

Leaving Home to Join Extremist Violence

Framing of Swedish far-right & Islamist foreign fighters' reasons to
travel abroad to join violent extremist groups

Abstract

Why do some individuals travel to foreign land to join violent extremist groups? This thesis aims to fill the research gap on foreign fighters and their reasons to travel abroad, focusing on one of the countries most affected by this phenomenon; Sweden. Additionally, this thesis intends to counter the fixation on *Islamist* foreign fighters, which tend to make foreign fighters a product of Muslims. By developing a theoretical and methodological framework with two different levels of analysis, this thesis involves a descriptive in-depth comparative analysis of Swedish far-right and Islamist foreign fighters' framing of their reasons to travel abroad, set in relation to Swedish newspaper's framing. According to the findings presented in this study, Swedish Islamist and far-right foreign fighters frame their reasons to travel within the concepts of "outrage and empathy", "adherence to ideology" and "search for identity and meaning", but in somewhat distinct manners. The same applies to Swedish newspapers' framing; Swedish newspapers' frame Swedish far-right and Islamist foreign fighters within the above concepts, however, in very distinct manners and with a greater degree of resonance with Islamist than with far-right foreign fighters.

Keywords: Swedish foreign fighters, radicalisation, far-right, Islamist, Frame Theory, frame resonance, frame analysis, Syria, Ukraine

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1 Introduction

“Brothers [were] being killed when fighting against Assad. It was my duty as a Muslim to help them”

- Swedish Islamist extremist in Syria, Nilsson 2015: 347

“If we were to be attacked in Sweden, I would appreciate others helping us. Therefore, I want to help when Ukraine has been attacked by Russia”

- Swedish far-right extremist in Ukraine, DN 2015b

Why does some people travel to foreign land to join violent extremist groups? Contemporary conflicts around the world have resulted in a significant increase of individuals from Sweden travelling abroad to join and fight with extremist groups, more commonly known as “foreign fighters”. Despite the considerable attention these individuals have received, there is little consensus on how to understand and conceptualise this issue (Gustafsson – Ranstorp, 2017: 5; Dalgaard Nielsen, 2010: 797-798). The diverse theoretical and methodological features of previous studies characterise a contentious research field on foreign fighters. Within this field, some subjects are more disputed than others. Recent criticism has been targeting a fixation on Islamist extremists, making extremist violence (and the phenomenon of foreign fighters) a product of Muslims (Kundnani, 2012: 5; Cordesman, 2017). As a result, the Radicalisation Awareness Network of the European Commission (RAN) has expressed that the most “fundamental issue impacting all focus areas is the comparability between different types of radicalisation depending on ideology” (2016: 5). Another significant critique targets the field’s tendency to ignore contextual and dynamic aspects of political violence, such as the role of discourse and institutional and media actors (Demetriou – Alimi, 2018: 560).

In response to recent critique, a new field within the discipline has emerged called Critical Security Studies, which focuses on “the role of language, representation, discourse and meaning” (da Silva – Crilley, 2017: 165). Inspired by poststructuralism and social constructivism, scholars within this field view the social construction of a phenomenon as vital to understand acts of political violence in general and issues such as radicalisation and foreign fighters in particular. Media and the concept of “media framing” in particular have received a lot of attention within this field, since media framing is considered to shape how political violence is understood, assessed and constructed, that it “serve[s] to legitimise and delegitimise violent struggles” (Heath-Kelly, Jarvis, and Baker-Beall cited in da Silva – Crilley, 2017: 165) as well as influence how people act upon a problem (Papacharissi – Oliveria, 2008: 53; Jackson in da Silva – Crilley, 2017: 165). Within this new field of research, it has also been argued that the emergence of congruence

(“frame resonance”) between values and ideas of mass media and social groups plays a vital role in the mobilisation of new recruits. In short, if mass media framing resonates with a social group’s framing this has the potential to motivate and drive mobilisation and radicalisation (Snow et al. 1986: 464; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010: 802).

Scholars and political institutions have urged others to contribute to Critical Security Studies by examining these issues further and, in particular, by exploring the dynamic between how “social movements develop these frames, [and] how journalists evaluate and define them” (Carragee – Roefs, 2004: 224-225) and, even more importantly, “whether there are parallels between for example jihadi and right-wing radicalisation” (RAN, 2016: 5).

This thesis aims to contribute to the literature on framing, foreign fighters and radicalisation as well as to contemporary policy making in the following way: by (1) comparing frames made by far-right extremists and Islamist extremists of their reasons to travel abroad to join violent extremist groups; and (2) comparing these frames and their relation to journalists’ framing of the same issue. Hence, this study focuses on foreign fighters’ radicalisation process, though, it will not involve the *whole process* of radicalisation rather focusing on *one essential part*; (the framing of) reasons to travel abroad to join violent extremist groups. Furthermore, this study will adopt an interpretative and descriptive approach to allow a more profound and in-depth analysis of these issues, inviting future scholars with the purpose of developing explanatory research to use the descriptive data and findings gathered in this study.

In accordance with these objectives, this study will involve two different research questions and two supplementary questions, formulated in the following way:

1. *How do Swedish far-right and Islamist foreign fighters frame their reasons to travel abroad to join violent extremist groups?*
- *To what extent is their framing similar/different to one another?*
2. *How do Swedish newspapers frame these foreign fighters’ reasons to travel abroad to join violent extremist groups?*
- *To what extent does their framing resonate with Swedish foreign fighters’ framing?*

2 Theory

This study has adopted a theory developing ambition, hence, combining and developing different theories to meet this study's main purpose; to contribute to the literature on framing, foreign fighters and radicalisation. The disposition of this chapter reflects a "funnel approach"; beginning with an overview of previous research, followed by and narrowed to two different theoretical frameworks; (2.2) Frame Theory and (2.3) Foreign fighters' reasons to travel abroad, in addition to key definitions. This, in turn, has laid the foundation for the concluding section where the theoretical framework adopted to this study is discussed in detail.

2.1 Previous research

Foreign fighters is neither a new nor an Islamist phenomenon (Frenett - Silverman, 2016: 63). In the mid 19th century thousands of Catholic youngsters poured into Rome to fight the Italian Unificationists, and during the Spanish Civil War thousands of volunteers poured into Spain to fight Franco (Nilsson, 2014: 344; Bakker – de Bont, 2016: 839). There is no single answer to why these individuals choose to travel abroad to fight in foreign conflicts, despite a considerable amount of research on foreign fighters in recent years (da Silva – Crilley, 2017: 168). Nonetheless, and in contrast to the conceptualisation of radicalisation and terrorism, there is relative consensus among scholars on how to define foreign fighters; "non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict" (Malet, 2010: 9; Hegghammer, 2010: 57). While a considerable amount of research has been done on *Islamist* foreign fighters and their reasons to travel abroad (see for example Hegghammer, 2010; Malet 2010; Lindekile et al. 2016), other ideologically characterised foreign fighters have not gained as much attention. Aside from a few scholars who recently began analysing the interaction between far-right and Islamist extremists, concluding that they are involved in a vicious cycle of xenophobia (Ebner, 2017) and that their radicalisation processes are very similar to one another (Manning – La Bau, 2015; Abbas, 2017: 54). Different ideological strands of *foreign fighters* have gained close to zero attention, aside from a recent research project carried out by Frenett and Silverman. "Foreign Fighters: Motivations for Travel to Foreign Conflicts" (2016) by Frenett and Silverman entails a comparative study on (ideologically) different foreign fighters and their motivations to travel.

Concerning the previous research on framing, the concept of framing has received increased attention within the field of foreign fighters and political violence. Although "media framing" is the most common research object when studying political violence, some framing scholars have turned to other forms of

framing, such as “social movement framing” as well as the interaction between media and social movement framing (Carragee – Roefs, 2004: 224; Benford, 1993; Benford – Snow, 2000; Holmes Cooper, 2002). These scholars tend to conceptualise framing as a mobilization strategy and analyse social movements on a macro level rather than looking at framing from an individual perspective or as socially constructed, a critique which will be discussed in the following section.

2.2 Frame Theory & frame resonance

The theoretical and methodological paradigm called *framing* is still in the process of development and renewal (de Vreese, 2005: 60). The original perception of framing derives from Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* (1974), and is based on the idea that “events rarely speak for themselves and that various frames will compete to establish themselves as the authoritative interpretation of social reality” (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010: 802). As a sub-branch of social movement theory, Frame Theory focuses on the social production of meaning, individuals’ conceptualisation of themselves as a collectivity and how intersubjective and social processes generate motivations to act (ibid: 801-802). Despite a considerable amount of research on framing, this concept has proved to be very elusive to measure (Maher cited in Matthes – Kohring, 2008: 258). Hence, in order to apply and measure a frame, it has been important to identify its specific elements (ibid: 263). *Frame* will be interpreted according to one of the most cited scholars of the framing literature; according to Entman, a frame is “manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements” (1993: 52).

