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What Is the Driving Force behind Georgians' decision
to Join the Islamic State:
A Study of Life Stories of Georgian Jihadis through
Media Articles

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Author: Giorgi Modebadze
Advisor: Markus Holdo
Examiner: Anders Ackfeldt
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Abstract

The following thesis is concerned with understanding the motivational factors behind Georgian jihadis' decision to join the Islamic State. It uses the theory of the Islamisation of radicalism to explain the process of radicalisation in Georgia.

Resting on a mixed methods research design, the thesis aims to study the individual stories of Georgians fighting for the Islamic State in order to understand the motivation in their personal stories which pushed them to go to war. For this aim, the study creates a database of twenty-six dead Georgian fighters of ISIS after coding the data related to their personal stories collected from online media articles.

In addition to investigating the motivation of Georgian jihadis, the thesis tries to test Roy's theory of the Islamisation of radicalism and makes a comparison between the general characteristics of the Western European and Georgian fighters of the Islamic State.

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I. Introduction

The Islamic State has become a fascination for an increasing number of young jihadis from Georgia since the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. As stated in the annual report on the activities carried out by the State Security Service of Georgia, tens of citizens of Georgia were fighting for ISIS by the end of 2015, with many more keen to joining the terrorist group.¹ This document maintains that the authorities in Tbilisi have a detailed information about less than fifty citizens of Georgia who had been staying in Syria and Iraq by the end of 2015.

Nobody can certify the exact number of fighters from Georgia having joined the Islamic State though. Assumptions are made mainly based on the verbal information. Therefore, normally, it is impossible to determine whether the individual has fought under the flag of ISIS until his or her death is known. Most of the experts in the field admit that the actual number of citizens of Georgia fighting for ISIS is higher than the one mentioned in the official statistics. Usually, the scholars estimate that the number of Georgian fighters in Syria and Iraq has been more than one hundred. However, politicians and Muslim citizens of Georgia often exaggerate or, on the contrary, decrease the figure. Recruitment from Georgia seems to be somehow lessened lately, yet the numbers mentioned above is high for a small country with the population less than 4 million.²

Georgians' involvement in terrorist and military actions in the Middle East damages country's international reputation and threatens state security. Effective policies are to be formulated and implemented, and a number of successive actions are to be carried out by Georgian authorities in order to prevent its citizens to join ISIS and thus, protect the national security of the country.³ It is impossible without initially identifying Georgian fighters' motivations to join the Islamic State. And this is exactly the aim of the following thesis: to understand the general determinants of radicalisation of Georgian jihadis in order to create basis for devising a comprehensive strategy against violent extremism. I will collect and analyse individual stories of the jihadis from Georgia who have joined ISIS since 2011. Having a detailed look at the individual cases is the best way to

¹ The State Security Service of Georgia, *The State Security Service of Georgia Report 2015* (Tbilisi, 2016), 11, <http://ssg.gov.ge/uploads/%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%92%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%A8%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98/SSSG%20REPORT.pdf> (accessed March 1, 2017).

² Tiko Osmanova, "Georgian's Lessened Interest in the Islamic State," *Rezonansi*, January 10, 2017, accessed February 6, 2017, http://www.resonancedaily.com/mobile/index.php?id_rub=8&id_artc=32279.

³ The State Security Service of Georgia is the central agency of the government of Georgia dealing with this problem in cooperation with other governmental institutions and international partners.

emphasise the common trajectories of recruitment of Georgian fighters in order to fully understand the process of radicalisation in the region. Life stories of these people must contain a bunch of useful information that will make it clear what the main push and pull factors are behind their decision to fight for the Islamic State.

As noted, it is almost impossible to determine whether the individual has been a member of the Islamic State until his or her death is known. The State Security Service has confirmed the death of more than twenty citizens of Georgia since 2012. As already mentioned, the number of citizens of Georgia fighting in Syria and Iraq seems to be much higher, and also, more is willing to join the Islamic State. However, it is impossible to find out their names from the government authorities. Nor the local media sources are effective in dealing with this task. Even if the names are disclosed based on verbal information spread in the public, it is almost beyond the bounds of possibility to assert that these people are violent extremists having ties with the Islamic State or even fighting for it. As long as the authorities have preferred to abstain from disclosing the names of the other jihadis, except for about ten citizens of Georgia who are suspected of being guilty of having ties with ISIS, I will analyse the life stories of the dead fighters, minimising the risks related to the inaccuracy of information. I will reveal the individual features of their radicalisation and break down the ways the determinants of this process have been framed.

Thus, the present thesis is driven by the objective to study the individual stories of Georgians fighting for ISIS. Resting on a quantitative research design, it provides and discusses data from media articles written about Georgian jihadis. Articles in the local media are still the most suitable source of data for the following study.⁴ I will collect and code all types of media articles which contain valuable information from the life stories of the radicals. By using the statistical methods for data analysis, I will examine the individual cases of Georgian jihadis and explain the driving force behind their decision to join ISIS.

The aim of this analysis, and the present thesis in general, is to show the existence of specific crucial points, in the form of variables, in personal stories of radicalised Georgians, which acted as the main push and pull factors when they made the final decision to join the Islamic State. In

⁴ The reasons will be discussed in detail later in the paper.

addition to it, undoubtedly interesting part is to explain the relationship between differing variables to describe the common underpinnings of radicalisation in Georgia.

In order to fulfil these purposes, the thesis is based on the following research questions:

1. What is the main motivations for the citizens of Georgia to join the Islamic State?
2. How are these push and pull factors, which encouraged the jihadis to make the final decision to go to war, related to each other?

II. Previous research

A lot has been written in the academia about the driving forces behind jihadi terrorism. The characteristics of terrorists and the circumstances under which they join the jihad vary with time and place. Consequently, scholars come up with different explanations when studying the pull factors contributing to the rise of violent extremism. In the following chapter, I will review the literature on radicalisation, outline how the leading European and Georgian researchers explain the flow of foreign ISIS recruits, display the challenges Georgian academia is facing with this regard and point out my contribution to the existing knowledge.

Is Islam to blame in the process of radicalisation?

In the West, the main debates have always been over the role of Islam in the process of radicalisation. In recent days, the scholars try to understand the reasons for the rise of the Islamic State as the most powerful terrorist organisation and figure out to what level Islam is to blame in banding radicals together in Syria and Iraq.

Olivier Roy, a professor at the European University Institute in Florence and one of the leading scholars of political Islam in the world, downplays the role of religion when explaining the driving force behind jihadi terrorism. In his article published in *Le Monde*, the expert argues that Europe is facing not the radicalisation of Islam, but the Islamisation of radicalism.⁵ According to him, ISIS

⁵ Olivier Roy, "Jihadism Is a Generational and Nihilist Revolt," *Le Monde*, November 24, 2015, accessed March 3, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/11/24/le-djihadisme-une-revolte-generationnelle-et-nihiliste_4815992_3232.html.

is merely an opportunity for the young radicals, like Al-Qaeda or smaller terrorist cells were earlier. Roy assumes that these people will fight with a different party in the future.

The scholar thinks that European jihadis, mainly the second-generation immigrants or converts to radical forms of Islam, are engaged in the generational revolt that has little to do with Islam. Their biographies suggest that they do not have a history of religious practice, nor have they undertaken serious religious studies. Roy points out why radicals choose Islam as the way of rebelling against society. He writes:

For the second-generation immigrants, the answer is obvious. They take an identity that their parents, according to them, have mishandled; they become “more Muslim than Muslims,” and especially their parents. The energy they put in vain into reconverting their parents to their new-found Islam is significant, and shows the extent to which they are detached.... As for converts, they choose Islam because it is the only thing available on the market serving radical revolt. Joining the Islamic State will certainly guarantee them a route to terrorize.⁶

In order to support his arguments and explain the process of radicalisation in France, Roy collected individual stories of the violent extremists and made a qualitative research. Studying individual trajectories allowed him to spot a cluster of repeated patterns, investigate the conditions under which the radicalisation takes place, point out social, political, cultural and psychological characteristics of the jihadis, and draw the general portrait of an Islamist radical. Roy’s study and its conclusions will be reviewed into details in the next chapter.

Another influential scholar who follows the same approach as Roy and downplays the role of religion is Scott Atran. In his essay, the director of research in anthropology at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, identifies the main reasons which inspire young people from out of the Middle East to join ISIS and become the most lethal assailants. According to Atran:

What inspires the most lethal assailants in the world today, is not so much the Quran or religious teachings but rather a thrilling cause and a call to action that promises glory and esteem in the eyes of friends. Foreign volunteers for the Islamic State are often youth in transitional stages in their lives – immigrants, students, people between jobs and before finding their mates. Having left their homes, they seek new families of friends and fellow travellers to find purpose and significance.⁷

⁶ Olivier Roy, “The Islamization of Radicalism,” *Mada Masr*, January 11, 2016, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/01/11/opinion/u/the-islamization-of-radicalism/>.

⁷ Scott Atran, “ISIS Is a Revolution,” *AEON*, December 15, 2015, accessed February 15, 2017, <https://aeon.co/essays/why-isis-has-the-potential-to-be-a-world-altering-revolution>.

Atran suggests that the notion of the clash of civilisations, mainly between the Islamic world and the Christian West, provided by Huntington in 1993, is misleading. Therefore, this theory cannot be used to explain the motivation of young people to join the Islamic State. As for Atran, “violent extremism represents not the resurgence of traditional cultures, but their collapse, as young people unmoored from millennial traditions flail about in search of a social identity that gives personal significance and glory.”⁸ As a result, these individuals radicalise to find their identity in a flattened world. “In this new reality, vertical lines of communication between the generations are replaced by horizontal peer-to-peer attachments that can cut across the globe,”⁹ Atran maintains. He considers this trend as a dark side of the globalisation.

