

‘Caribbean Jihad’: Radical social networks and ISIS foreign fighters from Trinidad and Tobago

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ABSTRACT: The cataclysmic rise to prominence of the Radical Islamic Network (RIN) in Trinidad and Tobago afforded this small twin island developing state, the unenviable title of Highest Exporter of ISIS foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) per capita in the Western Hemisphere. Such notoriety jolted the nation to re-examine and revise its strategies to treat with radicalisation and religious extremism, with special emphasis on transnational militancy. As such, this research effort explores the FTF issue through the lens of the radical social network and the Radical Milieu from which these fighters emerged. This network centric approach to Islamic militancy in Trinidad and Tobago is a novel one that illuminates on the intersection of people, places and events, that integrated ideas and mobilized resources into the complex geo-clustered network of FTFs. The application of Social Network Analysis (SNA) has provided an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the defining relationships within the RIN and how the structural properties of the network protected some members whilst it progressed others to Jihad and Martyrdom.

Keywords: foreign terrorist fighters, Jihad, martyrdom, Radical Islamic Network, social network analysis, Trinidad and Tobago

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Introduction

This article utilizes a network centric approach to investigating the social relationship shared between the estimated 130 Trinidad and Tobago (hereafter T&T) nationals that travelled to Syria to join ISIS (also referred to as IS, ISIL and Daesh) as Foreign Terrorist Fighters (hereafter FTF) (Aldrich & Mahabir, 2019). The focal period of the investigation is the five-year period from January 2013 to December 2017, which represents a period of significant territorial conquest and FTF recruitment by ISIS. (Hegghammer, 2017, Taneja, 2017). The whole idea of FTFs from a western, democratic, secular, Caribbean-island state, known more for its frenzied carnival celebrations and party loving lifestyle, is quite difficult to contend with.

Whilst the Caribbean region is not a focal point for terrorism research, the region has been identified as having such activity, prior to the mentioned five-year period (Phillips, 2008). The most well-known case was the 1976 Cubana airline bombing that resulted in the death of 73 people (Phillips, 1991). The number of terrorist attacks is not significant and, as Bishop and Khan (2004) point out “the Caribbean may not provide high payoff targets for a terrorist organization seeking international audience”; however, the potential nexus between the criminal world and terrorist networks should be a matter of significant concern for regional security. From human, small arms, and narco-trafficking to high corruption and porous borders (Izarali, 2017) the region lacks sufficient resources to tackle those challenges. Within such an environment, extremist movements and radical networks can and do collaborate with organized crime for mutual benefit (Badri-Maharaj, 2017; Paoli, Fijnaut, & Wouters, 2022). The ease of trafficking across the region, combined with the spreading of ideas and misinformation via cyber space, can drive the small Caribbean states towards becoming sites of radicalization. Therefore, understanding the operational aspects and functioning of clandestine Radical Islamic Network in T&T can be an important source of valuable information and data for national and regional security and intelligence organizations, working to prevent the Caribbean region becoming an extremist hotbed.

As a Small Island Developing State, T&T enjoys high levels of ethnic diversity, with no tangible discrimination or lack of opportunity and a fair level of economic prosperity (Badri-Maharaj, 2017), also has a well-entrenched and fairly pervasive Radical Islamic Network (hereafter RIN) (Cottee, 2019; McCoy & Knight, 2017). The Foreign Fighter phenomenon in T&T has its roots in the 1980s and early 1990s when members of the Jamaat Al Muslimeen received training in Egypt and financial support from Libya in preparation for the July 27th, 1990 attempted coup in Trinidad (Deosaran, 1993; Cottee, 2019). The events of 1990 and the ties made with the Pan-Islamic movement led to the creation and entrenchment of a well-established RIN in the country and set the conditions for this contemporary wave of terrorism (Badri-Maharaj, 2017). The network has since been an active contributor to broader international terrorist networks (McCoy & Knight, 2017). The notoriety of the RIN was reinforced globally in 2015, when Trinidad born, Shane Crawford; nom de guerre, Abu Sa’d at-Trinidad, featured as the poster boy for ISIS online magazine, Dabiq (Graham-Harrison & Surtees, 2018). This was followed by the United States Country Report on Terrorism 2016 (United States Department of State, 2017) that placed T&T as the exporter of the highest number of Foreign Fighters per capita from the Western Hemisphere.

The roles played by radical social networks are a generally under investigated aspect of terrorism research, even though these networks play a significant role in determining the trajectories to violent terrorist action (Sageman, 2004). These networks, or “radical milieus”, (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014) are segments of the society that covertly or overtly embrace and promote terrorism and the use of violence. This deviance permissive environment provides an echo chamber for extremist ideologies and serve as a breeding ground for FTFs radicalisation (Malthaner, 2018). This research will focus on the structural and affiliative elements of the network, utilizing a bifocal analytical approach that will illuminate the descriptive and relational elements of the network, as well as examine key elements of the network structure. The intent is to glean the meaning and value of the relationships between the Foreign Fighters and their radical milieu. As such, the article will explore the workings of the network with the hope of improving the understanding of how various elements of the network contribute to the development of FTFs in T&T. It also seeks to explore the social settings within which radicalisation occurs and the interplay of permissive and precipitative factors that progresses individuals to the “tipping point” of terrorism (Gladwell, 2002; Noriks, 2009). Finally, it provides a road map for future research agendas on the effectiveness of the

various response initiatives and how these can be adjusted to critically analyse the incubative effects that communities can have on terrorism (Causwell, 2018).

The following section will focus on the methodological underpinning of the research. The next component will then present the data findings, including the SNA diagrams. The third section will present the interview data that has been included into the SNA. The discussion section will summarize the characteristics of the RIN in T&T. Finally, concrete policy recommendations will be suggested in the context of T&T, advancing SNA as useful tool for employment by security and intelligence agencies.

Methodology

Sageman (2004) described social networks as “complex structures that create shared worlds of meaning and feelings which shape identity and preferences”. The application of SNA for analysing terrorist networks has become quite fashionable since the 9/11 attacks conducted by the Hamburg Cell (Krebs, 2002). The mapping, measuring, and analysis of the Hamburg cell by Krebs using opensource data, provided a methodological approach for academics and law enforcement which enhanced the value of the traditional link analysis. Since then, there has been an explosion of SNA of terrorist groups (Burroni & Everton, 2020; Carter, Maher, & Neumann, 2014; Cunningham, Everton, & Murphy, 2016; Everton, 2012; Koschade, 2007; Mullins, 2012; Sageman, 2011). According to Coviello (2005), the networks are made up of two dimensions, processes and structure, which are the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of the networks. The quantitative approaches to network analysis capture the complexities of relationships using numbers and it simplifies the elements of the network providing an overview of the complex structures (Bernhard, 2018). The qualitative approaches tease out the symbolic interpretation of the relationships between the actors in the Network (Ahrens, 2018; White, 2008). Therefore, the SNA allows a phenomenological inductive approach to network analysis where rich, deep, process-based information is generated, integrated and interpreted to give meaning to the multi-dimensional nature of human relationships.

Table 1: List of interview participants.

