



Department of Political Science

Chair: Sociology of Terrorism

How does one become a terrorist and why:

Theories of radicalization

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Introduction

This research aims to provide a detailed analysis of theories regarding the process of radicalization in the West both before and after the creation of ISIS. The comparison between the two periods is necessary in order to understand the evolution of terrorism and of the research referring to it. Since it is an extremely complex and widespread phenomenon, scholars provide a wide range of views that often conflict. Ideology and religion are not always the answers to radicalization. Some scholars support the centrality of ideology as a trigger for violence, while others highlight the relevance of social context, friendship, love, revenge and nationalism. Islamic fundamentalism, which seems to be the only leading factor for terrorism, is sometimes considered only a marginal reason.

The life experiences of terrorists reveal an extremely wide range of events that could possibly trigger an individual's necessity to act in a violent way. Marginalization, social frustration, the search for thrills or heroism, are on many occasions much more driving reasons to kill others. The following work aims to provide a chronological reconstruction and to investigate how an individual who grew up in a Western environment can kill innocent citizens in the name of a terrorist organization. Since 9/11, the general perception of terrorism has been that of a powerful and centralized organization threatening the West and its population, brainwashing people and organizing attacks, but recent events have proved that modern terrorism has a larger number of facets. The theories developed in these chapters, show the gradual improvements in terrorism research. Starting from the top-down recruitment guided by al-Qaeda, the studies gradually shift towards a bottom-up version of the phenomenon, linked to lone wolves. Theories have changed from considering radicalization as a process linked to the power of a centralized organization, to a more individualistic hypothesis.

The first chapter analyses four major works on terrorism, which were developed before ISIS became the centre of attention for research, from 2001 until 2014. Starting from Moghaddam's publication in 2005, the chapter examines the psychological and social conditions that may lead an individual to embrace terrorism. Belonging to a terrorist organization has a high level of costs for the people involved, both on a social and material level. Wiktorowicz, the second author cited, analyses the aspects that make this choice worth the risk, why individuals take part in violent organizations and how this belonging affects their lives. Silber and Bhatt provide an extremely clear idea of the pattern followed, providing a four-phase model of radicalization based on recent attacks or plots in European capitals. Subsequently, the focus is on different levels of radicalization. The individual, group and mass radicalization processes are all carefully analysed by McCauley and Moskalkenko, who take into account a great number of factors as possible triggers of violence. As a conclusion of the first chapter, the Italian sociologist Donatella della Porta, traces the fundamental mechanisms that play a role in the onset, persistence and demise of clandestine political violence.

The second chapter focuses on four works published after 2014, when ISIS became prominent. It must be taken into account that the authors named in this chapters have worked on terrorism even before ISIS. Anyway, I've considered their most recent works as extremely fitting for this research. Horgan's 2014 work, for example, analysed the involvement and engagement pattern within an organization, but also disengagement and the psychological costs of belonging to extreme groups. Two years later, Sageman published the book "Misunderstanding Terrorism", deepening his "bunch of guys" theory and his sociological analysis of political violence. Another detailed model of radicalization is proposed by Orsini, who analysed the pattern of terrorists by vocation using the DRIA model. He based his research on 21 case studies of attacks in the West and proposed his view of the non-existent correlation between terrorism and poverty. His opinion is shared by Kuznar, who, in addition, carefully studied the narrative used by the Islamic State during recruitment. Political, emotional and religious topics are all well distributed according to time and place by ISIS in the process of engaging people.

Finally, the third chapter provides a practical comparison between two terrorists belonging to the two different periods considered. The biography of Mohamed Atta, leader of the 9/11 attack, is analysed following Silber and Bhatt's model, showing how different stages are all traceable in a terrorists' life experience. Following the same logic, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel's biography, is analysed according to the DRIA model. The two characters belong to different terrorist waves. Atta was commanded and controlled by Al-Qaeda and was well educated and strategically prepared; Bouhlel organized independently and lacked strategy, preparation and psychological stability. The two biographies are utilized as practical evidence of the large differences not just between theories but also between terrorists.

In order to fully understand terrorism both as a phenomenon and as a threat, many different facets must be examined. All scholars cited in this research provide factors essential to understand the large number of variables involved in terrorism. Not all attacks can be classified under the same interpretation, and terrorists present many different psychological and social profiles. These studies are fundamental in terms of classifying the information gathered until now about terrorism and represent the starting point for future research. Terrorism, like every sociological phenomenon, will continue to change and the challenge for researchers is to account for both its past and future evolution.

Chapter One

(2001-2014)

1.1 Fathali M. Moghaddam

“The Staircase to Terrorism”, 2005

The Iranian philosopher Fathali M. Moghaddam, professor at Georgetown University, provides us with one of the most complete analyses of the psychology of terrorism, dictatorship and democracy. He became interested in those subjects in the late 1970s when the revolution broke out in Iran. In 1979, the Shiite leader Ruhollah Khomeini returned to Teheran after many years in exile. Exploiting the government crisis of that period and the population’s discontent, he became the leader of the Iranian revolution and succeeded in imposing a new form of government that, as Moghaddam said, was a corrupt dictatorship with a religious cover. The violence that characterized the revolution, the loss of freedom and the terror spread among the population, were the first catalysts of Moghaddam’s dedication to the psychology of terrorism, dictatorship and democracy.¹ His personal origins and the history of his own country, led him to deepen his understanding of the psychological and social aspects that undermine democracy and eventually pave the way for terrorism. In his opinion, the correlation between the two is the basis of a working long-term policy against terrorism. Moghaddam investigated the patterns that can lead a person to become engaged in terrorist organizations and violence.

1.1.1 Context

Fathali Moghaddam places his theories in a specific international context. The globalized and interconnected world of mass communication is the stage on which one major lifestyle ends up taking precedence over the others. There is no doubt that when it comes to influence, the West has an undisputed protagonist, the United States. Western values and traditions saturate every possible network in order to be affirmed as the dominant values of modern times. The westernization wave overwhelms countries in Asia, South America and Africa. Generally, the expectations of freedom, economic growth and improvement are widespread reasons for attraction to a western lifestyle. This explains why major segments of societies turn positively towards this kind of influence. However, negative feelings of frustration and grudge are also probable responses. On one hand, the disappointment for unrealized expectations can easily generate many forms of resentment. On the other, concern about being incorporated by western values and therefore losing the fundamental pillars of one’s own culture, can cause the West to be seen as a dangerous threat. In many Islamic societies, authoritarian

¹ Sara Martin, *4 Questions for Fathali Moghaddam*, “Monitor on Psychology”, 48/2017, p. 25

forces take advantage of this feeling of discontent in order to stir up a regime focussed on the total refusal of western traditions and which feeds off the us-versus-them concept.

1.1.2 The staircase to terrorism

In 2005, following the tragic events of 9/11, Moghaddam published an in-depth analysis of the process that can lead to terrorism, using the metaphor of a narrowing staircase.

Before understanding how this metaphor is used by Moghaddam, it is important to give a clear definition of the world “terrorism”. Given that this is a very controversial topic and every author favours a different description, Moghadam offers the reader his own clear view. He defines terrorism as “*politically motivated violence, perpetrated by individuals, groups, or state-sponsored agents, intended to instil feelings of terror and helplessness in a population in order to influence decision-making and change behaviour*”.²

“The staircase to terrorism” represents the rise of an individual through different floors, which leads to the destruction of others. Every floor represents an individual attempt to find one’s own position towards the world and the society. Starting from the ground floor, the changing of level means that the individual is searching for different answers and solutions that his actual condition is not providing. As individuals climb the staircase, the number of choices reduces until the only result is the terrorist act. The five-floor staircase is a fitting metaphor to understand how an individual deviates from the great majority, searching for the right “door” for him, ending up destroying others.

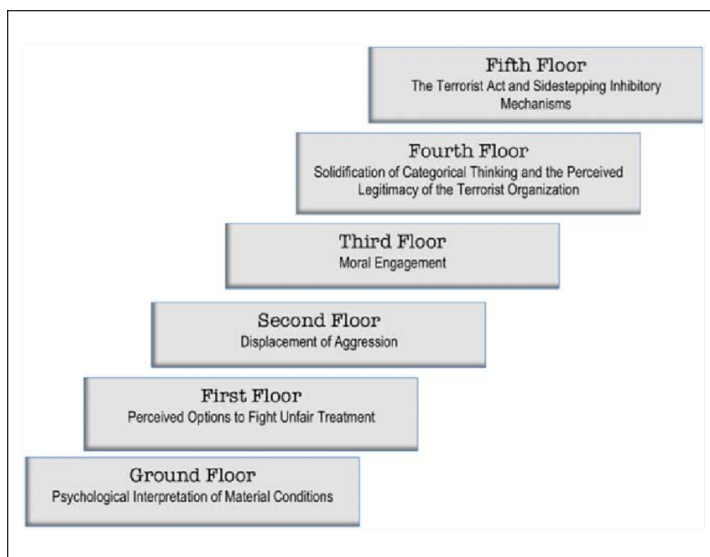


Figure 1: The Staircase to Terrorism³

²Fathali Moghaddam, *The Staircase to Terrorism: A psychological exploration*, “American Psychologist”, 60/2005

³Source: Randy Borum, *Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A review of conceptual models and empirical research*, “Journal of Strategic Security”, 4/2011, p. 40

Ground Floor: Psychological Interpretation of Material Conditions

This level is occupied by the vast majority of people and it is very unlikely that many people will move from the ground floor. It is extremely important to highlight that Moghaddam analyses the process starting from a “normal person’s” condition. He is not taking into account a special circle of individuals but society as a whole. The first distinction is between these people and those who decide to change step. For the latter, what pushes them to the climb is a sense of injustice and frustration. It would be natural to think that this is strictly correlated with social status or an economic condition but this is not proved by facts. The reality shows no correlation between material conditions and terrorism. What really counts, from a psychological point of view, is perceived deprivation. As Moghaddam shows, sometimes higher expectations mean bigger disappointment. This is the reason why not only poverty can lead an individual to the need to climb the staircase. The subjective perception of injustice is what plays a role in feelings of deprivation. The Iranian psychologist cites Runciman’s distinction between egoistical and fraternal deprivation as fundamental to terrorism. The first refers to the sense of exclusion and injustice that the individual is experiencing within a group and in a personal way. On the contrary, the second refers to the feeling of deprivation as something shared with a group in comparison with others. This last kind of feeling is more likely to lead to collective action. The idea of sharing a position often gives the courage to take part in a common goal, to fight for it and even to die. The extremist “anti-establishment” tactics are always generated by a sense of fraternal deprivation, which is powered by economic, political or different cultural perceptions of fairness.

First Floor: Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment

The search for solutions to perceived unjust treatment is what pushes individuals to the first floor of the staircase. The rise of talented individuals that want to improve their condition can be extremely useful for a society. The mobility and circulation of individuals helps to avoid non-normative actions. When everyone has the possibility to enhance and change their condition, the feeling of social struggle automatically decreases. Generally, the socio-political order is more likely to be ensured in societies where people are able to participate, move, and choose between different options during decision-making. Therefore, for people that have found options to improve their position through participation there will be no need to look for other solutions. In other words, these individuals will have no need to continue climbing considering that they will feel satisfied at this level of the staircase. On the contrary, in those nations in which participatory democracy is particularly lacking, such as Saudi Arabia, individuals could be more motivated to climb further and more willing to assert their unheard voice. In those realities, individuals will find themselves unsatisfied with the options that their society is offering. This persistent sense of deprivation pushes those people to move to the second floor.

Second Floor: Displacement of Aggression

The search for a target to blame is the fundamental aim at this stage of the staircase. Commonly found in the United States, this target is exploited by many governments to divert criticism and to generate a strong us-versus-them feeling. By the displacement of aggression Moghaddam means the redirection of individuals' frustration towards an enemy which becomes the object of future aggression. Those people who identify their enemy as the source of their deprivation will move to the third floor searching for a practical way to fight the out-group.

Third Floor: Moral Engagement

At this stage, the feeling of isolation and injustice that pushed individuals to the third floor pushes them into being part of a secretive organization with a morality parallel to the mainstream. The construction of a moral universe that justifies the struggle against the world is the basis of individual involvement in terrorist organizations, which, according to Moghaddam, act at two different levels. On the macro level, the organisation presents itself as the only means to reform society and fight the enemy. On the micro level, the organization becomes a stamping ground for stymied individuals, often recruited to accomplish the most dangerous missions. After finding his own place in the organization, what seems completely immoral from the mainstream point of view becomes absolutely moral for the terrorist in terms of fighting the "enemy". Potential recruits find themselves with the opportunity to acquire a new social identity and role, fighting against an out-group to bring justice to the world. The secrecy of the organization isolates recruits from their social and emotional reality. Wives, parents, and closest friends become totally excluded from the life the individual has chosen to follow. This isolation leads to total moral identification in the organization's aim, which leads individuals to the conviction that they are pursuing a just cause and to the will to accomplish it.