Atran brings the data of France’s Centre for the Prevention of Sectarian Drift Related to Islam to support his findings. He cites the centre and notes that 80 percent of the fighters who have joined the Islamic State come from non-religious families. Another important source for Atran to back his analysis is West Point’s Center for Combating Terrorism. Atran cites the center which has found out that the average age of the fighters who have joined ISIS is twenty-five and, for the most part, these fighters have no traditional religious education. They start following the radical religious teachings through the jihad. Moreover, about 25 percent, often the most passionate followers, are converts. Atran considers that “self-seekers who have found their way to jihad reach out through private gatherings or the internet.”¹⁰ He suggests they might be people who feel uncomfortable with their everyday lives and cannot express themselves in the societies they live. Thus, a lack of self-realization and the feeling of humiliation is the primary motivation for them to look at the world in a different way. One more critical data, quoted by the author, reveals that more than 80 percent of the combatants, joining the Islamic State, “do so through peer-to-peer relationships, mostly with friends and sometimes family.”¹¹ On the contrary, very few join through mosques or after recruitment by anonymous strangers.

Gilles Kepel, another leading expert in the world on Islamism and the Middle East and North Africa region, disagrees with Roy and Atran over the reasons why European youth of Muslim

⁸ See note 7 above.

⁹ See note 7 above.

¹⁰ See note 7 above.

¹¹ See note 7 above.

extraction turn to terrorism and join the Islamic State. He tends to believe in the structuralist explanations of the phenomenon. To be specific, in contrast to Roy, Kepel develops the idea of radicalisation of Islam and blames the religion, specifically its extreme forms like Salafism, in motivating the youth to join the Islamic State. The scholar argues that social, economic and political marginalisation of Muslims in France facilitated to create the third generation of Jihad, the fighters who emerged from 2005 to 2015. Their marginalisation pushed them towards the extreme forms of Islam. Kepel cannot separate violent jihadism from the nonviolent forms of Salafism. He values such religious views as the fundamental push factors in creating the suitable conditions under which the youth is drawn to terrorism.¹²

Studies on Georgian jihadis

The involvement of an increasing number of young citizens of Georgia in military actions in the Middle East is obvious and the experts of the field see this trend threatening to the national security. However, it is noteworthy that there has not been done adequate research to understand the driving force behind Georgian Jihadis' decision to join the Islamic State. Still, a limited number of scholars, like Bennett Clifford, and Giorgi Goguadze and Sergi Kapanadze have explored the motivation of the radicals from Georgia.

In his work, Bennett Clifford, a researcher at Caucasian House, analyses the recruitment factors of Georgian fighters in Syria and Iraq. The researcher makes a distinction between push factors which are motivating the jihadis to leave the country, and pull factors which attract individuals to go to Syria and Iraq rather than fighting elsewhere. As for him, the main push factor is the poor economic circumstances the Jihadis live, while Salafism acts like the most powerful pull factor to recruit the youth affected by the poor social and economic conditions. However Clifford argues that narrowing down the problem may not be effective at all in this case. He assumes that it is easier to recruit the youth in the Muslim communities characterised with a higher degree of tension with central and local authorities.¹³

¹² Timothy Peace, "Who Becomes a Terrorist, and Why?," *The Washington Post*, May 10, 2016, accessed March 4, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/10/who-becomes-a-terrorist-and-why/?utm_term=.7425e88f698f.

¹³ Bennett Clifford, *Georgian Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq – Factors of Violent Extremism and Recruitment* (Tbilisi: Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, 2015), 9.

Structuralist explanations of the radicalisation of Georgian youth dominate in the policy document too written by Giorgi Gogvadze and Sergi Kapanadze, the researchers at Georgia's Reforms Associates. Despite not being the only place in the country from where the radicals leave for Syria and Iraq, the researchers study Pankisi Gorge in-depth, as the region in Georgia where the most of the jihadis come from. Regarding the religious dimension, they mention Wahhabi movement, which is gaining strength in the region, as one of the sources for radicalisation, but the scholars fail to provide relevant facts or arguments. However, the experts analyse several fundamental social and political challenges in Pankisi Gorge which promote the process of radicalisation and facilitate the recruitment of Muslim youth of the region.¹⁴

The first problem observed by the researchers is the low quality of education in Pankisi Gorge. The lack of educational programs and activities and, in general, a failure of Georgian educational system to address the issue allow to spread the fundamentalist-radical ideas. As a result, majority of the senior pupils have a negative attitude regarding getting higher education. It is noteworthy that there are cases of Arab countries, mainly Saudi Arabia, funding Pankisi youth to participate in programs promoting Wahhabism.¹⁵

Poor economic conditions and unemployment rate is noted as one of the most acute problems in this policy document too. As for Gogvadze and Kapanadze, these challenges greatly affect the outflow of the youth of the region. The researchers were not able to provide any data on employment or income levels, however they underline the trend that the families of the militants and the Wahhabis are in better economic condition than the rest of the population of Pankisi Gorge.¹⁶

Wahhabism is considered as a determinant to create the ideological basis for the radicalised youth to join the Islamic State. The document says the number of the followers of Wahhabism has been increasing annually. Yet, the exact statistics are not provided in this case either.

It is worth to note that the researchers have noticed the existence of a generational gap in Pankisi Gorge. They claim their research made it clear that the youth and the elder people have contrasting attitudes about ISIS and the decision of the jihadis to go to Syria and Iraq. Unlike the elderly, to

¹⁴ Giorgi Gogvadze and Sergi Kapanadze, *Daesh and Challenges Facing Georgia* (Tbilisi: Georgia's Reforms Associates, 2015), 10-13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

some extent, young population of the region positively evaluate the decision of their fellows who have joined the Islamic State. “Their main argument for why people go to Syria is the indifference of the Georgian state, the lack of opportunities for development and the lack of economic prospects in general,”¹⁷ the document says. Wahhabism adds religious and ideological argument to these factors.

The experts acknowledge the activation of ISIS supporters in Georgia and illustrate the instruments of recruitment of young radicals. According to the document, the main tool to recruit the youth is internet. Yet again, the reader is given no supporting evidence. Recruitment in public spaces is also mentioned as practised way of recruitment in Georgia, but the researchers question themselves the effectiveness of this tool and note that there is a very big opposition from the traditional Muslim communities towards pro-ISIS meetings. More powerful tool is the recruitment that takes place abroad. The document notes “... there are dozens of cases when young Muslims ... travelled to various Muslim educational institutions in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, or Syria, for the purpose of broadening their religious knowledge.”¹⁸ Usually, they are easily radicalized in this way.

Contribution to the existing knowledge

As with these works, a limited amount of research done on Georgian jihadis, does not follow the methodological approaches used by the Western scholars, like Roy, to study the problem of radicalisation. Roy’s approach will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter. The scholar has done a qualitative analysis to find out the driving force behind jihadi terrorism. As there is no general, open database of the Islamic militants who have joined ISIS, quantitative analyses was very hard to do for Roy. Still, he managed to incorporate some elements of the quantitative research in his study, and thus, integrate quantitative and qualitative data in the form of mixed methods. Unlike Roy, Bennett Clifford, and Giorgi Gogvadze and Sergi Kapanadze used solely qualitative research methods. Perhaps, it is the reason why these scholars tend to believe mainly in the structuralist explanations of the process of radicalization in Georgia, which focus on religious and

¹⁷ See note 15 above.

¹⁸ Gogvadze and Kapanadze, *Daesh and Challenges Facing Georgia*, 16.

social patterns. The absence of elements of the quantitative research when studying the process of radicalization, is a huge problem for Georgian academia.

Another problem is the lack of adequate scientific analysis of the process of radicalisation of Georgians in the academia. To some extent, it is difficult to do because there is no open database of the citizens of Georgia who have joined ISIS. Georgian authorities are not willing to reveal additional information about these fighters. However, a decent research is possible to be done in the case of collecting and analysing the suitable data and this is what I intend to do in this thesis. As I argue, looking into the individual stories of Georgian fighters is the best way to obtain the suitable data. By importing this data on Georgian fighters, I will be able to provide my concept supported with examples and study the problem of radicalisation in Georgia following the way this problem was studied by Roy.

In addition to studying the life stories of Georgian jihadis, I will incorporate certain elements of the quantitative research in my study and look at the issue not only from the structuralist standpoint. The studies incorporating these three elements are lacking in the literature on Georgian jihadis. The following thesis is particularly important because of this reason: It can facilitate to fill in this gap created in the academia.

III. Theoretical framework

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the role of Islam is widely discussed in the literature on radicalisation and the leading scholars of the field have developed contrasting theories explaining this process. In this thesis, Olivier Roy's theory of the Islamisation of radicalism will be used as a tool to highlight the individual features of the process by which Georgian jihadis came to hold extremist views. The adoption of his theory and the methodological approaches used by Roy will promote me to achieve the purpose of this thesis as it is the most suitable theory for presenting the existence of important motivating factors, in the form of variables, in life stories of Georgian jihadis, which seriously influenced their decision to fight for ISIS.

In this chapter, I will review how Roy explains the roots of radical violence in Europe, analyse in detail the theory of the Islamisation of radicalism, and import the findings of a research conducted by Roy which underline the validity of his theory. It will allow us to understand how

the Frenchman explains his points of view and spell out why jihadis have found in Islam the paradigm of their revolt.

The roots of radical violence in Europe

Before publishing his article in *Le Monde* in November 2015, where the scholar developed his theory of the Islamisation of radicalism, he had already discussed the roots of radical violence in the West and analysed the reasons behind the success of Islamist fighters in Europe in his book published back in 2004. In that book, Roy mentions the question of deterritorialisation of Islam produced due to emigration of one third of the world's Muslims, living as minorities in the West now.¹⁹ Roy defines deterritorialism as a process when “religion and culture no longer have a relationship with a territory or given society.... There is no longer any social authority or social pressure to conform...”²⁰

The delinking of religion and culture, and the subsequent weakening of Islam's social authority among the migrants in the Western countries was also the result of a growing individualisation of religious practices. As for Roy, it means that “... to be a Muslim and the reconstruction of a Muslim community rest on the individual.”²¹ As a result, “reconstruction of what it means to be a good Muslim in a non-Muslim society essentially rests on the individual.”²² Roy notes that when believers experience and formulate their relationship to religion, it may lead to various forms of religiosity, from liberal Islam to a neo-fundamentalism, a revival of Islam, or re-Islamisation.