Participant	Gender	Background
Interviewee 01	Male	Intelligence Community
Interviewee 02	Male	National Security
Interviewee 03	Male	Intelligence Community
Interviewee 04	Male	Imam
Interviewee 05	Male	Businessman
Interviewee 06	Male	Imam
Interviewee 07	Male	Businessman
Interviewee 08	Female	Businesswoman
Interviewee 09	Female	Businesswoman
Interviewee 10	Male	Educator

For this research, the data collection involved information gathered through desk research and ten (10) semi-structured interviews which, due to COVID-19 restrictions, were conducted in-person and virtually. The interview data was useful in filling information gaps about key personalities in the social network diagrams. It also provided a better understanding of the geo-clusters in the network as well their origins. The sampling size was closely tied to the theoretical data saturation point (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007), so once there was no new data or richness in the quality of information provided; no new participants were sought (Creswell, 2007; Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020). The emphasis of the interview data collection was to obtain detailed explanations about the defining relationships between the FTFs and their social network and interrogate any areas where the issues highlighted in the T&T scenario intersected with the theoretical examples of the Radical Milieu (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014). The questionnaire design utilized open ended questions that allowed the respondents an opportunity to elucidate on the actors as well as the key aspects of the relationships shared (Mack et al., 2005; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). A degree of flexibility was exercised with the list of questions posed to the participants, which optimized their responses based on their different experiences, areas of expertise and access to the Network.

Once the interviews were completed the audio was reviewed and key observations and field notes were recorded as part of the reflections on the interview and the data collection experience. The audio recordings were then transcribed and formatted with Microsoft Word. These transcripts were then analysed in relation to the theoretical codes that were developed and recorded in the Code Book (Creswell & Creswell, 2019; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2019). The following themes within the Code Book have been identified:

- Ideological and material interdependence in the network;
- Value systems in the network;
- Geo-social relationships in the network;
- Deception in the network;
- The network as a path to radicalisation;
- Diffusion of the network;
- Policy measures to prevent a recurrence.

Following the analysis of the interviews, the gleaned network-relevant data was added to the publicly available data set, which expanded the size and understanding of the RIN. The refined data was analysed using the IBM i2 Advanced Analytics and Intelligence Analysis Software (IBM, 2018; IBM i2) and the emergent network diagram presented a more comprehensive visualization of the RIN in Trinidad and Tobago. The final network diagram was then structurally analysed using the Social Network Analysis function of the i2 Software which examined the following three attributes within the network:

- Degree Centrality – a measurement of social power and the social capital of the nodes in the diagram based on the numbers and density of the ties between the nodes (Takemoto & Oosawa, 2012).
- Closeness Centrality – a measure of how close an actor is to other actors, placed in the context of communication relations, such an actor will not need an intermediary to transmit a message (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). These actors have the best access to other parts of the network and visibility on activities throughout the network (IBM, 2018)
- Betweenness Centrality – a measurement of how locally dependent the actors in a network are on a particular actor to connect the activities of a network (Wasserman

& Faust, 1994). These are the gatekeeping nodes that control the flow of information to other parts of the network, indicated by the number of paths that flows through a node within the network (IBM, 2018).

This bifocal analytical approach of the network allows for the identification of power shifts, strategic action and relationship management in the network (Coviello, 2005). The qualitative analysis focused on social identification along with the affiliative and communicative aspects of the relationships between actors (Schepis, 2011), whilst the structural aspects focused on the Centrality of actors in the network (Moody & White, 2003). The research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the respective university. The following section proceeds to data findings.

Data analysis

Network demographics and geo-clusters

The network which emerged from the data had an overall size of one hundred and thirty-nine (139) actors with a diameter of six actors. It comprised 79 males (57%), 44 females (32%) and for 16 individuals (12%) there was insufficient biographic data. An 'Unknown' column in [Table 2](#) features throughout: this is a persistent problem when researching covert networks, due to the incompleteness or fuzziness of available data and details (Rodríguez & Rodríguez, 2005). From the network, 100 persons (72%) were identified as having travelled, 39 persons (28%) that did not travel, and 17 persons (12%) that have returned indicates that some 40% of the network was still intact in Trinidad and Tobago. The ethnic composition of the network was a generally balanced figure of African to East Indian members at 41.73% and 42.45% respectively. The highly concentrated feature of the network is reflected in the 90% of the members of the network who came from three general areas in Trinidad (Gail, 2016).

Location played a major role in the way the network developed, the density of RIN members in three general areas speaks to the intimate and tightknit nature of the network. The locations of the various clusters occurred where the residence of a radical Imams or a Lead FTF intersected with the location of a Radical Masjid. The intersection of these two variables was key to the propagation of the ideology. [Table 3](#) below gives a breakdown of the radical Masjids and the associated Imams.

The network diagram of the RIN at [Figure 1](#) highlights key relationships and delineates the geo-clusters formed by the family cliques. It depicts the active involvement of thirty-five (35) families, twenty-one (21) of which travelled to Syria. The network clusters were essentially families, with a high concentration of the FTFs in three general locations in Trinidad. The basis of the geo-clustering was a function of the Masjids that endorsed the Salafi-Jihadi ideology. Significant in the network were the Lead FTFs, who were instrumental in cohering the family clusters around these Masjids, either naturally, or through a deliberate move to these communities prior to leaving for Syria. It can be adduced from this dynamic, that radicalization of entire families occurred in the comfort and privacy of the homes and the preferred places of worship. The Imams and Lead FTFs served as connectors in the network and in many instances, provided the segue for various family units to collaborate and develop mutually reinforcing relationships. The Lead FTFs connected the family clusters to the upper echelons and the key leaders of the network. The RIN was a relatively flat and highly decentralized arrangement with a heterarchical network design; this allowed each individual family units to operate autonomously. This type of organizational structure facilitates and protects the key leaders and those most committed to the ideology. However, within the individual family clusters there

was a distinct hierarchy, with the husbands or Lead FTFs being the de facto leader of the cluster. These Lead FTFs had direct and often times residential associations with the Boos Settlement and the Masjid Ummah Ibn Khattab. Patriarchy and Polygamy was clearly identified as a feature of the network (see the interview analysis section).

Table 2: Summary of Radical Islamic Network (RIN) data.

THE RIN IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO					
Activity	Males	Females	Unknown	Total	
Members of RIN	79	44	16	139	
	57%	32%	12%	100%	
Travelled	52	32	16	100	
	37%	23%	12%	72%	
Did not travel	27	12	0	39	
	19%	9%	0%	28%	
Returned	4	4	9	17	
	3%	3%	6%	12%	
ETHNICITY					
African	East Indian	Mixed	Caucasian	Unknown	TOTAL
58	59	1	2	19	139
41.73%	42.45%	0.72%	1.44%	13.67%	100%
GEOGRAPHIC AREAS OF HIGH RIN CONCENTRATION					
Rio Claro	Chaguanas	Diego Martin	International	Unknown	TOTAL
48	45	33	8	5	139
34%	32%	24%	6%	4%	100%

