

Biopolitics and zoēpolitics in a post-political era:
Hegemonic struggle in the Swedish debate on foreign terrorist fighters



Abstract

With an increasing number of Swedish citizens joining military extremist organizations in the Middle East, this study aims to identify and discuss the current discourses on how to handle foreign terrorist fighters through an analysis of the Swedish debate during 2014-2015. While one faction presents strategies and policy suggestions aiming to reconstitute what are described as mentally ill and socioeconomically excluded individuals, others in turn propose repressive measures through harsher punishment and revocation of citizenship of individuals identified as a threat to Western values. Using the methodological approach from discourse theory, this work aims to explore the ways in which the discourses are constructed. Furthermore, the study applies the Foucauldian toolbox of governmentality, and the ideas of biopolitics and zoēpolitics respectively to explore the inherent rationalities within each discourse, opening up for a discussion on what possible consequences a hegemonic struggle between the discourses implies. The work concludes that in an era of post-politics where morals can be argued to have triumphed over politics, repressive measures referring to the securitization and protection of Western values present themselves as an objective and reasonable lines of action in contrast to reconstitutive strategies where foreign terrorist fighters are constructed as victims in need of help.

Keywords: Governmentality, biopolitics, zoēpolitics, foreign terrorist fighters, post-politics

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1 Introduction

In the aftermath of the outbreak of the Syrian civil war the upsurge of military extremist groups who claim independence from the Assad-regime, such as the Islamic State (IS) and the al-Nusra front, have been sources of interest and worry for policymakers, politicians and journalists both in the region itself and in the West. To date, such organizations have attracted approximately 20 000 foreign terrorist fighters to join their forces, whereof about 4500¹ are from Western Europe. The number of fighters choosing to leave their life in Europe for an uncertain future on the battlefields continues to grow, with little indication that the infected conflict in the region will come to an end, or that the continued recruitment of fighters will stop anytime soon. On the contrary, the numbers have grown exponentially since the outburst of the war in 2011 (ICSR, 2015). Researchers, policymakers and politicians struggle to grasp the reasons for the sudden mass recruitment, how this recruitment can be prevented, and lastly how returnees should be handled. In Sweden it is now estimated that about 300 young men and women have left to join such groups (SÄPO, 2015), thus topping European statistics regarding the amount of fighters per capita. The current Swedish debate includes a vast range of proposals on how the problem should be handled, which has resulted in a watershed, particularly on the issue of returnees. Policy suggestions include everything from repressive policies such as revoking citizenship and judging fighters for treason, to restitutive policies such as integration through work and housing. The proposals and the discussion on the issue raise questions regarding principles on citizenship and the role of the state in governing issues of transnational character on Swedish soil. This study suggests that the way in which policymakers, journalists and politicians have discussed the issue can be understood through the theoretical framework on governmentalities coined by the French political philosopher and historian Michel Foucault, which is useful to understand different approaches on governance of the state and its citizens. Two such approaches that have been examined by scholars within political science and political philosophy are *biopolitics* and *zoēpolitics*. This study will argue that the restitutive measures can be studied as a form biopolitics: as a tool to shape the population as a political entity aiming to include and take care of deviant behavior. The repressive measures can in turn be read through the concept of zoēpolitics, which aims to protect the political society by expelling what threatens it into a state of bare life.

1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is to critically assess the debate on Swedish foreign terrorist fighters through a discourse analysis of the policy proposals put forward in the contemporary debate. The overall aim of the study is to explore the inherent principles, world-views and rationalities, and the mechanisms of power at play through the

¹ Numbers last updated January 2015 (ICSR, 2015)

Foucauldian notion of *governmentality* generally, and *biopolitics* and *zoēpolitics* specifically. My research questions are thus:

What are the dominant discourses with regards to foreign terrorist fighters in the contemporary debate in Sweden today? How are the discourses constructed, and what are the possible implications of these?

Consequently the aim of the study is threefold: firstly to describe the existing discourses on foreign terrorist fighters in Sweden, second to trace the way in which the discourses are constructed, and lastly to explore what implications the ongoing debate and perceived discursive struggle might have on the further development of policies and laws directed towards the management of foreign terrorist fighters, arguing that there is limited space for a discursive shift in an area that to a large extent has come to be influenced by the international “war on terror”.

1.2 Previous research and relevance of the study

Researchers within the field of security studies specialized on global terrorism have aimed to understand and predict the reasons for religious radicalization and the development and force of attraction of religious extremist organizations such as the Islamic State. The body of research comprises studies from widely different fields, from qualitative studies within sociology and social anthropology to quantitative studies within international relations and security studies. “*Why conventional wisdom on radicalization fails: the persistence of a failed discourse*” is an in-depth study that aims to qualitatively explore the contemporary discourses on radicalized young men in Britain. Here the researchers discuss the problems that arise when policymakers and the media frame radicalization as an unavoidable consequence of alienation, ideology, influence, or use of the internet, while Britain’s military involvement in, for example, Iraq is regarded as less relevant for the same issue (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010). They further discuss how the current discourse on radicalization has gained a foothold, which in turn has created space for harsh policy responses such as increased surveillance and border controls. Therefore, they argue, the discourse on foreign terrorist fighters in Britain should be understood as a political strategy just as much as an attempt to explain radicalization itself. The following study positions itself in the same area of research, seeking to explore the current discourses in the Swedish context, opening up perspectives for moving beyond simplistic arguments, and rather aiming to understand the possible implications of the specific ways in which the issue is currently discussed.

The French political philosopher and historian Michel Foucault wrote extensively on the issue of securitization. His theories were later applied as a tool to explore one of the 21st century’s core concerns within the field of international relations and global politics: the war on terror as launched by the USA in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. There are numerous studies in line with this theoretical framework, where the

concepts of governmentality, securitization and state of exception seeks to understand the challenges 'the West' is facing in its approach in these issues (see e.g. Aradau and Van Munster, 2009; Baker-Beall, 2013; Debrix and Barder, 2009). The specific concepts of biopolitics and zoēpolitics have in turn been applied to the issues of migration and integration (Schinkel, 2010), regimes of deportation (Walter et.al., 2010), European border control (Aas, 2010) and last but not least on the camp; a concept where both biopolitics and zoēpolitics are at play, critically assessed in the work of the German political scientist Hannah Arendt in the years after the second world war (Arendt, 1950), and later by the American sociologist Judith Butler who has described the case of Guantanamo Bay and the lawlessness that characterizes the current situation there (Butler, 2004).

However, no studies have so far applied the theoretical framework of governmentality, biopolitics and zoēpolitics on the relatively new phenomena of foreign terrorist fighters specifically. Rather, the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and citizenship has been dominated by studies within criminology and law, where measures on how to handle foreign terrorist fighters have been discussed from a legal perspective (see e.g. Alastaire et.al., 2015; Bakker et.al., 2013; 2014). Researchers affiliated to the International Center for Counter-Terrorism located in the Hague have expressed worries regarding the long-term consequences of the short-sighted solutions put forward in the Netherlands and Britain. The following study should thus be understood as a contribution towards broadening perspectives on a subject that currently is characterized by the technical perspective of policymakers; rather, this study aspires to direct attention towards principals of citizenship, governance and power through the perspective of political philosophy.

1.3 Defining foreign terrorist fighters

Exploring a contemporary subject brings several issues to the table, one of them being the challenge with regards to the terms and definitions used within the field. Foreign fighter is a label that requires some clarification, as there is room for linguistic confusion. The phenomenon of transnational insurgency is neither new, nor unique to the situation in the Middle East; the conflict in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the Spanish civil war and the Israeli war of independence 1948 are all examples of conflicts that attracted fighters who were residents in other countries. Despite certain similarities, academics have not perceived it as a singular type of problem, which is clear from the absence of an agreed-upon term. There is thus a range of labels used by academics and policymakers in the field to describe people leaving their country of residence to fight abroad. The British historian David Malet (2013) suggests that *transnational insurgents* is a more precise notion as it eliminates some of the confusion the word *foreign* brings with it, which raise the question to whom the fighter is foreign to. In the Swedish case many of the foreign terrorist fighters are not ethnic Swedes, and the notion thus has the unfortunate side-effect of casting doubt on the nationality of the person, as it can

interpreted that the person is ‘foreign’ to Sweden. Furthermore there are accounts of Swedes who have joined the insurgents in Ukraina, also classed as foreign terrorist fighters. Despite the many pitfalls the notion carries with it, foreign terrorist fighter is an increasingly used label, somewhat manifested with the 2014 UN Resolution 2178 on counter terrorism strategies, which coined the term on an official international level. However, the use of *terrorist* is not unproblematic as there is an ongoing struggle between experts and politicians on what the term actually comprises. It can also be debated whether the term *terrorist* here aims to depict the fear of returnees conducting terrorism in their country of residence, rather than refer to the actual actions conducted in the conflict-zone. In Swedish media *IS-krigare* (IS-fighters) frequently used, which is a somewhat imprecise term, as it limits itself to describe only one of the many active Islamic extremist organizations in the Middle East. The following work will use the notion ‘foreign terrorist fighters’ and refer to those who choose to leave for religiously motivated organizations active in the Middle East. Further, the notions leans on the definition of foreign terrorist fighters by Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF); “*individuals who travel abroad to a State other than their States of residence or nationality to engage in, undertake, plan, prepare, carry out or otherwise support terrorist activity or to provide or receive training to do so (often labeled as “terrorist training”)*” (GCTF, 2015).

1.4 Scope and delimitation

The scope of the study has been limited to exploring the debate on foreign terrorist fighters leaving Sweden to join the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. In Sweden the issue about how to handle foreign terrorist fighters is discussed as a matter concerning the increased occurrence of violent extremism in general. In strategies presented by the National coordinator against violent extremism, as well as smaller local initiatives, the issue of violent Islamic extremism, far-right extremism and the autonomous left are seen as threats to be handled on equal premises, all three requiring similar measures. While it would be valuable to explore all three groups, this paper will exclusively look at the debate concerning individuals who have joined radicalized military organizations in the Middle East. Furthermore, this study limits itself to discussing foreign terrorist fighters as a homogenous group, which is the way the issue has been put forward by policymakers and politicians. This study will thus not go in depth on the fact that there are many girls and women who choose to leave and that they come from widely different socioeconomic backgrounds. This is seldom put forward in discussions and should therefore be explored in further research in order to get a more nuanced and correct presentation of the issue.