As already been mentioned, this study is dedicated to theory development and to contribute to the literature on framing. Hence, it will incorporate the critical voices within this discipline, namely that Frame Theory tend to be “structurally biased” and influenced by rational choice theory. Scholars of Frame Theory ignore the fact that actions (i.e. the action of framing) are socially constructed, driven by emotions and far from strategic (Goodwin - Jasper, 1999: 49). In reference to this critique, a descriptive approach might be more appropriate and not, which is usually characterising a frame analysis, to explain and analyse framing as a strategy employed to mobilise new recruits. By embracing this critique, it will also be possible to descriptively analyse “frame resonance”.

Studies on “frame resonance” (in the literature more commonly known as “frame alignment”) aims to “measure and discuss the degree to which framing succeeds in striking a cord of responsiveness in the target group or in the public at large” (Lindekilde, 2014: 202). Such studies deal with the comparable and dynamic ambitions of frame analysis; to involve contextual aspects of framing (Lindekilde, 2014: 208). These studies have emphasised how, if congruence emerges between social movement frames and media frames, framing will have action mobilizing effects. In short, if mass media framing resonates with social movements’ framing this might drive radicalisation and mobilisation of new recruits (Dalgaard-Nielsen,

2010: 802; Benford – Snow, 2000: 613-614; Snow et al. 1986: 464). This study will refer to “frame resonance” to avoid the structural and strategical bias which the word “frame alignment” might impose.

2.3 Foreign fighters’ reasons to travel abroad

The theory developing ambition of this study involves combining Frame Theory with Frenett and Silverman’s findings, generating a typology of frames. Before elaborating further on the typology, this section will introduce the framework of Frenett and Silverman.

Frenett and Silverman (2016: 63) point to the fact that Islamist extremists as well as far-left, far-right and ethno-nationalist movements have recruited foreign fighters all over the world at various points in history. Hence, emphasising that foreign fighters is neither a new nor an Islamist phenomenon. The foreign fighter phenomenon is generally, as well as in this study, understood as “non-citizens of conflict states who join insurgencies during civil conflict” (Malet, 2010: 9; Hegghammer, 2010: 57). Frenett and Silverman’s research is based on interviews and secondary literature on foreign fighters from ideologically different backgrounds with first-hand experience of joining violent extremist groups abroad from a variety of places around the world. They conclude that three motivational factors “were prevalent to one degree or another in all cases examined, regardless of ideology, geography or time period” (Frenett – Silverman, 2016:64-65):

- (1) outrage at what is alleged to be happening in the country where the conflict is taking place and empathy with the people being affected;
- (2) adherence to the ideology of the group an individual wishes to join and;
- (3) a search for identity and belonging

In addition to this theoretical framework, it has been important to specify and properly define the contentious labels “Daesh”, “Islamist extremism” and “far-right extremism”. The following paragraphs entail a more detailed conceptualisation of how these phenomena will be understood.

2.3.1 Defining Daesh & Islamist extremism

This study intends to use the term “Daesh” (“Da’ish” in Arabic) when referring to the designated terrorist organisation in Syria and Iraq. Other acronyms are Islamic State, Isis, Isil or IS. “Daesh” is the Arabic acronym more commonly used in the Middle East and which, in recent years, have been used by an increased number of researchers and political leaders around the world. By applying this Arabic acronym, this study intends to challenge the groups’ legitimacy by using a label the group despises and excluding the word “state” (BBC, 2015). When referring to

Daesh and its Islamist ideology, it is important to underline that Islamism is a multifaceted phenomenon and not all Islamist affiliates are violent (Nilsson, 2015: 345). “Islamism” is an umbrella term for believing Islam to be the basis of all values. In contrast to the more popular (and Eurocentric) understanding of the term, Islamism is founded on a *reinterpretation* of Islam rather than being fixed to a traditional interpretation (Olsson cited in SVT, 2011; Sayyid, 2017: 81). Academic literature lacks a clear and culturally nuanced definition surrounding the force of Islamism. *Jihadi-Salafi* reflects an attempt to counter this shortcoming. Jihadi-Salafi groups are assumed to be extremist, internationalist and anti-western, with roots in the Salafi or Wahhabi religious tradition. However, the term “Jihadist” is often “wrongly associating the noble religious concept of *jihad* with illegitimate violence” (Hegghammer, 2014: 246, 254). The word “Salafist” is furthermore perceived too vague. This is one of the reasons why the label “jihadi-salafist” has proved difficult to apply and analyse. One might conclude that “[c]ulturally specific terminology, when used carelessly and excessively, may even be detrimental to scientific analysis” (Hegghammer, 2014: 264-265). Therefore, this study will apply the comprehensive word *Islamist* in an attempt to circumvent a discussion surrounding the hybrid phenomenon of Islamism.

2.3.2 Defining far-right extremism

The extreme right or right-wing will in this study be referred to as “far-right extremism”. In essence, scholars on extremist theory define extremism by distinguishing between extremists who refuse “the values of the game [i.e. democracy]” and “democrats” (Jekel et al., 2017: 2). *Far-right* extremism, in turn, is defined as a bundle of ideological features, such as the idea that everything unwanted is unnatural, ethnocentrism, blaming scapegoats and “nationalising historiography” (i.e. the idea that citizens of a specific nation are superior all others) (ibid: 3).

2.4 Theoretical framework - A typology of frames

This study will adopt an abductive approach within the structure of Frame Theory. An abductive approach inheres a systematic agenda, where the purpose is to produce and analyse already defined frames, in addition to create new insights based on surprising research evidence throughout the analysing process (Timmermans – Tavory, 2012: 170). While a deductive approach (i.e. to analyse already defined frames) risks to overlook important frames, this study will circumvent this shortcoming by adopting a flexible abductive approach. Although, still involving a systematic design to strengthen the replicability and validity (Matthes – Kohring, 2008: 262; Reese et al. 2001: 98; de Vreese, 2005: 53). The process of defining and selecting these frames has, in addition to Frenett and

Silverman's study and Frame Theory, been guided by Cappella and Jamieson's (1997: 47) criteria for selecting frames, namely: the frame should have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics; the frame should be commonly observed in a journalistic practice; the frame should be able to be reliably distinguished from other frames. These criteria are, however, limited to *news frames*. Even so, Cappella and Jamieson say these should be no different from any other frame and have thus guided this study (1997: 44). Hence, the frames are formulated in the following way:

1. **Outrage and Empathy.** This frame reflects the initial emotional reaction to what is perceived to be taken place in the region where the extremist will later travel and follows with "a wish to 'do something' to stop it" (Frenett – Silverman, 2016: 66). This frame has been shown in several studies as both a motivational driver and a strategy used by insurgencies to recruit affiliates (ibid; Malet, 2010; Benford – Snow, 2000: 613).
2. **Adherence to the Ideology.** This frame reflects the necessity of "a rough adherence, or at least a lack of antagonism towards, the guiding philosophy of that group" (Frenett – Silverman, 2016: 68) in order to join a group abroad. *Ideology* is conceptualised according to the definition guiding Frenett and Silverman's research: "a belief, whether at face-value or inherent, and compasses ideological factors including socio-religious and nationalist beliefs" (ibid).
3. **Search for Identity and Meaning.** This frame reflects the quest to fill a perceived "'vacuum' of an individual's identity and to achieve some sense of personal fulfilment", in addition to "consolidate a self-perceived identity and relational meaning to perpetuate this identity" (Frenett – Silverman, 2016: 71). Even though sharing many similarities with the second frame (*Adherence to the Ideology*), since a shared identity within a community is perceived as a key driver of foreign fighters (see Malet, 2010), this frame differs from the second frame in that it is personal rather than political. In addition to identity and personal fulfilment, this frame also involves a search for meaning, power, adventure, "comradery" and "to stand apart from the crowd" (Frenett – Silverman, 2016: 71-73).

3 Methodology

This chapter will present the method used in this study. Since this study is dedicated to analysing social movements' and journalists' framing and the data available is first and foremost text-based, a qualitative frame analysis seemed most appropriate.

3.1 Frame analysis – a combination of methods

A frame analysis aims to examine “the selection and salience of certain aspects of an issue by exploring images, stereotypes, metaphors, actors, and messages” (Matthes, 2009: 349) and is concerned with the interpretation and meaning making of, for example, media and social movement communication (Lindekilde, 2014: 196). Despite a consensus on this general aim, the diverse methodological and operational tools used in previous studies reflect the heterogeneity of frame analysis and the difficulty in applying such a method (de Vreese, 2005: 60). Due to this diverse methodological field, this study will combine several methodological tools of frame analysis to create the most appropriate methodological foundation.