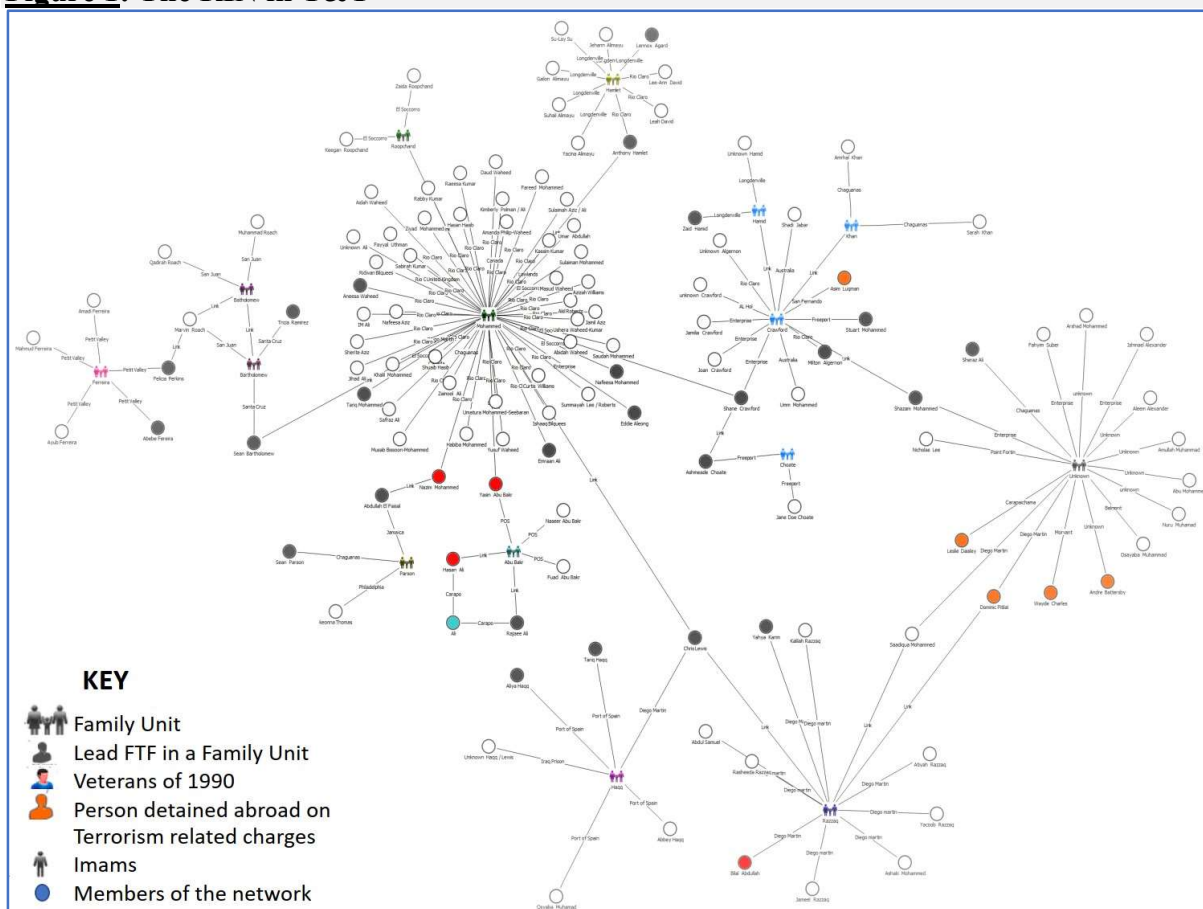
Sources: Triangulation of multiple publicly available sources and participant interviews (Cottee, 2019, 2021; Ellis, 2017; Gail, 2016; The Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network, 2019).

Table 3: List of Masjids attended by the FTFs

LOCATION	IMAM	MASJID
Rio Claro	Nazim Mohammed	Masjid Ummah Ibn Khattab
Chaguanas	Lennox Agard	Masjid Al Kaleefa
Enterprise	Taulib Searles	Enterprise Community Masjid
Carapo	Hassan Ali	Al Islamia Jammah
El Socorro	Sheraz Ali	Nur E Islam
Freeport	Ashmeade Choate	Darul Qur'an Wal Hadith Islamic School
Diego Martin	Yahyah Abdal Karim	Masjid Da'watil Haq Rich Plain Masajid

Sources: Triangulation of multiple publicly available sources and participant interviews, as in Table 2.

Figure 1: The RIN in T&T



Note: Full-size image available as a separate file.

Social Network Analysis

After looking at the demographic and topographic data presented by the network diagram, a Social Network Analysis of the data was done using the i2 Analyst Notebook. The analysis measured three centrality metrics: betweenness, closeness, and degree centrality of the network. [Table 4](#) gives a summary of the top ten results for each centrality measure. These entities are also circled in green and numbered in the network diagram for ease of identification.

The Mohammed family generally dominated the top two positions in all centrality measures, with the El Socorro Cluster (Mohammed Family 02) being attributed as the significant cluster in the network. Families emerged as a statistically significant entity in the network, particularly in the measure of Degree Centrality or direct social influence in the network, they occupied nine of the top ten spots. Lead FTFs were also significant in the RIN, with personalities such as Shane Crawford and his close associate Milton Algernon featuring prominently as well as the 1990 coup veterans such as Nazim Mohammed, Abu Bakr and Bilal Abdullah. Imam Nazim Mohammed emerged as the most central figure in the network, with the ability to wield a significant amount of social influence, this result is consistent with the literature on the RIN (Cottee, 2019; The Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network, 2019).

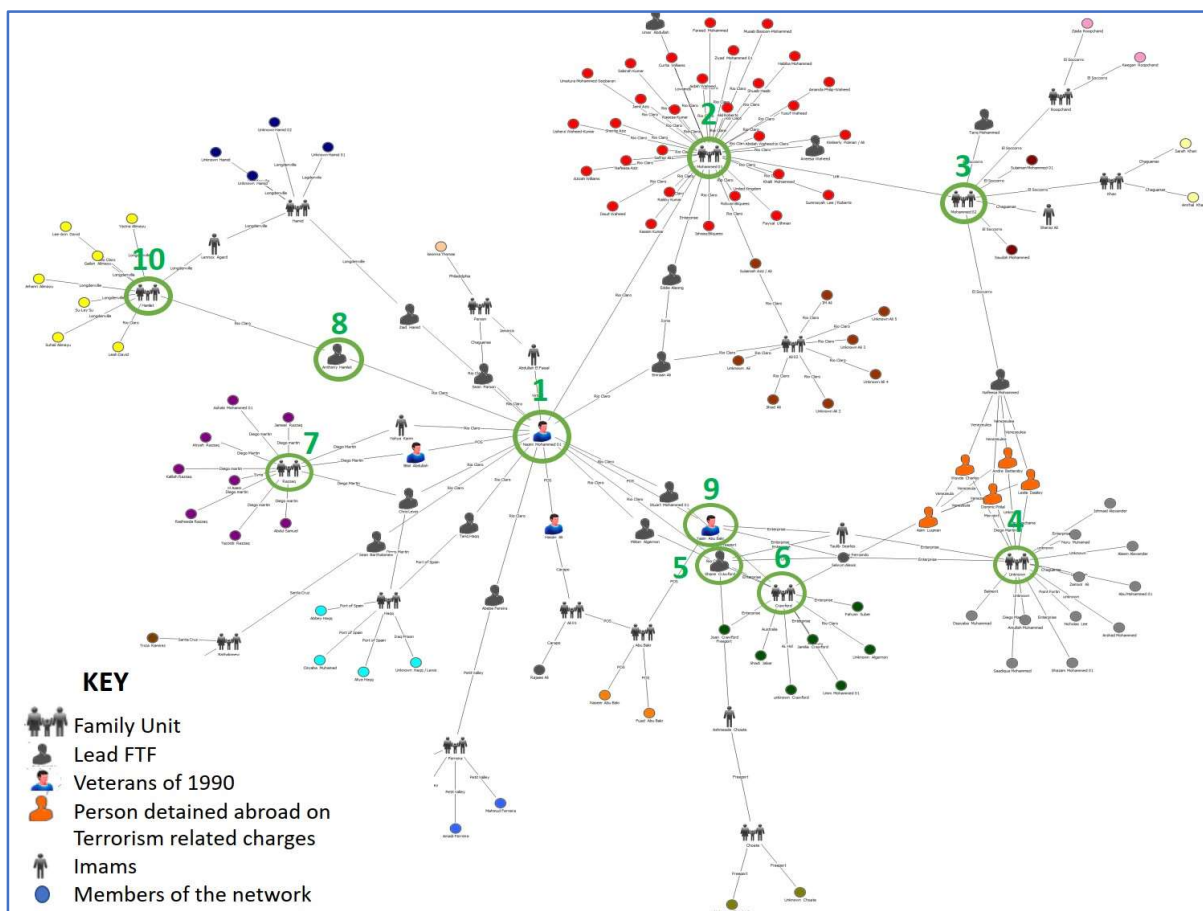
Table 4: Top ten central actors in the RIN.