Fourth Floor: Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization

At this floor the categorisation us-versus-them dominates as a view of the world. The concept of looking at society in a binary way leads the future terrorist to totally identify with the organization. At this stage, the probabilities of coming out alive are slim. The author identifies two categories of recruits: those who will be long-term members, and the "foot soldiers". To the first category belongs the individual who is introduced in a small cell, typically composed of four or five members. The cell is the place in which the process of legitimization is completed. Other individuals are chosen to become "foot soldiers" whose aim is to carry out a violent attack. Regardless of the category, the psychological process by which the individual feels part of an

“us” against a “them” is extremely relevant. Fundamentalism feeds off the identification of a unique enemy to fight. Once you are part of such an organization, your loyalty, commitment and faith must be completely directed towards that. At this point, the individual has definitely become part of a group from which it is impossible to come out alive.

Fifth Floor: The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanism

The last stage is passing from theory to practice. Committing violence is not easy. Before strategy, before deciding the victim, the place and the weapon, a psychological process of detachment is necessary. Moghaddam detected two processes: social categorization and psychological distance. Firstly, the categorization of civilians as enemies, started in the fourth floor, allows the terrorist to sidestep every inhibitory mechanism. This means that considering civilians as enemies who can be legitimately killed makes it easier for the terrorist to carry out an attack. Also, the choice of long-distance weapons, such as guns, helps to avoid the inhibitory mechanism for which it could be difficult to kill others. It is fundamental to categorise the target, creating a psychological distance from other humans. The dehumanization of the single civilian allows a terrorist to look at others just as enemies to be destroyed. In addition to this, good strategy ensures that victims are seldom aware of the danger occurring. The surprise effect during an attack enables the terrorist to avoid the inhibitory mechanism as the victim is probably lacking the means to defend him or herself.

1.1.3 Policy recommendations

Starting from the assumption that short-term solutions, counterterrorist units and measures have certainly been fundamental against terrorism, the author analyses what politicians and psychologists can do to find a long-term solution. The problem is not just how to fight terrorist organizations but, especially, to understand how it is possible to prevent more and more individuals starting the dangerous climb to the top of the staircase. Moghaddam identifies prevention as the most important long-term solution. Given the possibility that a normal individual might experience some circumstances that push him or her to climb the staircase, strategy should focus on the start of this pattern: the ground floor. In fact, as the author says, “*as long as conditions on the ground floor remain the same, every terrorist who is eliminated is quickly replaced by others*”⁴. In a society in which this kind of climbing happens, finding a bad apple does not solve the entire problem. Having identified frustration and social injustice as the main drivers of the climbing, promotion of policies of equality and inclusion and the implementation of a contextualized democracy can be a good political answer. Giving more opportunities to each member of society could reduce the number of individuals that feel the need to climb from the ground floor to other floors to find their voice. Moreover, from an educational point of view,

⁴Fathali Moghaddam, *The Staircase to Terrorism: A psychological exploration*, “American Psychologist”, 60/2005

the author highlights the need to avoid social categorization. People, societies and groups must not be induced into a binary view of things, which generally leads them to read the world as us-versus-them.

To summarise, Moghaddam's analysis accurately depicts how being a terrorist can be the result of many different social and individual situations. The process is progressive and consists of many floors, doors and stairs, in which individuals are willing to affirm themselves. A psychological approach to the terrorist phenomenon is fundamental to understand the issue and to promote long-term solutions. The staircase metaphor, as well as being an excellent sociological analysis, is also a way to highlight the fact that people who find a place in those kinds of organization are responding to discomfort and malaise, which can often be generated by social conditions. There is no possibility of stopping such phenomena if society is not ready to deal with its underlying problems.

1.2 Quintan Wiktorowicz

“Radical Islam Rising: Muslim extremism in the West”, 2005

Quintan Wiktorowicz published “Radical Islam Rising”⁵ in 2005 with the aim of investigating the factors that lead a rational individual to embrace terrorism, accepting a high level of risks and costs. Radical Islamic movements in the West operate in an environment in which counterterrorist legislation and social hostility function as notable constraints for their development. Starting from the assumption that, especially after 9/11, Western legislation has become increasingly strict in terms of legal measures against radical views, the author highlights the fact that taking part in an extreme movement involves risk. Also, both Western and Muslim society have developed a strong form of hostility against the radical interpretation of Islam. Given that the surrounding environment is not at all favourable to those kinds of movements, being part of one means accepting high costs and risks. At this point, the most rational question to be asked is why an individual should consequently develop an interest in such movements. To answer this question Wiktorowicz starts his analysis focusing on one specific group, Al-Muhajiroun⁶, based in the United Kingdom. The movement was founded by Omar Bakri Mohammed and strongly believes in the establishment of an Islamic state, no matter in which country and against which population. In following this aim, it allows the use of violence against people who would hinder the creation of the caliphate. As Omar himself said, they will not stop until “*the black flag of Islam flies over Downing Street*”⁷. The movement today has 160 “formal members”, more than 700 followers that participate in group lessons and activities, and around 7,000 “contacts”, intended as people that might be

⁵Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim extremism in the West*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2005

⁶Kylie Connor, “Islamism” in the West? *The life-span of the Al-Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom*, “Journal of Muslim minority affairs”, 25/2005

⁷Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim extremism in the West*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2005, p. 9

potentially interested in participating. Given this level of participation, the high level of risk and costs must necessarily be overcome by some other incentive. After analysing the costs and risks of being an activist, Wiktorowicz tries to identify the factors that push a rational individual to decide that participation is convenient for him or her.

In particular, he points out three main focus areas:

- Cognitive openings and religious seeking
- Credibility and sacred authority
- Culturing and commitment

1.2.1 Method

As the author declares, gaining access to information about extreme movements is extremely complicated. He was able to combine different methods to produce his analysis. Firstly, he sometimes had the possibility to interview activists in structured and organized interviews, but on other occasions, they took place on the bus or walking through some events or demonstrations. This requires a good level of flexibility in question choice, since places and occasions can strongly influence the activist's predisposition to talk. In addition to interviews, the participation and observation of the movement's public events were important tools of analysis. Lastly, the consultation of movement documents, including hundreds of manuals, books and articles, were the last reference to give the author a complete framework of the main characteristics of the group and especially of its leader and activists.

1.2.2 High-Risk Movement

Rationally, being part of Al-Muhajiroun means having more costs than benefits. However, it is not possible to assume that participants are all unable to rightly evaluate a cost-benefit analysis. Before answering the fundamental question of why anyone should participate in such a movement, Wiktorowicz explains in detail the requirements that make the cost-benefits analysis seem negative. Al-Muhajiroun requires a lot of participation, study and involvement. Being an activist means taking part in a differentiated range of weekly lessons, usually lasting two hours but whose duration is extremely likely to change. Absence is rarely allowed and homework is required. The schedule for members and non-members is extremely tight and, alongside frontal lessons, there is a considerable amount of individual study. Members must be well informed about the international and political affairs that concern the Muslim community around the world. They are required to have a good understanding of their religion and ideology but also of socio-political current affairs. Being part of the movement not only means understanding and studying the leading thought but also disseminating it. Therefore, public events, demonstrations and protests are an essential social dimension that each member needs to experience and promote. Al-Muhajiroun requires that, once you become part of it, you understand

your life as a function of the movement's interests. Considering that elasticity in this view is not included, an individual that accepts this pattern must accept some costs.

Material costs

Being part of the movement means accepting significant material costs. As a member, you are supposed to donate one-third of your salary to the movement. Since the vast majority of participants are students or young adults, this has an enormous weight on activists' economic conditions. This requirement, together with the time dedicated to Al-Muhajiroun, leads many individuals to accept lower paid jobs in exchange for some schedule flexibility. This increases the weight of material costs on family conditions. Some others try to become self-employed professionals in order to combine a good income with religious practice, but this involves a clear margin of risk. Moreover, in Western societies, being known as part of a radical movement can expose an individual to social exclusion and sometimes labour market exclusion. Given that there is no law protecting extreme activists from prejudice, dismissal or discharge are probabilities that an activist should take into account when considering joining radical movements. In addition, being a part of the movement is a risky activity in itself. This is firstly because it is often required to organize dangerous and violent plots that usually include suicide or being killed by police. Secondly, it is because legislation against terrorist organizations has been developed in order to arrest and dismantle every kind of extreme and violent group, especially after 9/11.

Social costs

Embracing a radical ideology has a strong impact on the activist's previous life and there are many social costs. The first cost is where a family is involved. Especially for women, children and home obligations are an extremely relevant cost, considering the time commitment that the movement requires. On some occasions such as lessons or demonstrations, children are allowed, but fulfilling religious practice and family duties at the same time can be extremely demanding. Most commonly, because activists are usually young university students, the greatest pressure comes from their parents. Moderate Muslim families, who have raised their children in the West, are extremely hostile towards radical views of Islam. Because they believe that extreme views are spreading a "Islamophobia" around Western society, moderate Muslims refuse any radical interpretation of religion. Next to family opposition, aspirant activists also experience the loss of friends. Once an individual starts following Al-Muhajiroun ideals, the old Western social life becomes completely incompatible with this new mentality. The table below provides an extremely effective list giving the idea of the incongruity between extreme duties and Western habits.

-
1. Listening to music and radio
 2. Smoking
 3. Cruising
 4. Watching TV
 5. Running away from responsibilities to go on picnics and holidays
 6. Daily socialising with the intention to have fun and kill time
 7. Sleeping a lot and chilling out
 8. Deserting reading serious books such as the Qur'an, Hadith and Fiqh to read cheap newspapers, novels and magazines
 9. Playing games
 10. Solving crosswords
 11. Chatting on the phone for hours
 12. Ignoring duties/responsibilities and prefer to rest, slack and be lazy
 13. Exceeding ones involvement in sport activities
 14. Diverting from the serious, fruitful work to wasting time
 15. Playing on the internet for no need
 16. Looking for excuses not to do any duties as he is bored with doing them
 17. Window shopping and spending hours in the market
 18. Going to cinemas and restaurants to eat out
 19. Hanging out with friends
 20. Joking around and being sarcastic
-

Figure 2: *Social Activities Discouraged by al-Muhajiroun*⁸

Both the moderate Muslim community and Western society trigger a process of isolation and exclusion that the activist must accept as part of the religious process he has chosen. This leads the movement to become the only social reality the individual refers to.

1.2.3 Al-Muhajiroun's structure

Al-Muhajiroun's ability can be seen in the structure the movement has developed. Given the fact that followers are always proportional to coverage, having an organized and extended structure assures the movement better control in different territories. In order to have good visibility and presence in different places, Al-Muhajiroun have built a strong hierarchy that allows them to satisfy the growing number of supporters. Omar Bakri, with many different local branches, is able to cover a vast number of issues and to manage them in a single direction coherent with the movement. The top-down process ensures national and international coverage for the leader and does not risk neglect of a part of his followers.