Firstly, this study has adopted a definition of qualitative frame analysis formulated by Linström and Marais (2012: 25); referring to an interpretative text-based analysis, a form of qualitative content analysis where frames are identified, described and compared.

Secondly, this study will be guided by the framework of both macro- and micro-frame analysis. Different frame analyses will assume different forms depending on the frames being analysed. The general definition of frames used by frame analysts is macroscopic; referring to broad patterns of the spoken and written word, often in relation to media or social movement discourse. Contrary to this macroscopic focused analysis is a *micro-frame analysis*; referring to the spoken and written word of *individuals* or, in social movement analysis, social movement *participants* (see Johnston, 1995/2004: 218-219). Since this study will analyse both macro frames (media frames) and micro frames (social movement participant frames), a combination of both frameworks seemed most appropriate.

Lastly, this study will be guided by Lindekilde (2014: 214, 219) and his transparent methodological framework of frame analysis.

Before turning to a more detailed description of this combination of methods in the section below, it is critical to emphasise that the meaning and framing of a particular phenomenon is contingent and never completely fixed (Lindekilde, 2014: 203). However, by taking this fact into account when analysing the material and limiting the analysis to a specific time period, this will hopefully not diminish the study's validity and reliability.

3.1.1 A transparent micro- & macro-frame analysis

To increase the intersubjectivity in a qualitative frame analysis it is important to involve a high degree of transparency (Lindekilde, 2014: 213). One way to do this, as has been put forward by Lindekilde, is by giving access to a codebook where the analyst documents the procedures used when analysing and coding the material. Another strategy is to use displays, defined as “condensed, visual depiction of qualitative data, which facilitates analysis and helps detect patterns/trends/themes” (Dahler-Larsen cited in Lindekilde, 2014: 214). By combining these strategies, this study aims to enhance the intersubjectivity of this study’s analysis. The codebook is reflected in the “typology of frames”.

In contrast to earlier frame analyses on social movements, this study will analyse each subject of the social movements separately, since, as has been recognised and called for by several scholars, framing scholars need to realise that a social movement reflects “a field of actors, not a unified entity” (Gamson & Meyer cited in Carragee – Roefs, 2004: 226). Johnston has provided the literature on frame analysis with a close and in-depth methodology of discourses within social movements. He argues that frame analyses might be strengthened through, what he calls, a *micro-frame analysis* which focuses on “the spoken and written texts of social movement *participants*” (Johnston, 1995/2004: 218-219, my accentuation). Such “microscopic scrutiny” allow for high validity, to capture otherwise lost data and reveal potential links between different parts of the text (ibid: 229). Despite the fact that a *full line-by-line transcription* of a text is the ideal for a micro-frame analysis, this is difficult to apply when analysing a wide range of material and several subjects. Hence, Johnston has come up with an alternative method; an *ideal-typical schema* (a form of display, similar to Lindekilde’s framework), where representative and central parts of several texts/interviews/subjects are selected and melded together - in order to convey the details necessary to verify the frames (ibid: 238). The ideal-typical schema encompasses three upper nodes (the “key framing concepts” in the analysis) as well as several lower nodes, which will vary (or not) depending on the subject’s framing (see Figure 1 for an ideal-typical schema exemplified). The point of this way of structuring the material is that the structure of the schema, the degree of consistency or variation between cases, will guide the discussion and the results of the comparative analysis. This type of method deemed most appropriate for conducting this study, since it reflects a comparative analysis of several subjects. Even though this way of organising and analysing frames is originally guided by an inductive approach and is “far from perfect” (ibid: 241), this method permits a systematic and comparative discussion on frames within the elusive and heterogeneous framework of frame analysis.

Johnston concludes that, if one uses this method to compare media and social movement participants’ framing, one might expect parallels between the media texts’ schema structure and social movement participants’ schema structure (ibid). Hence, this display-like method will be adopted both to a macro-frame analysis of media framing and a micro-frame analysis of foreign fighters’ framing.

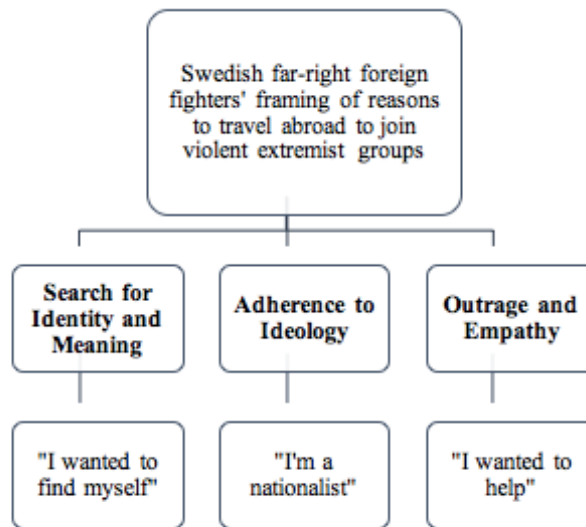


Figure 1. An illustration what an ideal-typical schema might look like

3.2 Case selection & limitations

Swedish foreign fighters is an understudied phenomenon within the academia. Although the issue has been on the political and security agenda for a long time and received a considerable amount of media attention, little is known about them (Gustafsson – Ranstorp, 2017: 6). It has been estimated that Sweden is one of the top countries affected by this phenomenon, relative to its population size. Since 2011, at least 300 Swedish citizens have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join Daesh or al-Qaeda affiliated groups and at least 30 Swedish citizens have travelled to Ukraine to fight the Russian separatists (ibid; Sydsvenskan, 2015; Neumann, 2015). Since media has examined this phenomenon to a greater degree than the academia, this study’s selection of cases refers mainly to the availability of news-reports. The cases have furthermore been selected based on their correspondence to the definition of foreign fighters and the (territorial) definition of violent extremist groups, in addition to their adherence to the ideological spheres this study aims to examine (far-right and Islamist extremism). Due to this study’s territorial delimitation, focusing on Sweden, violent extremist groups are understood in accordance with the Swedish Security Service’s definition, as “groups who choose to stand outside the democratic society and who see violence, harm and other crimes as legitimate tools in their struggle” (Swedish Security Service, 2009: 10, quote originally in Swedish). Both these cases involve individuals that have travelled to foreign land (where they lack citizenship) to join violent extremist groups; the groups they have joined adhere to social nationalist (or even neo-Nazism) or Islamist ideologies and use violence as a legitimate tool in their struggle. The case selection is furthermore based on and limited to individuals and newspapers with

Swedish origin, in addition to the availability of reliable and adequate secondary data - primary sources were not an option due to the limited scope of this study, being a Bachelor's thesis.

This study intends to employ a small-N studies design. This design seemed most favourable since the availability of material is rather limited and will thus require a limited number of cases. In addition, such research design can provide in-depth, intensive knowledge and conceptual refinements. However, the choice of research design is often presented with a trade-off. In this study, the choice of a small N-study will present the analysis with strong internal validity (i.e. the degree of confidence that the conclusion is warranted) but it will make it generally weaker in external validity (i.e. degree of generalisability) (Halperin - Heath, 2012: 15, 166-167, 171-172; George - Bennet, 2004: 19). Hence, this study will not be able to make any general or universal conclusions due to the very small number of cases and material used. However, the knowledge deriving from the results of this study is still of great importance since it embody a vast research gap on the academic and political arena (RAN, 2016: 5).

Another limitation refers to the selected time frames. The time frame selected for each case reflects the availability of data, in addition to when foreign fighters travelling to Syria and Ukraine began to appear in media coverage. What is important to note is that the different time spans between the first two cases might make the comparative analysis generally weaker in validity, however, the data selected are mainly referring to the periods of 2013-2015 in both cases. Part of the analysis is dedicated to measure frame resonance and, while the time span for media coverage is selected to provide a valid comparison, the data available is mainly referring to 2013-2015.

The following paragraphs entails a more detailed explanation of the case selections and time frames, as well as a short historical background of each case respectively.