Rank	Betweenness		Closeness		Degree Centrality	
1	Nazim Mohammed	1.00	Nazim Mohammed	1.00	Mohammed Family 01	0.35
2	Mohammed Family 01	0.69	Mohammed Family 01	0.91	Nazim Mohammed	0.17
3	Mohammed Family 02	0.25	Shane Crawford	0.82	Unknown Cluster	0.17
4	Unknown Cluster	0.23	Yasin Abu Bakr	0.79	Crawford Family	0.11
5	Shane Crawford	0.21	Chris Lewis	0.76	Razzaq Family	0.11
6	Crawford Family	0.16	Milton Algernon	0.76	Ali Family 02	0.09
7	Razzaq Family	0.15	Stuart Mohammed	0.76	Hamlet Family	0.09
8	Anthony Hamlet	0.15	Emraan Ali	0.75	Mohammed Family 02	0.08
9	Yasin Abu Bakr	0.14	Anthony Hamlet	0.75	Hamid Family	0.06
10	Hamlet Family	0.14	Bilal Abdullah	0.75	Haqq Family	0.06

Betweenness in the RIN

Betweenness is a measurement of how locally dependent the actors in the network are on a particular actor to connect the activities from various parts of the network (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Actors with high Betweenness wield informal power as they are best positioned to broker ideas and resources from one part of the network to the other (S. F. Everton, 2012). Nazim Mohammed received a score of 1.0, which suggests that he had a connection with every actor in the network; this positional power would allow him to exert a degree of control and influence on the flow of ideas and resources within the network. The Mohammed Family, Cluster 1 (Rio Claro) and Cluster 2 (El Socorro) were second and third respectively, which suggest that they played a leading role in the network and were highly connected to the various parts of the network, either directly or through intermediaries.

Figure 2: Top Ten Betweenness Measure of RIN in T&T

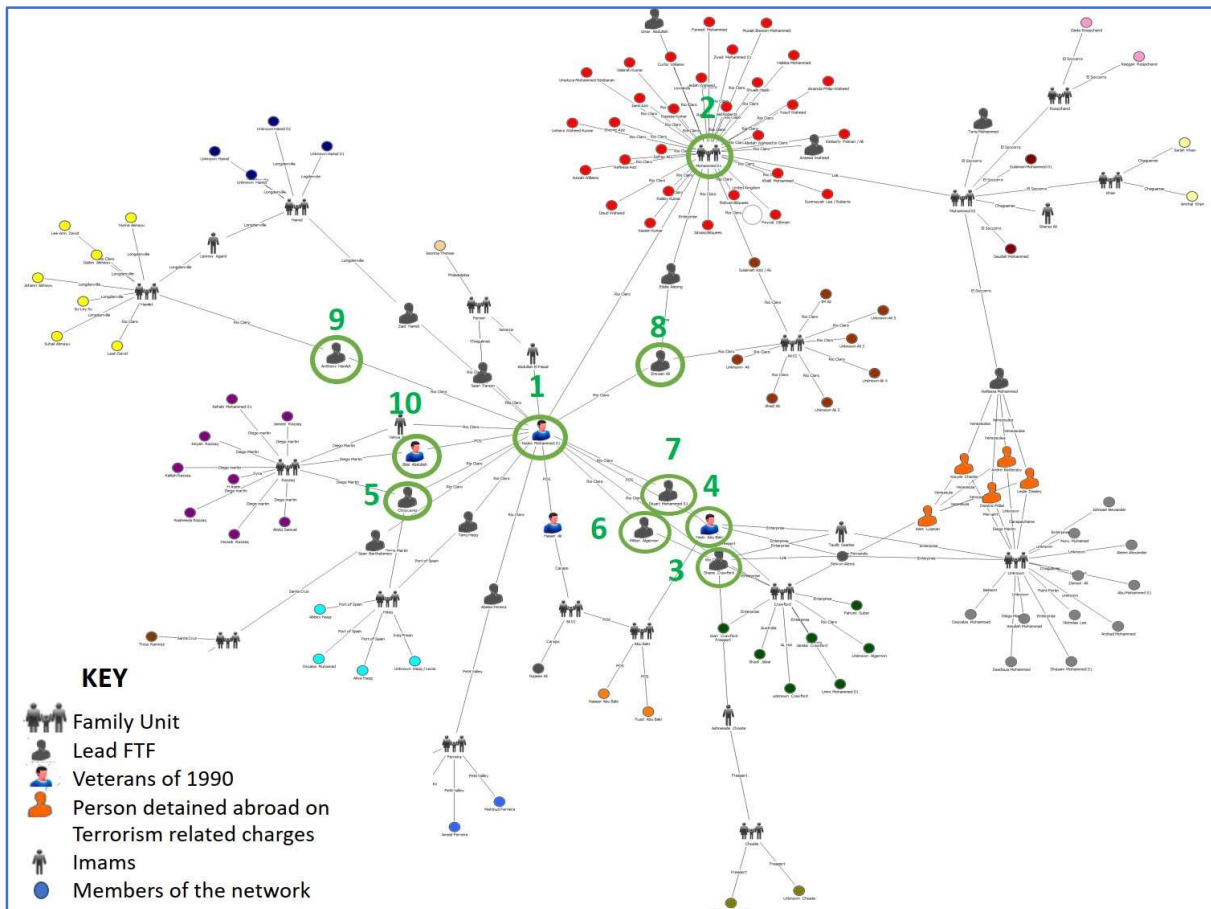


Note: Full-size image available as a separate file.

Closeness in the RIN

Closeness measures the social distance between the actors in the network, this closeness relates to the rate of transmission and the diffusion of ideas, communication and resources (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Actors with high closeness measures have the best access to other parts of the network as well as visibility on activities throughout the network. Nazim Mohammed featured as having the highest measure for Closeness in the network, his proximity to the other nodes in the network is achieved through his family connections and the Lead FTFs. It was also noted that three of the four 1990 veterans in the network were in the top ten Closeness measures, this underscores the idea that Jihadi veterans are a source of inspiration for radicalisation of future FTFs as they enjoy experiential knowledge and legitimacy (Sageman, 2011).