⁸ Source: Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim extremism in the West*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2005, p. 57

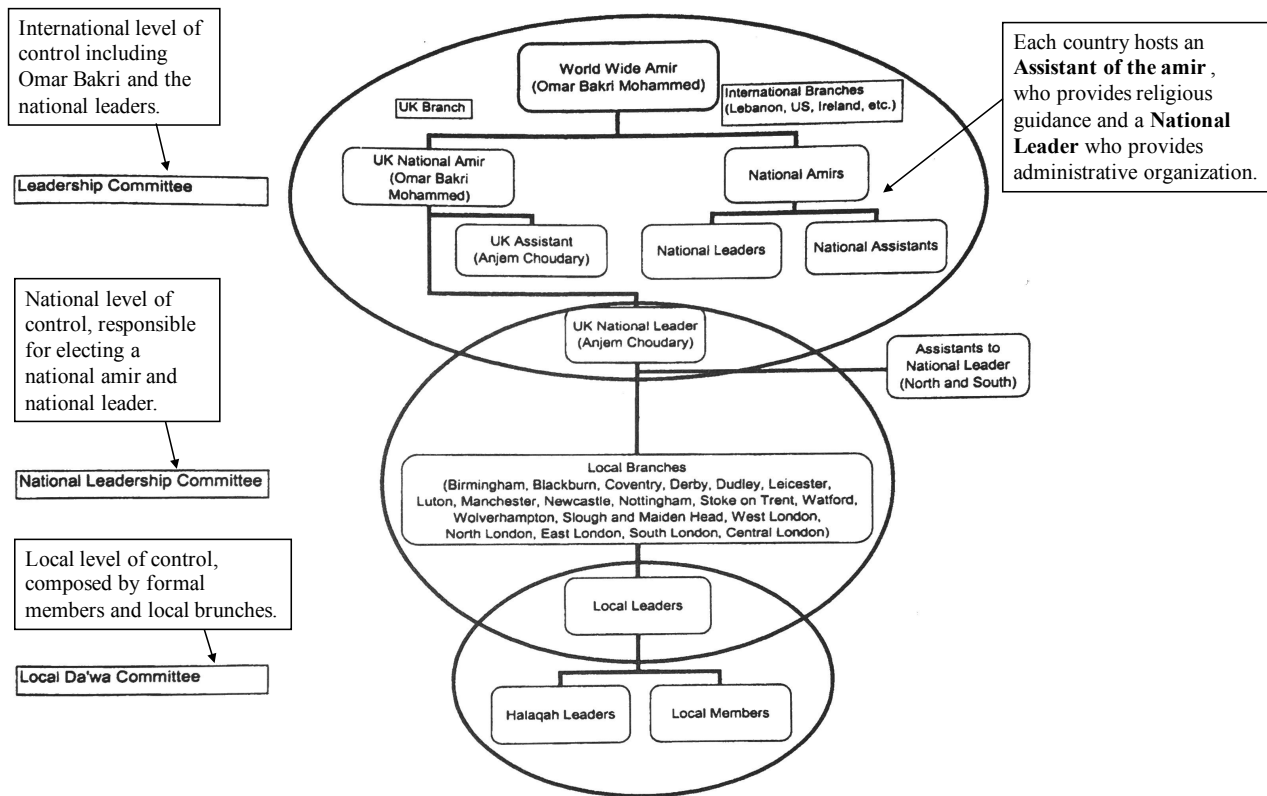


Figure 3: Movement Structure⁹

1.2.4 Three focus area

Cognitive opening and religious seeking

When individuals make such an irrational decision, it is never sudden. The process that leads a moderate person to approach an extreme view of the world is complex and includes different actors and circumstances. The author underlines the necessity to identify what motivates a moderate individual to listen to such alternative views. Here the concept of cognitive opening is important. Cognitive opening is a moment when, because of some personal crisis or experience, an individual becomes more open and exposed to new interpretations of life. This is the result of a feeling of mistrust and uncertainty towards society and previously held beliefs. In this scenario, Al-Muhajiroun starts to impose its views as effective answers and possible interpretation of the world. A cognitive opening can be triggered by an identity crisis, or pushed by the movement itself. As it will be assumed by Silber and Bhatt¹⁰, the Western environment might have a role in generating a sense of alienation in Muslim communities. In fact, a Muslim in a secular society may not find satisfying theological guidance and experience a feeling of disorientation. Young Muslims can experience

⁹Source: Ivi, p. 107

¹⁰Mitchell D. Silber, Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, Police department of New York City, New York, 2007

racism, exclusion from the labour market and discrimination, which can lead them to question their identity and their belonging to Western society. The sense of bewilderment, widespread among young Muslims, is the best starting point for Al-Muhajiroun's recruitment. Omar Bakri himself explains: "People are looking for an Islamic identity. You find someone called Muhammad, who grew up in Western society; he concedes a lot so people accept him. He changes his name to Mike, he has a girlfriend, he drinks alcohol, he dances, he has sex, raves, rock and roll, then they say, "You are a Paki". After everything he gave up to be accepted, they tell him he is a bloody Arab, or a Paki."¹¹ Although in many cases a personal crisis is the trigger of a cognitive opening, in some others the movement makes a lot of effort to foster one. In this sense, the public activity of Al-Muhajiroun is fundamental and uses two main methods. Public events, demonstrations and conferences characterized by collective participation and effective use of strong rhetoric and raw images, are a first example of how the movement involves society and future activists. However, this is often not sufficient in fostering cognitive opening, which is extremely personal. Individual meetings are more commonly effective. Al-Muhajiroun requires activists to spread their ideology around their social network, pushing friends, family and colleagues to open themselves to a different vision of Islam, exploiting the fact that those relationships are based on trust. The fact that usually those people already trust each other provides the activist the opportunity to be heard without scepticism and in a more spontaneous way. Otherwise, in the case of the recruitment of strangers, trust needs to be built. This requires more time and the ability to create social links. Conversations about Islam are not lessons, they take the guise of normal chats and debates and they open the possibility of a new worldview. Of course, the conversation is always oriented towards different concerns. The ability of a recruiter lies in understanding what could push an individual to learn about Islam and then focusing on that aspect in conversations. The table below represents the most common triggers for approaching Islam.

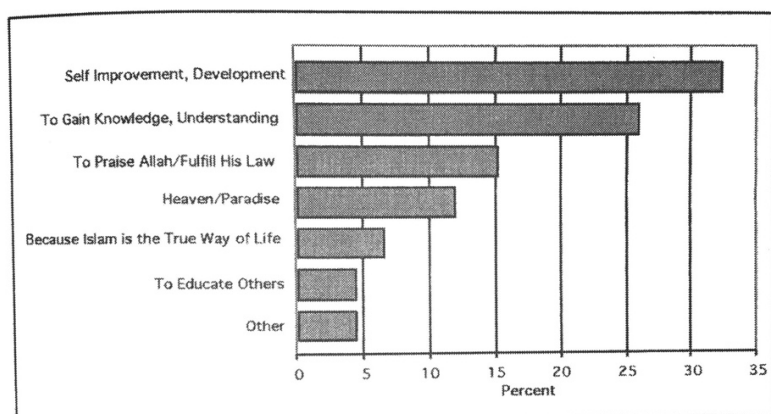


Figure 4: Most important reasons for learning about Islam¹²

¹¹Adam Lebor, *A Heart Turned East: Among the Muslims of Europe and America*, Thomas Dunne Books, New York City, 1997, p. 129

¹²Source: Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim extremism in the West*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2005, p. 95

Non-joiners:

Wiktorowicz offers an extremely interesting comparison between those individuals who chose to embrace extremism and those who did not. A survey was carried out in the Muslim community of well-educated young men from ethnic minority groups who considered British society racist. The author was able to identify some main points that differentiate non-joiners from joiners:

- They value religion as extremely relevant. On the contrary, Al-Muhajiroun activists considered religion marginal before their conversion.
- They see British society as having some traces of racism, but not as extreme as Al-Muhajiroun members.
- They generally feel more fulfilled by their life conditions.
- They usually trust British government and institutions.
- There were no clues that they ever experienced a form of cognitive opening.
- They were not part of any activist's social network (family, friends or colleagues).

Credibility and sacred authority

Al-Muhajiroun is just one of the many extreme Islamic movements in the United Kingdom and Europe. To be the most followed, this group needs to face competition with others, and therefore credibility is fundamental. The movement must focus on presenting the public the best possible image of itself, its members and especially its leader. Omar Bakri has totally understood this point. The great majority of people chose Al-Muhajiroun because of the known expertise Omar Bakri is supposed to have. Wiktorowicz was able to identify the main areas in which Bakri has had complete success.

His educational background and knowledge are his first asset. It is undeniable that he has focused on Islamic religion and jurisprudence, gathering knowledge that cannot be found in traditional imams. This is shared among all activists and scholars. One of them, Anjem said, *"I had never seen anything like what he used to talk about. The science of foundation, the science of Islamic jurisprudence, the science of Qur'an, of hadith. He was like a bottomless treasure. No matter what we asked him he always had a solution, an answer. That was something unique."*¹³ The reliability of all the information given by Bakri has always been confirmed by his confidence and conviction that persuaded even the most sceptical. Of course, when lessons have such a strong cultural basis, people are more likely to think that what they hear is the truth and that they can trust it. This provides Al-Muhajiroun with strong credibility. Nevertheless, Omar Bakri does not rely only on his knowledge when it comes to convincing people to follow his movement. His credibility is also founded on his

¹³Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2005, p. 139

character. Unlike many other movements' leaders, he is economically self-sufficient, which means that he is less open to corruption and needing money from the government. His inheritance gives him the appearance of a generous businessman. Moreover, he seems to be not just economically independent but free from any influence in general. He is sure of all the topics he deals with and is never scared of confrontation and consequences. He appears a strong and respectable man who strongly believes what he preaches. Next to his knowledge and character, his personality also plays a pivotal role in obtaining people's trust. What makes him extremely appreciated by lost young people is that he is easy-going and always available. He provides his personal contacts to everyone interested in the movement and in debating about Islam. This, as well as appearing a sign of kindness, is also a way in which he can develop close control of people who follow him, by establishing a tight relationship of trust. Omar Bakri can boast impeccable charisma, great oratory skills and a strong sense of humour that makes people think of him as a good and reliable leader. Good foresight was also shown in his decision to perfect his English, a quality that gives him the possibility to fully interact with the society in which his movement is located. The publication of Al-Muhajiroun's religious materials in English is rare among other movements and again helps in competing with them.

Culturing and commitment

It must be highlighted at this point that, despite the reasons why a person could be interested in embracing Islam, the possibility of free riding is still available. Free riding means the possibility for individuals to follow lessons, embrace Islam and Omar Bakri's teachings, but to back out when activities become too risky, letting others act in their name. From a rational point of view, this would maximise a person's interest, having the benefits of being part of the movement without exposing him or herself to dangerous actions. What takes over at this point is a culturing process that inspires and motivates risky aspects of the ideology. This centres on the belief of Tawhid, the oneness of God. A good Muslim, who truly aspires to salvation, must refer to, believe in and worship only Allah. On the contrary, whenever someone ascribes a partner unto Allah, he is destined to hellfire. Once students have truly accepted the centrality of Tawhid, the link between sacrifice and salvation becomes clear. Everything Al-Muhajiroun requires, in order to receive a spiritual payoff, needs to be done in terms of personal interest. Sacrifice and observation of God's will is not a collective action, it is an individual pattern towards salvation. Next to the centrality of Tawhid, the movement identifies some other essential undertakings to fulfil in order to avoid damnation. Because the Qu'ran is sometimes vague about the duties that this model requires, Al-Muhajiroun must define some guidelines for his students. They consist in three divine duties that must be accomplished in order to reach salvation.

1. Muslims must share and promote their beliefs and precepts among the population.
2. Muslims must fight disbelief by promoting virtue over vice.
3. All Muslims, regardless of the place, must aim at the re-establishment of the caliphate.

Considering that this is God's will, and that he is able to judge every person on Judgement Day, respecting and being actively engaged in every request of the movement is therefore in an individual's interest. From the point of view of an Al-Muhajiroun student, the maximization of his or her own interest is to be rewarded in the hereafter. From this perspective, sacrifice and hardship are only signs that the right path has been undertaken. Risks and costs do not have to be interpreted as something negative but as a sign of future salvation. Therefore, culturing is about making sure that students adopt this view of the world and accept sacrifice in their own interest. The last step of the culturing process is to become "intellectually affiliated". As Anjem, Omar Bakri's assistant, described, a person is intellectually affiliated when "*the culture has merged with him in his actions: he propagates; he attends the stall; he wants to come to the circles; and basically he carries da'wa. He propagates the ideas and from what he says he seems to understand them as well*"¹⁴. This very selective process pushes students to learn and concentrate on the religious duties that the movement requires. Having a certain number of "intellectually affiliated" individuals allows Al-Muhajiroun to build a network of promoters that are able to spread the message of the movement all around the world.