1.5 Outline

The three research questions presented in section 1.1. will function as an overarching structure of the text. Thus, chapter 2 aims to briefly *describe* the discourses as identified in the Swedish medial debate during 2014-2015. Chapter 3 presents a theoretical framework within which the empirical findings will be analyzed, presenting the concepts of governmentality, biopolitics and zoēpolitics, and discussing the implications these perspectives on power carry with them. With regards to the second research question, chapter 5 aims to illustrate *how the discourses are constructed*, deploying the methodological tools from discourse theory as presented in chapter 4. Chapter 6 aspires to approach the empirical material using the concepts of biopolitics and zoēpolitics respectively and thus to *discuss some of the implications* that arise in what can be described as a hegemonic struggle between two competing discourses. Lastly, chapter 7 will discuss the results, and suggest that these can be explained through the perspective of post-politics.

2 Discourses on foreign terrorist fighters

2.1 Development of the debate

The Swedish debate on how to prevent further recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters and how to handle returnees must be understood as a chain of events and statements, which in turn has resulted in strategies on how to handle the issue on local and national levels. In this study I have identified a medial debate, where politicians and opinion builders actively position themselves, alongside a policy process resulting in strategies. The factors that evoke reactions from debaters and policymakers is in this study split in three categories; *firstly* the continued growth of IS in the Middle East through the occupation of strategic cities, *second*, the continued increased recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters and stories of either new recruits, returned or killed fighters from Sweden, and *thirdly*, violent attacks executed by returned foreign terrorist fighters or Al-Qaida inspired individuals on European soil, and the perceived increased threat this evokes. Separately and combined these are factors forcing politicians and debaters in Sweden to react and take a standpoint. The timeframe of the debate is confined to the 2014-2015, notably because IS took control over the strategically important city Mosul in Iraq June 2014 (The Guardian, 2014), arguably leading to a shift in the perceived threat the organization posed to the West. Further, during 2015 lethal attacks in the name of IS, or by Al-Qaida inspired individuals, were executed on European soil, leading to an escalation of the debate.

In what must be seen as a step in line with the perception of IS as an increased threat, the UN Security Council presented Resolution 2178 on the criminalization of foreign terrorist fighters and all affiliated activity on September 24 2014. The resolution urges member states to speed up their work on national criminalization as a way of preventing further recruitment and to enable member states to receive returnees with necessary measures. This led to an escalated debate on the fact that Sweden at that point had not criminalized these travels. This is not to say that Sweden had no strategy whatsoever; about one year earlier the department of justice, led by the liberal party's Birgitta Ohlsson, ordered independent investigators to report on the current state and future trends of extremist violence, resulting in the establishment of a National Coordinator on Violent Extremism, led by the previous party leader of the Social Democrats Mona Sahlin. The coordinator's task is to assess the needs of support and assistance to relevant actors such as the police, schools, social services, civil society organizations and religious institutions. The work is under development, but the focus so far has been to educate and strengthen the cooperation between such actors first and foremost with a preventive purpose.

With regards to decisive events that have affected the way in which the issue has been discussed are the two attacks on France: the Charlie Hebdo attack January 7 2015 and ten months later the massacre of 129 civilians in central quarters of Paris November 13 2015. Both attacks have been confirmed as executed by European citizens who had

received weapon training and financial support by military extremist organizations in the Middle East: the Kouachi brothers behind the January attacks were affiliated to Al-Qaida's branch in Yemen (Reuters, 2015), and IS took responsibility for the November attacks (Liberation, 2015). The events forced politicians to take a standpoint in an issue that up until then had been seen as a problem on foreign (read: Middle Eastern) soil. The Charlie Hebdo attack was during the early month of 2015 used to argue that terrorist fighters receiving training abroad could pose a potential threat when they return, which was made relevant once again with the attacks in November 2015. While it can be discussed whether or not the development of strategies on counter terrorism and the handling of foreign terrorist fighters have emerged as a direct result of the attacks, the change of word in aftermath of the attacks at least shows that the attacks have created a medial space for a discussion of the issue. In the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attack the debate concerned worries over the continued recruitment of fighters in Europe, the continued growth of IS in the Middle East and its advance towards the West, and perhaps foremost, the threat returnees pose to society.

2.2 Understanding the debate through discourse analysis

With this brief account of some of the factors that have driven the development of the debate, it is clear that foreign terrorist fighters have been an issue of political contestation on both national and international levels during 2014-2015. In order to understand the way in which the issue is discussed and what inherent worldviews the arguments lean on, it is useful to apply the analytical concept of *discourse*. This concept is a post-structuralist reaction to the modernist and essentialist belief in the existence of one universal rationality (Finlayson and Martin, 2006:157ff). The definition of the notion differs slightly from scholar to scholar, but a widely agreed-upon term is that a discourse is a certain way to communicate and understand the world (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000:7). An important point of reflection to bring up with regards to the presentation of *discourses* in plural is the extent of a discourse as such, or, in other words: how totalitarian it is. Foucault further argues that a discourse is a series of statements that belongs to the same discursive formation and consist of a definite amount of statements for which one can define conditions of existence (Foucault, 1972:133f.) A strict Foucauldian reading would thus not recognize the suggestion that there is more than one discourse at work at once on the same subject, arguing that a discourse is all-encompassing to the extent that it makes it impossible to imagine, speak or think outside of it. Foucault would rather suggest that there are several discursive fields revolving different subjects (e.g. revolving medicine, sexuality, democracy and so on). This study thus rather leans towards the conceptualization by the post-Marxist political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their work *Hegemony and socialist strategy* from 1985, where they argue that we approach reality and create meaning through discourses, and that discourses exist within a *hegemonic system* where discourses namely 'compete' in an antagonistic relation. Hegemony, as coined by the

Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci in the beginning of the 20th century, should be understood as a way of conceptualizing power, and is a term that describes the organization of collective will, manifested through linguistic practices: “*Hegemony highlights the mechanisms through which dominant groups in society succeed in persuading subordinate groups to accept their own moral, political and cultural values and their institutions through ideological means*” (Mayr, 2008:13). A *hegemonic system* can thus be understood as the system within which a struggle between worldviews takes place, through linguistic practices.

Returning to the Swedish debate on foreign terrorist fighters, there is reason to argue that the debate can be read as a struggle between two competing discourses within a hegemonic system. Such an assessment of the discursive landscape is supported by the editors of the magazine on politics and culture, *Arena*², who in the preface to an edition on the subject state that “*in the debate on how society should take on young men who have fought with IS there seem to be two factions: those who want harsher penalties and withdrawn citizenship. And those who want to help and understand*” (Arena, 2015:6)³. The following sections will take a closer look at these two perspectives, and explore some of the core contentions, arguing that there are in fact two distinct discourses at play in the debate on how to handle foreign terrorist fighters. I will return in depth to the specific methodological tool of *discourse theory* in chapter 4, with which I will analyze the empirical material in chapter 5.

2.3 Restitutive discourse

On the one hand I identify what I in this work choose to call a *restitutive* discourse, which is constituted by arguments applied both on how to prevent the further recruitment of fighters, and the handling of returnees. In this context *restitute* can be read in the same way as *rehabilitate*: a word frequently used in the context of criminology to describe criminals’ way back into society after committing a crime. In this work it refers to the ambition to repair, fix and give a second chance, a task taken on by the authorities, and thus reminds of the language used in the handling of drug addicts. Within the restitutive discourse foreign terrorist fighters are seen as a problem generated through processes of socio-economic exclusion, failed integration and psychological factors which has led to their choice of leaving Sweden to fight in the name of military extremist organizations in Syria and Iraq. The suggested strategies on how to handle the problem are twofold and include both preventive and restitutive measures. I would argue that both approaches (preventive and restitutive) are part of the same discourse, although this could be subject to debate (a preference for preventive measures does not necessarily exclude the wish for repressive measures). Foreign terrorist fighters in the risk zone are seen as a challenge for the local authorities; travels

²Arena claims to be politically independent, however, it is affiliated with one of the biggest leftist think tanks in Sweden and should be read accordingly.

³My translation

should therefore be prevented through the strengthening of early warning systems, and increased cooperation between the police, schools, social services and families. If the damage is already done and they have already travelled and even chosen to come back, the returnees are considered as “sick” or “damaged”. This is illustrated by suggestions to rehabilitate them and help them back to society by assisting them in finding housing, work and a meaningful role in society. A quick look at the website of ‘The national coordinator for protecting democracy against violent extremism’, led by Mona Sahlin, serves as a fruitful illustration of the restitutive discourse. The headline reads: “*No one is born extremist. Together we can prevent violent extremism. Let’s strengthen the individual and the society through preventive measures*” (The national coordinator for protecting democracy against violent extremism, 2014). The group arguing in line with this discourse should be understood as those trusting the capacity of the state; if only the structures are good enough, the problem will not arise. If the state can rebuild a strong connection between the individual and the state, this group believes, the problem can be prevented, and even solved.