3.2.1 Swedish far-right foreign fighters, 2013-2017

Since the year of 2011, at least 30 Swedish citizens have travelled to Ukraine to fight the Russian separatists and many of them have joined the nationalistic paramilitary regiment Azov Battalion (Sydsvenskan, 2015). The Ukrainian Azov Battalion is an ultra-right outlet, with an emblem reminiscent of the Nazi Wolfsangel which was used by the SS Division and Volunteers during the Second World War, and is referred to as a "neo-Nazi paramilitary militia" (Foreign Policy, 2015; The Guardian, 2014). The paramilitary group was established in the spring of 2014 in connection to the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and has been accused of brutal violence and war crimes, including inhumane abductions and torture (OSCE, 2016; Amnesty International, 2014). The Swedish foreign fighters joining the Azov Battalion have called themselves "Ukraine Volunteers" and stated on their Facebook page: "We can now show that we stand united with white European nationalists in other than words by joining together with our fellow peers. The Nordic dream of adventure stands for the door, grab it and follow us to

Ukraine to realize the fantastic words ‘we must secure the existence of our people and the future for our white children’” (cited in SR, 2017, quote originally in Swedish) (the last words entail a famous Nazi quote). The Swedish foreign fighters joining the Azov Battalion have received a lot of Swedish as well as foreign media attention, in contrast to a near absent attention from the academia. Thus, one of the biggest contributions of this study might solely be to gather data for this first case. This case entails seven Swedish far-right foreign fighters who have joined the Azov Battalion in Ukraine and is limited to the time frame 2013-2017. The selection of these seven individuals reflects first and foremost the data available in Swedish media referring to these individuals (even though the validity of media material can be questioned, something which will be further discussed in the section on data collection) and the fact that these are individuals with far-right sympathies who have travelled abroad to fight, since this study intends to compare frames produced by far-right foreign fighters with Islamist foreign fighters. The time frame selected for this case, which involves a larger time span than the second case (see below), reflects the availability of material, beginning in 2013 and ending in 2017, with reference to a particular interview sample; a Swedish Radio P1 Documentary called “De svenska ukrainakrigarna” (“The Swedish Ukraine Warriors” in English) which was broadcasted in 2017.

3.2.2 Swedish Islamist foreign fighters, 2013-2015

At least 300 Swedish citizens have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join Daesh (or al-Qaeda affiliates group) since 2011. The transnational Islamist group Daesh originates from Jamaat al-Tahwid wa-i-Jihad founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a group which became active in the wake of United States invasion in Iraq. The fact that Iraq was left with a power vacuum due to the withdrawal of the US troops and the appearance of the Arab Spring in 2011, created an operational base for Daesh to flourish (Hove, 2018: 4). The ideological roots in this Islamist group centres around the doctrine of “takfir” (i.e. ex-communication; depriving the rights or membership in a religious community) and (an extremist interpretation of) “global jihad” which entails that it is “an individual duty, incumbent by all Muslims, to defend the Muslim world and its religious culture if any part of it were threatened” (Nilsson, 2015: 343; Joffé, 2016: 801). This case study involves six Swedish Islamist foreign fighters joining Daesh in Syria, limited to the time frame 2013-2015. The selection of this case is first and foremost based on Nilsson’s study on Swedish Islamist foreign fighters; “Foreign Fighters and the Radicalization of Local *Jihad*: Interview Evidence from Swedish *Jihadists*” (2015), which is one of few existing academic texts where primary qualitative material has been gathered on *Swedish* Islamist foreign fighters. The interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2014 and reflects foreign fighters who are still active or returning from Syria (Nilsson, 2015: 343, 347). Furthermore, the selected individuals and time frame for this specific case reflects the material available from interview samples with Swedish Islamist foreign fighters in Swedish media: a Swedish Radio P1 Documentary called “De svenska krigsresenärerna” (“The Swedish foreign

fighters” in English) which was broadcasted in 2015; and the manuscript of “Bilals resa” (“Bilal’s travel” in English) by Uppdrag granskning, a Swedish television program focusing on investigative journalism produced by the Swedish public service television company (Sveriges Television, SVT) in 2014.

3.2.3 Swedish newspapers, 2013-2015 & 2013-2017

The four biggest newspapers with the greatest outreach in Sweden are Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Aftonbladet and Expressen, according to a survey carried out by the Swedish platform and database for analysis of digital media and surveys, Dagens Analys (2016). Even though the results of this survey might not be applicable to other time frame, these four can nevertheless be considered the most popular and well-established newspapers in Sweden. Two of these newspapers, Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet, represents two daily newspapers labelled non-partisan liberal and non-partisan moderate. The other two, Aftonbladet and Expressen, are both tabloid newspapers labelled non-partisan social democrat and non-partisan liberal. The selection of these four newspapers is based on the fact that, when put all together, they tend to reach a broad audience from both the conservative and liberal spectrum. An analysis of newspapers’ framing requires newspapers that are representative and these selected newspapers might hence correspond to this purpose. The selected time frame reflects the time span selected for the two cases above and framing of the cases respectively, to enable a reliable and valid comparative analysis.

3.3 Data collection & material

The data in this study derives from secondary material from media and alternative media coverage, in addition to academic research. Media coverage is the main source of information to this frame analysis, it has thus been important to make use of a reliable tool to separate and analyse the data gathered from media on Swedish newspapers’ framing from the data gathered from media on foreign fighters’ framing. Hence, the data collection has been guided by the notion of macro- versus micro-frames, i.e. broad patterns of the spoken and written word (macro) versus the spoken and written word of participants or individuals (micro). In short, this will be done by paying attention to and separating the “speaking subjects” in the journalistic article; depending on if it is a journalistic description (macro-frame) or a quote from a foreign fighter (micro-frame). Such a separation would of course not have been required if there had been more material on foreign fighters available, aside from media coverage.

3.3.1 Data collection on foreign fighters (micro frames)

“Soft issues”, such as motives and beliefs, derived from media is considered hardly substantive and possibly not valid (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010: 805). Furthermore, it has been argued that media is often filtered; news media might be state-owned, associated with a specific party in question, or the fact that their reporting often depends on the relevance to the audience. “Soft issues” are furthermore often based on interpretations and are generally harder to ascertain than “hard facts” (events, actors and issues) (Öberg - Sollenberg, 2011: 50, 56). Since this study intends to analyse material on soft issues derived from media, certain difficulties in reliability and validity are to be expected. This is why it has been important to first and foremost consider the differences between *news agencies* (international “news wire services”) and *news organisations* (local mass media, such as national newspapers). Öberg and Sollenberg have emphasised the importance of staying as close as possible to the original source, to gather the most in-depth detailed coverage (Öberg – Sollenberg, 2011: 47-48). Hence, the data for the different cases will primarily be collected from Swedish news organisations. This is primarily in reference to the first case on far-right extremist. To keep strong reliability and because different news organisations operate in different ways, it has been important to limit the analysis to a few, which are considered more “quality” and “objective”, news organisations: Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Swedish Radio (SR) and the Swedish public service television company (SVT) (Björkvall, 2012: 349; Öberg - Sollenberg, 2011: 50). In addition, this study will apply *triangulation* to its data-gathering strategy, by involving complementary sources such as Amnesty International’s report *Abductions and Torture in Eastern Ukraine* (2014) and academic articles from the Diplomatic Courier (2015).

Scholars have been advised to use media material cautiously, because actors might sometimes “play to an audience, using the news media for their own purposes, because it may affect how their actions are interpreted” (Öberg – Sollenberg, 2011: 50). However, this can be beneficial for a frame analysis, because the researcher’s intention is to analyse the *framing* of reasons to travel rather than the actual reasons.

3.3.2 Data collection on Swedish newspapers (macro frames)

The data for the third case (Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Expressen and Aftonbladet) has been collected through entering each and one of the different newspapers websites and using certain “search strings” to find material on media framing:

Far-right foreign fighters travelling to Ukraine to join Azov Battalion:

Any of these terms: Ukraina OR Svensk OR Högerextrem OR Extremist OR Resa OR Konflikt OR Krig OR Azov

Date range: 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2017.

Islamist foreign fighters travelling to Syria to join Daesh:

Any of these terms: Syrien OR Afghanistan OR Bosnien OR Svensk OR Islamist OR Extremist OR Resa OR Jihad OR Konflikt OR Krig OR Islamiska Staten OR IS OR ISIS OR Daesh

Date range: 1 January 2013 – 31 December 2015.

The search strings presented above are both quite broad, considering the range of material available. To create a feasible sample of media framing of both groups of foreign fighters, a manual filtering was also conducted, excluding any articles that involved refugees, foreign fighters from other countries than Sweden, foreign fighters not joining Azov Battalion or Daesh, or did not involve foreign fighters' reasons to travel at all.

These search strings have also been useful when searching for material on foreign fighters' framing (micro frames), yet, excluding material deriving from Expressen and Aftonbladet.

4 Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of this study and is divided into two parts. The chapter begins with presenting the data collected on the micro-frames; the different frames used by Swedish Islamist and far-right foreign fighters respectively. This will be followed by a comparative discussion of similarities and differences between the different groups' framing, in relation to the theoretical framework. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to an analysis of macro-frames and potential frame resonance; Swedish newspapers' framing of Swedish foreign fighters' reasons to travel abroad and to what extent this resonates with Swedish foreign fighters' framing.

It has been important to present the different participants and the quotations anonymously, primarily because some participants have performed with their real names and others have used anonymous aliases in the data collected. They will be presented as Far-right foreign fighter 1 (2, 3 etcetera) and Islamist foreign fighter 1 (2, 3 etcetera). Moreover, even though most quotes are originally in Swedish and have been analysed in their original language, they will be translated and presented in English to allow for greater intersubjectivity.