The expert suggests that neo-fundamentalism targets individuals, not communities. According to him:

In the West it appeals to an uprooted, often young and well-educated but frustrated and already disgruntled youth. For such uprooted individuals, fundamentalism offers a system for regulating behaviour that can fit any situation, from Afghan deserts to US college campuses. No wonder ‘loser’ should not be understood in purely socioeconomic terms: it is not a matter of poverty but of self-identity.²³

¹⁹ Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

²² *Ibid.*, 175.

²³ *Ibid.*, 269.

When it comes to analysing the common traits of the Islamist radicals, Roy categorises members of al Qaeda and the new terrorists. The scholar mentions that almost all first-generation members of al Qaeda came from Muslim countries and went directly from the Middle East to Afghanistan for joining jihad. They had a previous record of political activism and were following a traditional way of life. On the contrary, the second wave, the phase when “the flying jihadi was born, the jihadi jet set,”²⁴ was characterised with a growth of the Western militants. They were operating internationally and had not any ties with the Muslim world they claimed to represent. Roy notes that most of these fighters left their home countries to fight or study abroad. Roy characterises them as cultural outcasts in their home and host countries. To sum up, Roy differs three main groups out of the second wave militants: students coming from the Middle East to study in the Western countries; second-generation Muslims who were born in the West or came there as infants; and converts.²⁵

By using a sample based on the individuals involved in or indicted for international terrorism since the World Trade Center bombing of 1993, Roy outlines the common features of these new wave of militants. These traits include: deterritorialisation, expressed in global operation of the fighters; re-Islamisation in the West where the number of born-again Muslims started to follow the path to radicalisation after September 11 attacks and its aftermath; uprooting and acculturation, depicted in refusing to adopt traditional ways of life; waging peripheral jihad in the West; finding subcontractors in the places where local radical groups have a genuine base.²⁶

The Islamisation of radicalism

As we see, from the early period, Roy saw these developments, namely the re-Islamisation of Europe and the revival of radicalism, as echoes to the global trends in protest. He identifies the similar patterns when exploring the logic behind jihadi terrorism in the West today, briefly mentioned in the previous chapter. And what is more, when developing his theory of the Islamisation of radicalism in the above-mentioned article published in *Le Monde*, Roy focuses on the two main groups of extremists in the West, he has written much about in his earlier works: second-generation immigrants and converts. Roy states that the phenomenon of radicalisation of

²⁴ Ibid., 302.

²⁵ Ibid., 303.

²⁶ Ibid., 304-321.

these two groups of youngsters, who, for the most part, follow a violent strain of Islam, has been very stable since 1996 in France.²⁷

Unlike many analysts, Roy does not find the structural explanations of this trend useful. Roy provides a brief definition of the culturalist and the third-world explanations which dominate the media in France. The former highlights the recurrent and emphatic “clash of civilisations” and implies that the revolt of Muslim youth shows Islam cannot be integrated as there is a relative absence of liberal reformist thinkers in Islam. The latter explanation consistently refers to postcolonial struggle, the identification of youth within the Palestinian cause, their rejection of the Western intervention in the Middle East and separation from Islamophobic French society. According to the scholar, the both of these structural explanations face the same obstacle. Roy forms it as the following question: “if the causes of radicalisation were structural, then why does it affect only a small and very narrow fridge of those who claim to be Muslims in France?”²⁸

In order to provide with his own explanations, Roy takes a look into the information provided by the state security which has identified thousands of people as threats to national security. The data makes it clear that the number of converts to Islam has been increasing with time. They already constituted 25 percent of the radicals at the end of the 90s. Roy calls the readers’ attention to the condition that the new converts have never suffered from racism or Islamophobia and questions the sincerity of their sudden desire to retaliate for the humiliation of Muslims. Roy notes that many of the converts come from the countryside and have no but little reason to identify themselves within a Muslim community. This fact forms the basis for the researcher to assume that France is not facing the revolt of Islam or uprising of Muslims, but a specific problem of two groups of youngsters, mostly immigrants. Roy concludes that the question is the Islamisation of radicalism, not the radicalisation of Islam.²⁹

In the same article, Roy outlines the common characteristics of second-generation immigrants and converts to explain the main motivational factor behind their radicalisation. The jihadis from the both groups in Europe are engaged in a generational revolt. These young radicals turned away from their parents and their understanding of culture and religion. Already Westernised and having adopted the youth culture of their generation, jihadis found Salafi Islam appealing as they never

²⁷ See note 5 above.

²⁸ See note 6 above.

²⁹ See note 5 above.

wanted neither the culture of their parents, nor the system of the Western values. It allowed these youth to rebuild themselves on their own while rejecting the concept of culture, which had already become the source of self-hatred for them.³⁰

As for Roy, “the key to revolt stems from the failure to disseminate Islam as a culture.”³¹ Second-generation Muslims and converts are the ones who primarily face this challenge. Unlike them, first-generation Muslims are the carriers of the cultural Islam of the country of their origin and the third-generation immigrants are familiar with “... the modes of expression of Islam in French society.”³² Concerning the converts, they consider Salafism as a pure form of religion and adhere to it. They are not interested in cultural compromise. “Here they join the second-generation immigrants’ “estranged” Islam, which manifests in a generational, cultural and political rupture,”³³ Roy maintains. Briefly speaking, a moderate Islam has nothing to do with them. Radicalism attracts these youngsters by definition and Salafism appears to be the product that suits best these converts’ own cleavages from their past.

Roy briefly mentions some common features of these jihadis in the same article, consisting of a common practise of breaking up with the families, a lack of having history of piety and religious practise, an absence of serious religious studies and interest in theology, a display of the new conviction and the desire to revenge, furious individualism and isolation from Muslim communities and public life, the signs of revealing their deep frustration, nihilism and pride. Roy concludes that the jihadis are more nihilists rather than utopists, as they have never integrated socially in the Muslim societies they claim to defend. Therefore, these terrorists cannot be viewed as a manifestation of the radicalisation of Muslims, Roy assumes. Rather, their violence is a reflection of a generational revolt which affects the particular category of youth.

Roy has an answer on the question why Islam was chosen as the way of rebelling against society. The second-generation immigrants took the identity they thought to be mishandled by their parents and pretended to become pure Muslims. The converts chose Islam just because it was the only tool available on the market serving the radical revolt. So was the Islamic State. These

³⁰ See note 5 above.

³¹ See note 6 above.

³² See note 6 above.

³³ See note 6 above.

jihadis just found ISIS as a means to meet their needs and Roy is sure, they will fight with any other convenient party in the future.

The new jihadis

In his essay, written after the November 2015 Paris massacre, Roy reveals the findings of his qualitative research which increase in worth his theory discussed here. As already mentioned, the Frenchman incorporated certain elements of the quantitative research too in his study. He compiled a database of about one hundred people who have been involved in terrorism in France, or have left France or Belgium to take part in global jihad, studied their individual stories and described their path of radicalisation in this way. Yet, the central findings of the study are relevant not only for France and the Western Europe, but the Maghreb and Turkey, as well.³⁴ The data was taken from the open sources as the most of the Islamic militants who have joined al Qaeda or ISIS have been identified, with their life stories and backgrounds well documented through police investigations and by journalists as well. The objective of the study was to understand the process of radicalisation in order to formulate the policy of prevention.

In the essay, Roy suggests two ways to define radicals. According to him, the first category of radicals are comprised of the people who jumped into action for either "... having reached a terrorist sanctuary such as Yemen, Syria or Iraq, or previously Bosnia or Afghanistan; having perpetrated a terrorist attack; or having been caught in an advanced stage of preparation for such an attack."³⁵ He puts those who have displayed just an intention to join jihad or get involved in violent activities in Europe into the second category.

Before reviewing the particular variables used in Roy's study and analysing the patterns of radicalisation based on them, it is to be said that the Frenchman sees this process "... more linked to individual trajectories rather than to the radicalisation of a community."³⁶ According to the scholar, the patterns are general across Europe but differently distributed from country to country.

³⁴ Olivier Roy, "Who Are the New Jihadis?," *The Guardian*, April 13, 2017, accessed April 15, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2017/apr/13/who-are-the-new-jihadis>.

³⁵ Olivier Roy, "What Is the Driving Force Behind Jihadist Terrorism?," *Inside Story*, December 18, 2015, accessed March 6, 2017, <http://insidestory.org.au/what-is-the-driving-force-behind-jihadist-terrorism>.

³⁶ See note 35 above.

However, Roy leaves some space for special cases or exceptions. By summing up the conclusions of the study, Roy draws a general portrait of the Islamist radical:

Radicalisation is a youth revolt against society, articulated on an Islamic religious narrative of jihad. It is not the uprising of a Muslim community that is victim to poverty and racism: only young people join, including converts who did not share the “suffering” of Muslims in Europe. These rebels without a cause find in jihad a noble and global cause, and are consequently instrumentalised by a radical organisation (al Qaeda, ISIS), that has a strategic agenda.³⁷

In order to investigate the circumstances under which the radicalisation takes place, and point out sociological, psychological or cultural characteristics of the radicals suggested by Roy, it is better to review the findings of the study according to the variables Roy used to describe the patterns of radicalisation.

Roy opens the discussion by stating that there are not psychiatrically specific patterns for the radicals. However, he admits frustration and resentment against society, which are caused by the discrepancy between expectations and social outcomes, are commonly shared psychological trait among the jihadis. The consequent narcissistic crisis makes them open to nihilism and to the narrative of heroism offered by the Islamic State. In addition, religious dimension provides a framework for personal reconstruction for them.