In conclusion, it is undeniable that, from a rational individual point of view, being part of Al-Muhajiroun implies more risks and costs than benefits. Social exclusion, the economic and time commitment that the movement requires, and the amount of knowledge to acquire, all seem to be negative triggers. The opening towards extreme Islam starts with a phase of cognitive opening in which individuals develop their interest in finding a new interpretation of the world. Sometimes feelings of social exclusion and isolation can be triggers of this necessity. This individual predisposition, in the case of Al-Muhajiroun, is met by a charismatic leader, who manages an organized and credible movement. Here, together with the individual's will to learn, is the activist and leader's capacity to create a comfortable reality for the future member. Cognitive opening and a movement's credibility and leader are the main basis for an individual's participation, but ideological progress must happen. In the culturing process, the ideology is assimilated and this is fundamental to comprehend the rationality behind being part of Al-Muhajiroun. From the participant's point of view, eternal salvation is an unquantifiable benefit that exceeds any possible earthly comfort. Next to material evaluation of preferences in fact, many individuals evaluate the relevance of moral preferences. Aspects such as duty, honour, religious calling and beliefs, may sometimes be worth any material cost. In these terms, considering values more important than material benefits, Al-Muhajiroun's members are not acting in an irrational framework. What Wiktorowicz has underlined, apart from all the fundamental characteristics of such a movement, is that being part of it provides the individual with a higher aim and, even though it may seem unworthy, it becomes strongly rooted in the participant's life and mind-set.

¹⁴Ivi, p. 191

1.3 Mitchell D. Silber and Arvin Bhatt

“Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat”, 2007

Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, both well-known intelligence analysts, provide an accurate analysis of the process of radicalization in the West. Their aim is to depict a clear framework of social and personal circumstances that lead a Western resident or citizen to become a threat for his or her host country. After 9/11, the blast radius of terrorism started to expand and the radicalization process to accelerate. Prior to that day, the ideas of jihadization and of becoming mujahedeen were not so popular among aspiring jihadists. The spread of the concept that committing a violent act in the West is actually the culmination of the radicalization pattern, makes the attack a sort of responsibility and changes the way many individuals interpret jihad. The bedrock is to be found in the Jihad-Salafi ideology, which is actually based on the pursuit of an autonomous jihad carried out by western individuals against their host country. The main aim is to create a pure society founded on the laws of the Quran, and a worldwide Caliphate. This, of course, generates a feeling of religious and political hate towards infidels of the West, who are undermining the solidity of the Islamic State. What the two analysts do in this report is to highlight every aspect and actor of the radicalization path. It is a slow process by which “unremarkable” individuals, citizens or residents of a Western country use al-Qaeda as inspiration to carry out an attack. This is the first fundamental concept of the analysis: the protagonists are not part of or directed by al-Qaeda, but are normal people who live in a Western society. Starting from this assumption, the framework suggested by Silber and Bhatt is based on a comparative case study of five relevant attacks. Those five cases are: Madrid March 2004 attack, Amsterdam’s Hofstad Group, London’s July 2005 attack, Australia Operation Pendennis and the Toronto 18 Case.

Analysing the details belonging to those cases, the authors have divided the radicalization process into four distinct phases:

- 1) Pre-Radicalization
- 2) Self-Identification
- 3) Indoctrination
- 4) Jihadization

The fact that an individual might experience one of these phases does not necessarily mean that they will end up committing an attack. However, people that go through each stage, are more likely to follow the terrorist aim. To give a clear idea of the concept, the authors use the metaphor of a funnel. Starting the process does not always mean that the peak will be reached but, even if someone does not actually become a terrorist, this does not mean that they do not represent a threat for society in the future.

1.3.1 Four-phase model

Phase 1: Pre-radicalization

*“Pre-Radicalization describes an individual’s world- his or her pedigree, lifestyle, religion, social status, neighbourhood, and education- just prior to the start of their journey down the path of radicalization.”*¹⁵

It should be noted that no psychological factor is involved. This is important because the instinctive attitude towards a terrorist is to consider him or her crazy and unable to think rationally. This assumption is totally wrong. Many factors can compromise the reality of an individual and lead them to take the radicalization path, but none of them is psychological infirmity. Firstly, it is necessary to consider the environment. In a Western country, living in a Muslim area or community, could generate a sense of isolation and social exclusion, which brings the desire to bond with individuals who feel the same. The more vulnerable an ethnic community, the more it is exposed to penetration by terrorism and radicalization tendencies. In second place, the candidates’ social dimension is extremely relevant. Their age, life, work and ideology, which usually develops in a Muslim community, are important investigation areas. Even if it is almost impossible to draw a profile, scholars have found some commonalities among radicalized individuals. They are generally second or third generation male Muslims under the age of 35 from different ethnic backgrounds who live in a Western country. Most of them received an education, in many cases even attending university. Many of them experienced a recent conversion or, even if Muslims, they are seldom radical or devout. They usually have “unremarkable” backgrounds, which means ordinary jobs and life styles. Some have already experienced crime or prison. In these terms, the London case study accurately depicts the Pre-Radicalization stage. In this case, a series of coordinated bomb blasts hit London’s public transport system around 8:50 AM causing 52 dead and 700 injured. The first relevant observation to be made is that the Muslim population in the United Kingdom is around two million people, of which half is concentrated in London. Three out of four bombers were part of this community. They were all described as well-integrated people with, again, “unremarkable” backgrounds. All educated, working, and mostly adjusted to Western customs. However, the fourth individual, Germaine Lindsay, was a convert to Islam. Born in Jamaica, he lived in Britain and converted to Islam in 2000. It is clear from this group of terrorists that they cannot be differentiated from many others, and that nothing, at this stage, can indicate the possibility of embracing a radicalized ideology. It is also important not to underestimate the significance of Lindsay in the analysis. The archetype of “the convert” is often present in case studies and is a very important figure. The need to demonstrate their religious convictions and their radical separation from their past social dimension often makes these people very aggressive and determined.

¹⁵Mitchell Silber, Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: the Homegrown Threat*, The New York City Police Department, New York, 2007, p. 22

Phase 2: Self-identification

“This stage, which is largely influenced by both internal and external factors, marks the point where the individual begins to explore Salafi Islam, while slowly migrating away from their former identity- an identity that now is re-defined by Salafi philosophy, ideology, and values. The catalyst for this “religious seeking” is often a cognitive event, or crisis, which challenges one’s certitude in previously held beliefs, opening the individual’s mind to a new perception or view of the world.”¹⁶

This phase concerns the trigger that causes the approach to a new ideology. Of course, this can belong to different spheres of the individual’s reality. Often, the crisis regards the individual’s identity. This can be caused by a political “moral shock” from some unjust treatment Muslims are suffering, or by a personal crisis such as a big loss. However, the crisis can also be linked to a difficult economic condition or a feeling of social exclusion and alienation. Starting from the stressor of a feeling of incompleteness, and given the popularity of the Salafi interpretation of Islam in many networks it is highly probable that an individual will find the answers they are searching for in this ideology. In this way, the “Progression or Gravitation Towards Salafi Islam” begins. This process of rapprochement to Salafism has some distinctiveness. The individual starts to feel the need to reunite with like-minded individuals, untying himself from the old life. For those, usually a majority, who have always adopted Western customs, habits and clothing, these all need to be eliminated. The new Salafist starts growing a beard, wearing traditional Islamic clothing and disavowing everything that belongs to the unbelievers’ world. The most important part of this process is the regular attendance at a Salafi mosque. Here, what started as something individual becomes a group reality. Your convictions and aims are shared and encouraged by many other individuals, who represent the main form of legitimation of your thought. This “group think” is the main link between self-identification and the next step of Indoctrination. Before moving to the next stage of the radicalization process, it is appropriate to analyse the self-indoctrination phase in practice, studying the Madrid 2004 Attack. On this occasion, a series of coordinated bombings against four commuter trains was responsible for killing 191 people and injuring 2,050. Most of the Madrid bombers had experienced some political or personal crisis before approaching Salafism. For example, the Tunisian student Sarhane ben Abdelmajid Fakhret grew up in a middle-class family and was depicted as a “gracious and engaging” student by his university professor. Then, suddenly, something changed. He became “incommunicative” and withdrew from school. Even if the exact stressor of this crisis is not clear, it is quite evident that some personal experience meant a radical change in Fakhret’s personality and life. For individuals like Fakhret, the next stage is to find themselves welcome in a new environment, which in this particular case was the Centro Cultural Islamico, also known as “M-30 mosque”. As Silber and Bhatt documented “*M-30 had*

¹⁶*Ibidem*

*a history of being the mosque of choice for radical-thinking Muslims and as an extremist incubator*¹⁷. At this stage it is clear how, pushed by a relevant life crisis, it is not difficult for individuals that have already experienced Islamic religion to transition from normal practice to radicalization. The need to find answers in a difficult period of their life, together with the popularity of extreme thinking among many social and virtual networks can easily lead to the third stage of the process: Indoctrination.

Phase 3: Indoctrination

*“Indoctrination is a stage in which an individual progressively intensifies his beliefs, wholly adopts jihadi-Salafi ideology and concludes, without question, that the conditions and circumstances exist where action is required to support and further the Salafist cause. That action is militant jihad.”*¹⁸

At this stage the password is: Legitimization. Individuals become totally convinced about the rightness of the Salafism cause to create a pure worldwide Muslim community. What was an ideology turns into a personal cause. Violence, committed in order to defend and fight for the “greater good”, is not only justified but also morally right and must be encouraged. Here, as previously seen, the individual ideology turns into group thinking and individuals become clusters. At this stage, it is necessary to highlight the importance of two figures. Firstly, the “spiritual sanctioner”, whose role is to legitimate the jihad, giving reasons why suicide is justified. When the group actually decides to go for the attack, organized by the “operation leader”, who plays the leading role and keeps the cluster focused on their aim. The two main indicators that distinguish this stage are: withdrawal from the Mosque and the politicization of new beliefs. The mosque, which until now served as an extremist incubator, becomes obsolete at this stage. Individuals feel that there is nothing more they need from the mosque, in some ways feeling that their knowledge and determination are more important. At this point, the intentions of the cluster need to be protected and kept secret, leading to the perception of the mosque as a threat. In fact, they tend to be monitored and controlled places, given that their role as extremist incubators is well known. Moreover, individuals at this stage start to apply their new beliefs to their view of the world. The us-versus-them vision starts to dominate, the world is broken down into believers and unbelievers. The breakup with the rest of the world is radical, excluding everyone that is not part of the restricted, like-minded clique the individual has built. The fundamental role of the “spiritual sanctioner”, together with this radical rupture with the past can be clearly traced in the Melbourne/Sydney case. In 2005, 17 men were arrested while planning an attack, probably in different spots of both cities. The leader of the operation was Imam Abdul Nacer Benbrika who, as theoretically anticipated, left the Omran’s Brunswick mosque together with some of the most violent and radical elements of the congregation. Based on his conviction that the Muslim community

¹⁷Ivi, p. 32

¹⁸Ivi, p. 30

needed to defend itself from the infidels, he shared this message with the rest of the group, convincing the others that their fight against the government and the population was right. Benbrika fulfilled the role of “spiritual sanctioner” both in Melbourne and Sydney, encouraging and inspiring the cluster to feel their cause was morally justified.

Phase 4: Jihadization

“This is the phase in which members of the cluster accept their individual duty to participate in jihad and self-designate themselves as holy warriors or mujahedeen. Ultimately, the group will begin operational planning for jihad or a terrorist attack.”¹⁹

This stage is based on the passage from thinking to action. At this point of the radicalization process, individuals may remain in the group or independently look for opportunities to fulfil the jihad. In both cases, the aim at this point becomes reaching the condition of being a holy warrior. The individual starts feeling the duty to accomplish his mission and this, contrary to the rest of the process, can be quickly realizable. The stage of jihadization is not usually as gradual as the rest of the pattern, two weeks can be easily enough to accomplish this phase. Like the stages that have already been analysed, jihadization also has different indicators. Firstly, the group or the individual must experience the acceptance of jihad. After inwardly being sure that committing jihad is the purest goal they can aim at, they start searching for a place to complete the acceptance phase. Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kashmir, and Somalia become hosting countries for individuals that are looking for jihad. Some people are searching for more religious answers and legitimization, while others seek some real action in order to finally become mujahedeen. In both cases, what a group really needs at this point, before being able to take action, is to train their capabilities and cohesion. The training phase is divided by the authors into physical and mental training. Activities such as camping, target shooting or paintball games are typical “outward-bound” type activities, which are essential to reinforce group physical resistance and complicity. Next to the relevance of “group-think and action”, also individual mental reinforcement is fundamental. The fact that those individuals are going to kill and be killed cannot be underestimated, and this needs strong resolution. The glorification of death aims to reduce the fear of being killed and improves the sense of determination and rightness in taking action. Once the group has finally developed a trustful cohesiveness and is mentally focused on the cause, the last phase is ready to take place. Preparing an attack is strategically very complex and a lot of information is required. Many answers are given by internet research, which is a precious instrument for terrorists to choose the target and to arrange the attack. In terms of planning, the analysis of the place is also relevant. Studying maps and watching videos that show the attack site allow the cluster to plan

¹⁹*Ibidem*

different escape routes and avoid unforeseen events. Finally, and most important, is the acquisition of the necessary material. A list of possibly suspicious material purchased before an attack has been highlighted by the NY Police Department and contains: chemicals to form explosives in bathtubs, TNT, watches or phones to use as detonators, large amount of any chemical or material. After designing a convincing strategy and making sure that all the necessary material has been found, the cluster is ready to direct the final attack against the target chosen during the last phase of the jihadization. This is the most complicated phase in the radicalization process and is often the quickest to realize. The psychological changing of an individual and his approach to an extreme ideology is highly complex and detailed. It is a strongly gradual process that an individual experiences. On the contrary, having developed the conviction that being a holy warrior is the highest objective, the phases that separate a person from committing an attack are faster and sometimes easier to complete.