4.1 Micro-frames

4.1.1 Swedish far-right foreign fighters' framing

4.1.1.1. Outrage & empathy

When discussing the reasons to travel abroad, the primary reason introduced by all seven far-right foreign fighters was an emotional reaction to what was happening in the conflict zone; a will to do something to help. Far-right foreign fighter 1 says: "I saw that they were in need of help, and I was able to help. There was not much to think about" (SVT, 2014). Far-right foreign fighter 5 (SR, 2017), in turn, elaborates further on this emotional reaction, emphasising the international community's negligence of what was happening and how Ukrainian people were omitted to their own faith:

When they rise and fight for their own right, they get trampled. Then you get even more depressed. It seemed like they were completely abandoned by their own people. [...] they would get five people standing and bash a [Ukrainian] person until he could not move.

By travelling to Ukraine and joining the Azov Battalion, the feeling of caring for and defending a victim under attack was a frame used by all participants; “You show them that there are others from other parts of the world that actually see you, we see you and we think about you, and we care” (Far-right foreign fighter 5 cited in SR, 2017). Some did not only express a care for and defence of the Ukrainian people but referred also to the whole of Europe. Far-right foreign fighter 3 says: “If we were to be attacked in Sweden, I would appreciate others helping us. Therefore, I want to help when Ukraine has been attacked by Russia” (DN, 2015) and Far-right foreign fighter 4 explains his reasons with “it’s a fight for Europe!” (Allen, 2015).

4.1.1.2. Adherence to ideology

“No, I am not a Nazi, I see myself rather as unpolitical”

- Far-right foreign fighter 3, DN, 2015b

The majority of the far-right foreign fighters analysed in this study claim that they *do not* adhere to the ideology of the violent extremist group they have joined, even though all participants are (or have been) members of a far-right political party or organisation in Sweden. Far-right foreign fighter 4 states that he feels “uncomfortable” with the social nationalist politics of the Azov Battalion (Allen, 2015). Others (Far-right foreign fighter 2, 3, 5 and 7) claim that they adhere to “anti-communist” or even “pacifist” ideas, in contrast to the paramilitary group they have joined (DN, 2015; SR, 2017; SR, 2014). Similarly, Far-right foreign fighter 1 (SR, 2014) refuses to describe himself as “far-right” or “neo-Nazi”, though, he says that his reason to travel was to create an ethnically homogeneous Ukraine: “I fight for Ukraine, because Ukraine can become the cradle of a new nationalism in Europe” (SvD, 2014a) and “[m]y goal is a white Ukraine. I am a nationalist and I want white Europeans to continue to exist in Europe” (SvD, 2014b). However, this way of framing differs from the rest of the group.

Whether these individuals actually adhere to the ideology of the group they have joined is beyond the scope of this study, surely the assumption made by Frenett and Silverman (2016) is correct when considering party memberships. Although it is a thought-provoking issue.

4.1.1.3. Search for identity & meaning

Foreign fighting is “inherently related to self-identification” (Frenett – Silverman, 2016: 71). As such, to stand apart from the crowd, to seek comradery, adventure or meaning characterise foreign fighters’ reasons to travel abroad. This is also something which is clearly highlighted by far-right foreign fighters analysed in this study. Far-right foreign fighter 1 says that “I couldn’t... stay away. Everyone wants to make their impression in history and I think I made mine” (Allen, 2015). Far-right foreign fighter 5 points to the importance of feeling needed and useful: “When

I left, I escaped from this feeling of not being needed at home. I just wanted to go, to help and to do something else and be useful” (SR, 2017). Additionally, most far-right foreign fighters describe their reasons to travel as seeking out their hyper-masculine identity¹; to find personal fulfilment via violent and aggressive activities. Far-right foreign fighter 7 (SR, 2015) points to, what he calls, the “warrior mentality” as a critical reason to travel:

It’s like... this warrior mentality. Because you can only find it there, this traction to battle, either a fight on the street or an armed battle. But I’ve never been a fighter. Sure, I have fought when necessary. This mentality, to live fully, sounds a bit cliché, nonetheless this is what you do and feel the most when you’re close to death.

Far-right foreign fighter 1 agrees with him: “You’re never so alive as when you’re close to death. That’s for sure” (Allen, 2015). Others point to a feeling of selfishness, because of their urge to engage in battle. Far-right foreign fighter 4 emphasises that: “I could give money to the cause, [...] but in a sense, I’m selfish, I want to be here [fighting] and doing less, probably than if I was contributing in a [financial] sense” (Allen, 2015). One of seven individuals describe themselves as a “pacifist” - “I actually describe myself as a pacifist. But what should you do when Russia invades a sovereign state?” (Far-right foreign fighter 3 cited in DN, 2015) - however, he is the only one not framing his reasons to travel as an personal urge to fulfil a hyper-masculine identity.

¹ “Hyper-masculine identity” derives from Gender Theory and Personality Research, and refers to a macho personality constellation where violence is seen as manly and danger as exciting (Mosher – Sirkin, 1984: 150). Although this study does not intend to involve a gender perspective, the conceptualisation surrounding the phrase “hyper-masculine identity” illustrates critical aspects in this study and is thus included in this analysis.

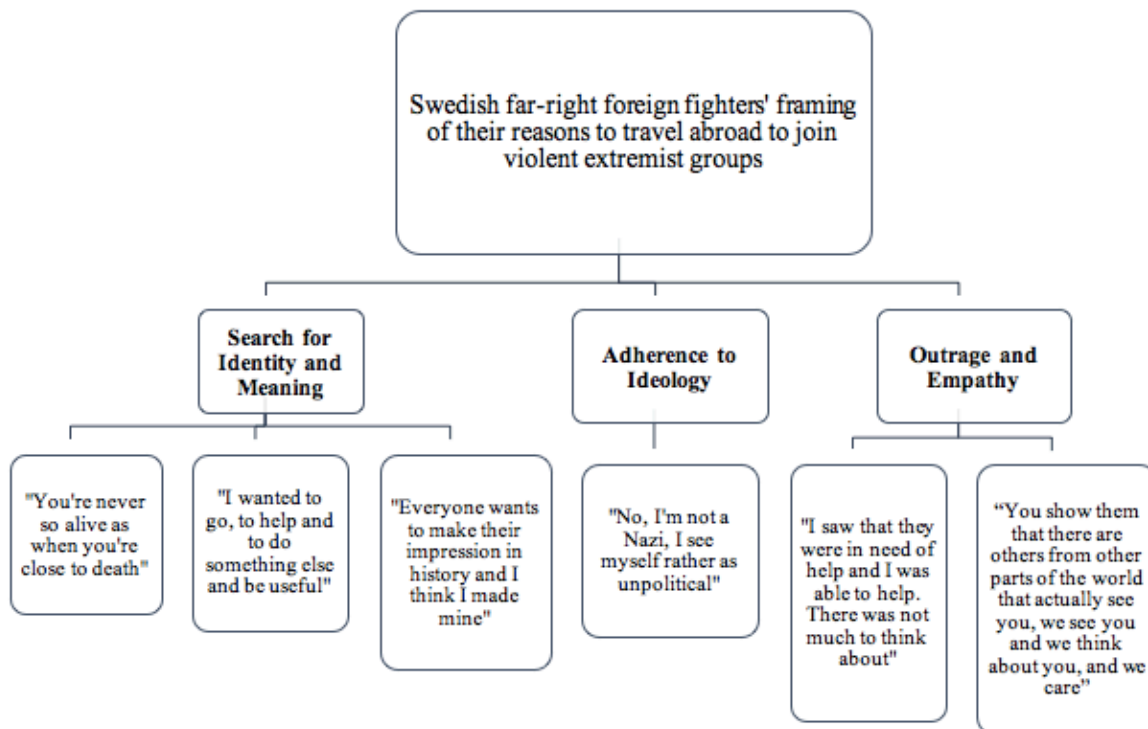


Figure 2. A summary of Swedish far-right foreign fighters' framing of their reasons to travel abroad to join violent extremist groups.

4.1.2 Swedish Islamist foreign fighters' framing

4.1.2.1. Outrage & empathy

Even if he had a job and a decent income, Islamist foreign fighter 4 says “it had no meaning when so many other Muslims were being killed” (Nilsson, 2015: 352). Five out of six Islamist foreign fighters analysed in this study expressed an emotional reaction to what was happening in Syria, referring to “victims” and “suffering”, which motivated them to travel and join the violent extremist group. They repeated phrases such as “the cruelties of Assad”, “help people”, “liberate them” and “Muslims were killed” (ibid: 349; SVT Nyheter, 2014; SR, 2015). Furthermore, the majority expressed an anger towards the “Americans” and “those who want democracy” because “they are behind all the corruption” (Nilsson, 2015: 348-349). This in turn was framed and associated with a sense of duty, something which will be discussed further in the next sections; “brothers [were] being killed when fighting against Assad. It was my duty as a Muslim to help them” and “it is a duty to help other Muslims” (Islamist foreign fighter 3 and 4 cited in ibid: 349).