2.4 Repressive discourse

On the other hand, I identify a *repressive* discourse, *repressive* referring to the types of penalties thought to best solve the problem. Harsher penalties are thought to both prevent further recruitment, but should perhaps foremost be read as measures thought to be ‘on par’ the with the torture, persecution and arbitrary assassinations of civilians the organizations have become affiliated with. Within this discourse politicians and experts approach the problem in line with the now familiar ”war on terror”; joining military extremist groups abroad and all affiliated activity is here first and foremost seen as a security hazard, a threat to the west and its core values such as democracy and peace. There is fear that the fighters will return radicalized and trained, ready to execute terrorism on European soil. Participation in any training or fighting, financing or facilitation of such activities should therefore be criminalized and punished accordingly. Suggestions to punish such activity by revoking citizenship, and judging the perpetrators as traitors, are predominant suggestions to address foreign terrorist fighters. Such suggestions are less present in Sweden than in other EU-countries such as the Netherlands and Britain, where revoking citizenship and travel documents has been introduced as a lawful measure, however, there are politicians in Sweden arguing in line with this discourse as well. The leader of the Swedish Christian Democrats Ebba Busch Thor held a speech this summer holding that foreign terrorist fighters are a threat to Swedish values, suggesting that the laws need to be sharpened and that foreign terrorist fighters should be judged as traitors and given lifetime in prison. I will return to more examples that support this perspective in chapter 5.

2.5 What is left out?

Having argued that there are two distinct discourses at play, expressed through different strategies on how to handle foreign terrorist fighters, it is worth taking a look at what is left out in such a conceptualization of the debate. One important aspect that has to be emphasized is that those who argue in favor of giving returnees work and housing also have expressed that the crimes they have conducted cannot be met with impunity, which is reflected by the broad political support of the need for criminalization, in line with UN Resolution 2178. It could thus be argued that all are in fact a part of the repressive discourse. Despite this, I still hold that there has been a crystallization of arguments, partly through the reactions the presented suggestions have generated. Despite the fact that the discourses have no strict borders, and arguments float in and out of both, I maintain that an analysis of two distinct discourses is fruitful in exploring the issue of Swedish foreign terrorist fighters. I will return to the discourses in chapter 5, demonstrating their existence through presentation of selected material.

3 *Governmentality: a theoretical framework*

Having defined discourses as specific ways of conceptualizing and approaching reality through linguistic practices, I will now turn to the concept of governmentality as coined by Michel Foucault in his later work. This will serve as an overarching concept of power, which will be explored through the notions *biopolitics* and *zoēpolitics* as conceptualized by Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben respectively. I draw on the work of the Dutch sociologist Willem Schinkel (2010), who previously has applied the framework of bio and zoēpolitics as forms of population control on the issue of migration. The framework is useful in depicting the way in which foreign terrorist fighters are constructed as a problem, and as a method to explore the different mechanisms of power at play in the relation between the state and this specific group.

3.1 *Governmentality*

Given that the concepts biopolitics and zoēpolitics are derivatives of Foucault's key notion of *governmentality* (Agamben, 1998; Walters, 2012), I find it helpful to establish governmentality as an overarching perspective on power. I have chosen to apply the analytical framework under the precondition that governmentality functions as an overarching perspective on the way in which power functions and is executed, while biopolitics and zoēpolitics should be understood as different versions of this technique. Governmentality is a rich concept not fully defined by the originator himself, and scholars have in their studies of Foucault's work stated that it should be understood as an 'analytic toolbox' with which societal phenomena can be explored, rather than an all-encompassing or fixed theory (Walters, 2012). However, in general terms governmentality explores the conduct of power, by looking at the way in which practices, techniques and rationalities function to shape behavior in different contexts (Walters, 2012:11). As the German sociologist Thomas Lemke (2002) points out, the concept ranges from "governing the self" to "governing others", here illustrated in the words of Foucault:

"[...] governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques, which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself" (Foucault, 1993:203-4, in Lemke, 2002)

Despite this very broad definition of governmentality, a large part of Foucault's work on the concept concerns governance of and by states. By looking at material such as policies, instructions and directives, Foucault suggests that it is possible to discover how rationalities or systems of thought have constituted the state as a thinkable and meaningful entity (Walters, 2012). In this work I choose to lean on Lemke's (2002) reading of governmentality where he identifies three different categories: strategic games between liberties, government, and domination. I here choose to focus on

government, as it serves as the most useful concept when exploring population control. Although domination in some sense is relevant too, government on its side captures the ambiguity in power relations, especially between the state and its people. Government here refers to the previously mentioned rationalities that enable the regulation of conduct by the state. Furthermore, it is fruitful to distinguish between governmentality that aims to control the population internally and externally. Internal control would here imply “protecting the population from itself” by forming, sculpting and modifying the existing population towards a healthy social body. External control would in turn imply to abject or expel what does not fit the existing entity (Schinkel, 2010). Schinkel further holds that biopolitics and zoēpolitics therefore can be understood as forms of biopower, since they both are forms of power treating aspects of life of death. It should be clear by now that the Foucauldian framework of governmentality by no means offers a fixed definition of how the concepts should be applied. My classification should thus be read as an adaption allowing me to conceptualize the question at hand. On the basis of these categories, I will in the following sections elaborate on how they function and how they will serve as fruitful analytical points of entry when looking at the Swedish debate on foreign terrorist fighters today.

3.2 Biopolitics

Since the notion first came into use in the beginning of the 20th century, the emphasis on each of the components – bio and politics – has shifted and thus been deployed in different ways. Thomas Lemke (2010) describes this development as going through several phases and shows that the notion first was used as a way to conceptualize the state as an organic, living entity. This was in line with the school of thought adapted by race biologists who argued in favor homogenous and racially pure societies, and what they referred to as a ‘healthy state body’, which was used during the second world war by the national socialists movement. Later on, the concept came to signify the relationship between human life and nature, and is in this regard used to describe the way in which biotechnology has to be restricted and controlled to protect humanity from the eventual mishaps the work within the field can come to produce. The way the concepts have been used differ in their understanding of the hierarchical relationship between politics and life, and which one should be superior to the other. Lemke further argues that the fact that bio and politics have been perceived as isolated entities in these two previous approaches to biopolitics, leads to their inability to account for their relationality and historicity. He therefore argues that it is most fruitful as a concept to describe the relationship between the state and its citizens, as held by Foucault.

As developed in *History of Sexuality* Foucault emphasizes biopolitics as a form of power in the intersection between life and politics. In the broadest sense, biopolitics is here to be understood as a tool for the state to make its population subordinate to power, but in a more subtle sense than a direct, applied control “over” the citizens. The power is not one-directional, applied on to the citizens, but rather goes through them,

leaving them no other options but to adapt their behavior so as to not create friction or be punished through the scrutinizing eyes of co-citizens, or even the individual itself (Foucault, 1978). An important point is that the human body itself is subject to power; biopolitics concerns the fostering of life and ultimately the power to let die (Dean, 2007). Along with such a dimension of power, a hierarchical understanding of what constitutes a good and worthy life arises (Schinkel, 2010). One of the core conclusions of Foucault's work is thus that power is productive; power must be understood as productive network running through the societal body, rather than a negative entity with repression as its main task (Foucault, 1980:119).

Previous research on population control in general, and migration in particular, has applied biopolitics to show the discursive construction of immigrant integration where "society" is placed in a dichotomous relation to "not integrated" (Schinkel, 2010). An important aspect here is how the majority society or the hegemonic society is held up as the norm, while divergent behavior has to adapt, reshape and change to fit. The hegemonic society is expressed through cultural codes such as language, but also life choices such as conducting a productive way of life through study and work. The productive way of life is established as the norm, and thus becomes a strategy to uphold the hegemonic society, reinforced and manifested through these conducts of living. Biopolitics here functions as a regulatory power as it touches upon questions of what a good and correct way of living comprises (Dean, 2007:73ff). The control of society is thus a matter of communication and discourses where the governing of the self is articulated through politics, institutions, laws, policies and science, which enables the hegemonic way of life. The governing of citizens is here focused on their minds and at the same time approaches the collective body of society. With regards to Swedish foreign terrorist fighters, biopolitics should here be understood in a wider sense than life and death as ultimate categories, and rather in terms of the content of a lived life which is deviant from the norm and has to be modified and corrected.

3.2.1 Example: *Folkhemmet*

The Swedish concept *Folkhemmet* – the People's Home – was manifested as a political ambition that lasted from the 1930s until the end of the 1970s, and still, to a certain extent, has an influence on the understanding of the purpose and possibilities of the Swedish welfare state. Combining socialism with capitalism, it shaped the modern idea of the Nordic welfare state, where the concept of insurance through collective taxation secured equal access to, for example, schooling and health services, to all citizens (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The politics introduced in the name of *Folkhemmet* touched upon widely different areas such as economics, housing and cultural expressions. However, one of the policy areas that remained particularly prominent was the outspoken aspiration of a healthy state body. Through the extensive use of sterilization based on theories of eugenics, functionality and health, Sweden was in the forefront in Europe in shaping its societal body (Olsson, 1999). While the outcome of such politics can be understood as repressive and limiting, the purpose was to achieve equality and

prosperity. The driving force behind the development of politics during this period was concerns about a society in decay, where poverty and sickness was perceived as a threat to the continued reproduction of the nation state (Olsson, 1999:168). *Folkhemmet* is thus a useful example in understanding the mechanism of biopolitics in the Swedish context, as the concept rests on a deliberate shaping and control of the human body as means to exercise power, the result being a politicized human body used as a tool for a greater purpose. Although sterilization no longer occurs to the extent it did in the first half of the 20th century, the idea that certain practices or lives are harmful both for the individual itself and for the state is still visible in the forced sterilization of transgendered persons, which was banned as late as in 2013 (SOU 2013/14:106). The way in which deviant and harmful behavior is taken care of by the state through laws restricting unhealthy products, facilitating a healthy lifestyle, and the offering of programs to prevent and treat mental illness and drug abuse indicate that the use of biopolitical measures were not restricted to the era of *Folkhemmet*, but rather a strategy that to a large extent still characterizes Swedish politics.