1.3.2 Radicalization Incubators

During the process of absolute breaking with their social and family life, extreme individuals build their new reality in some particular venues. These places can be the areas in which the radicalization process began or where it has been nurtured. Mosques are the first and most common place where an individual develops an extreme pattern. It has been shown that M30, Stratford mosque, Al Raham mosque and Omran's Brunswick mosque, were constant venues in all the attacks studied. However, many other places served as incubators, and some of them are astonishingly common places such as cafes, flophouses, student associations, Salafi-based NGOs, water pipe bars or even butcher shops and book stores. These places have been found to be typical incubators that host the main stages of the radicalization process.

- Prisons

*“The nature of prison environments, coupled with the social marginalization of inmates, cultivates a strong desire for bonding, group identity, and spiritual guidance. Allen warned Congress that these factors may be exploited by prisoners in pursuit of terrorist goals”.*²⁰ This means that the hostile and dangerous environment pushes individuals to approach those people who share their language, culture or religion. This may easily lead to coming into contact with radicalized individuals that exploit the difficult situation to share their extreme ideals and create their own cluster. Professor Farhad Khosrokhavar provides an extremely well-realized analysis in which he shows the context and the actors that play a fundamental role in the particular prison context. He differentiates the “radicalizer”

²⁰ Mark Hamm, *The spectacular few: Prisoner radicalization and the evolving terrorist threat*, New York University Press, New York, March 2013, p. 10

from the “radicalized”, which means the individual who plays an active role in sharing his extreme ideals and those who face the manipulation and learn the discipline. The psychological fragility and stress that affects a lot of people in detention is the perfect field for a charismatic radicalizer to create a micro-network inside the prison’s walls. ²¹

- Internet

Having access to unlimited networks, provides the possibility to build a connection with a virtual group that is ready to share your ideals and values. In the first phase of the radicalization process, the internet represents one of the most used incubators to approach Salafism and to start getting involved in a new community. It can be used not only to give the individual an extreme vision of the world but also to build a virtual meeting place in which extremists can share hate and ideas and build new relations. Once individuals have approached an extreme ideology, the role that internet plays changes. Through the material shared on it, individuals start to see the world from a new extremist point of view. Extremist websites and chat-rooms provide a huge quantity of indoctrination material that is easily reachable and that can accelerate the radicalization process. In addition, because the jihadi-Salafist ideology is without doubt the most common online, it means that if an individual is searching the internet for answers, they are extremely likely to find Salafist views and to approach them. Then, after functioning as an “echo chamber” in the radicalization process, the internet covers a different role in the Jihadization phase. At this stage, the internet is firstly used as the main instrument to plan an attack, analyse the target and find the necessary material and information. Individuals then start to encourage themselves to take action, enforcing cluster conviction and strength. The fomentation of the rightness of the cause through the internet provides a complete justification for the jihad.

1.3.3 September 11, 2001 Attack

The 9/11 attack represents an important turning point in the radicalization process conception. Prior to 9/11, the idea of fighting for a global jihad was not as widespread and the radicalization process moved at a much slower rate. Even if individuals already travelled to Afghanistan or Pakistan, there was not the sure idea and aim of becoming a terrorist. The current conception of committing an attack as the culmination of a radicalization process, is something that started to belong to the common idea of jihadization after the 9/11 events. From that point, the radicalization process started to accelerate, based on the idea that the only aim and responsibility was to become a mujahedeen and accomplish an attack in the name of the global jihad. This is the reason why, analysing the steps of radicalization regarding the 11 September attack is extremely important

²¹Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Radicalization in Prison: The French Case*, “Politics, Religion and Ideology”, 14/2013

to understand all the attacks that have followed. Another important point that Silber and Bhatt highlighted is that 9/11 differs from the attacks already analysed due to its overseas origins. The terrorists responsible for the attack, unlike the ones previously cited, were not citizens or residents of the United States but actually from Hamburg.

Number of terrorists	19
Perpetrators	Al-Qaeda
Targets predicted	World Trade Center The Pentagon White House
Attack type	Aircraft hijackings Suicide attacks
Targets touched	World Trade Center The Pentagon
Deaths	Nearly 3,000

Pre-radicalization

Mainly from the Arab community in Hamburg, the members of the Hamburg cell are totally consistent with the common characteristics previously identified. All were between the ages of 16 and 30, and were primarily students from the Middle East. Usually not very religious, they were all Western-educated and accustomed to the western lifestyle, all with “unremarkable” backgrounds. Ramzi bin al-Shibh was the only individual familiar with the Quran, while all the others were mainly middle-class students integrated into Western society.

Self-indoctrination

It was possible to prove for some of them that a personal or political crisis happened and led to approaching Salafism. In some cases, there was a family loss, whereas in some others a trip to their home countries was the stressor for a radical change. As an example, Ziad Jarra, known as a “playboy” among his university friends, became devout and stopped wearing western clothes just after his father’s death. What Jarra experienced may be quite common around the Hamburg cluster. Since 1996, Al Quds Mosque served as venue and reference point for the cell, regularly sponsoring an extreme vision of Islam. The Salafi Mosque of Hamburg accelerated the radicalization process, creating a network of shared ideas, values and interpretations of the religious message.

Indoctrination

After its formation in the Mosque, having spent a lot of time sharing aims and ideals, the group concluded that Al-Quds was not the appropriate place to meet anymore. Leaving the Mosque represents the first step of the Indoctrination process. Then, the meetings took place in some member's apartment. At this point, the group became totally exclusive and secretive, guided by a "spiritual sanctioner", Mohammad H. Zammar, and an "operational leader", Mohammad Atta. The relevance of these two figures have already been analysed as fundamental motors of group-think and action. Zammar, a veteran who fought in Afghanistan and Bosnia, helped to strengthen group cohesiveness and certainty about the legitimacy of their cause. Atta focused on the group's agenda.

Jihadization

At this point, the group turned from discussing the legitimacy of jihad to planning where and how to put it into practice. The decision to fight was made, which means the acceptance of jihad was completed. Despite the original idea of traveling to Chechnya, the final training destination was Afghanistan, where the group arrived in 1999. There, they were regarded as the perfect cluster to finally implement Al-Qaeda's plot. After their recruitment, Atta started planning each phase of the September 2001 attack following bin Laden's orders. The role of the "operational leader" here was fundamental. Silber and Bhatt claim that without such an intelligent individual, radicalized in a Western country and seeking an opportunity to prove himself in Afghanistan, the 9/11 plot would never have been so successful. Nineteen hijackers were involved and succeeded in carrying out one of the most devastating attacks the Western world has experienced.

In conclusion, some observations should be made:

- The radicalization process is extremely gradual and experiencing one phase does not mean surely becoming a terrorist.
- Often extreme individuals come from "unremarkable" backgrounds.
- Many different social and personal factors can serve as triggers to approach an extreme view of Islam.
- Salafism is extremely popular in many virtual and non-virtual networks, which serve as incubators.
- The great majority of attacks are carried out by 2nd or 3rd generation immigrants in their country of residence, inspired but rarely guided by Al-Qaeda.
- 9/11 differs from the vast majority of attacks due to its overseas origins and its Al-Qaeda guided plot.

1.4 Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko

“Friction: How Conflict Radicalizes Them and Us”, 2011 (Updated version, 2016)

McCauley and Moskalenko published a first edition of “Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us”²² in 2011. In 2016, a second edition of the book called “Friction: How Conflict Radicalizes Them and Us”, has been published as an updated version of the first. References are related to the most recent version. Anyway, the work still belongs to the first research period of the thesis considering its unchanged contents. Providing an extremely interesting analysis of radicalization, McCauley and Moskalenko introduce their theory refusing some main common assumptions about terrorists. Firstly, they should not be categorized as crazy because, considering the amount of precise calculation that an attack requires, most of them must be lucid. They also reject the huge difference there is supposed to be between them and others. In reality, everyone experiences some form of radicalization. What is interesting is not why terrorists become radicalized, but why this is the form of radicalization they experience. They are not the only ones who develop radical feelings and beliefs in support of a specific cause, since radicalized opinions and strong feelings of belonging to a group are part of the human attitude. The most important question about terrorism is what pushes individuals to such violent and dangerous radicalization. According to the authors, ideology is not an answer. Wahhabism and Salafism are widely practiced religions but they do not support terrorism. The radical and fundamentalist beliefs that they preach do not include violence towards civilians and innocent populations. McCauley and Moskalenko claim that, if you want to find some legitimation for violence, every religion can be interpreted in a twisted way. Many scriptures from any religion provide some ambiguities that can be read as a justification for violence. However, this does not mean that the general ideology or religion can be considered a trigger. The human and personal interpretation of an ideology cannot be controlled. According to the authors, this breaks the link between ideology and radicalization. Starting from this basic assumption, the book focuses on three levels of radicalization, aiming to provide a complete explanation of all the phenomena that influence and constitute it. The three levels of radicalization identified are:

1. Individual Radicalization
2. Group Radicalization
3. Mass Radicalization

1.4.1 Method

McCauley and Moskalenko make use of a very interesting method in order to analyse radicalization. Their analysis starts from a People’s Will terrorist. People’s Will was one of the first terrorist groups that acted in

²²Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How conflict radicalizes them and us*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016

Russia from 1879 against the power of Czar Alexander II²³. The authors believe that starting from a group that the public perceive as extinct, it is easier to identify some main features that emotions might blur when it comes to contemporary terrorism. Having underlined these factors, they analyse an Al-Qaeda terrorist, underlining the clear continuity with the past. McCauley and Moskalenko are able to provide a study of terrorism that is independent of time and group.

1.4.2 Individual Radicalization

The first level of radicalization that McCauley and Moskalenko identify is individual, which means triggered and experienced at an individual level. For them, some main mechanisms are:

- Personal Grievance
- Group Grievance
- Slippery Slope
- Love
- Risk and Status
- Unfreezing

Personal Grievance

This first mechanism is activated by personal experience. Usually, individuals suffer something during their life that feeds a feeling of revenge. The individual starts aiming to punish those responsible for personal suffering, sometimes a particular person but, more often, a class. Even if the initial target was a single individual, the feeling of revenge can be extended to the whole class to which the individual belongs. What motivates revenge is anger. This emotion might push an individual towards violent acts that are interpreted as necessary means of justice. The Russian terrorist Andrei Zhelayabov's experience offers a clear example of this. His feeling of revenge started as a personal desire for justice against a landowner who was responsible for raping his aunt. When the local landowners protected their colleague from being accused, the feeling of anger shifted from a single person to landowners as a class. This need for revenge was what pushed Andrei towards People's Will. It is possible to identify the same need for revenge, many years later, in the case of Fadela Amara, France's secretary of state since 2007. She started experiencing the desire for revenge as a response to racism against her mother. Her personal grievance became political, and she started fighting against discrimination suffered by Muslim women. Her radical thoughts never translated into violence, but

²³Martha Crenshaw, *Terrorism in context*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, Philadelphia, 2007, pp. 63-89

bear witness to how an individual experience of suffering or humiliation can easily lead to the development of extreme ideals.

Group Grievance

Group grievance differs from personal grievance because it can be activated by another individual or group suffering, which does not directly regard the radicalized individual. This means that the radicalization process is triggered by some other's grievance. A form of altruism can be the first cause of such a mechanism, in particular, strong reciprocity. In other words, the advantages that cooperation provides are greater than for non-cooperation. Science has proved that, in nature, cooperation between individuals helps maximise benefits and reduce costs. When something is perceived as bad behaviour, helping the good people is something that humans instinctively do. The tendency to help those we believe to be good people is a form of altruism that may explain group grievance. Group identification is another important key concept. Identification can be positive, which means feeling good about others' wellness, or negative, which means enjoying others' troubles. Positive identification is part of everyone's life and can regard a sports team, friends, or an idol. Identifying with a group means developing strong sympathy and empathy, which in some cases can lead to action. Emotional commitment to a group may lead to feeling their grievance as your own and acting as a consequence of this. The first woman terrorist in history, the Russian Vera Zazulich, is an example of the group grievance mechanism. Strongly identifying with students imprisoned during the 1877 protests and against the cruelties perpetrated in jail, she started planning violence against governors. She subsequently became part of People's Will and followed her conscience in fighting governors' arrogance and injustice.