Unsurprisingly, the absolute majority of the jihadis Roy studied come from second-generation Muslims, and most of the others are converts to Islam. Apart from that, there is no other significant sociological feature shared by these radicals. Roy adds that geographic distribution of the jihadis corresponds to a certain extent to the demographic map of France. There is an insignificant overrepresentation of the regions with large numbers of migrants, and, on the contrary, an underrepresentation of the big rural cities in the West of the country.

A number of the jihadis shared a youth culture and came to have a criminal background. Personal crisis, imprisonment in their case, became a determinant for them to turn to born-again Muslims or converts. The sudden return to religion was mostly followed by political radicalisation, Roy claims.

³⁷ See note 35 above.

Roy states that the massive trend of radicalisation in France is obviously a youth movement. The parents of the young radicals actively disapprove the decision of their children and resist it in all possible ways. Moreover, Roy detects a peer phenomenon linked to this youth movement, as the radicalisation mostly takes place within the networks of friends. For instance, there is often a siblings' solidarity, when the one radicalises following his brother's example.

It is to be mentioned that only a small number of jihadis had a previous history of militancy. Nor the absolute majority of the radicals had ever mobilised around religious or political movements. Their radicalisation was not the result of a long-term maturation in such movements. Their recruitment process followed different patterns, Roy assumes. Yet, the more common is the radicalisation a small network of peers, like neighbourhoods and relatives, as already mentioned. Roy adds that the final process is a recruitment through internet. ISIS actively uses it as a tool of communication and propaganda.

Roy believes that culturalist idea, explaining individual radicalisation as a reflection of the radicalisation of a frustrated Muslim community, is irrelevant when analysing jihadis in France and in Europe in general. As for the scholar, high proportion of converts have been regularly overlooked because it contradicts the following idea. The proportion of converts is large everywhere. In France it is the highest and goes up to 25 percent.

Another noteworthy pattern is the recruitment of young women who marry the jihadis. Roy notes that the share of converts is the highest in this category among the all categories of recruits. These women are not characterised as simply submissive spouses, but they reveal the leading roles.

As for Roy, the main motivation for young men to join jihad is "... the fascination for a narrative we could call "the small brotherhood of super-heroes who avenge the Muslim ummah."³⁸ Obviously, the ummah is global and abstract, not identified with a national cause. The narrative is built on the contemporary youth culture. It is staged on the aesthetics of violence and the young radicals usually have their role models, sometimes with no Islamic reference at all.

As discussed above, the revolt is expressed in religious terms for two reasons, Roy believes. Firstly, as the most of the radicals are Muslims, they become more open to the process of re-Islamisation. And secondly, jihad is the only cause available on the global market. Joining jihad,

³⁸ See note 35 above.

the militants adapt Salafism as it is easy to understand and it glorifies their own deculturation. Roy makes a distinction between religious radicalisation and jihadist radicalisation and once again notes that the absolute majority of the jihadis never followed a real process of religious education. As a result, they have a small knowledge of Islam.

Last but not least, the jihadis have lost connection with their families and the Muslim communities in Europe. They do not reconnect with Muslim societies in the Middle East, neither. Only small number of them were regular parishioners in local mosques. Roy assumes that this pattern explains why Imams have not a significant influence on the process of radicalisation and why reforming Islam does not matter. He admits that religious dimension has an important role in their struggle. However, he does not see it as an ideological rationalisation of Islamic theology. Not theology but religiosity is the key in this process, Roy concludes.³⁹

Roy's latest article published in the Guardian, which is an edited extract from his new book, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*, may be used to conclude this chapter. Roy summarises the debates between him and his critics, mainly Kepel, over the causes of jihadi terrorism by stating that the structural explanations, discussed above, are inadequate to account for the phenomena. Despite acknowledging religious, social and political dimensions, he couldn't find a causal link based on the empirical data available. Roy's argument is that "... violent radicalisation is not the consequence of religious radicalisation, even if it often takes the same paths and borrows the same paradigms."⁴⁰ Religious fundamentalism exists and causes serious problems, yet it does not always lead to political violence.

IV. Methodological approach

A research paradigm, method and data collection and analysis technique is chosen for this thesis based on its aim and goal, and research questions. As already noted in the introduction, the aim of the research is to reveal the particular crucial points, in the form of variables, in life stories of Georgian jihadis, which promoted them to join the Islamic State. In order to reach this aim, I need to study the individual stories of Georgians fighting for ISIS. As explained in detail later in this chapter, the media articles written about Georgian jihadis contain valuable information about the

³⁹ See note 35 above.

⁴⁰ See note 34 above.

stories of the fighters and remain the most suitable source of data for this study. As far as I am using Roy's theory to highlight the individual trajectories of radicalisation of Georgian jihadis, the best option should be the adoption of the methodological approach used by the Frenchman in his study. It will enable me to test the theory of Islamisation of radicalism on the example of Georgian jihadis and find out whether Roy is right, partly right or wrong when explaining the driving force behind jihadi terrorism.

In the present chapter, I will discuss why the case of Georgia is interesting to analyse the patterns of radicalisation, review the methods of data collection and analysis, develop a theoretical framework for analysing the individual stories of the jihadis, outline possible problems with the approach in terms of validity and reliability, and discuss the ethical issues related to the research.

The case of Georgia

As mentioned before, the theory of Islamisation of radicalism and the central findings of Roy's study are relevant not only for France and the Western Europe, but also the Maghreb and Turkey, as for the expert. It means the findings of the study made by Roy may be generalised, even though the scholar has had a database of people who had been involved in terrorism in France, or had left France or Belgium to join the Islamic State.

In order to test whether the findings of Roy's study are right, partly right or wrong and examine if they may be generalised to other regions too, I have to analyse the case of some other country according to the methodological approaches used by Roy. Georgia is the relevant case to do so for several reasons and if we understand the motivation of Georgians behind their decision to join ISIS, it will help us explain what inspires jihadis in general.

Georgian case is interesting for a number of reasons, above all, the location of the country. Former part of the Soviet Union, Georgia, is located in the South Caucasus and sharing a border with Turkey. ISIS controlled territories are just a thousand kilometres away from its capital and the largest city of Tbilisi. Georgia, the Orthodox Christian country, is surrounded by the Muslim neighbourhood. Along with sharing a border with Turkey and Azerbaijan, from the South-West and the South-East, respectively, Georgia has a common border with the North Caucasian Federal

District of Russia.⁴¹ Obviously, Georgia may not be regarded as a part of the West because of its geographical location.⁴² It should not be considered as an Eastern nation either. It is interesting to explore whether the findings of Roy's study, mainly based on the database of combatants from Europe, are applicable to Georgia.

When talking about the location of Georgia and its closeness to the territories controlled by the Islamic State, we have to mention that in 2015 ISIS declared the creation of governorate in Russia's Northern Caucasus, called Caucasus Wilayat. It contains the operational territory of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus: Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabarda, Balkaria, and Karachay.⁴³ These are the bordering territories of Georgia, as noted. Consequently, the threat from the Islamic State has come closer. With nearly all field commanders and fighters of the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus having pledged allegiance to ISIS, the probability still remains that the governorate will make active steps.⁴⁴ Therefore, Georgia happens to be surrounded by the fighters sharing the Salafi jihad ideology that may promote to inflow the fundamentalist-radical ideas in the country.

Moreover, an ethnic composition of the country and a high number of Muslims make Georgian case more interesting for testing Roy's theory. As noted, the major religion in Georgia is Christianity. The religion is not officially endorsed by the state though. According to the results of the 2014 General Population Census, Orthodox Christians comprise more than 83 percent of the population. Muslims, on their turn, amount to more than 10 percent of the population in Georgia. The total number of Muslims in Georgia is slightly less than 400,000.⁴⁵

One more important aspect, which makes Georgia appealing case to check the correctness of the findings of Roy's study, was overviewed in the introduction. It is a relatively high number of young Sunni Muslims of Georgia, mainly from the Pankisi Gorge, fighting in Syria and Iraq. For the most part, the high-level fighters of the Islamic State who have Georgian citizenship come

⁴¹ Armenia is the only Christian country, excluding Russia, sharing a border with Georgia.

⁴² However, Georgia has trying to join the EU and NATO for years. Its relations with the EU were brought to a new level in 2014 by signing the Association Agreement. Besides, Georgia actively contributes to NATO-led operations and cooperates with the allies in many other areas.

⁴³ Harleen Gambhir, "ISIS Declares Governorate in Russia's North Caucasus Region," *Institute for the Study of War*, June 23, 2015, accessed April 13, 2017, <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/isis-declares-governorate-russia%E2%80%99s-north-caucasus-region>.

⁴⁴ Gogvadze and Kapanadze, *Daesh and Challenges Facing Georgia*, 5.

⁴⁵ National Statistics Office of Georgia, *2014 General Population Census*, (Tbilisi, 2016), 9, http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/files/english/population/Census_release_ENG_2016.pdf (accessed April 5, 2017).

from this region. Although recruitment from Georgia seems to have decreased and the number of radicalised people have been lessened lately, the amount of Georgian jihadis in the Middle East remains high.⁴⁶

Data collection

As stated before, media articles written about Georgians fighting for ISIS remain the most suitable source of data for this thesis. By collecting and coding all types of media articles written about jihadis, it is possible to analyse their life stories and explain the driving force behind their decision to join ISIS.