Figure 3: Top Ten Closeness Measure of RIN in T&T

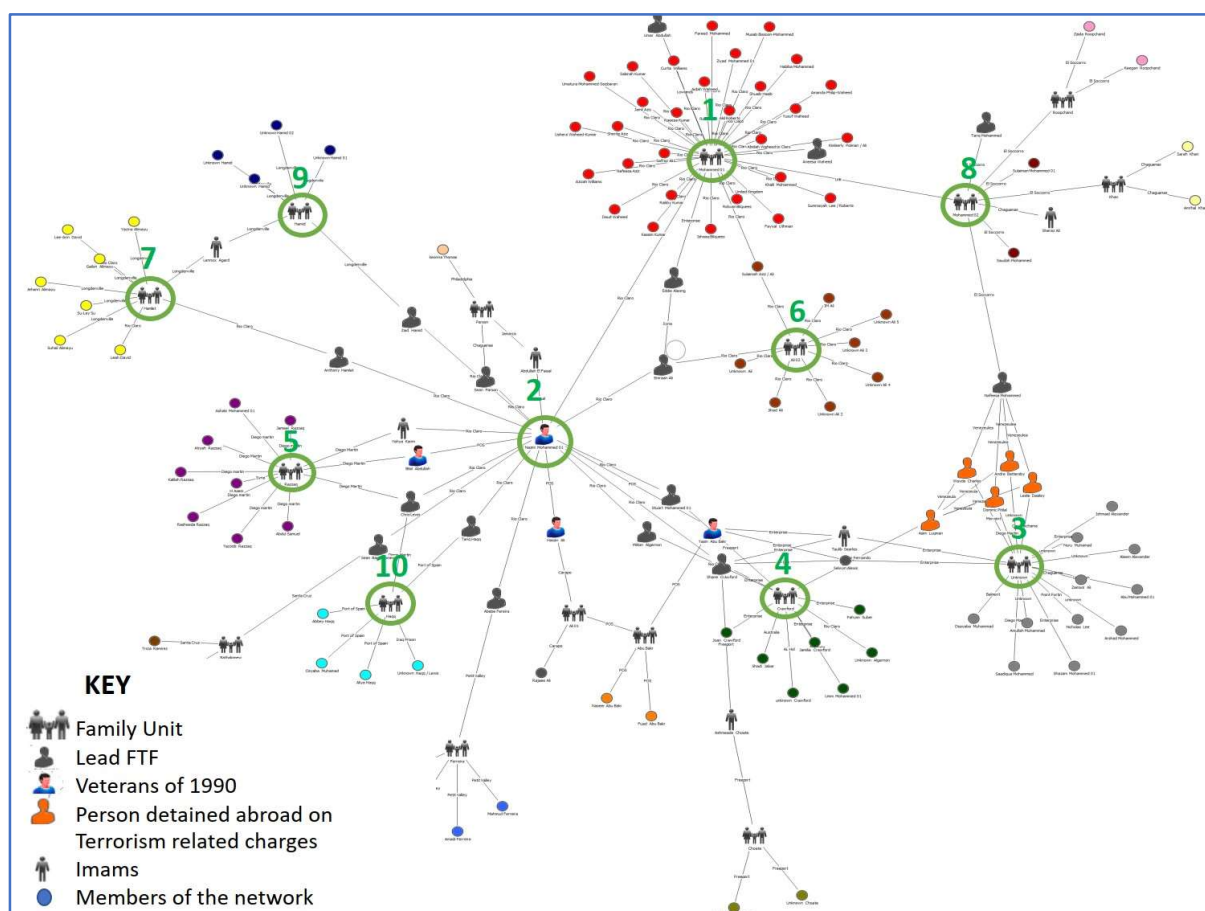


Note: Full-size image available as a separate file.

Degree Centrality in the RIN

Degree Centrality is a count of the total number of ties an actor has in the network. Actors with the most connections are assessed as having the most exposure to the network, they are the most popular and play a gatekeeping role (Everton, 2012). The Mohammed Family, Cluster 01 (Rio Claro) featured as the most prominent entity in the network, having the most connections as well as the highest total number of FTFs from a single family unit, which is estimated by Cottee (2019) to be approximately 14 persons. Nazim Mohammed was the second most central entity in the network, followed by the Unknown Cluster, which are those actors for whom there was insufficient biographical information to allocate them to a Family Unit. Families featured very prominent in the Degree Centrality, and as a Gatekeeping metric it would suggest that in order to join or move within the network it would have to be by and through a family unit.

Figure 4: Top Ten Degree Centrality Measure of RIN in T&T



Note: Full-size image available as a separate file.

The SNA of the RIN reflects an intersection of people and places, woven into a tightly knit organisation, with distinct personalities who brokered varying levels of influence and power in the network. The emergent organisation chart provides insights into the distribution of power across the network, which placed family units at the helm of the movement. This family-oriented feature lends to the theory that the FTF movement was based on the “radicalisation of a bunch of families” (Cottee, 2019). Other statistically significant actors were the Lead FTFs and the 1990 coup veterans, who enjoyed “Rock Star” status in the network (Sageman, 2011). They had the positional power to control the flow of ideas and resources across different parts of the network (Causwell, 2018; Everton, 2012). Metrics alone does not tell the full story, however, the triangulation of the three centrality measures, paints a clear picture that the family was the defining social relationship in the network

Interviews analysis

The ten interviews were conducted and analysed using an open coding technique and a thematic analysis approach, the themes were summarized into the key concepts that emerged within each code. Interview data was coded into seven theory driven codes which were mentioned above; these codes provided the basis for exploring the unique elements of the network during the interview stage.

Ideological and material interdependence in the RIN

The RIN was a highly complex entity that was socially embedded within the communities and social groups from which the members emerged (Ahmad, 2016; Helfstein, 2012; Sageman, 2004). Investigating the network's interdependencies provided a functional structure for the analysis of the social interaction and interpersonal relationships that occurred in the network (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). The identification of the interdependencies would add to the definition and comprehension of the network and those specific needs of the members which the network helped them to satisfy (Everton, 2012; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Three aspects of interdependencies were looked at, namely, key relationships along with material and ideological interdependencies within the network.

On the issue of key relationships, 70% of the responses reflected a general agreement that familial relationships defined the network. For instance, Interviewee 10 pointed out that "It was a sort of block mobilization, with approximately 26 families leaving". "People were radicalized as part of a family; this was the big predictor of who went (to Middle East)." Material interdependence was highlighted as unique feature of the relationships in the network; 90% of the respondents mentioned the role of key leaders and financiers providing financial and material support for the FTFs. According to Interviewee 3 "They would provide them with emotional and financial support and the assurance of re-acceptance at the Mosque on their return." Lastly, ideological interdependence emerged as the primary determinant of why families and individuals travelled to Syria and join ISIS. Of the responses received, 80% identified Imam Nazim Mohammed and the Boos Settlement Commune as the ideological milieu where the evangelization and mentorship of the FTFs occurred. As Interviewee 4 pointed out "There is a connection between the ideology and the Masjid in Rio Claro, as the Imam was using this ideology for many years, before and after the 1990 Coup, this was one of the ideological differences he had with Yasin Abu Bakr."