Slippery Slope

The concept of Slippery Slope is a major pillar in radicalization theories. The idea is that participation in an extreme group is a progressive process that starts with some basic assignment. People do not start being involved by killing someone, they start from non-violent actions and gradually get nearer to violence. The requests from the group gradually become more and more costly and the individual is inclined to satisfy them even when the level of violence involved increases. This is the consequence of the individual accomplishing the previous request and that he does not see anything bad in going a little further each time. If the last action the individual did for the group seemed right, why should something that is just a little different from the previous action suddenly be wrong? Slippery Slope theory considers involvement as a gradual escalation in tiny steps. The small difference between one request and the next makes involvement more spontaneous than it is usually imagined. This was what Adrian Michailov experienced. He was a good man with the aim of doing good, who became part of the Russian terrorist network. He had never developed any revolutionary

aspirations, nor was he interested in political terror. However, he was attracted by “going into the people”, a People’s Will slogan, which pushed militants to get closer to working people and peasants. Starting from this, but never willing to become involved in violence, he became involved in the movement. Each small step justified the next and, despite his requests, he was never able to leave the group. Omar Hammami, an English Christian who radicalized, experienced a similar pattern. He came into radicalization slowly. He started by getting interested in his Syrian origins, and ended up with radical ideals. Of course, this was not sudden. He went to Syria, Egypt, and then Somalia, where he met some extreme friends and their Salafi vision, and then informed people on the Internet about it. Hammami’s pattern is the clear example of a long, unforeseen and gradual progression towards a radical view of religion.

Love

Love for a partner, family or friends is one of the most common reasons for an individual to first encounter extreme ideology. Recruitment often focuses on friends and family networks because, the factors of trust and love, facilitate the progress. After persuading a person to join the group, love can push him or her to extreme acts. Sophia Perovskaya was not interested in violence at all before falling in love with Andrei Zhelyabov. As her interest for him grew, her desire to follow him in every initiative became greater than her resistance to violence. The need to protect and support loved ones can be a priority that can lead people to commit unexpected acts. Love can be not only for a partner but also for family. The phenomenon of sibling terrorism is well known in the West. Amorzi bin Nurhasyim’s need to be with his brother and have his approval were the reasons why Amorzi became radicalized. He did not believe in extreme ideologies and never suffered any grievance but his feelings of brotherhood made him proud of being a terrorist.

Risk and Status

Some people need a physical thrill in their lives and extreme groups surely offer this kind of breath-taking activities. Risking their lives and freedom, and engaging in violent and dangerous plots seems to be the perfect life choice for some. For these people, being of low rank in the group is not enough and becomes boring. Risky and thrilling actions are the only ones worth doing. These individuals are psychologically characterized by a desire for danger and political terror is a perfect occasion. Alexander Barannikov entered People’s Will in search of powerful experiences and quickly climbed the hierarchy of the organization, looking for real action. He was not searching for fame, as was Leon Mirsky who joined the movement after his girlfriend expressed her admiration for Barannikov himself. Mirsky was not like Barannikov, he was not reckless but he needed status and recognition. This pushed him to be a militant and to imitate Alexander’s violent actions. As the authors highlight, the need for status is extremely common, especially among the lower classes. Being

uneducated, or having no job or prospects limits the amount of possible losses and increases the need to impose themselves. This can clearly be a common trigger of extreme actions for those who do not have alternative patterns of fame.

Unfreezing

By unfreezing the authors mean the loss of connection and the need to escape life that leads individuals to radicalization. Some people approach an extreme group to find protection, considering the movement a sort of safe zone. In these cases, fear is what triggers involvement. Underground cells can be a place in which the individual hides and builds a new reality. More commonly, the unfreezing regards the old individual's life. Old ideals, values and relations are left and new ones are developed. After losing every connection with friends and traditions, the individual must refreeze in a new network. Losing personal constraints makes involvement in dangerous activities easier and facilitates extreme individual ideals. What Muhammad Bouyeri experienced is a clear example of this mechanism. He is known to be responsible for killing Theo van Gogh in 2004 in order to punish him for his offensive movie "Submission". Bouyeri's life is littered with disconnection periods. He spent seven years in prison separating from every relationship he had. Just after this experience, he lost his mother to cancer and failed in opening a youth centre in his own community. In addition, as a consequence of his increasing radicalised thought, he lost his job. All these events gradually increased his sense of loneliness and aggravated his rupture with his reality. As a clear consequence of this, he felt the need to build a new network and forget the past. When he met the "Hofstad Group"²⁴, he felt like he had finally found what he was searching for.

1.4.3 Group Radicalization

Radicalization is not just an individual pattern. Often, the escalation towards extreme ideals is a shared experience by a group. Goals, ideals and preferences are shared by small groups of people linked by strong interdependence. Group perception of good and bad and, therefore, of moral values is the only thing that individuals use as a benchmark. Being supported by group consensus provides a strong sense of safety and determination at the same time. There are three mechanisms that can lead groups towards radicalization:

- Group Polarization
- Group Competition
- Group Isolation

²⁴ Lorenzo Vidino, *The Hofstad Group: The new face of terrorist networks in Europe*, "Studies in conflict and terrorism", 30/2007

Group Polarization

Group polarization means that decisions taken by a group of like-minded individuals are usually more extreme than the initial individual inclinations. Therefore, discussion and sharing of ideas among a group can lead to a shift from initial and usually peaceful inclinations to extreme ones. A good example is the pattern of polarization that the Russian revolutionary group “Land and Freedom” experienced. Students started to meet in student communes or discussion groups in order to share their feeling of disappointment with the czarist regime. Experiencing the reality of a commune gives the possibility to live surrounded by political and cultural discussion, which inevitably stimulates enthusiasm. At first, they started to share their revolutionary view with peasants in order to radicalize them. When they realized that this public was not embracing their views, they focused on factory workers, who were more politically involved. Some militants were arrested in this phase, fuelling a sense of outrage in the group. As a result of this feeling, some members of “Land and Freedom” started questioning the effectiveness of their actions and came up with the idea that violence might be the only trigger for change. Disillusionment and strong commitment to the cause led some activists to form the “Freedom and Death” faction. They were willing to prove that the political system was rotten by attacking its members directly. As the authors explain “*Groups of strangers brought together to discuss issues of risk taking or political opinion consistently show two kinds of change: increased agreement about the opinion at issue and a shift in the average opinion of group members. The shift is toward increased extremism.*”²⁵ The continued sharing of opinions that, given the situation, were becoming more and more extreme, mutually encouraged members, facilitating the shift towards more radical ideas.

Group Competition

The concept of “us” is always defined in contrast with “them”. Without comparison with others, a group is never really united. Cohesion, sharing and belonging are the result of an individual recognising himself in that group more than in others. Like-minded individuals recognise they are experiencing the same threat, or are fighting for the same ideals, which makes them allies. The more powerful the threat, the more group cohesion is stimulated, because more forces are needed to achieve personal objectives. “*The increased group cohesion produced by facing a common threat is expressed in three changes in the nature of relations within the group: increased respect for group leaders, increased idealization of in-group values, and increased sanctions for deviation from in-group norms*”.²⁶ This deep group belonging leads also to an escalation of hostility against the enemy. The main reason for this is that when many people considered as family die for a cause, an

²⁵ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How conflict radicalizes them and us*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, p. 118

²⁶ *Ivi*, p. 135

individual is increasingly willing to fight to ensure that these deaths were not in vain. The individual becomes part of a larger mechanism in which fighting is not just a matter of personal honour but of loyalty towards your group. The authors identify three kinds of political competition: Group vs State, Group vs Group, Group faction vs Group faction. The first is extremely common and regards the challenge between a social movement and state power, usually as a consequence of particular changes of policies. The second is generated by the competition for the same base of sympathizers and supporters, and is common among terrorist groups. The last is an internal group split. The most common example of this is the IRA divisions, which generated different independent factions of the same original movement.

Group Isolation

Strictly related to the other mechanisms, group isolation is a relevant factor related to its power. The individual's perception of the group as the only possible reality amplifies the level of commitment to it. The more the group progresses in the conflict, the more evident is its isolation. Especially when plots start to include violence, isolation is both a consequence and a necessity. Being so deeply part of a group generates social exclusion from the rest, but in the meantime, removal is necessary to protect the group from external threats. In addition, isolation occurs when priorities start to change. Sometimes extreme groups lose track of their initial aim, focusing only on the shared burden. As an example, People's Will, started as fighters for social freedom and rights and ended up caring more about their revenge than the population's interests. The individual's morality and needs are built around those of the group and escalation toward violence got fast-tracked. In fact, *"when an individual's social world has contracted to just one group, a "band of brothers" facing a common enemy, the group consensus about issues of value acquires enormous power. The social-reality power of the group extends to moral standards that justify and even require violence."*²⁷ It has been proved that this kind of isolation exaggerates every other group mechanism leading to faster polarization and greater competition with everything perceived as a threat.

1.4.4 Mass Radicalization

Terrorist groups act in isolation but count on widespread support. The network of contacts and sympathizers that terrorists have is widely developed, which means that as well as individual or group radicalization, there is also radicalization of the mass. This must be understood in order to understand terrorism, since supporters of the cause are an important factor in the pattern towards violence.

²⁷Ivi, p. 160

Again, the authors analyse this aspect identifying three different mechanisms:

- Jujitsu Politics
- Hatred
- Martyrdom

Jujitsu Politics

Jujitsu Politics is the idea that terrorists challenge state power in order to obtain counter violence and to encourage their sympathizers to mobilize themselves. In other words, terrorists exploit the state's attempt to fight back by stirring up violent action from their supporters. Al-Qaeda has made successful use of Jujitsu politics in fighting their enemy and encouraging people to support the group's aim. As the authors clearly explain in the book *“Attack United States at home, the U.S. response will be to send troops to Muslim countries, and this “invasion” will mobilize Muslims against the United State. Muslims who did not support attacks on Muslim governments previously will soon join bin Laden and al-Zawahiri in jihad against Americans”*.²⁸ Also, succeeding in attacking the West has another advantage for groups like Al-Qaeda. They build walls between Westerners and those Muslims that tried to integrate in Western societies. The feeling of terror and the instinctive response to attacks is a form of closure that generates cultural walls and favours the terrorists' position.

Hatred

Hatred becomes the only thing that the two parties in conflict feel for each other. They depict themselves in opposition to the other and define morality and good based on this confrontation. Each group stops seeing the others as human and starts attaching to them some negative definitions to describe their bad nature. The elimination of every human characteristic from the enemy is, in first place, a way of avoiding inhibitory mechanisms that human compassion can activate. Secondly, inhuman adjectives are extremely effective in discrediting and humiliating the counterpart. Looking at the enemy as animals (“pigs”, “vermin”) or as inanimate automata, reduces their essence to one of lower forms of life whose sacrifice is not connected with morality. The building of a totally negative perception of other groups encourages hate and facilitates violence. If the enemy's bad essence is immutably rooted in their nature, there is no possibility for them to change or improve. This helps fuel hatred and removes the possible moral obstacle towards violence.

²⁸ *Ivi*, p. 180

Martyrdom

Martyrdom acquires sense in a scenario in which individuals must find a higher reason for their suffering. Believing in the existence of a blessing as a consequence of personal sacrifice is the basis of the concept of martyrdom. In Russia, in the 1860s, all revolutionaries were inspired by a book about martyrdom, “What To Be Done?”, which was written by Nikolai Chernyshevsky during his captivity and became a guide for all the activists of that time. It was a scandalous novel written by a martyr challenging the readers about martyrdom. It encouraged the public to take action, to organize themselves and be involved in political issues. It was a sort of guide for students, telling them exactly what was necessary in that historical moment. Despite its effectiveness in maximizing the number of victims, terrorists use suicide bombers for other reasons. Firstly, martyrdom has to be considered as a chain reaction. Once an individual has sacrificed himself for a common cause, others will feel even more the necessity to fight and honour their comrade’s death. Also, an organization for which people are ready to sacrifice acquires much political credibility and recognition. Nevertheless, the idea that despite a state’s power a single individual can still inflict such terrible damage gives rise to strong feelings of fear, uncertainty and anger.