As noted in the introduction, assumptions about the people fighting in Syria and Iraq are usually made on verbal information. Despite declaring that they possess a valuable information about tens of citizens of Georgia fighting in the Middle East, the State Security Service of Georgia has preferred to abstain from publicly disclosing the names of the jihadis. Two of the latest official documents issued by the agency, where the problem of jihadis has been overviewed, are the annual reports on the activities carried out by the agency in 2015 and 2016. The State Security Service of Georgia has only revealed the names of ten jihadis in the annual report of 2015.⁴⁷ The personality of one more jihadi was disclosed in the annual report of 2016, in its turn.⁴⁸ Six of them were found guilty by the court and were imprisoned for several years according to the Criminal Code of Georgia, Articles 327, 327(1) and 328. The criminal litigation was initiated against the other four staying in Syria according to Article 410. Furthermore, the case of the last of these eleven people has been investigated under Article 330(1) of the Criminal Code of Georgia.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ The State Security Service of Georgia, *The State Security Service of Georgia Report 2016* (Tbilisi, 2017), 12, <http://ssg.gov.ge/uploads/%E1%83%90%E1%83%9C%E1%83%92%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%A8%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98/SSSG%20REPORT.pdf> (accessed May 10, 2017).

⁴⁷ The State Security Service of Georgia, *The State Security Service of Georgia Report 2015*, 11-14.

⁴⁸ The State Security Service of Georgia, *The State Security Service of Georgia Report 2016*, 13.

⁴⁹ Article 327 of the Criminal Code of Georgia (accessed March 3, 2017, <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/16426/157/en/pdf>) criminalises membership in a terrorist organization, participating in its activities or establishing or management of terrorist organisations; Article 327(1) contains recruiting a person as a member of a terrorist organisation or for carrying out terrorist activities; Article 328 criminalises joining a foreign terrorist organisation or a terrorist organisation controlled by a foreign state or supporting this organisation in terrorist activities; Article 410 deals with the participation of mercenaries in armed conflicts or military actions; Article 330(1) contains open support of terrorist activities and/or a terrorist organisation or public incitement to terrorism.

It is only when the jihadi dies and the subsequent news are spread, the State Security Service approves the person was fighting for ISIS. Since 2012, the agency has confirmed the death of twenty-six citizens of Georgia in this fashion. The information about the jihadis' death was first reported in the local media, with their names openly announced.

Despite questioning the efficiency of local media sources about identifying the names of the jihadis and providing the complete information about their ties with ISIS, articles in the media remain the most suitable source of data for this thesis. That is because Georgian authorities are never willing to reveal any sort of additional information about the jihadis, even in the case if the death of the particular person is officially confirmed. The family, relatives and the neighbourhood are not enthusiastic to share the stories of the fighter either. As long as the State Security Service confirms the death of the particular fighter or the identity of the jihadi is revealed in any other way by Georgian authorities, adequate attention is paid to the person in the media.

After realising that the media articles were the most appropriate source containing valuable information about individual stories of the dead jihadis, I decided to collect the data for the thesis from the articles written about these people. First of all, I made the list of twenty-six dead jihadis. I used various online media sources to find the articles written in Georgian and English languages, and reveal the specific crucial points, in the form of variables, in the personal stories of these people. I decided the time frame for the articles and set it from 2012, the year when the first Georgian fighter died in the Middle East, up until now.⁵⁰ During this process of data collection, I mainly used the online search engines of several major media sources which were known to be publishing articles about the citizens of Georgia fighting for ISIS.⁵¹ In addition to it, I took advantage of Google search engine. In order to uncover the appropriate articles, I was typing the particular set of words in the search engines. Primarily, I used to type the full names of the jihadis. This practice appeared to be advantageous as the majority of the articles I found useful for the aim of the thesis have been obtained in this fashion. Apart from the names of the jihadis, the most common sets of words during the online search were: "Georgian jihadis," "Georgians in ISIS" and

⁵⁰ The citizens of Georgia started to join the Islamic State from 2011, shortly after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War. However, the problem was not adequately covered by local or foreign media until the death of Rustam Gelyaev in August 2012.

⁵¹ For instance, the media sources publishing this type of articles in Georgian language are: Information Center of Kakheti (<http://ick.ge/>), Pankisi Community Radio – Radio Way (<http://radioway.ge/ka/>), Netgazeti.ge (<http://netgazeti.ge/>).

“radicalisation in Georgia.” Likewise, I used to type these words in Georgian language. Subsequently, I collected all the articles I found beneficial for my study and downloaded them.

Theoretical framework for data analysis

Resting on deductive reasoning, my study has a mixed methods research design as I am testing the theory of Islamisation of radicalism on the example of Georgians fighting for ISIS. Starting from the general principles developed by Roy in his theory, it allows me to check whether his findings are right, partly right or wrong while understanding the motivation of Georgian jihadis behind their decision to go to war. Subsequently, I have adopted the methodological approach used by Roy in his study. To be specific, for my data analysis, I have used the codes suggested by him in that study, in the form of variables.

Coding, that is the process of classifying individual pieces of data, coupled with some kind of retrieval system, is the most appropriate method to approach the analysis of my data.⁵² There are two basic approaches for creating codes. The first of them allows for the possibility of coding data for the purpose of testing hypotheses generated by a prior theory. In this case, the codes are suggested by this prior theory, in the form of variables. This option enables a researcher to convert qualitative data into crudely quantifiable.⁵³

Another approach for creating codes includes open coding, axial coding and selective coding, which are more common processes of coding in the qualitative data analysis. In open coding, a researcher suggests codes through his examination and questioning of data. In general, open coding is the initial classification of concepts. Axial coding is a reanalysis of the results of open coding with the aim of identifying the valuable general concepts. Still, more concepts may be identified through continued open coding after the axial coding has begun. During this process, discrete codes are arranged according to conceptual categories reflecting commonalities among codes. The third analytic level, selective coding, builds on the results of open coding and axial coding with the aim of identifying the central concept of the study, the one that the other concepts all related to. At this level, a researcher deals with various code clusters in a selective fashion to decide how

⁵² Earl R. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 13th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013), 396.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 397.

they related to each other. In this way, a set of rational statements is constructed which may be used to explain the phenomenon studied.⁵⁴

Although I used the codes suggested by Roy for my data analysis, I thought incorporating certain elements of qualitative research would be advantageous for the thesis. It should have enabled me to not only test whether Roy is right, partly right or wrong when outlining the driving force behind jihadi terrorism, but also look at the problem of Georgian jihadis from the structuralist viewpoint. Subsequently, I created codes with three common processes of coding in the analysis of qualitative data. I combined this way of acquiring codes with the approach of using the codes suggested by the previous theory, the Islamisation of radicalism in this case.

I arranged the codes I came up with into eighteen categories, introduced several options for each category and gave them separate numbers. The categories include: gender, age group, geographic distribution, family background, economic background, educational background, a form of radicalisation, the place and the ways of recruitment, psychically specific patterns, engagement in country's social and political life, criminal background, a history of militancy, engagement in religiously oriented social movements, religious background, patterns of religious educations, influence of Salafi ideas, relationship with traditional Muslim communities, and role models in the jihadi's worldview.

Collecting and coding tens of media articles gave me a huge amount of information about the radicals. In order to examine the individual cases of Georgian jihadis based on this information and explain their motivation to join the Islamic State, I used statistical analysis, specifically, univariate analysis and bivariate analysis. The first statistical method, univariate analysis "...involves describing a case in terms of a single variable - specifically, the distribution of attributes that it comprises."⁵⁵ Reporting frequency distributions, measuring central tendencies and dispersion are the examples of the univariate analysis used in this thesis. In its turn, bivariate analysis is "the analysis of two variables simultaneously for the purpose of determining the empirical relationship between them."⁵⁶ Therefore, it is explanatory rather than merely descriptive

⁵⁴ Anselm L. Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 101-161.

⁵⁵ Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 418.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 430.

analysis. For the aim of this thesis, I constructed contingency tables and calculated correlation between the differing variables.

Limitations of the study

Possible problems are connected with the methodological approach used in this thesis, which was discussed in this chapter, in terms of validity and reliability. Securing the accuracy of data, which promotes trustworthiness of the study and credibility of its results, was an important challenge to me. As I have already noted, the data for this thesis completely depends on media articles. It contains a risk to weaken my material as I do not have alternative sources of data, for example, official information from the government agencies or interviews with the families, relatives, and the neighbourhoods of the jihadis. However, as I argue, it was impossible to reveal relevant information from these sources. In order to minimize the inaccuracy of the data collected in the media and increase the trustworthiness of my study, I only studied the life stories of the dead jihadis. The details from their personal stories can be met in multiple articles online. It allowed me to double-check the validity of the data while collecting material for my study. As a result, the chances of missing important information affecting the conclusions of the thesis, are dramatically minimised.

Another challenge related to the reliability of the study was analysing the life stories of jihadis mainly through the articles written in Georgian language while using the codes suggested by Roy's theory. Translation between the languages might have created problems connected with the inaccuracy as the codes, categories and options should have been based on the variables found in Roy's study. In order to limit my interpretation of Roy's writings, which might have affected the validity of the study, I used English language in the online search engines. Consequently, I used articles written not only in Georgian, but English language as well. It enabled me to analyse the data accurately using the codes suggested by Roy, and minimise the risks related to translation.

One more caution to the reliability of the research is the usage of a theoretical framework, with the Islamisation of radicalism being the only tool to highlight the individual features of radicalisation in Georgia. Although Roy's theory and the methodological approaches used by the Frenchman in his study promoted me to achieve the purpose of this thesis, I introduced the certain elements of qualitative research and followed three common processes of coding in the analysis of

qualitative data. It gave me the chance to introduce additional codes and explain the driving force behind radicalisation in Georgia more thoroughly.

Ethical issues

Obviously, I encountered ethical issues while working on the thesis which need to be outlined in the paper. First of all, overviewing the driving force behind jihadi terrorism and analysing the motivation of Georgian jihadis to fight in Syria and Iraq, makes the information about the common trajectories of recruitment accessible for everyone. Making the life stories of the terrorists widely known, may be understood as stimulating sensitive groups to take the similar actions. However, my thesis has completely different purpose, which is to encourage formulating policies and carrying out a number of successive actions in order to prevent recruitment from Georgia, and, in this way, protect the national security of the country.