The relationships of the network were characterised by social, material and ideological interdependencies which were instrumental in spreading the ideology and supporting the FTFs (Sageman, 2011). The family was identified as the primary social support unit that provided the moral and emotional support for the FTFs. The radical Imams and the various sponsors which they were able to mobilize, were key in financing the efforts of the network. Consistent with the works by Causwell (2018) and the role of veterans in propagating ideas within the Radical Milieu, ideology was reported as the main driver in the movement to join ISIS. This ideological support system was provided by the radical leaders and the Lead FTFs who were noted as being responsible for setting the stage that caused many persons to join the Caliphate.

Value systems of the RIN

The core values embraced in the RIN revolved around the Salafi / Jihadi ideology and the tenets of Jihad and Istishhad or Martyrdom. Adopting these values was a pre-requisite to progressing in the network, it also determined how the members accepted and related with each other. From the responses, 100% of the participants agreed that the ideology and the system of beliefs inherent to the ideology defined the relationships in the network. For the FTFs, core to their beliefs was firstly a desire to protect the Ummah through Jihad and martyrdom, secondly, a preference to male dominance in decision making, and the unquestioning loyalty to the values of the network. In terms of Jihad and martyrdom, according to Interviewee 6 "For most young Muslims they would like to go into war and fight Jihad, this is where you die as a Martyr". "Jihad is like the crowning belief; and Martyrdom is a heavenly abode." Furthermore, patriarchy was a central concept of the ideology so to was the acceptance of polygamy, but this

in no way diminished the role of women in the network, as they were noted for their agency and resourcefulness. As Interviewee 10 pointed out “I'm thinking of like Tariq Abdul Haqq's sister, Aleah, she was pretty mouthy on social media. She's on Facebook, shouting about how wonderful the Islamic State is and cheering on beheadings.” “I mean, these women are quite politically engaged, and they're not stupid.” Lastly, the system of beliefs promoted strong bonds of loyalty and commitment to the brotherhood and to the cause. The most committed was a title afforded to those who demonstrated a willingness to do Hijra and make the ultimate sacrifice as is expected of all “True Muslims”. In the view of Interviewee 4 “the persons that went and committed to the ideology are unique, in that once you commit to the ideology you are forbidden to speak with and entertain those who do not support and oppose your beliefs. It is permitted to kill persons that oppose your ideology on the basis of their disbelief.”

The belief system of the RIN revolved around Jihad and Martyrdom which are central components of the Salafi/Jihadi teaching (Hegghammer, 2017; Moghadam, 2008; Sageman, 2011). This doctrinal system was instructive and cohesive, as it validated patriarchy and promoted polygamy. Contrastingly, it was also very divisive, as it established distinctions between the “true believers” and the apostates. Interviewee 4 mentioned that it was acceptable to kill disbelievers based on their disbelief, which reinforces the hateful, intolerant, and puritanical aspects of the ideology which was alluded to by Interviewee 3 and 9. Commitment and loyalty were distinguishing features of the network, there was a closeness between the members, which was characterized by uniquely strong ties through family and kinship connections (Granovetter, 1983; Hafez, 2016; Medina, 2014).

Geo-social relationships

The RIN was an intersection of people, places and events that effectively integrated ideas and mobilized resources to form a complex geo-clustered network of FTFs. The network thrived through the security and confidentiality that was provided in the regional cliques and family clusters. The network featured individuals from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, who during the normal course of things would not generally become involved in such a common endeavour. All 10 respondents (100%) stated that Rio Claro, Chaguanas and Diego Martin were the areas in Trinidad where the majority of the FTFs resided before leaving for Syria. These were locations where the network was most concentrated and the intensity of the social interactions was strongest. These areas also coincided with the locations of Radical Masjids and the most prominent FTFs. For instance, Interviewee 10 stated “It just so happens I think that Nazim was situated in Rio Claro and then Imam Samad in Diego Martin, which was the Sub Masjid of Rio Claro and then we've got a couple of Mosques in central around Lenox Agard”. “I mean, like, 70% of the persons that went, they came from Rio Claro, quite a lot of them lived on the Boos settlement.”

The network was made up of persons from all walks of life, the demographics of the RIN was consistent with the literature, which suggests, that FTFs typologies are varied and fits no single profile (Cottee, 2019; El-Said & Barrett, 2017). The RIN consisted of lawyers, doctors, businessmen, professional athletes and common criminals. The unifying thread across this social mosaic was the ideology. An interesting social dynamic that was introduced into the data, was the issue of race and race relations. Whilst generally a political issue, the racial tensions in T&T between persons of African and East Indian heritage is a very sensitive and divisive one. When asked questions related to the social makeup of the network Interviewee 10 explained that “The commonwealth boxer, Tariq Abdul Haqq attended a leading school in Trinidad went to the University of London and then came back to be a lawyer, his wife, similarly had a degree from Barbados, she was a lawyer.” “Nazim Mohammed and his family were pretty well off.” “One of the most prolific Trinis in ISIS Stewart Mohammed, he is from

Freeport, his family owns a packaging company, R&C enterprises, they're extremely wealthy, and he was one of the main players in the Trini pro-ISIS network.”

The cases of Tariq Abdul Haqq’s wife (who completed a degree in Barbados), the Jamaican radical cleric Abdullah el-Faisal and the 16 year old Jamaican boy who was trying to join ISIS via Suriname (Barker, 2017; The Gleaner, 2015; Curacao Chronicle, 2016) illustrate that small Caribbean states are not immune from the cosmopolitan endeavours of RINs. On the contrary, the increasing activity of organized criminal networks in the Caribbean region can be a future breeding ground for radicalization and recidivism of the FTFs returnees from Syria and Iraq (Clayton, 2017). As the CARICOM Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2018) points out, “institutional weakness, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, as well as inequality, significant poverty rates and high levels of criminality and low detection rates make the region susceptible to the infiltration of extremist ideology.” Those challenges and issues were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Byron et.al., 2021). Moreover, the global interconnectivity of the small Caribbean states via cyber space in spite of their weak cyber-security measures, (International Telecommunication Union, 2020) facilitates the spread of radical ideologies across the region.

Consequently, events and interactions play a major role in concretizing the relationships shared between the members of the network, these served as the meeting point for the RIN to share ideas, develop plans and to reinforce their belief system. The responses by the interviewees to questions related to the mechanisms and forums whereby the members of the RIN connected, highlighted the use of the internet, prayer sessions, and through the gang circles as the means by which the movement grew. For instance, Interviewee 4 stressed the importance of the internet “The doctrine took roots in Trinidad through persons engaging with foreign clerics on the internet; the core of ISIS recruitment was conducted via the internet.” This corroborates other research findings on the role of radicalization through the internet (Koehler, 2014; Rudner, 2017).

The Radical Milieu was concentrated in Rio Claro, with peripheral clusters in Chaguanas and environs as well as Diego Martin and environs. This geo-social clustering was a function of the Radical Masjids which were administered by the radical Imams, resulting in regional cliques similar to those described by Sageman (2004) in the Al Qaeda network. Consequently, the FTFs, were either indigenous members of these communities or persons that gravitated to these areas to experience a more fulsome interaction with the brotherhood. The diversity of the personalities in the network were reflective of the T&T society; well-integrated and cosmopolitan on the surface but having deep undercurrents of racism and classism. Cottee (2019) identified that 70% of the FTFs were graduates from secondary school and 25% were tertiary level graduates, many of whom hailed from the remote communities of Rio Claro. The activities and events that shaped the network was a blend of on-line as well as face to face engagements, Interviewee 6 spoke of “the network of messages” and “The meetings that were held with the Bothers that were supposed to go” suggesting that there was a type of “blended radicalisation” taking place.