4.1.2.2. Adherence to ideology

“Maybe I wasn’t a good Muslim before, *allahu alam* [i.e., God knows best], but being with the brothers is good for me. I learn new things every day”

Islamist foreign fighter 4, Nilsson, 2015: 359

“Islam for Dummies” and “The Koran for Dummies”, these are the books ordered on Amazon by two Swedish Islamist foreign fighter before travelling to Syria and joining Daesh (SvD, 2015). Although most Swedish Islamist foreign fighters are novices when it comes to the religious and ideological practices associated with the violent extremist group they have joined, they tend to frame their motivations to travel as if they had great knowledge of these ideas and practices before travelling.

The majority of these Swedish Islamist foreign fighters referred to a “local jihad” (a territorial limited fight) before travelling to Syria, instead of a “global jihad” which is endorsed by Daesh. Islamist foreign fighter 1 referred to “Shaam” (i.e., the Levant) in relation to his reasons to travel: “[Shaam] is the most important for us Muslims [...] that is where we will meet” (SR, 2015) and Islamist foreign fighter 4 talked about the cruelties made by Assad (Nilsson, 2015: 349). However, while in the conflict zone, these individuals start to refer to a global fight; “in the end we will fight the Americans” (Islamist foreign fighter 4 cited in *ibid*).

Islamist foreign fighter 4 emphasises that he and his fellow fighters had time not only to fight but also to discuss and learn about ideological and religious matters. These ideological and religious group talks in the conflict zone are where he learned about the doctrine of *takfir* (Nilsson, 2015: 353). Islamist foreign fighter 2 however is the only one who does not reflect this change in rhetoric. He explains why he travelled to Syria with adherence to the doctrine of *takfir* in connection to a sense of duty or obligation: “it is *haram* for Muslims to be friends with *kufar* and to live in *kafir* [i.e. infidel] land” (*Ibid*).

4.1.2.3. Search for identity & meaning

Among these Islamist foreign fighters, two words are constantly repeated in relation to their reasons to travel abroad and join Daesh: *shaheed* (i.e. martyr) and *shahada* (i.e. martyrdom); “This is what I want. I went to Syria to become a *shaheed*, but it is Allah *subhanawatala* [i.e., the Sacred and the Mighty] who decides” (Islamist foreign fighter 3 cited in Nilsson, 2015: 352). In a similar manner, the brother of Islamist foreign fighter 1 explains his brothers reason to travel as: “[he went there] to become a shaheed, you avoid all the trials before coming to paradise, it is much easier” (SR, 2015). Others mention shaheed not only in reference to “avoiding trials” but also “to help people for a better cause, and if you were to die on the way, you are considered a martyr” (representative for Islamist foreign fighter 1 cited in SVT Nyheter, 2014). This concept is also referred to when talking about the rewards of having travelled there and fight: “We talk a lot about that our goal is to please Allah *subhanawatala* and, *inshallah*, we will get *shahada* [i.e. martyrdom] when

fighting the enemy” (Islamist foreign fighter 4 cited in Nilsson, 2015: 349). In short, the word shaheed is perceived as a heroic and noble concept, and if you were to become one you will achieve personal fulfilment and life meaning.

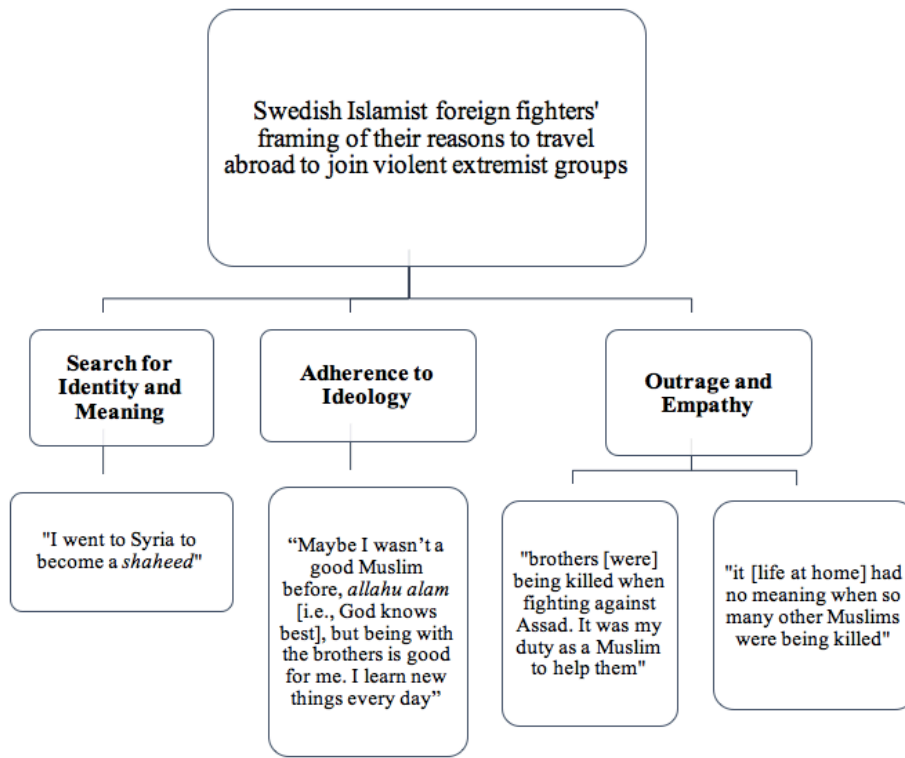


Figure 3. A summary of Swedish Islamist foreign fighters’ framing of their reasons to travel abroad to join violent extremist groups.

4.1.3 Comparing far-right & Islamists’ framing

This section will involve a summary of the analysis above and a comparative discussion on far-right and Islamist foreign fighters’ framing of their reasons to travel abroad, divided into the three frames included in the theoretical framework: (1) outrage and empathy, (2) adherence to ideology and (3) search for identity and meaning.

(1) When asked why they chosen to travel to foreign land to fight, both far-right and Islamist foreign fighters referred to some kind of victimhood and suffering; feelings of empathy to the people in the conflict zone. They framed their reasons to travelled with the words of “helping”. In addition, within the far-right foreign fighter group, this was framed in connection to a feeling of anger towards those who had caused the suffering as well as towards those with some kind of obligation to help; the national as well as the international community and their ignorance. Similarly, within the Islamist foreign fighter group, travelling to the conflict zone was framed as a form of obligation or duty: “It was my duty as a Muslim to help them” (Nilsson, 2015: 349). In addition, some articulated an anger towards those who “are behind all the corruption” (ibid: 348-349). In short, both

groups frame their reasons within the concepts of empathy (towards those suffering) and outrage (towards those causing the suffering and/or those with an obligation to help) in similar ways.

(2) Both groups refer to the ideology of the violent extremist group they have joined, but in very distinct manners. In the far-right foreign fighter group, everyone was very explicit when arguing that they do not embrace the social nationalist and racist ideas of the violent extremist group they have joined. These are ideas they do not want to be associated with, even though they all adhered to organisations or political parties with social nationalist or even neo-Nazi roots in Sweden. In contrast, the Islamist foreign fighters framed their reasons as strongly connected to the ideology of the violent extremist group, even though much suggests that their knowledge of this ideology was limited before travelling. This is evidently the biggest difference between the two groups' framing. How might this result be interpreted? One might suggest that, in accordance with the theoretical framework comprised within Frame Theory and the critics pointing to the social construction of frames, that different contextual and social settings will produce different ways of framing. Especially when it comes to such sensitive questions as (violence promoting) ideologies. However, such explanatory conclusions are beyond the scope of this study.

(3) Both far-right and Islamist foreign fighters frame their reasons to travel as a search for meaning by being useful and help. This is followed by a more personal motivation: "to live life fully" or "avoid trials" via fulfilling a hyper-masculine identity or becoming a martyr (a *shaheed*). Many far-right foreign fighters refer to an, by some described as selfish, urge to use violence and be close to death (i.e. to fulfil a hyper-masculine identity). In contrast, Islamist foreign fighters refer to the idea of martyrdom, which is rather perceived as unselfish and noble. Two very different aspects of fulfilling personal meaning with violence, via more self-absorbing or altruistic means.

4.2 Macro-frames & frame resonance

"They wrote 'Nazi brothers travel to Ukraine to fight' and made it sound like we were going on a "Jihadi trip", but that was not at all what it was"

Far-right foreign fighter 5, SR, 2017

Both Islamist and far-right foreign fighters implies that Swedish newspapers' reporting do not correspond to their own perception (SR, 2017; Expressen, 2014d). This section involves an analysis of Swedish newspapers' framing of Swedish foreign fighters' reasons to travel abroad (macro-frames) and to what extent this resonate with foreign fighters' framing (micro-frames). This section is divided into four parts, where the first three parts involves an analysis of Swedish newspapers' framing and potential frame resonance, and the final part is dedicated to a summary and concluding remarks.