In the text of the thesis I frequently use the terms of jihadism, Salafi Islam, Wahhabi movement. It is crucial to separate violent jihadism from the nonviolent forms of Salafism and to prevent incautious explanations of the recruitment with the premises of Islam. I have done this while overviewing the parts of the findings of Roy's study related to the influence of Salafism on young radicals, and also, while analysing my data.

Last but not least, my responsibility as a researcher has been doubled as long as the Georgian case is native to me because of my nationality. In order to secure that the material was based merely on findings, I have minimised subjective interpretations and put pre-judgements aside. It does not let my personal feelings affect the research.

V. Analysis

As mentioned in the previous chapter, for the aim of this thesis, I arranged the codes into eighteen categories, introduced several options for each category and gave them separate numbers. It allowed me to analyse the data, tens of media articles written about Georgian jihadis in my case, and answer the research questions of this thesis using the statistical methods for data analysis.

The following chapter, which is the most important part of the thesis, deals with presenting my empirical discoveries. In this part of my thesis, I will reflect on whether the aim of my study was

fulfilled and the research questions were answered. In order to understand the driving force of Georgian jihadis while joining ISIS and figure out the relationship between their motivational factors, and test whether the findings of Roy are right, partly right or wrong, I will provide information from the personal stories of the twenty-six dead jihadis and present the results of the statistical analysis.

The database of dead Georgian jihadis

The categories of codes formed by me act like independent variables in my research. As mentioned in the previous chapter, since I am testing the theory of Roy, I mainly use the codes suggested by the Frenchman in his study. In addition to it, I have added three categories following the common processes of coding in the analysis of qualitative data: economic background, educational background, and engagement in country's social and political life.

As already noted, I introduced several options for the categories of codes and gave them separate numbers. Characterising the twenty-six jihadis according to these options enabled me to create a database, in the form of a table, for the successive statistical analysis. Before presenting this database, we have to look at the options for each category. Figure 1 presents the options with respective numbers.

I. Gender	0- male; 1 - female.
II. Age group	0 - under 18; 1 - between 18-25; 2 - between 25-30; 3 - between 30-35; 4 - between 35-40; 5 - over 40.
III. Geographic distribution	0 - Pankisi Gorge; 1 - Telavi Municipality; 2 - Khulo Municipality.
IV. Family background	0 - native; 1 - immigrant; 2 - second-generation immigrant.
V. Economic background	0 - unemployed; 1 - employed but expressing economic hardship; 2 - absence of economic difficulties.
VI. Educational background	0 - school drop-out; 1 - high school graduate; 2 - holding a higher education diploma.

VII. A form of radicalisation	0 - individual radicalisation; 1 - radicalisation within a community.
VIII. The place and the ways of recruitment	Recruitment via/within: 0 - internet; 1 - network of friends; 2 - neighbourhood; 3 - network of relatives; 4 - jail.
IX. Psychically specific patterns	0 - existence of significant psychiatric problems; 1 - expressing posttraumatic stress disorder after participation in military actions; 2 - absence of specific psychological patterns of these type.
X. Engagement in county's social and political life	0 - disintegration from the society; 1 - low level of engagement in social and political life; 2 - absence of problems related to participation in county's social and political life.
XI. Criminal background	0 - imprisonment; 1 - cases of delinquency; 2 - absence of criminal history.
XII. A history of militancy	0 - engagement in military actions; 1 - expressing support to hostilities; 2 - absence of history of militancy.
XIII. Engagement in religiously oriented social movements	0 - active engagement in religiously oriented social movements; 1 - history of expressing support to such movements; 2 - absence of ties with religiously oriented movements.
XIV. Religious background	0 - convert to Islam; 1 - regular parishioner in a local mosque; 2 - inactive in religious activities; 3 - atheist.
XV. Patterns of religious education	0 - absence of traditional religious education; 1 - having a little religious knowledge; 2 - followed a real process of religious education.
XVI. Influence of Salafi ideas	0 - a long time Salafi; 1 - convert to Salafi school of Islam prior to going to fight; 2 - convert to Salafi ideas after Joining ISIS;

XVII. Relationship with traditional Muslim communities	0 - tensions with traditional Muslim community; 1 - absence of connection with Muslim community; 2 - strong ties with local traditional Muslim community.
XVIII. Role models in the jihadi's worldview	0 - Influential members of his or her community who avenge the Muslim ummah; 1 - friends; 2 - relatives; 3 - aesthetics of violence with no Islamic reference; 4 - absence of a role model.

Figure 1: Options for the categories of codes

As already noted, I characterised the jihadis according to these categories and created a database for my data analysis. Figure 2 below presents this database. There are only twenty-five dead jihadis as I have excluded Levan Nakaidze from the table. That is because it was almost impossible to detect notes about the personal characteristics of the jihadi in media articles. Record of the man, who was living in Ozurgeti Municipality before joining ISIS, only maintains that he was killed in hostilities after several months of fighting in Syria. He was thirty by the time of his death. It turns out he had no criminal history in Georgia.

It is to be noted that I was unable to find information from the personal stories of the jihadis related to only three categories out of eighteen total: the place and the ways of recruitment, relationship with traditional Muslim communities, and role models in the jihadi’s worldview. However, I gathered the general information regarding these issues in Georgia, which are briefly overviewed later in this chapter.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV	XVI
R.G.	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	2	2	0	2	1
A.M.	0	4	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	0	0	1	1	0
H.A	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	0
K.A	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	0
R.M	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	2	2	0	1
B.K	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	1
G.G.	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	0	1
D.T.	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	0	1

I.T.	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	0	1
D.S.	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	1
I.T	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	2	2	1	1	0	0
T.B	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	2	2	1	2	0	1
B.M.	0	3	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	1
K.G	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	2	0	1	2	0
M.T	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1
R.P.	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	0
V.B.	0	4	0	1	1	1	0	2	2	2	0	2	1	1	1
A.B.	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	1
O.M.	0	4	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	2	1	0	1	1	0
B.T.	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	0	1	1	0
R.K	0	3	0	0	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	0	1	1	0
T.B.	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	2	1
S.G.	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	0	1	1	0
M.K.	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	2	1	1	0	1
R.B.	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	2	2	2	0	1

Figure 2: The database of dead Georgian jihadis

Statistical analysis

In order to measure the impact of the independent variables of my research on Georgian jihadis' decision to join ISIS, it is useful to apply statistical methods of data analysis, primarily the univariate analysis. Reporting frequency distributions, and measuring central tendencies and dispersion should give us noteworthy results to understand the motivation of the Georgian fighters of ISIS and subsequently, check whether the findings of Roy are right, partly right or wrong.

In addition to the univariate analysis, for the aim of study, it is advantageous to apply the bivariate analysis. By constructing contingency tables and calculating correlation between the differing variables, we should be able to detect how the motivational factors, which encouraged the jihadis to make the decision to join jihad, are related to each other, and thus, answer the second research question of this thesis.

Everything is self-evident regarding the first variable, gender. As Figure 2 shows all of the dead jihadis were male. However, there might be some women from Georgia in Syria and Iraq. Certain news were spread in Georgian media about women who had left the country to join jihad. Several articles maintain that brides are sent to Syria and Iraq for the fighters of ISIS. The names of only

two women perceived in joining the Islamic State were disclosed though. One of them is believed to be returned back by her family. The government authorities have never confirmed the notes about women leaving Georgia for ISIS that is why is I did not include the information about female jihadis in my data.

As we can see below on Figure 3, youngsters comprise the absolute majority of Georgians fighting for ISIS. Sixteen fighters, 62 percent of the dead jihadis, were under twenty-five when they left for Syria and Iraq. Only three out of the twenty-six people studied were above thirty-five while going to fight. When talking about the category of age, two more indicators are to be added, arithmetic mean and standard deviation index. The average age of these fighters is slightly more than twenty-six. The number is this kind of high mainly because of Vakha Bugiev and Omar Margoshvili who are thirty-nine each, and Abdul-Malik Mutoshvili who is forty, in his turn. Regarding standard deviation, the index equals to 6.6 approximately, indicating that the data are not clustered closely around the mean.