3.3 Zoēpolitics

In his work *Homo Sacer* the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben gives an historical account of the ultimate punishment throughout history. According to Roman law *homo sacer* signifies a person who is not to be sacrificed, yet he who murders this person will not be convicted for homicide (Agamben, 1998:9). Thus, a person judged as *homo sacer* is reduced to what Agamben calls bare life, deprived of rights of citizenship. This in turn builds on the conception that life should be understood in two distinct ways. Referring to the philosophers of ancient Greece, he proposes the use of *zoē* to describe the simple fact of living for any living being – bare life – while *bios* indicates the proper way of living for a particular group or individual (Agamben, 1998). This of course has broader implications than being an etymological tracing; the two concepts inherently carry different understandings of power and political order. Judging someone as *homo sacer* implies sending it out in the *zoē*, the apolitical sphere of society, and exempting it from both human and divine law. Agamben shows how this is a returning concept throughout history, *homo sacer* being the Roman version of the concept, while the medieval image of the werewolf serves as the Germanic representation of the same. The werewolf too is banned from society, cursed to live in the wild and brute nature separated from culture and the civilized man. The werewolf is thus banned into *zoē* away from *bios* (ibid:104ff.). Agamben further states;

“The crimes that merit sacration [...] do not have the character of a transgression of a rule that then is followed by the appropriate sanction. They constitute instead the originary exception in which human life is included in the political order in being exposed to an unconditional capacity to be killed” (Agamben, 1998:85).

With regards to the two discourses on foreign terrorist fighters in Sweden today, zoēpolitics is therefore the mechanism paving the way for an understanding of foreign terrorist fighters as citizens unworthy of their citizenship, who should be excluded and kept away from the political society, the bios.

3.3.1 Example: State of exception

In an essay on the legal framework for detainees on Guantanamo Bay, Judith Butler reviews the concept *indefinite detention* by applying the analytical framework of Agamben. She states, “‘*indefinite detention*’ is an illegitimate exercise of power, but it is, significantly, part of a broader tactic to neutralize the rule of law in the name of security” (2004:67). Judith Butler mounts a central point of critique towards Agamben., arguing that his perspective is one-dimensional, and misses the way in which categories of subjectification intersect and legitimize policy outcomes. While Agamben identifies the mere existence of powers that have the ability to include-exclude members of society based on the idea of citizenship, he does not take into account how the power is used to target and manage certain populations, and how it differentiates populations on the basis of ethnicity and race (Butler, 2004:68). Butler’s added perspective underlines the need to understand how intersecting subject positions potentially strengthen and facilitate discourses on foreign terrorist fighters.

Butler’s case on indefinite detention serves as a fruitful point of comparison to show the mechanisms of legitimization at stake when dealing with “terrorists”. An important distinction between the case of indefinite detention, and the current debate on reprimands towards foreign terrorist fighters in Sweden is the fact that the US authorities legitimize their actions on the basis of a situation of exception, making space for actions unsupported by existing laws:

“‘Indefinite detention’ does not signify an exceptional circumstance, but rather, the means by which the exceptional becomes established as a naturalized norm. It becomes the occasion and the means by which the extra-legal exercise of state power justify itself indefinitely, installing itself as a potentially permanent feature of the political life in the US.” (Butler, 2004:67)

The Swedish approach of publically discussing how the problem should be solved, can be argued to be more democratic in contrast to the US case, which has proved to be highly arbitrary; the requirements of evidence are lowered or non-existent, based on officials’ judgment of detainees as more or less “dangerous” (Butler, 2004:74). However, while democratic processes are established as a virtue to strive for, the adaption and change of the law in order to legitimize reprimands on foreign terrorist fighters, can also be understood as the ultimate manifestation of a certain discourse. Installing new laws can in other words also be understood as a way of permanently justifying power exercised in a state of exception. The German political philosopher Carl Schmitt aptly points out the connection between sovereignty and the state of exception, stating that “*sovereign is he who decides on the exception*” ([1985]2005:5), thus relying on a dialectical relation between law and politics and an authoritarian

perspective on the sovereign state. His observation has often been referred to by critics of the war on terrorism, such as Chantal Mouffe (2005). Although Schmitt and his work served the Nazis and their ideology during the first half of the 20th century, his ideas capture an important aspect of state sovereignty previously left out by the classical political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes (DeBrix and Barder, 2009).

Keeping Foucault's work on power in mind it can be argued that Butler (2004), Agamben (1998) and Arendt's (1950) reading of 'the camp' as an ultimate expression of a state of exception as an example of zoēpolitics in practice is a somewhat narrow reading of the mechanism of zoēpolitics.

"[...] there is no face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom, which are mutually exclusive (freedom disappears everywhere power is exercised), but a much more complicated interplay. In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination)." (Foucault, 1982:790)

Accepting this reading of the relationship between power and freedom it can here be argued that 'the camp', with the retention of detainees and a complete deprivation of their freedom, contradicts this very definition of power. I will return to the implications this has for the case of foreign terrorist fighters in the analysis section, arguing that this in fact serves as a more precise example of the mechanisms of zoēpolitics.

4 *Discourse theory: a method*

This chapter will stake out the scientific premises for the thesis, and give a brief account of discourse theory as a methodological tool. Furthermore, I will explain how I have proceeded in finding the material and discuss some of the methodological challenges the study poses.

4.1 *Ontological and epistemological presumptions*

By examining a variety of sources, this study aims to map out the current debate as expressed in newspapers, forums and published articles by politicians, experts and researchers within the field. As the purpose is to explore existing discourses on foreign terrorist fighters in Sweden and to trace the rationalities these are built upon, a critical assessment through discourse analysis presents itself as a natural choice of method. Further, the methodology of this study is tightly paired with the theoretical framework. As previously mentioned, I lean on the presumption that the field of discourse analysis serves as a toolbox, where theory and method along with ontological and epistemological assumptions are inseparable. The ontological point of departure in this research is that there is no objective truth or reality out there to be found if we only dig deep enough. Rather, our ideas should be understood as the precondition for reality. Thus, epistemologically, the study is situated in the social constructivist tradition, based on the idea that meaning is created and negotiated through language, and reality is here understood to be the result of our attempts to categorize the world in order to create meaning (Bergström and Boréus, 2000). In extension of this, knowledge and truth are always historically and culturally specific, with an inherent possibility of being something else (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000:11). With these presumptions, discourse analysis serves as the most useful tool to decipher the material and to get a deeper understanding of what power structures and inherent arguments are at play in the question of foreign terrorist fighters in Sweden today.

4.2 *Discourse theory: a methodological tool*

The material will be approached through the conceptual framework of *discourse theory*, as coined by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and socialist strategy* (1985). They build their theory on the assumption that social phenomena are never complete or total, but rather that there is always space for negotiations on how society and identity are defined (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). The aim of discourse analysis is thus to map out the process on how meaning is created, through a constant struggle between different ways of conceptualizing the world. Further, it aims to show how certain practices of meaning, or discourses, are accepted to the extent that they are experienced as natural, evident and even impossible to imagine differently: what is

referred to as *objective discourses* (Laclau, 1990:34). Objective discourses can be understood as the result of a power struggle, and are left unquestioned and accepted as common knowledge rather than something political that needs to be discussed. However, an objective discourse can be brought up and problematized in a different context, and thus has an inherent fragility (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000:44). An important aspect here is the depoliticizing process an objective discourse implies, and even as some would argue, its de-democratizing effect. While an objective discourse is perceived as evident and nonnegotiable, discourse theory aims to reveal that there is notably a close relation between objective discourses and ideology, as they become all-encompassing systems of thought. The goal of discourse theory is thus to destabilize and deconstruct what has become accepted overall. One such objective discourse that has come to be manifested throughout the 21st century is that the war on terror is an adequate response to the 9/11 attacks. Discourse theory further uses the notion of *antagonism* to describe ongoing lines of conflict, which arise when discourses clash. The process where an objective discourse is contended with and negotiated around by a competing worldview, or a competing discourse, is within discourse theory referred to as *hegemonic intervention*, which describes the process from when something is perceived as a political conflict to an objective, natural ‘truth’.

With regards to the ontological point of departure of discourse theory, Laclau and Mouffe notably comment on the relation between realism and idealism by emphasizing that they do not question the “realness” of different phenomena or objects, which they have been accused of by critics. Rather, they point out that it is the meaning we ascribe to these phenomena that is in their center of attention – the way they are discursively constituted has implications for our way of perceiving them (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:108). Furthermore, as theorists within the hermeneutical school have emphasized, interpretations and practices are always intimately connected. This approach thus negotiates around the once rigid distinction between objective positivist explanations and subjective hermeneutical descriptions (Howarth et.al., 2000:6).

Discourse theory holds that discourses are constructed through the use of *signs* or *elements*, which get their meaning as they are placed in a system of distinctions, put in contrast to what they differentiate from. *Nodal points* in turn are privileged signs around which the other signs are organized and receive their meaning. In this process a discourse is established as a totality where nodal points fix the meaning of the connected signs. A discourse in this way excludes other meanings of the signs, reducing the possibility of other meanings (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2000:33f). The signs relate to each other through *chains of equivalence* where signs are given meaning through what they are similar to and different from, and is an important aspect in the process of identity building which contribute to the reproduction of discourses. Through the process of subjectification, individuals’ or groups’ identity is manifested through the abovementioned chains of equivalence, giving a group or an individual a limited set of characteristics and choice of action that is meaningful for this group or individual. My analysis aims to identify the nodal points in each of the discourses and with the aim of

mapping out and understanding the function of the chains of equivalence. My aspiration is that this will shed some light on the rationalities the discourses are built upon.

4.3 Selection of material

Discourses are reproduced on different levels, in different types of media, for different purposes. Few of the texts that together constitute a discourse are expressed with the deliberate goal of reproducing the discourse; rather, this is the inevitable result of the accumulation of texts over time, which together contribute to a manifestation of the discourse. Relevant material can consist of both linguistic and non-linguistic data such as speeches, published academic articles, news articles, interviews, policy proposals, ideas and institutions, which together constitute a given discourse (Howarth et.al., 2000:4). In this project the material has been selected on the grounds of its representativeness and width. Further, as I explore an ongoing debate, the texts have been chosen on the grounds that they cross-reference each other, and thus their intertextuality.