4.2.1 Outrage & empathy

“Wanted to help” (DN, 2015a). Stories about young men travelling to Ukraine to “help” and “assist” the Ukrainian people have covered the headlines and news-reports in Sweden’s most read newspapers (DN, 2014a; DN, 2014b; DN, 2015a; SvD, 2014a; Expressen, 2014a; Aftonbladet, 2015). These emotions of outrage and empathy that are covered in these headlines are clearly resonating with the framing made by far-right foreign fighters. This stands in contrast to the news coverage on Swedish Islamist foreign fighters, where references to empathy only appear when referring to a specific gender of Islamist foreign fighters (women) (DN, 2015c). Instead, the emotions of empathy and solidarity are rather referred to in opposite terms, as the “only way we can stop more teenagers from joining this brutality” (SvD, 2015b).

4.2.2 Adherence to ideology

“Among his [Azov Battalion and far-right foreign fighter] comrades, one has a Swastika hanging around his neck, another has a tattoo on his shaved head which says '100% racist'”

SvD, 2014a

In addition to a motivation to help, when news-reports on Swedish far-right foreign fighters travelling to Ukraine covered the headlines, the motivations to why these individuals had travelled were explained with themes such as; “far-right radical sympathies”, “a violent Nazi”, “ideologically driven”, “the goal is a white Ukraine” and “supporting the social nationalist revolution in Ukraine” (Expressen, 2014a; Expressen, 2014b; SvD, 2014a; SvD, 2014b; SvD, 2014c; SvD, 2014d; DN, 2014a; DN, 2015a). Swedish newspapers frame far-right foreign fighters with strong adherence to the ideology of the violent extremist group they have joined. This, however, do not resonate with the framing made by far-right foreign fighters themselves, who argue for the opposite. When news-reports covered Swedish Islamist foreign fighters, the ideological ideas of takfir, global jihad and to build a Caliphate were likewise common descriptions when explaining the reasons to why these individuals had travelled to Syria (Aftonbladet, 2015; DN, 2015c; DN, 2015d; Expressen, 2014d; 2014f; Expressen, 2015a; Expressen, 2015b; Expressen, 2015c). In contrast to the case of far-right foreign fighters, this clearly resonates with the framing made by Swedish Islamist foreign fighters and their attempts to frame their motivations with adherence to the Islamist ideology of Daesh.

4.2.3 Search for identity & meaning

“They gave away all their belongings and went there for jihad. They did not want anything from the earthly life. They desired martyrdom”

Expressen, 2014g

A recurring theme in the Swedish news-reporting on Swedish Islamist foreign fighters is the search for personal fulfilment; a search for meaning - “[t]hey wanted to go because they feel like the earthly life lacks meaning” (DN, 2015d), a search for power and glory - “attracted by the promises of power, fame and eternal glory” (SvD, 2015b), and a search for martyrdom (Expressen, 2014d; Expressen, 2015e; DN, 2015d). These aspirations are furthermore portrayed as romanticised illusions; illusions “of the most dangerous kind, because they grow out of the lack of hope and make use of the desire among our youth to belong to something greater than themselves” (SvD, 2015b; Aftonbladet, 2015). This description of Swedish Islamist foreign fighters, that they are in search for identity and meaning, is furthermore framed in the light of exclusion, unemployment and lack of education (SvD, 2015b; Expressen, 2014d; DN, 2015c; DN, 2015d).

The above framing made by Swedish newspapers is resonating with the Islamist foreign fighters framing; they both portray the reasons to travel as a search for meaning and identity in the light of finding martyrdom. However, at the same time, Swedish newspapers’ framing is distinct to Islamist foreign fighters framing on several accounts. Swedish newspapers framing entails a lack of agency and lack of meaning in a meaningless life; that these individuals are attracted to an illusion and driven by marginalisation and lack of hope. This stands in great contrast to the framing made by the majority of Islamist foreign fighters, where the search for meaning is described as a personal choice and becoming a martyr as a heroic concept; to leave home, not because of a lack of meaning but because they cannot bare to watch people suffering without doing something about it.

The above media framing of Islamist foreign fighters is distinct from the media framing of far-right foreign fighters. When Swedish newspapers have covered far-right foreign fighters, only a few articles mention a search for identity and meaning in relation to reasons to travel to Ukraine. On the contrary, some newspapers portray these individuals as “family men” (DN, 2015a; Expressen, 2014a) with a “normal” and meaningful life in Sweden. Though, in a few news-reports, far-right foreign fighters are framed as persons searching for “highs” via violence, which still resonates with the far-right foreign fighters’ framing related to an urge to fulfil a hyper-masculine identity (Aftonbladet, 2015; Expressen, 2014a; DN, 2014a).

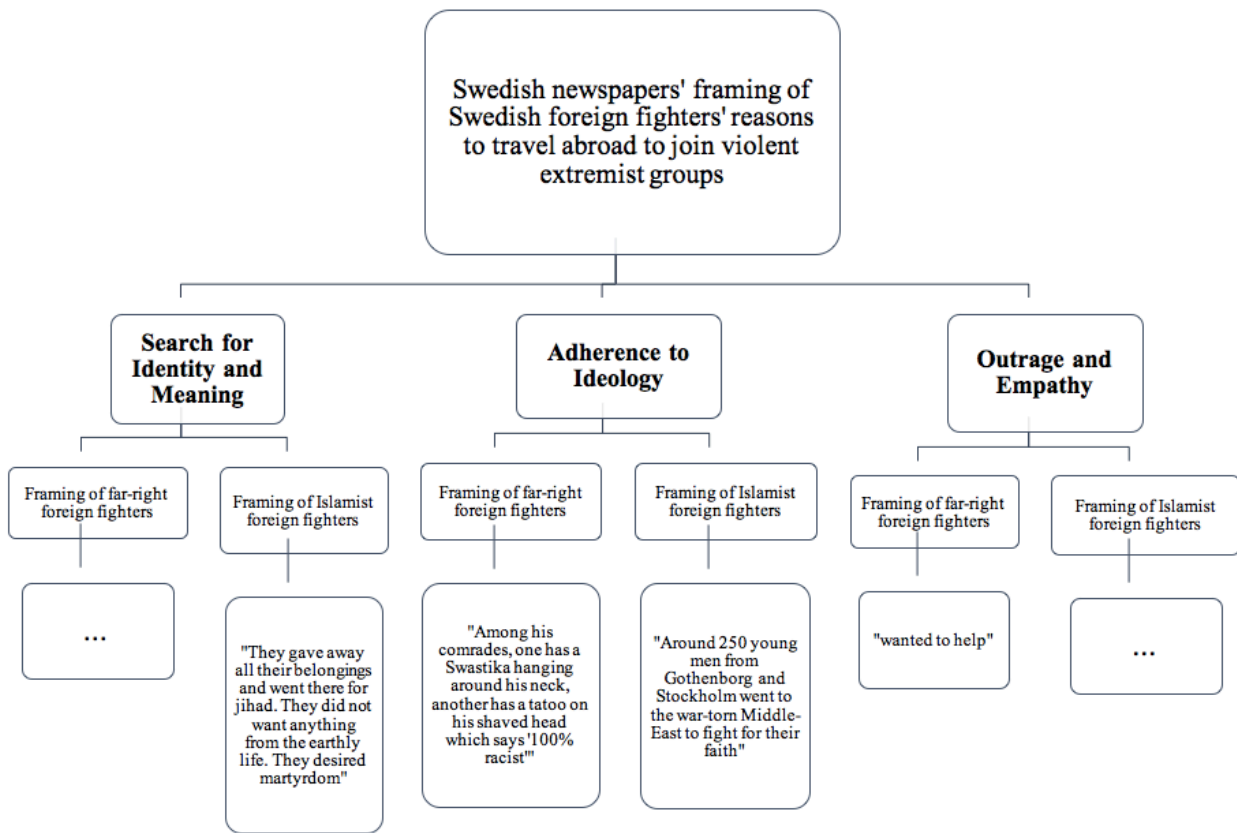


Figure 4. A summary of Swedish newspapers' framing of Swedish foreign fighters' reasons to travel abroad to join violent extremist groups

4.2.4 Conclusions of findings

By presenting and comparing the framing made by Swedish newspapers and foreign fighters, the following conclusions can be made:

(1) Journalists framing of far-right and Islamist foreign fighters refer to the concepts of “outrage and empathy”, “adherence to ideology” and “search for identity and meaning”, but differs depending on which group is considered. For instance, while far-right foreign fighters are portrayed as empathetic and outraged to what is happening in the conflict zone, Islamist foreign fighters are not. Moreover, while Islamist foreign fighters’ reasons to travel are portrayed with reference to a search for meaning in a meaningless life at home, far-right foreign fighters are rather seen as leaving a meaningful family life for a meaningless life of violence;

(2) Journalists framing of far-right foreign fighters does not resonate with the framing made by far-right foreign fighters, except for the concept of “outrage and empathy”. Far-right foreign fighters are portrayed with strong adherence to the ideology of the violent group they have joined and not as “meaning-seeking”

individuals, though some articles resonate with a search for a hyper-masculine identity.