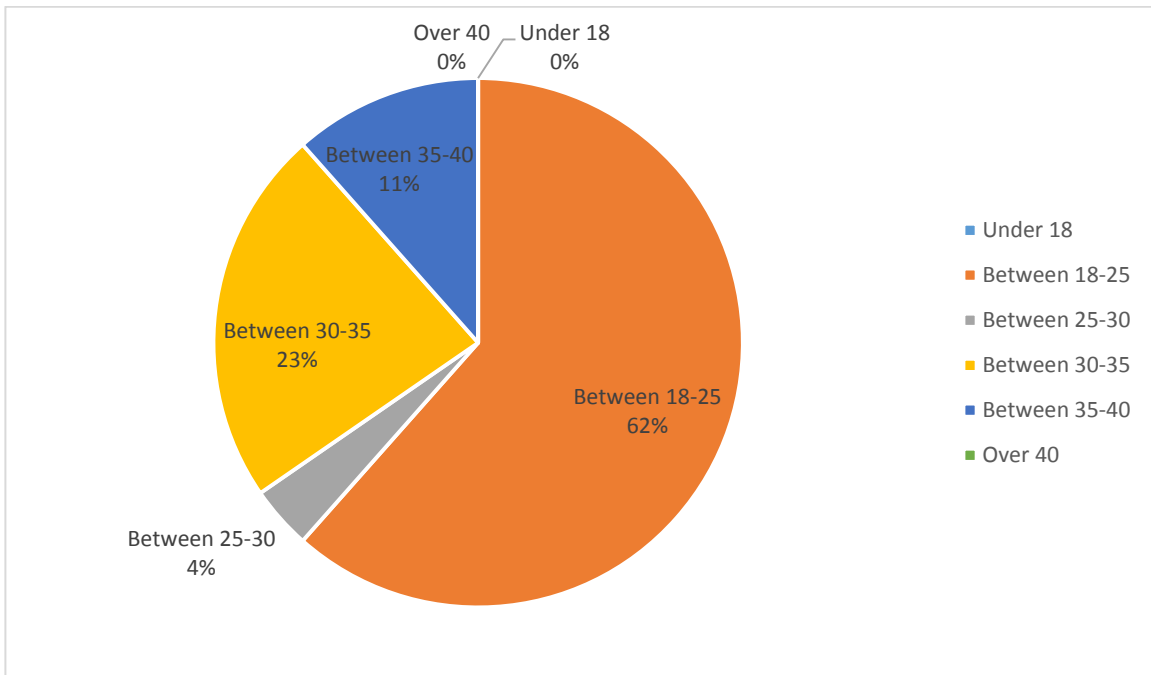


Figure 3: Age groups of the jihadis studied

Absolute majority of the jihadis studied, twenty-three out of twenty-six, comes from the Pankisi Gorge. Only Levan Nakaidze, Beslan Mukhtarov and Khvicha Gobadze were born and raised in different parts of Georgia. Pankisi Gorge is a valley region located in the Akhmeta municipality of Kakheti, Eastern Georgia. Orthodox Georgians have been living there alongside the Muslim Kist people, a Chechen sub-ethnos, since the beginning of the 19th century. From the early 2000s, after two wars between the Chechen Republic and Russia, Muslim refugees from Chechnya appeared in the region together with a number of militants. Consequently, the majority of the population is composed by the Sunni Muslims in Pankisi nowadays.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, for the most part, the jihadis from the Pankisi Gorge are the high-level fighters of the Islamic State. The most influential of them was Tarkhan Batirashvili, also known as Omar al-Shishani, an ethnic Georgian, who was one of the leaders of ISIS and one of the most wanted jihadis in the world until his assassination in 2016. In 2012, he travelled to Syria, settled in the city of Haritan, in Aleppo province, and gathered around him the Russian-speaking fighters from the former Soviet Union, particularly the North Caucasus. Several other young people from Pankisi are usually mentioned among the famous fighters of the Islamic State. One of them is Murad Margoshvili, also known as Muslim al-Shishani. The latter is not included in my study though.

Slightly more than the half of the jihadis studied, followed the patterns of individual radicalisation. To be specific, fourteen out of twenty-five jihadis, excluding Levan Nakaidze for the reasons mentioned earlier in this chapter, which comprise 56 percent of the dead fighters from Georgia, were radicalised in this fashion. It means the situation is somehow balanced regarding this variable, a form of radicalisation, as the difference between the fighters who followed the patterns of individual radicalisation and the ones who were radicalised within the communities, remains insignificant.

Everything seems clear regarding the next category, psychically specific patterns, as all of the fighters studied appear free from any significant psychiatric problems or posttraumatic stress disorders. However, the experts and the local people in Pankisi Gorge, where the absolute majority of the jihadis studied come from, mention the problems related to the existence of harmful effects of frustration caused by the discrepancy between the expectations and social outcomes. For instance, Ruslan Baramidze, a senior researcher at Batumi Shota Rustaveli University and an

expert on Georgian Islam, highlights the importance of this problem and suggests that young people from Pankisi are looking at the radical Islam as a means to self-realisation. He explains that the young radicals “... all start from saying that before joining this religion they were looking for their true selves, and now they have found it.”⁵⁷ He also mentions the growing influence from the members of the radical religious groups when they are being portrayed as ideals, so the youth which cannot see the other means to self-realisation, decide to be like them. As we can see from Figure 2, only eight jihadis, which comprise 32 percent of the twenty-five fighters, were perceived of having no problems related to participation in country’s social and political life. Majority of the fighters were engaged in social and political life only in part. It may be explained by the frustration linked to the problems of self-realisation mentioned here.

Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between the geographic distribution of the jihadis and their engagement in county’s social and political life. We can see that 56 percent of the twenty-five jihadis studied came from the Pankisi Gorge, and at the same time, were incompletely engaged in social and political life in Georgia. The central trend depicted on the contingency table is that the two jihadis who came from the other parts of the country expressed even lower social activity, as the both of them were having serious problems related to participation in county's social and political life.

Count	Engagement in county's social and political life			Grand Total
	0	1	2	
Geographic distribution				
0	4.00%	56.00%	32.00%	92.00%
1	0.00%	4.00%	0.00%	4.00%
2	0.00%	4.00%	0.00%	4.00%
Grand Total	4.00%	64.00%	32.00%	100.00%

Figure 4: Relationship between geographic distribution and engagement in country’s social and political life

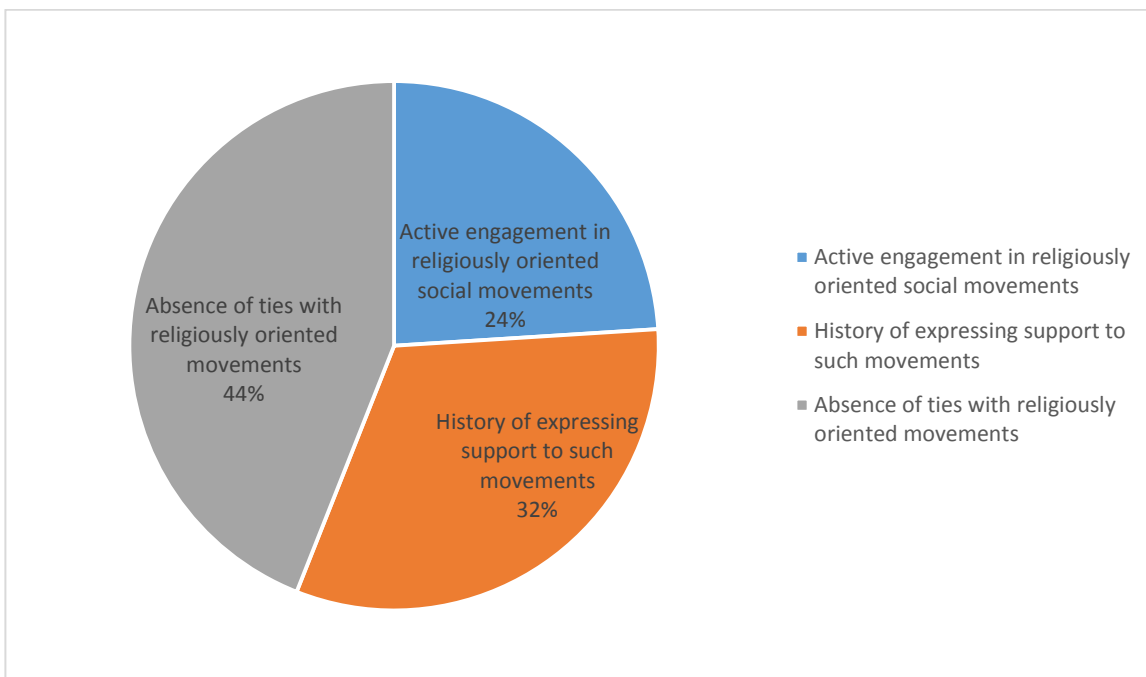
Absolute majority of the jihadis had no criminal background before joining the Islamic State. The cases of Ruslan Machalikashvili and Tarkhan Batirashvili are the only exceptions. The latter

⁵⁷ Inga Papovaite, “Pankisi Youth Choose Radical Islam over Grim Reality,” *Democracy & Freedom Watch*, November 21, 2014, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://dfwatch.net/pankisi-youth-choose-radical-islam-over-grim-reality-94931-32304>.

was even imprisoned. A former sergeant in the army, Batirashvili was arrested and charged with illegal possession of weapons in 2012. His father is sure Batirashvili was set up, and he was sentenced to three years in prison for nothing. Temur Batirashvili thinks his son's service in the intelligence agency was a real reason for it. It was in prison, where he met a Saudi follower of the radical Salafi interpretation of Islam and got recruited, Temur Batirashvili says.⁵⁸

Figure 2 demonstrates that Georgian jihadis had little experience with fighting before going to the Middle East. Only four of the radicals were engaged in active military actions earlier, while nineteen jihadis, which comprise 76 percent of the twenty-five jihadis studied, had no history of militancy by the time they joined ISIS.

Figure 5 illustrates the engagement of the twenty-five jihadis in religiously oriented social movements. As it turns out, 56 percent of the fighters had been mobilised around such movements. Moreover, almost one-fourth of the dead jihadis were actively linked with them in the past.



⁵⁸ Marcin Mamon, "The Mujahedeen Valley: How a Chechen from Georgia Became a Feared Leader of ISIS," *The Intercept*, July 13, 2015, accessed March 28, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2015/07/13/chechen-georgia-became-feared-leader-isis>.

Figure 5: Engagement of the jihadis studied in religiously oriented social movements

As Figure 2 shows, in general, the jihadis were regular parishioners in local mosques. Only six of twenty-five jihadis were inactive in religious activities before being radicalised. It is to be noted that Rustam Gelyaev was the only convert to Islam out of these dead Georgian jihadis.

It is interesting to compare the relationship between the age of the jihadis and their religious background. Figure 6 shows that 40 percent of the twenty-five jihadis studied, were between 18 and 25, and at the same time, were parishioners in local mosques. It is to be added that the fighters who were above twenty-five, were more active in religious activities than the younger jihadis. As the same figure shows, slightly more than 88 percent of the dead jihadis, eight out of nine, who were above twenty-five, were regular parishioners in local mosques. The number is high compared to less than 69 percent of the younger fighters, eleven out of sixteen, who were that active. These are the main trends depicted from this contingency table.