Methodologically, I have proceeded by using the search engine Retriever, specialized on media research. I have started out by typing in keywords such as *IS-krigare (IS-fighters)*, *jihadkrigare (jihad fighters)* (which are the most common descriptions of the group in Sweden), and further add the keywords *återvända (returned)*, *bemöta (respond)*, followed by a) counting the hits, b) mapping the related keywords and c) noting the time span in order to reconstruct a brief chronologic development of the debate. Counting the hits is relevant to understand how central something is at a certain point or date. If many newspapers pick up on an event or statement it gives an indicator that this is of importance, which increases the probability that politicians and policymakers will respond in some way. Mapping out the related keywords (often names or places) to each of the inserted keywords is a strategy used to situate the keyword in a bigger context. Each search lists a series of keywords, which naturally changes for each article. Each month or day will thus produce different connected keywords. I have here chosen to focus on keywords from the Swedish context to narrow the hits; keywords such as Iraq, Syria or USA are less important here than names and places from Sweden, as I am interested in the Swedish debate. I then add these keywords to the search, helping me to narrow the result down to what is most relevant to this study. Lastly, mapping out the timespan is done by noting when there is a peak of published articles containing a certain keyword. The word IS-fighter, for instance, shows a remarkable peak in the days following the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris. This provides an indicator to focus on articles published shortly after the peak, as these were probably written as a response to the event. In addition to selecting material with this method, I have chosen supplementary texts that emphasize the perspective represented; these texts should thus be understood as methods of gaining a deeper understanding of the rationality behind each discourse.

Following these steps gives reliability in the sense that the study is reproducible by other researchers. Validity-wise, it is somewhat harder to argue that the method actually helps me to answer whether there are several discourses at play and whether or not there is an ongoing hegemonic struggle. However, a systematic analysis of the material at least gives the possibility for other researchers to argue otherwise. Additionally, the material should here be seen as the foundation with which I am able to explore the existence of discourses, and to demonstrate how these can be understood through a specific theoretical framework. The material is thus not meant to be a complete coverage of the existing material on the subject, but rather as a way to show that there within various types of sources (political documents, debate articles, interviews) is reason to argue that there are two distinct discourses.

5 *Empirical findings*

As argued in chapter 2, I believe there are two distinct discourses at play in the Swedish debate on how foreign terrorist fighters should be handled. The material thus centers around two different political suggestions, or strategies. One strategy is identified as using repressive measures, suggesting harsher punishment, while the other is identified as promoting restitutive measures, holding up reintegration through employment and stable connections to society as a solution to handling returnees and preventing further recruitment. The point of departure is that the discourses are in an antagonistic struggle, representing two different rationalities and thus fighting to define the group foreign terrorist fighters and the best solution to accommodate the problem. Using the method discussed in chapter 4, I have identified articles or speeches that have provoked further debate on the subject. The strategies put forward by politicians and policymakers are more or less official; some are articulated in published political documents, while other have been presented as speeches at political gatherings, or in medial interviews. The reactions to the strategies have in turn been gathered from a wider range of sources such as debate articles published in newspapers and in think-tank magazines, twitter, interviews, and so forth, based on intertextuality – as many of the studied articles cross-refer back to each other.

As mentioned in section 4.3, I have used supplementary texts to get an in-depth perspective on the rationalities within the discourses. I have therefore chosen to analyze two longer in-depth interviews with foreign terrorist fighters. One was published as a part of a reportage by SVT's program *Uppdrag Granskning* February 22 2015 called "Shahada (martyrdom)". The other is the portrait "Why did you want to die Samir?" published by the political independent magazine *Arena* February 2015. The interviews present two widely different stories of the driving factors behind their engagement in the Middle Eastern conflict and are of relevance as they were published in February after the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris.

I want to emphasize that I understand that neither of the strategies is presented as the only way forward by any of the politicians or debaters. Rather, the chosen strategy is often one of many put forward, in combination with preventive measures. The strategies are thus not held up as mutually exclusive, but rather as complementing each other. However, the debaters often hold up one of the strategies as more prominent than the other. I would further argue that the strategies represent different perspectives on the responsibility of the individual versus the importance of structures as a reason for radicalization on a more aggregated level. The different explanations for radicalization that are expressed are thus oftentimes connected to widely different solutions. I will return to the relationship between these factors in the analysis section. The material will in the following section be structured around the previously presented discourses: the restitutive and repressive, respectively.

5.1 Restitutive discourse

5.1.1 Socioeconomic exclusion

In a portrait published in the political magazine *Arena* February 2015, Evin Ismail tells the story of her childhood friend Samir who grew up in the same suburban area as her, an area said to have recruited the largest amount of Swedish foreign terrorist fighters. Originally, the interview was to be part of her thesis in sociology on life in the suburbs. However, some time after the interviews were completed she got the message that Samir had left to join IS in Syria, and that he was killed during his time there. Rather than remaining a single individual portrait of the challenging life in the Swedish suburbs, the story suddenly became a contribution to the larger debate on the phenomena of foreign terrorist fighters. *Arena* presents the portrait as “*a story about Sweden*” on the front page, suggesting that the problem of young, marginalized men leaving Sweden to fight in the Middle East is a story about something greater, about Sweden and a failed system leading young, oftentimes second or third generation immigrants subject to discrimination to escape a situation lacking prospects or opportunities. The portrait quotes Samir on stories from his childhood, on how he got caught in a reciprocal, vicious circle of distrust, suspicion and doubt between himself and authorities such as teachers and the police. “*The police wanted to mark us with a feeling, that we from the suburbs are bad people, that’s the feeling they want you to have. It is systematic harassment*”. Ismail herself reflects upon Samir’s death stating: “*his death was a symbolic action with a message to society. The message is: ‘Fuck you, I am not your little dog anymore’.*” (Ismail, 2015)⁴. The portrait can be understood as a contribution to a greater debate on the challenges of segregated cities, discrimination and racism. The radicalization of young marginalized men is here presented as one of the many consequences of the abovementioned societal problems in Sweden today. This perspective presents the social structure as the premise for the possible choices an individual can make.

In line with the picture painted by Ismail and her story of Samir are the strategies on violent extremism published in the winter/spring of 2015. Many municipalities saw the need to establish their own strategies while they were waiting for a national plan, which was not published until late summer 2015. Two of the strategies that evoked strong reactions were those of the municipalities of Örebro and Stockholm. Of the approximately 300 Swedes who have left for Syria most have come from notably Örebro and Stockholm, but also Malmö and Gothenburg. From Örebro alone, the sixth largest locality in Sweden, tens of young men and women have joined military extremist groups. Some are still there, some have been killed, and some have returned to their town of residence. The group of returnees is represented both by those who wish to exit the movement and those who might have dubious intentions for using their acquired knowledge. However, this is difficult or even impossible to determine, due to

⁴ All translations are mine. Interview in Swedish available at Dagens Arena: <http://www.dagensarena.se/magasinetarena/varfor-ville-du-do-samir/>

the lack of available information. On January 16, 2015, in an interview with the local news channel SVT Tvärsnytt, the municipal government councilor Rasmus Persson from the Center Party listed possible measures to handle the ongoing situation. They included actions both to prevent further recruitment, but also actions aimed at taking care of the foreign terrorist fighters when they have returned. In the interview, Persson suggests providing them with a place to stay, giving them connections to employment services, as well as possibly psychological counseling, given the traumatic experiences the returnees have been through. These measures are meant to prevent further social exclusion, which is held up as one of the central explanations to why they left in the first place (SVT Tvärsnytt, 2015). The statement led to a series of reactions and a vivid debate with articles and statement from other politicians, some supporting him, but most accusing him and the line of action to be weak and completely off charts. In an additional interview few days after the initial statement he chose to correct himself, stating that he felt that the message had not come through the way he wanted. He pointed out: “...all felonies executed abroad or in Sweden must be repressed, but that is up to the judiciary to handle.” He further stated: “The challenges in Örebro municipality are first and foremost to prevent the continued recruitment to extreme organizations” (SR P4 Örebro, 2015).

Örebro municipality is not the only political actor connecting social exclusion with the problem of radicalization. On May 19, 2015, Stockholm City presented their strategy against violent extremism, which included similar lines of argument. Here, four perspectives were held up as central for how the work should be organized: *promoting, preventing, support to relatives, and after perspective*. The strategy is directed towards three main groups at risk for violent extremism: the autonomous left, the extreme right and the Islamic extremists. The promoting part is meant to provide a safe foundation for equal rights and democratic participation, and implies long-term structural work with issues such as human rights, democratic development and antiracism. The preventing part of the strategy is directed towards the specific risk groups, and implies coordination between police, social services, civil society groups, employment services, schools, health services, religious groups and housing companies. Support to relatives in turn implies setting up a hotline, where family and friends can seek advice and help. Lastly, the ‘after perspective’ is aimed towards both those who want to exit extremist movements, as well as returnees from fight zones. The strategy here states that it is “*crucial to provide adapted inclusive measures*” (Stockholm City, 2015:5). In the following passage the needs are specified:

“With regards to subsistence it is important that there is a cooperation between social services’ livelihood support, employment agents (Jobbtorg) and other efforts at the labor market administration (arbetsmarknadsförvaltningen) as well as a link to employment services (arbetsförmedling).” (Stockholm City, 2015:5)

Although there is little or no discussion reasoning around the mechanism linking returned foreign terrorist fighters to the need of housing and work, there is reason to argue that such efforts can have a normalizing and disciplining function. I will return to

this argument at length in chapter 6. Using the tools of discourse theory, the nodal point is *structural problems* around which other signs are given meaning. Providing housing, employment and counseling is in this context meaningful as a solution to structural problems, which are presented as the source of the problem. Pointing to structural problems as the reason for radicalization can be argued to take away some of the responsibility of the individual itself, making the society as a point of focus.