1.4.5 Radicalization of Opinions VS Radicalization of Actions

As previous theories have pointed out, the gap between extreme opinions and violent actions is extremely broad. Having radical ideas does not always mean having the courage and means to actually carry out a violent attack. The authors have used two different pyramids representing the different patterns of radicalization. The first provides an idea of opinion progression towards radicalization and the second a progression from ideas to actions.

The grade of involvement in Jihadi ideology is clearly represented by a four-step pyramid.

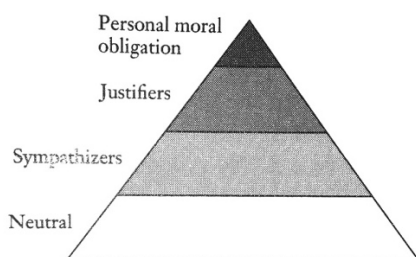


Figure 5: Opinion Radicalization Pyramid²⁹

The first level refers to people who do not embrace any Jihadi narrative and positions and are indifferent

²⁹Source: Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How conflict radicalizes them and us*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, p. 267

towards it. Sympathisers occupy the second level. They are those who share hostility against the West and its war against Islam, but do not actually consider any defence. At the third level, the authors place those people who think that Jihadists are defending Islam from infidels and, consequently, their violence is morally justified. Finally, the top of the pyramid describes those who believe that everyone has the responsibility, as good Muslims, to fight the West defending Islam. However, these are all convictions that do not transfer into practice. Even people who are at the apex of this pyramid never actually take real action.

Starting from the assumption that the vast majority of radicals do not take action, the following pyramid describes the grades at which ideas turn into practice.

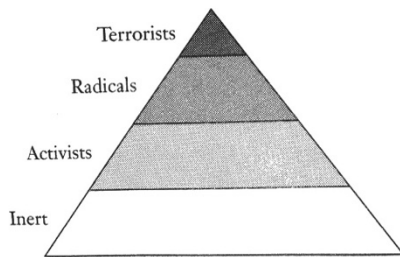


Figure 6: Action Radicalization Pyramid³⁰

The first step includes all politically inert people, who take no action. Next, activism is considered by people who embrace non-violent actions in order to practice what they preach but avoiding violence. The third level includes people who are engaged in illegal practices and violence may sometimes be included. Finally, terrorists are identified as the apex of the pyramid, intended as people who address their illegal and violent actions towards Western civilian targets. As the authors explain: “*The borders between the levels of the action pyramid represent the most important distinctions in radicalization of action: from doing nothing to doing something, and from illegal political actions to killing civilians.*”³¹

In conclusion, radicalization, according to McCauley and Moskalenko, develops simultaneously on different levels. Firstly, individual progress towards extremism consists of different subjective mechanisms. Usually, more than one mechanism coexists in the same experience. For example, an individual can experience both a personal grievance and a slippery slope process. Identifying which role each mechanism plays is fundamental to understand extreme ideals and actions, but some elasticity is required in analysing human experiences. In addition, the group reality is important in terms of consensus and polarization of ideals. Group radicalization is extremely common and leads to a rapid progression towards violence resulting from the mutual support provided inside the group entity. Both individual and group radicalization are part of the context of action

³⁰Source: *Ivi*, p. 270

³¹ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *Friction: How conflict radicalizes them and us*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, p. 270

radicalization. In other words, the apex of both patterns is violent action, planned individually or more easily in a group. Otherwise, mass radicalization is more about opinions, where the level of ideological support terrorists can count on is extremely relevant. It is unlikely that radicalized masses will ever take action, but their support is fundamental for the terrorists' cause. Mass ideologies are equally important in terrorism studies because they help complete the framework by considering not just the terrorist himself but also everyone for whom the Jihadi's fight is morally right.

1.5 Donatella della Porta

“Clandestine Political Violence”, 2013

In “Clandestine political violence” (2013), Donatella della Porta, an Italian sociologist, studied the mechanisms that play a role in the onset, development and extinction of clandestine political violence. Firstly, it is necessary to define this concept. According to della Porta, political violence must be understood as “*those repertoires of collective action that involve great physical force and cause damage to an adversary to achieve political aims*”³². From this assumption, she identified two variables on the basis of which she formulated a fourfold typology. She differentiated between four types of political violence, proportional to its intensity and organizational form: “(1) *unspecialized violence – low level, less organized violence*, (2) *semi-military violence – violence that is also low-level but more organized*, (3) *autonomous violence – violence used by loosely organized groups that emphasize a spontaneous recourse to high-level violence*, (4) *clandestine violence – the extreme violence of groups that organize underground for the explicit purpose of engaging in the most radical forms of collective action.*”³³ The book especially focuses on this last group category, which is often considered in connection with terrorism. In these terms, she based her work on a four case-oriented comparison:

- 1) Left-wing organizations in Italy and Germany (1970s-1980s)
- 2) Right-wing organizations in Italy (1970s-1980s)
- 3) Basque ethno-nationalism (1970s-1980s)
- 4) Al-Qaeda

Starting from the comparison between these different violent groups, della Porta underlines some major differences between the first three and Al-Qaeda. Islamic fundamentalism has distinctive characteristics unlike other forms of political violence. Firstly, the religious basis usually generates more lethal and indiscriminate

³² Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 6

³³ *Ivi*, p. 7

forms of terrorism to destroy the enemy. Religious ideas give space to sadism, paranoia and hatred against Western populations. Moreover, the possibility of using new technologies to spread the cause provides this kind of terrorism with a strong networked structure, which increases the rapidity of recruitment. On this basis, della Porta develops her work around the main evolution mechanisms of clandestine political violence, which are clearly summarised in the following table.

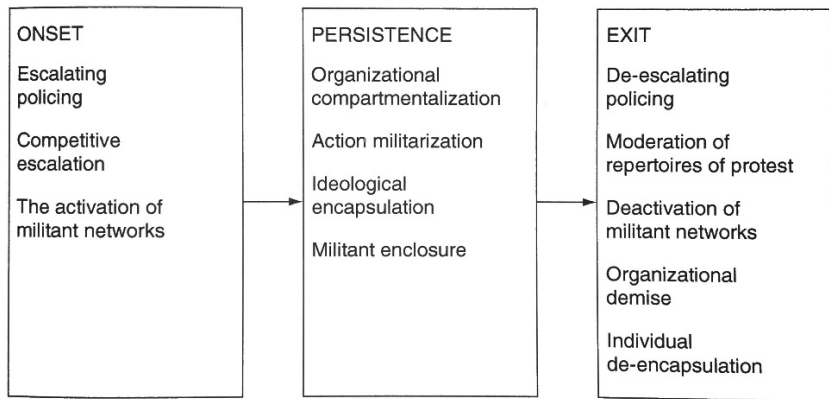


Figure 7: Mechanism in the evolution of clandestine political violence³⁴

In describing all mechanisms, della Porta considered different levels of analysis. Mechanisms are simultaneously influenced by the general context in which groups evolve (macro level), by organizational structure and dynamics (meso level), and by individual and interpersonal interactions (micro level).

1.5.1 Onset Mechanisms

Escalating Policing

To explain how violent action develops and escalates, della Porta takes into account social movement conflicts. Usually, violence explodes as a response to state behaviour or repression that society perceives as unjust. Analysing social movements in the 1980s, violence was fuelled by a general perception of policing as unjust and indiscriminate, which led to strong mistrust of the state. In this environment, social movements had the political opportunity to gain support and fight the state. In this situation, violence and counter violence created a vicious circle that fuelled the conflict. To understand the escalation of 1970s and 1980s movements towards violence, the national political context is the most important variable. Otherwise, in the case of Islamic fundamentalism, more international contexts and phenomena must be taken into account. Following the same reasoning, Islamic terrorism must be interpreted as a response to violent repression against Muslims in different local conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa as well as to undeniable social and political exclusion experienced by Muslims in Western countries. A clear example is provided by Al-Qaeda's choice to target the United States. In the early 1990s, the United States attacked Iraq and established their military

³⁴ Source: Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 25

presence in Saudi Arabia, expelling Osama bin-Laden from the territory and relocating him in Sudan. In 1996, bin-Laden was again expelled under United States' pressure and relocated in Afghanistan. Ongoing conflicts in Iran, Kuwait, Egypt and South Arabia caused the perfect conditions for political violence to explode. The United States was targeted as responsible for Muslim repression and violence in the Middle East, and this put them in the crosshairs of terrorist organizations. The attacks of September 11th should be considered a response to United States military intervention in what Al-Qaeda considered their homeland. At the same time, the United States' reaction was what Al-Qaeda wanted in order to invigorate its message of a violent West. The United States' counter-violence activated a vicious circle that led to the escalation of political violence.

Competitive Escalation

Militants who took part in clandestine political violence were usually already used to radicalized forms of action, which developed during competitive interactions with political adversaries or adversaries in the movement family. Della Porta provides a clear example of the Italian social movement in the 1970s: *"In Italy, in the 1970s, competition between traditional unions and new, emerging rank-and-file ones led to escalating industrial conflicts at some factories. For example, a former militant remembers that before entering an underground organization he had already burned the cars of some bosses of the big Pirelli factory where he worked."*³⁵ Competitive escalation is important because, after bringing someone to violence, it leads to continuous escalation of its forms. The cycle of violence functions on the basis of competition with the adversary and on overcoming his strategies. The immediate consequence of competition with other violent actors is rapid innovation of forms of violence and increase of destructiveness. The competition happens both with other movements and with authorities. An effective example, related to Islamic fundamentalism, is Saudi Arabian competitive escalation. Saudi Arabia is important both for the large number of attacks in the country, and the number of Saudis who joined Al-Qaeda. The organization must be located in the region among a large social movement family. Generally promoting non-violent forms of Islam, movements such as the World Muslim League, Sahwa and JSM covered the territory, and were the first level of competition Al-Qaeda faced. The competition cycle involving Saudi Arabia started in the 1980s when thousands of Saudis fought next to other Muslims in Middle East conflicts. As previously highlighted, in a climate of bloody conflicts, in which Muslims were killing other Muslims, radical global jihad developed. In the years that followed, the government's repression of moderate Islamic opposition together with the return of Saudi fighters from war, helped politicize the violent competition and built the basis for the rise of radical Islam. In the 1990s, the United States' military occupation of Saudi Arabian territories led to a huge increase in the number of Saudi suicide bombers fighting against the Western adversary. Moreover, the Al-Qaeda branch in Saudi Arabia was

³⁵ Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 70

strengthened by the 9/11 attacks and by the United States' response that followed. Again, as part of the competition cycle, each part must answer violence by increasing the level of counter-violence with constant escalation.

The activation of militant networks

Starting from the assumption that an individual's motivation for embracing political violence is extremely varied, della Porta focuses on the activation of militant networks that sustain high-risk activism. The reasons why an individual becomes involved in terrorist activities may be related to a large number of factors; social exclusion, loyalty to the leader, group solidarity and discrimination are just examples. Considering this diversity of backgrounds and motivations, the author decided to focus on the ways in which the context and the organizational structure influence all types of individuals; in other words, how militant networks lead different individuals into clandestinity. Della Porta provides an important explanation regarding Islamic fundamentalism. Friendship and kinship play a fundamental role in involvement, independent from personal background and motivations. The great majority of suicide bombers are led into Al-Qaeda by friends or family members. The existence of informal networks based on trust, makes involvement much easier and more spontaneous. After taking part in some lessons, initiatives or joining the Mosque with some friends, the individual does not perceive the amount of risk that the organization embodies. The legitimacy of these practices makes involvement in clandestinity gradual and allows the individual to shift to violence together with a close network of people. According to della Porta, this is what explains the approach to high-risk militant networks in most cases.

1.5.2 Persistence Mechanisms

Organizational Compartmentalization

During their existence, extreme organizations can experience both repression from the state and a low level of support. Violent intervention from the state can generate deaths among an organization's ranks and an increase in violence intensity. The excessive appeal to violence can lead the organization to a loss of sympathizers and support. This translates into what della Porta defines as organizational compartmentalization, which means increased isolation of the group. When cornered by repression, it starts opting for more secretive, compartmentalized and isolated structures. The external environment represents a risk for the group's existence and this automatically leads to an increased level of clandestinity. In the case of Al-Qaeda, it is possible to witness this kind of structural evolution. Born as a strongly hierarchical organization, Al-Qaeda needed to change into a simpler and more secretive network as a result of repression. During the first period of its existence, the organization was a localized and centralized hub controlled by its leaders. Then, especially

after 9/11, the structural organization needed to change. Al-Qaeda opted for a deterritorialized networked system based on the operations of semi-autonomous cells. The organizational slide into clandestinity responded to its necessity to survive in an environment that was undermining its existence.