Count	Religious background			Grand Total
	0	1	2	
Age				
1	4.00%	40.00%	20.00%	64.00%
2	0.00%	4.00%	0.00%	4.00%
3	0.00%	16.00%	4.00%	20.00%
4	0.00%	12.00%	0.00%	12.00%
Grand Total	4.00%	72.00%	24.00%	100.00%

Figure 6: Relationship between age and religious background

Figure 7 illustrates the patterns of religious education of the twenty-five jihadis. As we can see, 84 percent of the twenty-five jihadis studied, twenty-one radicals to be specific, never followed a real process of religious education. However, it has to be mentioned that ten jihadis out of total twenty-five had some religious knowledge.

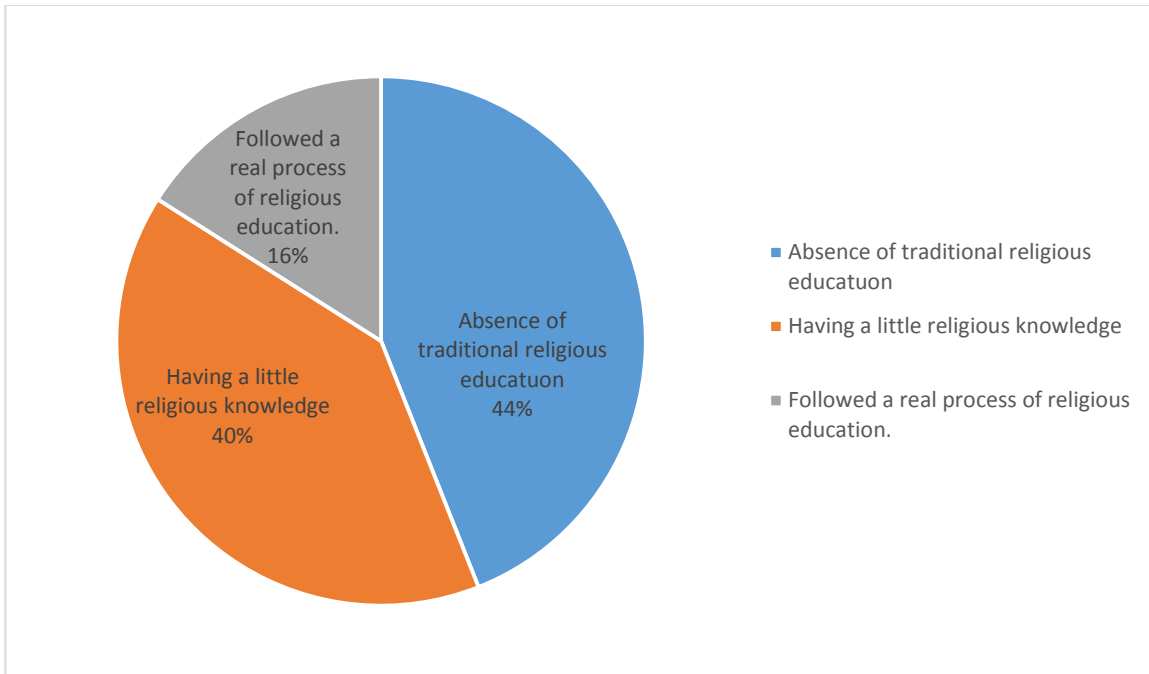


Figure 7: Patterns of religious education of the jihadis studied

Everything is obvious regarding the influence of Salafi ideas on the jihadis studied. As shown in Figure 2, ten of twenty-five jihadis had been a long time Salafi, while other fifteen converted to Salafi school of Islam prior to going to fight. Thus, all of these jihadis appeared to be sharing the Salafi jihad ideology before joining ISIS.

In addition to the categories discussed, Figure 2 provides information about the economic and educational background of the jihadis. As the data shows, fourteen out of twenty-five jihadis studied, were unemployed in Georgia. Eight more were expressing economic hardship. Regarding the educational background, absolute majority of the jihadis were high school graduates. Only four of them did go to the university, while Ruslan Machalikashvili was the only school drop-out.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, I was able to gather only the general information regarding the remaining three categories in Georgia, particularly the Pankisi Gorge in this case. To sum up this information, with reference to the place and the ways of recruitment, it has to be mentioned that Wahhabi movement has become increasingly popular in the region, especially among the youth. The spread of radical doctrines of the movement was promoted by the foreign actors, like the organizations mainly from Saudi Arabia. The local youth were recruited in the way.

When discussing the internal aspect, it is to be noted that the mosques of the followers of traditional Islam have never developed the extremist ideas and recruited the youth.⁵⁹

We have to mention that there are some tensions between the followers of traditional Islam and the radicals when talking about the next category, the jihadis' relationship with traditional Muslim communities. In the interview, the Imam of the Pankisi Gorge, Omar Aldamov, maintains that the followers of the Wahhabi movement do not respect local traditions, adhering to the Arab customs and habits.⁶⁰ However, despite the fundamental differences, the inhabitants of the region live friendly in the valley, says the Imam.

Regarding the last category, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the influential members of the ISIS who come from the Pankisi Gorge, especially Tarkhan Batirashvili, acted as role models for the radicalised youth. The members of their community who avenge the Muslim ummah are portrayed as ideals for them. The youth relatively easily makes the decision to follow their steps when they see no other means of self-realisation.

VI. Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, the objective of this thesis, which is resting on a mixed methods research design, was to study the individual stories of Georgians fighting for the Islamic State. It was necessary for the aim to understand the motivational factors in personal stories of Georgian jihadis which pushed them to go to war. It has to be added that the thesis was based on two main research questions to fulfil its purposes.

In order to understand the driving force behind Georgian's decision to join jihad and analyse how their motivational factors were related to each other, I created a database of twenty-six dead Georgian fighters after coding the data related to their personal stories, which I collected from online media articles. Creating categories and options based on the codes suggested by Roy's

⁵⁹ Misha Meparishvili, "A Struggle Between the Religious Fundamentalism and Tradition in the Pankisi Gorge," *Netgazeti.ge*, December 16, 2015, accessed March 30, 2017, <http://netgazeti.ge/2015/12/16/%E1%83%91%E1%83%A0%E1%83%AB%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9A%E1%83%90-%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98%E1%83%92%E1%83%98%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A0-%E1%83%A4%E1%83%A3%E1%83%9C%E1%83%93%E1%83%90%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94%E1%83%A2/>.

⁶⁰ See note 59 above.

study, allowed me to organise the information for the subsequent analysis. For the aim of this thesis, I used statistical methods of data analysis.

The results of the statistical analysis enabled me to investigate the conditions under which the radicalisation takes place in Georgia and reveal the general characteristics of the ISIS fighters who come from Georgia. To sum up the findings of this study, the process of radicalisation in Georgia should be regarded as a protest movement of the frustrated male youth who come mainly from the rural areas, particularly the Pankisi Gorge. The young people affected by the poor social and economic conditions express harmful consequences of resentment caused by the discrepancy between their expectations and social outcomes. They cannot identify themselves to the world. Meanwhile, the state does not offer them any means to self-realisation. As a result, they are not participating in country's social and political life.

The problems related to the educational system leave the youth open to other means to self-realisation, such as joining the radical groups and sharing the extremist ideas. A growing influence of foreign actors and the role models within their own communities makes it easier for them to make the final decision and go to war. Some of them follow the patterns of individual radicalisation prior to making the final decision and going to Syria and Iraq, while the others are radicalised within the communities.

As we have seen, these are not people with criminal background, history of militancy or active engagement in religiously oriented social movements. Nor their radicalisation is a result of a long-term maturation in political movements.

Is religion, particularly Islam to blame for this? Not at all. This study has made it clear that in most cases, the jihadis are regular parishioners in local mosques and share the Salafi ideas. However they never follow a real process of religious education and, as a result, have little religious knowledge. Besides, the mosques of the followers of traditional Islam try to resist to the process of recruitment of the local youth. This is enough to conclude that there is no theological dimension and we are not facing an ideological rationalisation of Islamic theology. Religiosity is the key. The frustrated youth finds jihadist radicalisation as the most appropriate tool serving the revolt and ISIS is offering them this option.

In addition to investigating the motivation of Georgian jihadis behind their decision to go to war, the thesis tested Roy's theory of the Islamisation of radicalism, and made a comparison

between the general characteristics of the Western European and Georgian fighters of the Islamic State. The thesis provides with accurate explanations how the central findings of the study of Roy are relevant not only for France and the Western Europe, but also for Georgia. It means the findings of Roy's study may be generalised, indeed.

As the results of the statistical analysis have demonstrated, the central findings of Roy are relevant in the case of Georgian Jihadis and, thus, we can determine his theory is partly right. The majority of the patterns discussed by Roy were met in the case of Georgian jihadis: Georgian jihadis did not have general psychiatric problems but expressed frustration and resentment against society; there was an overrepresentation of the rural areas when it came to the contribution to the reservoir of radicalisation; migrants among the fighters; majority of the jihadis were in their twenties, so the trend of radicalisation may be regarded as a youth movement; only a small number of the jihadis had a previous history of militancy; radicalisation was often taking place within a community, the jihadis were generally fascinated for the cult of super-heroes who avenge the Muslim ummah; the local Imams had no significant influence on the process of radicalisation; Islamic theology had nothing to do with the process; absolute majority of the fighters used the Salafi movement as a means to meet their expectations; many of the jihadis did not follow the real process of religious education.

However, some findings of Roy are not relevant in the case of Georgian fighters of ISIS, as my analysis has demonstrated. Unlike the Western Europe: the number of the second-generation migrants and converts was insignificant among Georgian jihadis; in general, the jihadis did not have a criminal background; a certain number of Georgian jihadis was mobilised around religiously oriented social movements in the past; women jihadis almost were not met in Georgia.

In this way, I was able to fulfil the aim of the thesis, answer my research questions, outline the driving force behind Georgian's decision to join the Islamic State, conclude that Roy's theory is partly right in the case of Georgian jihadis and, most importantly, stimulate into further research on the topic and comparative studies between European and non-European fighters by creating the empirical material in the form of the database of the twenty-six dead Georgian jihadis.

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