5.1.2 Mental illness

The strategies put forward by Örebro and Stockholm arguably present two types of help or assistance to returned foreign terrorist fighters. The first part, as discussed above, focuses on the structural problems of discrimination resulting in difficulties in getting access to the labor market and adequate housing. The other is a set of solutions and measures strongly connected to the perception that the young men in question suffer from psychological problems that should be met with counseling and health services. Coordinated health care efforts are presented as necessary both in preventive and restitutive perspectives. The following passage from Stockholm City's strategy illustrate the restitutive need:

“With regards to individuals who have participated in battle, there is likely to be a great need of health care efforts. Therefore it is important to coordinate the work of social services, social psychiatry, and units for abusive behavior, as well as health care centers and the psychiatry (PTSD, trauma etc.)”. (Stockholm City, 2015:5).

The preventive need is in turn illustrated by the case of Örebro, where they are installing a coordinator for preventive work against violent extremism and drugs, active per December 1, suggesting that radicalization and drugs are caused by the same problems. While discrimination and the individuals' socioeconomic situation is seen as a part of the problem leading to abusive behavior, this type of help still carries with it an understanding of radicalized young men as sick, a problem that should be met with care.

This perspective is further supported by the National coordinator on violent extremism represented by Mona Sahlin, who in an interview with Svenska Dagbladet in the days after Örebro stated the need of rehabilitating measures, where she supported the strategy with the following words: “*Many have psychological problems or have in other ways become excluded. This can be a risk factor leading to engagement in extremism of different kinds.*” (Svenska Dagbladet, 2015). The same perspective was putforward by the journalist Diamant Salihu who in a chronicle published in the newspaper Expressen March 2015 sheds some light on the issue of mental illness among foreign terrorist fighters joining IS, connecting the increased recruitment to the statistics on increasing cases of suicide among 15-24 year olds in Sweden published by Karolinska Institutet- He refers to his friend who has been working with relatives of foreign terrorist fighters who states: “[*Europeans who have joined terrorist movements*] are *analphabets when it comes to knowledge about Islam. They are actually searching for a way out, an 'exit'.*” (Salihu, 2015). While Salihu does not link the explanation of

why they choose to leave to any solution, his statement is still a contribution to the framing of foreign terrorist fighters as mentally ill, which in turn can be used to facilitate arguments of rehabilitation and reintegration.

5.2 *Repressive discourse*

5.2.1 *Threat to western values*

During the annual political get-together Almedalsveckan in July 2015, the newly elected leader of the Christian Democrats, Ebba Busch Thor, held a blatant speech on what direction the party could expect under her leadership. Improved family politics and a continued fight against terrorism were at the heart of her speech. The national strategy on violent extremism was supposed to be published June 2015, but was for different reasons postponed to August 2015. This in turn evoked impatience with many politicians, among them Busch Thor, who expressed frustration over the tedious process on an area that was identified as in urgent need of responses. The following passages from the speech are chosen to illustrate her perspective on the problem, on IS, and how returned foreign terrorist fighters should be met:

“Friends, Sweden is worth defending! The threats towards the open, democratic society are obvious. The islamistic extremists lead a war against our civilization. A war against the values the West is built upon – enlightenment, rule of law and democracy. They want to impose worry, fear, insecurity and instability in the West as well as in the Middle East.” (Busch Thor, 2015)

Busch Thor’s statement here describes a war between civilizations, and Western values that are worth defending. Using the language of discourse theory the nodal point is here *Western values*, around which other signs or moments are given meaning. The signs open, democratic, enlightenment and democracy are held up as worth defending, indicating that the Islamic extremists represent the opposite through their goal of imposing fear and instability. Through the construction of two opposing dichotomies, western values are here held up as hegemonically superior and worth defending by all means. By connecting the abovementioned signs there is a reduction of possibilities in what makes sense to express within the discourse. Busch Thor further argues that Sweden cannot only focus on the protection of people who are displaced due to the conflict in the Middle East; Sweden has a responsibility to prevent people from having to leave their countries in the first place – in other words mitigating the growth of IS, which is argued to be affected by continued recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters. With regards to this she lists three central strategies: 1) Offensive preventive work in the municipalities, 2) enforce the possibility to confiscate the passport of people of who are suspected of participating or planning to participate in terror organizations abroad. Thirdly, she argues:

“It is good that the government wants to criminalize fighting for terrorist organizations abroad. But I want to go further. If someone fights for IS or

other similar organizations one should be able to be judged for treason. In Great Britain they use suspension, which implies that a person can be denied re-entry in the country if there is suspicion of terror involvement. This is something we should look at in Sweden as well.” (ibid)

Busch Thor is not the sole person to suggest stricter control and harsher punishment. A number of liberal voices have brought similar suggestions to the table, among them the leader of the liberal People’s Party Jan Björklund. As a reaction to the suggestions presented by the councilor of Örebro, Björklund stated in an interview with SVT January 21, 2015: *“Those who are not Swedish citizens, but have a permit of residency should be expelled and are not welcome back”*. When asked if punishment is better than help he answers, *“Harsh punishment sends a message that [fighting for IS] is not allowed”* (SVT Nyheter, 2015). He grounds this in the argument that people who have been fighting with terrorist organizations are a threat when they come back because there is a risk that they return and execute terrorism here. *“What happened in France can happen in Sweden”*, he says, referring to the attack on the satirical week magazine Charlie Hebdo January 7, 2015. Revoking citizenship is thus legitimized firstly by the manifestation of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and western values worth defending, second by pointing towards the threat returned fighters pose referring to previous events.

The nationalistic and socially conservative party Sweden Democrats has expressed deep concerns for the missing laws on how to handle Swedish terrorists. As a reaction to Mona Sahlin’s statement that Örebro’s strategy on how to handle returnees was “a good example” (Svenska Dagbladet, 2015), Member of Parliament Kent Ekeröth raised the question in an article published on the news site Nyheter24 January 2015. Here he expresses his worry that the government has not done enough on the issue, and finally referring to his own recent suggestion, on behalf of the Sweden Democrats, to *“revoke their citizenship, even if it makes them stateless.”* (Ekeröth, 2015). Once again the argument is grounded in the threat the returning fighters pose to Sweden, and revoking citizenship is presented as a logic and much needed response to act of joining islamistic extremist organizations.

5.2.3 Religiously motivated ideology

In an hour-long reportage broadcasted by SVT on February 22, 2015, the journalists reconstructed an interview with a returned foreign fighter given the name “Adam”. The journalist seeks to understand his motivation for leaving and his interpretation of IS and their violent attacks on minorities in the region. The following section is an extract of the interview between the reporter (R) and Adam (A)⁵:

The reporter shows a video clip on Shaheed (martyrdom) to Adam:
“The shaheed is awarded seven things from Allah, seven things. Number one, that he will be forgiven from the first drop of blood. Number two, he will be shown his place in paradise, number three, he will be protected from the fitnah

⁵ All translations are mine. The full, transcribed interview in Swedish is available at SVT Uppdrag Granskning: <http://www.svt.se/ug/ug-referens-is-krigaren-adam>

of the grave (...) he will be married to the women of paradise in Jennah. And number seven, he will be allowed to intercede with up to 70 of his relatives.”

R: Do you believe in this?

A: Yes, I believe in it.

R: It sounds like a fairytale.

A: Yes, I understand that. I understand that people think that, but for us who are Muslims, it is something we know will happen, so it is not a fairytale for us, anyway.

R: All Muslims does not believe in this.

A: Yes, they have to believe in it. If you do not believe that martyrdom is the best, then you are not much of a Muslim. That is clear from the Quran and our prophet's statement, so it is not [sic], no one can come and say the contrary, and have proof against it, because there are clear proof in the Quran.

The conversation circles around different topics where Adam explains his conviction and the reasons around his motivation for leaving. Overall, the reportage illustrates the ideological aspect of his choice to leave. The interview is complemented with footage from speeches by President Barack Obama, where he speaks about the chase after the ideological leader Anwar al-Awlaki, who is claimed to be the mastermind behind Al-Qaida on the Arabian peninsula. The setting of the interview is thus the ongoing war between IS and the West. In archival footage, al-Awlaki says, *”Jihad is the greatest dead (sic) after believing in Allah. Jihad is greater than worshiping in the house of Allah, and serving it and serving the pilgrims. References that jihad is the greatest dead of all”*. The reportage thus has no focus on Adam's background, and says nothing about whether his early years in Borås were characterized by socioeconomic exclusion or problems of any kind. Rather, he claims to be fond of Sweden and would not want to cause any harm here. He is under surveillance by the Security Services (SÄPO) which has interrogated him about his will to execute an attack in Sweden:

R: What do you answer then?

A: No, obviously not.

R: And why is that obvious to you? You are in a fight against the West?

A: Yes, but not the entire West, and everyone is not involved, and Sweden is a country that has always been neutral in some way. So I think it would be a pity if Sweden listened to the USA and started putting up harsher regulations against jihadists or islamists, it would only get worse then, I think.

R: What would happen then?

A: Someone might get the idea to do something.

R: An attack?

A: Yes, that could be.

R: Could it lead you to do an attack?

A: No not me. I would never think of doing that in Sweden.

R: Why?

A: Because I grew up here, I was born here, I have my family here and this country is quite good, so I think it would just get worse. Who would I even target, who would I blow up?

To sum up, the conversation illustrates Adam's ideological conviction, and thus portrays a diametrically different story than the interview with Samir does. In some way

it complements the previously presented perspective put forth by Busch Thor, who argues that there is an ongoing war between the West and IS. While the interview does not express any policy suggestions and does not include statements from politicians on how the issue should be handled, I would still argue that the interview feeds the discourses within which the politicians' suggestions make sense.