Secrecy in the Network

The RIN was a confidential affair, maintenance of secrecy was more than a requirement, it was a necessity (Marone, 2021), and this is evident even today with the strict observance of a type of *omertà* code by its members. Many of the key leaders maintained low profiles and conducted their engagements clandestinely; they all continue to deny any prior knowledge of or involvement in the ISIS movement in T&T. In discussing the secrecy of the network, the following responses were provided by Interviewee 1 “the persons are seclusive, they don’t like the spotlight, the persons that would have left, they have always remained in the background”

and Interviewee 8 “When you see persons wearing a particular type of clothes and isolate themselves, move from their normal Masjid, buy their own food, they don’t speak to anybody, they tried to educate their children for themselves, home school and that sort of thing.” Furthermore, there was also an element of deception in the network as several persons claimed they were duped into travelling to Syria or when they arrived the situation was very different to what they were told it would be. For instance, Interviewee 5 pointed out the deception of females “So, when she started attending the mosque she was very pretty and when he saw her, he arranged to marry her. He told her they were going to England for a better life and he actually took her to Syria, and she was in a video begging to come back.”

The secrecy of the network could be likened to the *omertá* code of the Sicilian Mafia families, to date there has been no defectors, no state witnesses or any comprehensive account offered to date, on how the network operated. This could be a function of the heterarchical and highly decentralized structure of the network which insulates the core and upper echelons of the network from infiltration and interception (Everton, 2012). Or it could be a demonstration of the code of confidentiality and loyalty that was embraced by the members to protect the movement and the network. Claims were made that persons were duped into joining the Caliphate (Azard, 2019), this deception in the network, though contested by some authors (Cottee, 2021) served the purpose of ensuring that those who were not fully committed were not equipped with sufficient details to derail the undertaking. The surreptitious and clandestine nature of the RIN, in keeping their activities “dark” is described as a trademark feature of Dark Networks (Raab and Milward, 2003, p. 415; S.S. Everton, 2008, p. 7). What is now clear is that the FTFs have changed their narrative, from one of rejection of the life and lifestyle in T&T to one where they are pleading with the authorities for repatriation which is detailed in the Letter from Al Hol provided by Interviewee 9.

Network association as a path to radicalization

Although a small island state, T&T is noted for the highest number of FTFs per capita in the Western Hemisphere (United States Department of State Publication, 2017) which translates into a high probability that an individual in the normal course of their day could easily encounter a member of the RIN. The interview data showed that many persons were in fact directly in contact with the network but did not become radicalized. The data suggested that biographic availability, collective acceptance, and group dynamics were the determining factors of who progressed to the point of becoming an FTF and who did not. According to Interviewee 1 “The individuals that remained in Trinidad may have a reason for remaining in Trinidad, it could be financial it could be other family related problems, it could be that they would not have fully accepted the ideology but they remained as support for those who fully endorsed the ideology.”

As such exposure and interaction with the network and the ideology did not translate into automatic acceptance or participation in Jihad, the network is based on a tiered system of commitment and participation. This system is effectively illustrated in the Radicalization Pyramid, where persons within the network who are lower down the pyramid participated as sympathizers and supporters but only a minority actualize to become FTFs (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014). A critical point is that due to the small population size, for T&T that particular few, translates to the highest number of FTFs per capita in the Western Hemisphere. This raises serious questions as to how extensive is the wider base of activists, supporters and sympathizers the make up the entire RIN.

Diffusion of the Network

Radical networks are dynamic social structures that are resilient and effective and, although the focus of the data was during the period 2013 to 2017, the general trends in the data points to re-orientation of the RIN. What was identified is that within the network design the key nodes are protected in order to ensure the survival and regeneration of the network (Waldmann, 2008). In the questions related to the future outlook of the network, Interviewee 1 pointed out that “It is still ongoing, in terms of radicalizing a community through influence and ownership (Interviewee 1) Ideology is a difficult thing to recognize with the plain eyes and to understand who is being radicalized would remain a challenge, especially if you are not within that Islamic circle.” Apart from a few persons, the FTF component of the RIN in T&T has been shattered. All the leading male FTFs have either been killed, captured and imprisoned or displaced somewhere in the Middle East or North Africa. For those that travelled and were unable to return home “dey ketching rel hell” (Interviewee 9). The conditions at the Al Hol and Al Roj Refugee Camps where the women and children are being accommodated are reported to be horrendous (Interviewee 7) and the UN experts urging countries to repatriate their citizens amidst a deteriorating security and humanitarian situation (Omer & Kajjo, 2021; United Nations, 2021). The range of outcomes for the FTFs were either Martyrs, Prisoners, Refugees, and in a few cases, Returnees. Around 40% of the local component of the RIN is still intact, with ample opportunities for the key leaders and 1990 veterans to Jihadise the next wave of Recruits (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). The emergence of Sympathizers and Supporters, now participating in the Pyramid as Activists on behalf of the FTFs who are being denied re-entry, is a cause for concern. As this denial by the State can become a rallying cry to re-energise the network around a common grievance and a common enemy.

Policy measures to prevent a recurrence

The respondents from the Muslim Communities were in general agreement that the State’s response thus far have been inadequate and lacked an understanding of the sensitivities within the Islamic Community. The law enforcement and security personnel saw a need for more intrusive investigative procedures to detect and define the network. However, the general trend of the responses suggests that the State has not yet adequately addressed the key issues that have contributed to the problem and the continued delay increases the probability of failure for any future program. For example, Interviewee 2 stressed that “the fundamental problem is the growing disconnect between central government and the community ideology and identity.” A great deal of pressure is being placed on nations to adopt creative and adaptive strategies to rehabilitate and prosecute the Foreign Fighters and their facilitators (Vidino, Snetkov, & Pigoni, 2014). Policy measures must take into consideration the cultural context and resource availability, especially in Small Island Developing States such as T&T and strike that delicate balance that guarantees the national security interest with the respect for fundamental human rights (Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017). As such, policy responses should be inclusive and multi-faceted, so that they reflect the interest of the state as well as the voices of disenfranchised and vulnerable cross sections of the society who are susceptible to the pernicious ideologies of the RIN. Knoke (2018) recommends a networked approach that integrates the critical skill sets and personalities required for successful conceptual development and execution. The final section of the paper will further address the issue.

Discussion

The gathered data provided significant insights into the workings of the RIN in T&T and how the relationships at the group and network levels shaped the development of the network. The detectable elements of the RIN via opensource collection and the in-depth interviews provided very little by way of the personal relationships between the individuals. This opaqueness of the individual level relationships highlights the inherent challenges of collecting data on covert networks (Mullins, 2012). The incompleteness of the available information on dark networks (Cunningham et al., 2016; Everton, 2012) and the adherence by its members to an Omertá type code of secrecy creates significant difficulties to define the social connections and details of the connection. The SNA approach however was able to bridge the gap between the micro and macro levels of analysis and explore deeper, the role of groups and communities in shaping the actions of individuals and the society (Mullins, 2012; Ressler, 2006).

