45] Bryman, A. (2008) Social Research Methods, Third Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 56.

[46] Ibid. Bryman, A. (2008), p. 70.

[47] Survey refers to the whole process of interviews, interviews are the framework through which the survey was conducted, and questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions for the purpose of conducting a survey. For questions, closed-ended limits the answers to the response options provided in the questionnaire, unlike open-ended questions in which there are no response options.

[48] Examples include Grootaert, C. et al (2005) Measuring Social Capital: An Integrated Questionnaire, World Bank Working Paper No. 18, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, and United Nations (2005) Designing Household Survey Samples: Practical Guidelines, Department of Social and Economic Affairs, Statistics Division, Series F No. 98, New York, N.Y.: United Nations.

[49] The first focus group was conducted on 21 April 2016, with two middle-aged, long-term Molenbeek residents; the second focus group was conducted on 27 April 2016, with three young (under 30 years-old) Molenbeek residents; and the third focus group was conducted on 9 May 2016, with nine community representatives in Molenbeek including social workers and psychologists.

[50] According to the majority of the focus groups participants, this would make it incredibly hard to ask questions on the topics of extremism and radicalisation, as *'people had had enough'* of this. One specific objection was made to include the question: *'Do you think the people in Molenbeek are willing to help if needed'.* This is a widely-used question in surveys used to measure trust in others, but in this specific context however, it was deemed to be inappropriate, as it could easily be linked to the claim that the inhabitants of Molenbeek had purposely helped to provide shelter to Salah Abdeslam after the Paris assaults in November 2015 (Focus group participant, 9 May, 2016).

[51] After the attacks in Paris and Brussels, Molenbeek was heavily scrutinised by local and international journalists. See Higgings, A.(2015) 'In Suspects' Brussels Neighborhood, a History of Petty Crimes and Missed Chances',New York times, 16 November, available online at https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/17/world/europe/in-suspects-brussels-neighborhood-a- history-of-petty-crimes-and-missed-chances.html?_r=1 (last accessed 23 January 2017)

[52] As a result, the average interview time increased from approximately 45 minutes to well over 1 hour per interview. With the advent of the holy month of Ramadan, response rates significantly dropped. This protraction risked alienating the residents from the enumerators, so the decision was taken to revert to fully closed-ended questionnaires.

[53] As a complex phenomenon, violent radicalisation can be studied at three levels: a) the structural level, which includes long- term factors such as ideology, poverty, discrimination; b) the community level, which includes community relationships and group or network dynamics; and c) individual level, which includes psychological and emotional factors.

[54] 6 September 2017, European Committee of the Regions, http://eip.org/en/news-events/what-does-molenbeek-think- %E2%80%93-new-eip-survey-reveals-drivers-violent-extremism; 7 February 2017, USIP-EIP invitation-only event "Understanding and developing effective responses to radicalization and violent extremism"; 18 March 2017, public event "We are Molenbeek"; 5 May 2017, Plate-forme de cohésion sociale de Molenbeek.

[55] Meetings with experts and officials dealing with C/PVE issues at EU, State and local level, in Belgium, other European countries, the US of experts and officials.

[56] Refer to Part One, Section C.

[57] Antisocial behaviour includes the lack of cleanliness of the streets, nuisances as a result of sound, and general forms of incivility.

[58] As explained in the Introduction.

[59] Based on a contingency Table. n=396, X2= 63.61, p<.001

[60] It is the view of many respondents that if further attacks were to happen, it would be outside Molenbeek. If these extremists hide in Molenbeek and they seek to incite fear in the society, they will, according to the respondents, target other public places outside Molenbeek.

[61] Based on a contingency Table. N=399, X2=14.68, p=.144 (not significant).

[62] Berinsky, A & LenzEducation, G (2010) Education and Political Participation: Exploring the Causal Link, available online at http://web.mit.edu/berinsky/www/files/edu.pdf (last accessed on 31 January 2017)

[63] To some extent, this can be explained by the fact that nearly all those of North African heritage identify themselves as Muslims. They did so without further identifying themselves among specific subdivisions of Islam. It should be noted that the overwhelming majority is of the Sunni denomination, which is in line with the dominance of Sunni Muslims in Morocco and other North African countries.