5.3 Reactions

What is worth noting is the different ways in which the public and other politicians have reacted to the suggestions that have come to the table during the debate. After the interview with Rasmus Persson, one of the trending descriptions of the suggested actions was that it was like giving returnees *'gräddfil'* to the Swedish social services and welfare system: an expression oftentimes used to describe when someone is given privileges they are not entitled to or do not deserve. The suggestions were understood as paving the way for group rights, normally used to help disadvantaged groups. Another line of reaction is here illustrated by a tweet published by the chairman of Liberal Women, Gulan Avci: *"The municipality of Örebro will send IS-fighters to therapy. Has the councilor lost contact with reality?"* (Avci, 2015), suggesting that his way of approaching the problem was so off chart that he could not possibly be sane. While tweets should be read with care, as they often carry with them a sharper, more humoristic language than ordinary articles, her choice of words is still interesting, as it illustrates how difficult it was for many to even imagine treating foreign terrorist fighters by other means than harsh punishment. Another liberal politician who raised his voice in the wake of Persson's interview was the previous municipal council from the Liberal Party. In an article published in the newspaper focused on public policy Dagens Samhälle, he argue that Persson's statement must be understood in light of the strategy to gain voters launched by the Social Democrats 2011. He holds that the suburban area Vivalla, where most of Örebro's foreign terrorist fighters are recruited from, was subject the Social Democrats intensive chase for votes during the 2011 elections.

As a reaction to Stockholm City's strategy on violent extremism the local politician Lotta Edholm from the Liberal Party wrote a debate article in Aftonbladet stating that: *"Nowhere in the strategy does it say that the felonies committed by Swedish extremists abroad should get any consequences when they come back. Frankly put, this is offending."* (Edholm, 2015). The responsible politician behind the publication, Ewa Larsson, was quick to emphasize the need not to mix the responsibilities of the police and the municipal social services, stating in the same newspaper:

"As municipal commissioner of social services I am responsible of measures preventing people from falling through the safety net of society. To let persons who have committed crimes towards fellow

citizens and democracy adrift in society is both dangerous and irresponsible.” (Larsson, 2015)⁶

The study of the medial debate on foreign terrorist fighters thus show that suggestions in line with the restitutive discourse have met far stronger reactions than the suggestions in line with the repressive discourse. Those who have suggested harsher penalties and revocation of citizenship have not been forced to explain themselves, and specify what they mean, like the politicians behind the rehabilitating suggestions put forward by the municipal politicians of Örebro and Stockholm were forced to. This gives reason to argue that the repressive discourse has been understood as more rational and evident than the restitutive discourse, thus questioning the suggestion that there is a hegemonic struggle between two discourses on the subject.

⁶ All translations are mine

6 *Bio vs. zoē*

Having illustrated the way in which the discourses are structured around the nodal points *structural problems* and *mental illness* on the one hand, and *western values*, *security* and *ideology* on the other, I will in the following chapter approach the discourses through the theoretical framework on governmentality. Here the two techniques of governmentality biopolitics and zoēpolitics serve as points of departure in understanding the previously presented material. The purpose is to show what the lines of argument in each of the discourses imply, and further to explore possible consequences of a discursive battle based on the previously identified nodal points.

Along with the manifestation of nodal points around which other signs are given meaning, there is a process of identity building of the group foreign terrorist fighters, towards whom policy suggestions such as revoking citizenship or providing housing and employment are directed. The idea of identity building processes here rests on the work of Ernesto Laclau and his theories on subject positions, which in turn refers to Jacques Lacan (1989) and his work on identity building processes. Lacan emphasizes that identity building processes for an individual and groups are somewhat similar; both groups and individuals receive identity through discursive representation, identity is manifested in its relation to other identities, it is constituted through chains of equivalence defining what you are and what you are not, and lastly it is contingent – an identity is thus possible but not necessary (Lacan, 1989; Laclau, 1990). The contingency of the identity building process is worth keeping in mind as it supports the understanding of the discourses in a hegemonic struggle on how to define the group and the best-suited solutions.

6.1 *Understanding the restitutive discourse through biopolitics*

As the analysis of the debate of foreign terrorist fighters has shown, the group foreign terrorist fighters is given a limited set of identity possibilities where certain aspects of their identity are emphasized as more important and relevant, while other aspects are ignored. The process of constructing the identity foreign fighter is developed through chains of equivalence, including certain signs and excluding others. In the restitutive discourse the nodal points *structural problems* and *mental illness* make sense through a chain of equivalence where mental illness equates need of help. Sweden is a welfare state with a long social democratic tradition, where the responsibility of taking care of those who are in need is the state's responsibility. In turn, emphasizing structural problems as a root cause in this context implies that the person who has chosen to leave Sweden to fight abroad has been placed in a situation that is out of his or her control, where the society which is characterized by segregation, discrimination and unequal access to work and housing ultimately becomes an accomplice in the process of radicalization. With the policy suggestions focusing on provision of housing and jobs,

the group foreign terrorist fighters appear as victims of this problematic society who should be helped and taken care of, both in a preventive and restitutive perspective. There is a similar connotation to the suggestion of providing therapy to returnees and to merge the preventive work on radicalization with that on drug abuse, which contributes to an idea of foreign terrorist fighters as sick, psychologically damaged individuals who need a helping hand to get back on “the right track”. The policy suggestions within the restitutive discourse thus contribute to a construction of foreign terrorist fighters as victims of a failed society.

As argued in chapter 2.1., biopolitics can be understood as a type of governmentality used to control the population, not in a authoritarian way, but rather through practices, norms, institutions and regulations leading to the self-governance by the individual. Offering housing and employment thus has a normalizing capacity, providing foreign terrorist fighters with a pathway to the majority society. This is even more apt in the case of offering counseling to a group that is perceived as mentally ill, which can be read as a biopolitical tool and a way of politicizing the human body, a way of shaping and controlling what ultimately are the building blocks of society. Lastly there is reason to argue that the way in which the restitutive discourse puts the responsibility of radicalization and rehabilitation on the state is way of politicizing the problem. The solutions that are proposed indicate that the existing system is inadequate in its ability to integrate and create prosperous conditions for a certain group of the population, ultimately pushing them to turn against the West. Within the suggestions to rehabilitate and take responsibility for those marginalized individuals there is an inherent message that the very grounds, the system itself, has to change to put an end to the continued recruitment.

6.2 Understanding the repressive discourse through zoēpolitics

The repressive discourse, on the other hand, with the nodal points *western values*, *security* and *ideology*, facilitates the construction of foreign terrorist fighters as a threat, as criminals who have to be punished. As the act of joining, financing or in any other way affiliating oneself with a terrorist organization is about to be criminalized in Sweden, as encouraged by UNSC, there is little discussion on whether or not fighting for military extremist organizations should be penalized; this is unanimously agreed upon by those who have joined the debate. The question is rather how, and with what kind of measures foreign terrorist fighters should be met. The emphasis on how foreign terrorist fighters pose a threat to western values opens up to and legitimizes a more extensive form of punishment. In the words of Agamben and Schmitt there is reason to argue that there is a state of exception, allowing for measures that would not have been legitimate or acceptable within an ordinary context. Leaving your country of residence in the West to fight for a terrorist group allows for a different type of punishment than if the issue was “ordinary crime” not built on an ideology perceived to be a threat to core values such as democracy and peace. Thus, the act of joining military extremist groups

in the Middle East allows the West to take action and even expel the group from Western society, as a way to protect the Western values from being compromised or even destroyed by radicalized terrorists. The nodal point *ideology* contributes to an understanding of foreign terrorist fighters as sane, with a conviction they have chosen, which in turn implies that they individually are fully responsible of their actions. Within the repressive discourse, the group foreign terrorist fighters is through chains of equivalence constructed as a threat; values that have to be protected are evoked as a visualization of a fragile core that has to be protected from brutal threats that have made their way in and now have to be expelled.

While biopolitics directs its focus on gathering and shaping all citizens in a uniform, normative center as a mean to achieve control, zoēpolitics aims to achieve the same through the exclusion of what does not fit or what threatens the state's security. Framing foreign terrorist fighters as a group with an ideology that is a threat towards the core values of Western society legitimizes the expulsion of returning foreign terrorist fighters. While Giorgio Agamben's definition of zoēpolitics as it was used during the Roman era is framed as the ultimate punishment, more encompassing and far-reaching in its scope, there is reason to argue that the mechanism of zoēpolitics taps in to suggestions of revoking returning foreign terrorist fighters' citizenship. Exclusion from the political life, and being judged as unworthy of participating in society, must also be understood as a way of drawing a line between the majority society based on Western values and the perceived threat. The revocation of citizenship that results in statelessness is against the fundamental human rights of the UN, where article 15 states that everyone has the right of a nationality, and states further "*no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality*" (UNDHR, 1948). Most of the policy suggestions have therefore rightly revolved around the possibility of limiting travels in and out of the country through confiscation of travel documents. However, revoking citizenship has also been discussed. In order to get around the UN article 15, some have suggested revoking the Swedish citizenship only of those who have double citizenship. As scholars have shown in their analysis of migration politics and border control and the use of unlimited detention, there is a pressing need to emphasize the influence of ethnicity as a factor that shapes and legitimizes the expulsion of certain citizens.

Returning to 'the camp' as an example of the state of exception and as an illustration of the mechanism of zoēpolitics, I previously argued that the analysis of the Nazi camps by Agamben and the Guantanamo Bay by Butler invokes a narrow reading of the concept. Their reading fails to include an important aspect of the Foucauldian definition of power, which holds that power and a repressive relation between the state and the detainees also implies the presence of freedom. Therefore, I here hold that revoking citizenship as a conceptual example sheds some valuable light on the mechanism of zoēpolitics that the previous work on state of exception has failed to include. Revoking citizenship rather captures Agamben's original usage of zoēpolitics as an understanding of the ultimate punishment, the expulsion to a state of bare life

outside of the bios, which he illustrates with the Roman concept of *homo sacer* and the German myth of the werewolf. Revoking someone's citizenship implies that they are free to live, but are expelled from the political sphere. Ultimately, it could be argued that the Islamic State here has the same conceptual function as 'the nature' has in relation to the werewolf, as the exclusion and denial of reentrance to the bios symbolizes at least a conceptual death (if not death itself, noting the atrocities the Islamic State have become so infamous for). It is thus open to debate whether or not the punishment of being put in a camp, which implies total control over the citizen that committed the crime, actually captures the mechanism of zoēpolitics.