(3) Journalists framing of Islamist foreign fighters resonates in greater degree with the framing made by Islamist foreign fighters. Both refer to adherence to the ideology of Daesh and a search for identity and meaning via martyrdom. However, journalists do not at all mention a will to help, empathy towards the people suffering or outrage towards those causing that suffering, hence not resonating with Islamists' references to "outrage and empathy". Additionally, Swedish journalists refer to a lack of meaning and agency in a meaningless life, in contrast to Islamist foreign fighters who relate this to a personal and altruistic choice.

5 Conclusions

Why do foreign fighters travel abroad to join a violent extremist group? Recent criticism targets scholars' fixation on *Islamist* foreign fighters, making the foreign fighters phenomenon a product of Muslims. This thesis involves different ideologically characterised foreign fighters to avoid making the same mistake and to contribute to this research gap. By comparing one essential part of the radicalisation process (i.e. the framing of foreign fighters' reasons to travel abroad) of two different ideologically characterised foreign fighter groups, this thesis can conclude that both Swedish Islamist and far-right foreign fighters frame their reasons to travel within the concepts of "outrage and empathy", "adherence to ideology" and "search for identity and meaning", but in somewhat distinct manners.

Concerning outrage and empathy, the majority within both groups frame their reasons as a way to help people suffering and point to an anger towards those causing that suffering. Concerning a search for identity and meaning, the framings differ somewhat. Both groups mention a search for meaningfulness, however, while far-right foreign fighters refer to an urge to fulfil a hyper-masculine or violence-seeking identity via self-absorbing means, Islamist foreign fighters refer to a heroic and noble identity via altruistic means. Concerning adherence to ideology, their framing differs even more. Far-right foreign fighters argue that their reasons to travel have no connection to the ideology of the violent extremist group they have joined, even though much suggests that they do adhere to the ideology before travelling. In contrast, Islamist foreign fighters frame their reasons with rather strong adherence to the ideology of the violent extremist group they have joined, even though much suggests that they are rather novices of this ideology before travelling. Though beyond the focus of this study, an explanatory approach and analysis with a broader focus would be able to give explanatory contributions to these findings on several accounts. In the final section of this chapter such potential contributions will be discussed in more detail.

While the aim of this thesis has been to contribute to the literature and policy making on foreign fighters by comparing two different ideologically characterised groups of foreign fighters, a second research question and an additional contribution relates to an analysis of the dynamics (i.e. "frame resonance") between Swedish newspapers' and foreign fighters' framing. This additional level of analysis has been essential, since the involvement of contextual and dynamic features of radicalisation is critical to develop a more comprehensive analysis, and to address the shortcomings of prior research. By incorporating these aspects, this study can conclude that the framing made by Swedish journalists relates to the concepts of "outrage and empathy", "adherence to ideology" and "search for identity and meaning". However, when comparing journalists' framing of far-right and Islamist

foreign fighters, the framing differs somewhat. Additionally, journalists' framing of far-right foreign fighters does *not* resonate with the far-right foreign fighters framing, except from the concept of "outrage and empathy". Though, journalists' framing of Islamist foreign fighters resonates with Islamist foreign fighters' framing, except from the concept of "outrage and empathy" and the fact that Swedish journalists refer to a lack of agency and meaning.

While these findings embody a significant knowledge gap in contemporary radicalisation research, this study will not be able to make any general or universal conclusions due to the very small number of cases and the limited material used. Moreover, the fact that frames are contingent and never completely fixed make these findings limited to the selected time frame of this study. These are critical aspects to consider when examining this study as well as for future research to consider.

Although, the findings in this study point to several thought-provoking issues, explaining these issues is beyond the scope of this thesis. Hence, the final section will point to several aspects where explanatory contributions can be made to develop and advance the findings made in this study.

5.1 Concluding remarks - call for future research

Evidently, Swedish foreign fighters and especially far-right foreign fighters are an understudied phenomenon and further research is required. This might be the most evident limitation to this study; further extensive data is a prerequisite to test the validity of this study's findings. Hence, this study invites future scholars to, first of all, gather more data on Swedish foreign fighters and far-right foreign fighters. Furthermore, while an explanatory approach has been beyond the scope of this study, future researchers are invited to study explanations to the following questions:

(1) Why are Swedish far-right foreign fighters reluctant to be associated with the ideology of the extremist group they have joined? Evidently, to be called or call oneself a racist or neo-Nazi, with first-hand experiences of the Holocaust only a generation away, is a rather stigmatized issue in Sweden and Europe. In Germany and Sweden, the Swastika and its symbolic value even falls under the provision of hate crimes (Sydsvenskan, 2006; Allen-Ebrahimian, 2017). A refusal to be associated with racist or neo-Nazi ideologies might be interpreted as an attempt by these far-right foreign fighters to remove any associations between them and the Second World War heritage. Future scholars are invited to study this issue further.

(2) Why journalists' framing of Islamist and far-right foreign fighters differs and why journalists' framing resonates with the foreign fighters' framing on some accounts and not others? Also, an even more critical issue, are there consequences to be expected in relation to this? In line with the view on frame resonance as a social movement mobilisation strategy; is it possible to assume that a greater degree of resonance between journalists' and Islamist foreign fighters' framing can explain why ten times as many travelled to Syria than Ukraine?

(3) Why is it that some issues are similar and others not when comparing far-right and Islamist foreign fighters' motivations? Some scholars and policy makers have explained the radicalisation processes of far-right and Islamist extremists as similar to one another (for example see Manning – La Bau, 2015; Abbas, 2017: 54). However, according to this study's findings, there are some aspects that differ between the groups, such as; a search for identity and meaning through altruistic versus more self-absorbed means, or the differing approaches to adherence to the ideology of the violent extremist group.

Despite the fact that this study will not be able to make any universal or explanatory conclusions, this study has contributed with a developed theoretical as well as methodological framework and in-depth descriptive knowledge to the research gap on and future research of *Swedish* far-right and Islamist foreign fighters.

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7 Appendix 1: Macro-frame articles

List of analysed newspaper articles, collected from the “search string” which was applied to the data collection on Swedish newspapers’ framing (macro-frames)

Far-right foreign fighters travelling to Ukraine to join Azov Battalion:

Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2014, ”Varning för storkrig om östra Ukraina”
Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2014, ”En våldsbenägen nazist var en för mycket”
Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2014, ”Utred svenska nazister som slåss i Ukraina”
Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2014, ”Svensk nynazist deltar i striderna”

Dagens Nyheter (DN), 2014, ”Svenska högerextremister var på plats i Ukraina”
Dagens Nyheter (DN), 2014, ”Svenska extremister besöker Ukraina”
Dagens Nyheter (DN), 2015, ”Svenske Carolus om varför han strider i Ukraina: ville hjälpa till”
Dagens Nyheter (DN), 2015, ”Vi kan inte stå passiva inför aggressionen”

Expressen, 2014, ”Svenskarna som strider i Ukraina”
Expressen, 2014, ”Svensk nynazist deltar i striderna i Ukraina”

Aftonbladet, 2014, ”Färre svenskar lockas till Ukraina”

Islamist foreign fighters travelling to Syria to join Daesh:

Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2015, ”Alldeles vanliga vidriga människor”
Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2015, ”Extremister lockar med en hägring”

Dagens Nyheter (DN), 2015, ”Säpo: 125 svenskar kämpar för IS”
Dagens Nyheter (DN), 2015, ”Säpo: 125 svenskar kämpar för IS”
Dagens Nyheter (DN), 2015, ””Det sista jag vill är att skicka mina barn till kriget””

Expressen, 2014, ”Det är någon som hjärntvättar våra barn”
Expressen, 2014, ”IS-krigarna smugglas in – för 180 kronor”
Expressen, 2014, ”Svensk IS-terrorist dödad i flygattack”
Expressen, 2014, ”Tre svenska IS-krigare dödad i flygattacken”
Expressen, 2015, ”Svenske IS-krigaren utreds nu av Säpo”
Expressen, 2015, ”Svenske IS-krigarens gråtande video-vädjan”
Expressen, 2015, ”Mest glad över att kunna utföra jihad”
Expressen, 2015, ”Sanningen bakom IS reklamfilm”

Aftonbladet, 2015, ”Här värvas vi att gå med i IS”