The RIN in T&T is mainly a network of families, which are interspersed across three general geographic areas and interconnected via the veterans of the 1990 attempted coup, along with Lead FTFs, radical clerics and the Masjids they preside over. The socially embedded, geo-clustered cliques of close friends and family members are the defining elements of the Radical Milieu and the RIN (Soufan Group Report, 2015; Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014). Their participation had more to do with social networks and kinship ties rather than the fervent belief in an Islamic Utopia. The social and positional power of the families in the network, is underscored by the high centrality measures they received in the SNA. Interviewee 1 stated “families radicalized entire communities” and this was underscored by Interviewee 10, who saw the movement as a sort of block mobilization by “a bunch of families”.

The tendency of Muslims to support patriarchy more than non-Muslims is quite significant (Alexander and Welzel, 2011). This was also evident in the RIN, where the husband had full dominance in the major decision making and social influence within the various family clusters. There was also general agreement by 70% of the participants that the desire to make Hijra and perform Jihad was driven by the male figures in the network. The network diagrams had no statistically significant adult female even though they made up more than one third of the network. The promotion of patriarchy and other misogynistic types of behaviour such as polygamy and the denial of education to Muslim women and girls (Interviewees 8 and 9) are unique elements of the RIN that also contributed to the manner in which the network operated.

The Afro-Trinidadian Muslim have been tainted with the stigma of being involved with radical Islam and violent extremism, owing to the events of the 1990 coup and, in recent times, the rise of street gangs ascribing to themselves the nomenclature “Muslim”. The stigmatization of the RIN as being predominantly Afro-Trinidad Muslims has its roots in the 1990 attempted Coup and could be attributed to the contribution by a Member of Parliament who referred to a confidential report of approximately 400 Trinidadians joining ISIS most of whom were reportedly of African descent (Gail, 2016; Badri-Maharaj, 2017). This was reinforced by several social media posts made by Afro-Trinidadian Muslims depicting themselves in the Caliphate, with Shane Crawford being dubbed “ISIS Poster Boy” (Graham-Harrison & Surtees, 2018). What is now clear, is that this was a misrepresentation of the facts, as the data suggest a relatively even mix of African (41.73%) and East Indian (42.45%) members within the RIN. The socially prominent actors and family units in the network were of East Indian heritage and they came from predominantly East Indian Communities. This racialization of the discourse on radicalisation and extremism, only serves to deflect from the real issues which contributed to the FTF problem. The RIN was a cosmopolitan affair and the only basis of discrimination was between those who accepted the ideology and those that did not. This stands out as a major

social characteristic of the network, especially in a country where racism and classism play a central role in defining one's social circles (Kerrigan, 2015).

“Jihad is a crowning belief and martyrdom is of heavenly abode” (Interviewee 6), these two concepts underpin the ideology that drove families and communities to leave their lives in T&T and make Hijra in Syria. The Salafi/Jihadi adherents are a revolutionary revivalist faction who reject Western living and desire to return to a literal way of life that existed in the times of the Prophet Muhammad (Sageman, 2011). The incubative effects of the milieu on the ideology, facilitated the transformative process that progressed individuals and families towards a greater degree of commitment, to the group, the faith and the cause (Waldmann, 2008). The inspirational role of the spiritual leaders whilst not defined with great fidelity in the research data; their ideological support facilitated the uptake of the ideology and the resultant migration. Ideology overshadowed all external considerations and permitted the members of the RIN to kill an Apostate on the basis of their disbelief (Interviewee 4). This intensity of belief is a major characteristic of the RIN, which defines its members as a uniquely different subset of the society.

The network emerged around the key leaders and the radical masjids; their inspirational role as mentors and facilitators was significant to where and how the network developed. The key leaders in the RIN, inclusive of three of the four 1990 coup veterans, are identified in nine of the top ten Closeness Centrality measures in the network. This proximity of the Leaders to the other nodes, facilitated the transmission of ideas and the movement of resources across different parts of the network. These nodes of influence were centres of gravity for their respective clusters, which in turn depended on them for material and ideological support. The flat decentralized organizational design allowed Lead FTFs autonomy over their respective clusters, which improved the speed, flexibility and complexity of the communication and coordination (Everton, 2012). This also protected the key leaders of the network and insulated other segments of the network from infiltration should one cluster become compromised. These key leaders also connected the network to likeminded persons in Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jamaica and Guyana as well as to financiers and facilitators. It was however noted that, with the exception of Ashmeade Choate, no other Imam made Hijra to Syria. Which raises the question: if these Imams were propagating the ideology of Jihad, why did they not participate to the fullest extent?

Conclusions and policy recommendations

The RIN and its production of FTFs within the various radical milieus across T&T pose a real challenge to the security, stability and safety of the country and by extension the Caribbean region. The highly persuasive power of the Salafi/Jihadi ideology and its ability to transcend, socio-economic, cultural, religious and geographic boundaries have proven to be very effective. The role of family, religious leaders and the Jihadi veterans in promoting and socializing persons with international terrorism underscores the need for decisive action. This action requires an appreciation of the pervasive, dynamic and extensive nature of the Radical Social Network. More importantly, it should take under consideration the difficulty to detect or dislodge the socially embedded RIN, therefore, a very inclusive approach is needed to begin quieting these echo chambers of violent extremist fervour.

The heterarchical structure of the RIN is a challenge to traditional law enforcement approaches, which are generally focused on decapitation and key node disruptions. A better understanding of the radical network calls for a comprehensive and persistent application of Social Network Analysis that combines the structural and affiliative components of the network. It is through this deeper understanding of the network, that an effective national effort can be undertaken to re-imagine the counter terrorism efforts, repatriate and re-integrate FTFs that are

stranded abroad and eventually curb the regeneration of FTFs. The existence of distinct patterns of geo-clusters in the RIN suggests that targeted and community specific initiatives are required which should feature involvement from members of the community. Specifically:

- A targeted and inclusive approach to policy development which involves all the relevant actors with the required skill sets that captures the sentiments of the various cross sections of the society that are most vulnerable to the ideology. This effort should focus on building resiliency in the community and the family unit, with special emphasis on the Muslim family unit.
- A collective effort by all factions of the Muslim communities, to establish policies and practices for the identification and management of masjids that promote radical ideology. This effort must also extend to the adoption of more inclusive practices in the Masjids and the homes so that it empowers the Muslim wife to speak up against destructive behaviours and decisions by their husbands.
- Proper risk assessments must be a feature of any effort to repatriate FTFs into Trinidad and Tobago. Persons desirous of returning must be required to retrace their every move that took them from the shores of T&T to the Middle East. Their account must be investigated for accuracy and once verified then they can be given favourable consideration to return.
- Lastly, the future CARICOM Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2018) should include deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes that are currently missing in the mentioned report as well as within the national security structures of the individual Caribbean states. The FTF returnees will remain a pressing issue, especially in the case of T&T; but their return to their small island state of origin will also carry regional implications (John-Lall, 2022, Taitt, 2022).

This research provides a good starting point for refocusing the discussions on radicalisation and terrorism in Trinidad and Tobago, by switching the emphasis away from the individual actors and more towards their social networks, as it is the within the confines of the network and its robust undetected support structures that FTFs are made.

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