Having discussed the consequences of the arguments and policy suggestions situated within both the restitutive and the repressive discourses, it becomes clear that both lines of argument carry within them inherent problems regarding how the target group foreign terrorist fighters is constructed. That being said, there is a need to emphasize that joining military extremist groups cannot pass without being penalized; the aim here has rather been to show how the discourses and their rationalities are communicated through signs related to different rationalities.

6.3 A hegemonic struggle?

What then are the implications of a debate expressed through discourses evolving around the concepts of inclusion-exclusion, of politicized and depoliticized? Is such a debate able to accommodate differing perspectives on how to approach the handling of crimes of a transnational character? Or is it predetermined by the events of the past and the ways in which these have been managed? Leaning on Laclau and Mouffe's reading of Gramsci and thus the acknowledgement of a hegemonic system and the existence of a constant hegemonic struggle between discourses, the identification of multiple discourses should by now present itself as a valid conclusion. An ongoing struggle on how to identify the group foreign terrorist fighters, which arguably follows in the articulation of how they should be handled, implies that the group's identity is not yet determined, but rather is subject to an ongoing battle between different rationalities. Nonetheless, I will, in the following section, examine the preconditions and possibilities for such a hegemonic struggle.

Returning to the concept of hegemonic intervention and the conclusion that there are two distinct discourses in the debate on foreign terrorist fighters, I here argue that the repressive discourse must be understood as a hegemonic, objective discourse currently being challenged by the restitutive discourse. As a consequence I argue that the restitutive discourse represents a hegemonic intervention. As the analysis of the empirical findings has shown, the repressive discourse borrows and taps in to the familiar discourse on terrorists, framing foreign terrorist fighters as a threat to Western values and thus making repressive arguments reasonable, acceptable and understandable. Within the war on terror the concept of a state of exception has been used as a way of legitimizing questionable methods of detaining suspected terrorists,

military interventions in the Middle East and increased border controls. With regards to the issue of the still rising number of Western European citizens joining the battlefields in the Middle East, it is debatable to what extent this in itself indicates a state of exception. On the one hand, this is a situation that can be argued to simply be a part of the new reality, unlikely to change any time soon. Legislating the action of leaving the country of residence to fight abroad on the basis of a state of exception could thus be understood as magnifying a situation to a level disproportionate to the question at hand. On the other hand, foreign terrorist fighters can be understood as a particular situation unlike anything Sweden or Western Europe has faced before, not necessarily in its content, as it is not the first time foreigners have left their own country to fight in solidarity with troops abroad⁷, but rather in velocity and magnitude. Although no country has declared a state of exception with regards to foreign terrorist fighters at this point, the way in which the group has been articulated as a threat gives reason to argue that the issue allows for measures that at least in its logic and lines of argument relate to the concept of a state of exception. Arguments in line with the zoēpolitical concept, tapping in to the arguments used in the war on terrorism, thus come off as legitimate.

It can therefore be argued that there is no true hegemonic intervention, as the repressive discourse has positioned itself as an objective truth, making statements outside of it present themselves as irrational. Returning once again to discourse theory and its core presumptions that our perception of reality always is negotiable and floating, there is no apparent logic that one discourse should gain foothold over another. The explanation of such a conclusion is thus not found in the ontological approach to the issue. Rather, there is reason to argue that the concepts themselves carry the answer to why the repressive discourse presents itself as more rational than the restitutive. The following section will discuss this suggestion in depth.

⁷ The most pertinent example of foreign terrorist fighters in the Swedish context is the Swedes fighting with the communist against Franco during the Spanish revolution (Gyllenhaal and Westberg, 2015).

7 *Concluding discussion*

This study has explored the current discourses on Swedish foreign terrorist fighters through a discourse analysis of the policy suggestions presented by politicians, policymakers and journalists in different types of media during 2014-2015. Arguing that there are two distinct discourses at play, I have through the methodological framework of discourse theory explored how these are constructed, and what rationalities they rest upon. Applying the Foucauldian toolbox of governmentality I have established that the restitutive discourse, which frames foreign terrorist fighters as victims through its suggestions of rehabilitating them back to society with housing and employment, can be understood through the concept of biopolitics. The rehabilitating measures imply that the state takes responsibility for the consequences of failed integration and marginalization, aiming to get the young men and women “back on track” into the majority society where they ultimately can become productive citizens. The repressive discourse, on the other hand, represents arguments in favor of harsh penalties and even the revocation of citizenship of those who choose to leave. This can in turn be understood through the concept of zoēpolitics, where foreign terrorist fighters are framed as a group of rational, ideologically motivated individuals who pose a threat to the Western values of democracy, peace and universal human rights, and ultimately have to be expelled. Finally, the study has discussed that while the framework of discourse theory suggests that two competing discourses implies that there should be a hegemonic struggle, there are in this case factors impeding such a conclusion. Turning to scholars whose work revolves on the issue of post-politics, the following section aims to show that the reason for an absence of a hegemonic struggle can be found within the inherent logics of biopolitics and zoēpolitics respectively.

7.1 Bio and zoē in an era of post-politics

The concepts of biopolitics and zoēpolitics as means of governing the population can be understood in the light of the ongoing theoretical debate on the function of politics and ideology in a time where a neo-liberal rationality is argued to have triumphed – the fall of communism being the final receipt of such an assessment. In the work *On the political* (2005) by Chantal Mouffe the above mentioned perspective is referred to as the “third way” of politics, previously conceptualized by scholars such as Francis Fukuyama (1992), Ulrich Beck (1992) and Anthony Giddens (1990). Adherents of the ‘third way’ and a cosmopolitan worldview hold that the ‘free world’ has triumphed over communism and along with globalization and the universalization of liberal democracy, the world is moving towards a weakening of collective identities, free of enemies, and thus a world where consensus can be reached through dialogue (Mouffe, 2005:1). Mouffe is profoundly critical of such a claim, and argues that the lack of antagonistic platforms for political debate and a political scene where the political parties situate

themselves towards the center rather opens up space for new lines of contestation. Consequently, she argues, the very consensus others hold as the way towards peace and more democracy has become a source of deep lines of conflict (ibid:75ff), and has contributed to the growth of extremist movements such as the radical right in Europe and religious extremism in the Middle East. She further holds that the lack of political lines of conflict has led to an increasing influence of problematization in moral terms rather than strictly political ones. "...[T]he 'we'/'they' opposition constitutive of politics is now constructed according to moral categories of 'good' versus 'evil'." (Mouffe, 2005:75).

In her work on post-structuralism and analysis of depoliticization within the field of international politics, the British scholar Jenny Edkins argues that depoliticization must be understood as a way of technologizing politics, which in turn is a way of reducing politics to calculability (Edkins, 1999:1). She further holds that: "*in this context ideology is the move that conceals the depoliticization of politics and hides the possibility – the risk – of 'the political'.*" (ibid), thus pointing towards a similar mechanism as Mouffe: the increased presence of morality and in the case discussed in this paper: religiously motivated ideology, in the political contributes to a depoliticized political debate. This in turn must be understood as ways of contributing to the manifestation of certain political arguments merely as technical, yet necessary, solutions. The philosopher Slavoj Žižek captures the essence of the phenomena with these words;

"What makes New Labour (or Bill Clinton's politics in the USA) 'radical' is its abandonment of the 'old ideological divides', usually formulated in the guise of a paraphrase of Deng Xiaoping's motto from the 1960s: 'It doesn't matter if a cat is red or white; what matters is if it catches mice': in the same vein advocates of New Labour like to emphasize that one should take good ideas without any prejudice and apply them, whatever their (ideological) origins. And what are these 'good ideas'? The answer is, of course, *ideas that work.*" (Žižek, 1999:199).⁸

Within this perspective, politics are reduced to introducing ideas that work within what Žižek refers to as the 'framework of existing relations', e.g. the economic system, without any aspirations of changing it. Rather, Žižek holds, politics should be the art of the impossible, which "*changes the very parameters of what is considered possible in the existing constellation*" (Žižek, 1999:199). Mouffe in turn argues in favor of a multipolar world, where there are arenas to express grievances within other frames than the euro-centric idea of democratic peace and universality. Acknowledging that the contemporary political situation, especially on the international level, is characterized by being depoliticized is helpful in understanding why certain arguments have gained foothold and gain support while others are denied and deemed irrational. The depoliticized and technologized solution of harsh punishment and ultimately revocation of citizenship thus come of as rational in contrast to arguments within a discourse taking stance in an aspiration of changing the political framework presented within the

⁸ Italics in original

restitutive discourse. The absence of a hegemonic intervention from the restitutive discourse, which the framework of discourse theory suggests to take place, is thus explained by the manifestation of technical solutions as rational or necessary in an era of post-politics.

7.2 Further research

With the conclusion that the era of post-politics and the increased use of depoliticized solutions are affecting what are perceived as possible and rational approaches on how to handle foreign terrorist fighters in Sweden today, I hold that there are two possible directions for further research in line with this study. Firstly, I suggest that there is a need to further explore the issue of foreign terrorist fighters on a political level. As the empirical material has shown, politicians within the authoritarian/social conservative/economically liberal tradition on the right side of the political spectrum tend to argue that the ideologically driven individual who has chosen “to fight against the West” is the source of the problem, and thus suggest harsher penalties, while social liberal/communitarian parties on the left tend to see the socio-economic structures as the problem that has to be solved. This is something that indeed should be explored further quantitatively to test if there actually is such a correlation. In turn the results can be used to find sustainable political solutions on how to handle foreign terrorist fighters on a national level specifically, and contribute to a better understanding of nation states’ role in local solutions to issues of transnational character generally.

A second line of further research would be to explore the consequences of post-politics and depoliticization within other political areas. Having suggested that this has a profound effect on what are perceived as possible approaches to handle foreign terrorist fighters there is reason to argue that the mechanism of depoliticization has a similar effect on other subjects. It would for instance be of interest to see if this is limited to areas concerning security, or if this has come to change what are seen as rational political solutions within for example economics and public services, and maybe even more relevant these days: migration and asylum politics.

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