[64] Based on a contingency Table. n=248, X2=276.1, p<.001

[65] As explained in Part 2, section A 'Diversity in Molenbeek', 'Different communities in Molenbeek'.

[66] It is a widely-observed tradition in the Muslim communities to slaughter sheep in front of their houses during El-Eid and share its meat with family members and those in need.

[67] Based on an ANOVA comparison of means. F=19, p<.001.

[68] As explained in Part One, section B, 1, b.

[69] Based on a contingency Table. N=404, X2=14.13, p=.007.

[70] Based on a contingency Table. N=249, X2=13.48, p=.009.

[71] Most participants – who attended on a volunteer basis – were from the community of North African heritage. This is not surprising as this community constitutes the outright majority in the two-surveyed districts. All dialogue events were open for all residents of the two districts except for two events: one was designated as a female-only event and the other as a youth-only event, as already explained in the methodology.

72 As explained in Part One, section B, 1, b.

73 Based on a contingency Table. N=142, X2=12.68, p=.124 (not significant).

74 'Maison des Cultures et de la Cohésion Sociale' is a cultural centre in the Centre Historique district of Molenbeek where various activities are organised for the residents in order to enhance their social and cultural awareness.

75 Chaudhary, V. (2016) 'How Molenbeek fought back against Isis – with football' The Guardian, October 30, available online at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/29/molenbeek-brussels-fighting-isis-football (last accessed 24 January 2017)

76 Civic education (curriculum and civility) is the formal education provided and sanctioned by the state. Religious education, here, refers to the parallel Islamic system of education offered in mosques on weekends.

77 The municipality's Facebook page leads this campaign to give an alternative image of the community in the wake of the attacks.

78 The setting of in-depth interviewing is preferred to a focus group setting, because participants are unlikely to be at ease talking in a group about a topic as contentious as the process of violent radicalisation of someone they personally know. Jennings, K. (2007) The War as Social Space: Social Research in Conflict Zones, New Security Report, Fafo report 08, available online at http://www.fafo.no/index.php/en/publications/fafo-reports/item/the-war-zone-as-social-space

79 Ibid. Bryman, A. (2008) Social Research Methods, p. 458.

80 Scott Atran, address to the U.N. Security Council, 23 April 2015, a transcript available online at https://www.icea.ox.ac.uk/latest/news/article/date/2015/04/scott-atrans-address-to-the-un-security-council-ministerial- debate-on-23-april-2015-the-role-of-yo/?cHash=ad2ce2ef8921a5f8e667f1683ec5b3d8 (accessed 23 August 2016).

81 Ibid. Varshney (2001) 'Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond', p. 363.

82 Ibid.

83 Torrekens, C. & Adam, I. (2015) 'Belgo-Marocains, Belgo-Turcs: (auto)Portrait de nos concitoyens', Fondation Roi Baudouin. 85 Moghaddam, F.M. (2005) 'The staircase to terrorism: A psychological explanation', American Psychologist, 60 (2), pp. 161- 169.

84 This is in line with other analysis by Gary Anderson, in which he has argued for an expansion of people from North African origins on the Brussels police forces. Since this is a long-term measure, a short-term recommendation could be training in community policing and setting up small police garrisons in Molenbeek that have collocated public work sub-stations, which would bring the population closer to the police. Anderson, G. (2016) 'Time to Bring Counterinsurgency to Molenbeek', Small Wars Journal, 21 April, available online at http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/time-to-bring-counterinsurgency-to- molenbeek (last accessed 31 August 2016).

85 Sageman, M. (2008) Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century, Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia University Press, p. 86.

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[131] Interviews were conducted predominantly in French (78.8%), but a significant minority was conducted in Arabic (16.5%), as especially many older inhabitants of Molenbeek only speak Arabic. A small minority was conducted in Dutch (0.7%), English (2.5%), and Italian (1.5%).

[132] Data analysis and statistical software.

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Notes

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