Action Militarization

The more isolated groups become, the more their possibilities of gaining support through low-intensity violence or propaganda decrease. The strategic response of clandestine groups is to increase violence intensity over time through action militarization. Usually, social groups start with propaganda and end up, as a result of isolation and repression, with assassinations or kidnappings, used to obtain political changes. In the case of Al-Qaeda, it is possible to identify this evolution both in the form of action and in the number of incidents. As della Porta pointed out “Initially, AQ concentrated on the training and funding of Muslim resistance jihads in Chechnya, Kashmir, Indonesia, Georgia; Azerbaijan, Yemen, Algeria and Egypt. In 1993, however, the bomb at the World Trade Center killed 6 and injured more than 1,000 passersby. Two years later, a car bomb at the offices of Saudis National Group in Riyadh killed 7 people. [...] The second phase, characterized by the construction of a jihadi front, led, in 1998, to attacks by suicide bombers on US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, which killed 224 people. [...] On September 11, 2001, in the most lethal of the attacks attributed to the group, nineteen al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial aircrafts, resulting in a total death toll of 3,000.”³⁶ This description clearly depicts the escalation in action militarization by Al-Qaeda. The differentiation in the form of Al-Qaeda’s attacks’ and their evolution per year are represented in the two following images.

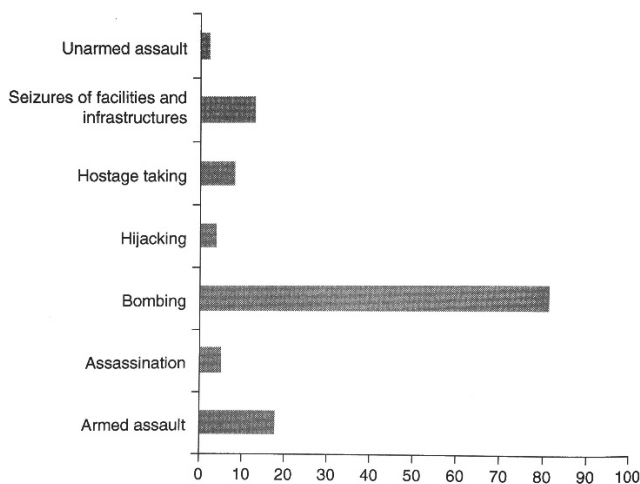


Figure 8: Al-Qaeda attacks per form of action³⁷

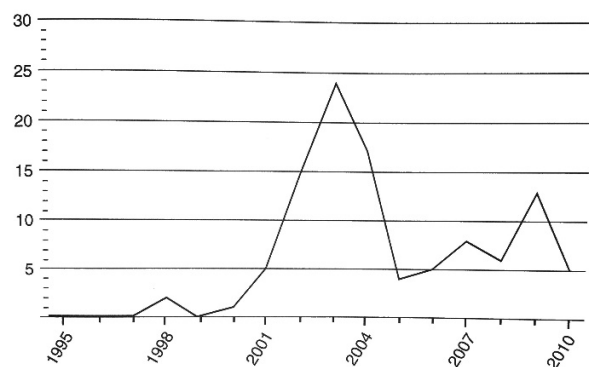


Figure 9: The number of Al-Qaeda incidents per year³⁸

³⁶ Ivi, p. 199

³⁷ Source: Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p.198

³⁸ Source: Ivi, p. 199

Ideological Encapsulation

Organizations must also develop their narrative in a parallel and coherent way with the previously analysed evolution. The definition of the organization's aims, values and enemies must evolve simultaneously with the organization's actions in order to appear credible and ideologically legitimized. Extreme organization ideology is a binary vision. The world is divided into good and bad, into us and our enemy. This leads to the widespread idea of militants as fighters of a holy cause against the enemy's bad nature, in which death and sacrifice must be interpreted as a sort of rebirth for the individual. In her analysis, della Porta underlines the evolution of extreme groups' macro-narratives and values as instruments to legitimize their violent actions. In these terms, it is extremely interesting to analyse some Al-Qaeda statements that demonstrate the evolution of the narrative over time. In 1998, Osama bin Laden declared "*Allah ordered us in this religion to purify Muslim land of all non-believers, and especially the Arabian Peninsula.*"³⁹ In 2002, he claimed "*By electing these leaders, American people have given their consent to the incarceration of the Palestinian people, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the slaughter of the children in Iraq.*"⁴⁰ Even if the target clearly remained the United States, the narrative that functions as a legitimizer changed from US occupation in the Arabian Peninsula to the Palestinian situation. Some years later, in 2007, a new modification can be identified in al-Zawahiri's statement: "*the near-term plan consists of targeting Crusader-Jewish interests, as everyone who attacks the Muslim Ummah must pay the price, in our country and theirs, in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Somalia, and everywhere we are able to strike their interests.*"⁴¹

Militant Enclosure

The involvement of the individual in militant networks has been explained through a broader network of friends and relatives, but maintaining commitment and remaining in the organization is another matter. Della Porta describes continued membership of an organization as supported by the building of a specific cognitive system, a sort of militant enclosure. This is the result of two different variables: affective focusing, which means the reduction of social relations of the small clandestine group, and cognitive enclosure, which means the parallel closure of communication channels. These two variables are analysed by the author as the main reasons why the individual maintains his or her commitment to the organization over time. Affective focusing consists in increased focus on the organization's cause, which also increases the ties between militants. Of course, the higher the level of risk in the organization, the more rapid this process will be. Being part of a secretive and dangerous action, together with sharing a strong political aim, leads individuals to feel part of a

³⁹ G. O'Boyle, *Theories of Justification and Political Violence*, "Terrorism and Political Violence", 14/2002, p. 40

⁴⁰ Christopher Blanchard, *Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology*, CRS Report for Congress, Washington DC, 2007, p. 5

⁴¹ *Ivi*, pp. 13-14

community fighting for the same cause. This brings militants to increase their political commitment as well as their binary vision of the world. As Islamic militants often affirm, the trigger for their participation was identification with collective suffering. Muslims around the world are undergoing torture and violence, and the militant's duty, as part of the same community, is to fight against the category perceived as responsible for the suffering. This feeling of belonging intensifies commitment and ties inside the group. Cognitive enclosure develops together with affective focusing. During this process, connections with external reality are eliminated in the name of the only valid perception of the world, which is the one spread within the group. Alternative or unconventional visions are seen as a threat and do not interest the individual anymore. Priorities meet only the organization's interpretation of reality and external ones are not considered as an option. This process is usually gradual and slow, but when it happens it makes disengagement extremely difficult.

1.5.3 Exit Mechanisms

Even if the level of commitment makes abandoning these organizations difficult, della Porta underlines the fact that the escalation process can actually reach a conclusion. This can happen both through the group's exit from clandestinity or through the exit of a single member. Again, there are some main mechanisms through which engagement is reversed.

De-escalating policing

As has been demonstrated, sometimes a state's escalating policing and repression fuels the radicalization process and clandestinity. For this reason, sometimes de-escalating policing can prove effective in terms of reversing engagement. In the majority of cases, coming out from cover means being killed or being sent to jail, options which do not encourage the individual to give up on the group. Offering alternative options and conversion opportunities can push some individuals to leave organizations and collaborate. A project of this kind was launched in 2002 in Yemen with the institution of Yemen's Committee for Dialogue.⁴² As of June 2005, having the possibility to collaborate and to dialogue, around 364 prisoners have participated in the program, renouncing their extreme beliefs. Moreover, even some suspected Al-Qaeda leaders became open to dialogue regarding their violent political ideals.

Moderation of repertoires of protest

Sometimes, groups realise that violence and extreme repertoires have an extremely negative impact on mobilization. Because the existence of a group strongly depends on people's support, when social movements

⁴² Michael Taarnby, *Yemen's Committee for Dialogue: Can Jihadists Return to Society?*, "Terrorism Monitor", 3/2005

realise that they are losing it, they become open to reducing extreme repertoire and moderate their narrative. However, della Porta points out the fact that, in the long-term, moderation is synonymous with failure for the groups since it shows their inability to find sympathizers, in turn undermining the legitimacy of their cause and facilitating de-radicalization. When people realise that the group was unable to pursue its aim, involvement loses its credibility and justification.

Organizational demise or disbandment

As a result of some particular happening, an organization, can disband, split or expel some members. In the majority of cases, an internal disagreement leads to the abandonment of a single member of group from the organization or to a split in the organization itself. Generally, some organizational changes are the cause of the disagreement, and the group is then considered far from the original model or policy. In the case of ideological or religious groups, the excessive use of violence, or the wrong choice of target can sometimes push some members to disapprove the new policy and abandon the group. When the original project is compromised, the integrity of the group is threatened, especially when involvement was based on common ideals and values.

Individual de-encapsulation

Starting from the assumption that an individual's possibility to abandon the group is proportional to his level of involvement, the duration of underground experience can vary. As for engagement, also disengagement is strictly connected to interpersonal relations and their effect on the individual. When the three main spheres of the individual's life, family, professional and political, start to conflict, defection is more likely to happen. When the individual's reality does not match in a unique sphere of confrontation, it is more probable that some relational circles will push the individual to abandon their extreme vision, taking over the role that radical friends cover in his or her life. However, this pattern is not easy. Firstly, if a strong feeling of loyalty was linking the individual with the extreme group, it is very dishonourable to abandon it. Moreover, sometimes leaving the group means collaborating with police forces and probably sending someone you used to consider your brother to prison. Psychologically, this can be hard to accept. In addition, accepting the modification of old beliefs and habits is a painful change in an individual's life. However, it is evident that the effort and difficulty of leaving is proportionate to the level of previous commitment.

In conclusion, della Porta's analysis aims to identify causal mechanisms that generate political violence rather than rooted causes. She points out that the radicalization process does not depend only on pre-existing conditions, but also on mechanisms developed in action. Evolution during the radicalization process is not

always the product of a strategy, but sometimes also a result of combined and unpredicted dynamics. This leads to the conclusion that “*The choice of clandestinity evolved gradually and during long processes; it was only in part premeditated, and not irreversible.*”⁴³ As specified in the introduction, mechanisms do not depend on a unique dimension of society but involve context, and organizational and individual level. The study of these factors allows the author to provide us with a clear analysis of the different dimensions in the evolution of clandestine political violence.

⁴³ Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 292

Chapter Two

(2014-2018)

2.1 John Horgan

“The psychology of terrorism”, 2014

It must be clarified that Horgan’s research dates back to many years before this publication. In first place, with a first version of “The psychology of terrorism”, in 2002, then updated by a new one in 2014. Moreover, among the great number of works related to terrorism, it is necessary to name “Terrorism studies”, published in 2012 and “Walking away from terrorism”, published in 2009. These are just useful examples to clarify the fact that Horgan’s contribution about terrorism is not recent at all. Anyway, in relation with this research, his last work is extremely fitting and therefore developed in detail in the following analysis. John Horgan published the “The psychology of terrorism”⁴⁴ in 2014 with the objective of understanding how much psychology is involved in the pattern that leads an individual to become a terrorist. In particular, the author studied the practices and characteristics of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the militant organization that operated against British rule in Ireland in the early 1990s.⁴⁵ Previous research was extremely limited and heterogeneous and it was difficult for the author to identify a single theory about the topic, especially the radicalization pattern. Rather than proposing his own theory, Horgan analysed previous research in order to find the main key points to describe the psychology of terrorism. Horgan focuses on the analysis of the psychological evolution that an individual might experience during the different stages of radicalization. As other authors have done before, he identifies the main phases he considers constituents of the process. The IED model includes three phases:

- Involvement
- Engagement
- Disengagement

Unlike some of his predecessors, he considers disengagement a relevant part of the individual radicalization process, especially from a psychological point of view. He analyses not only the individual terrorist and the social or ideological context he experiences, but also studies the consequences and psychological effects that involvement in a terrorist organization has on the individual.

⁴⁴John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, Routledge, London, 2014

⁴⁵Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*, Macmillan, London, 2003, pp. 3-28

2.1.1 The IRA

The Irish Republican Army was an Irish paramilitary group, created in 1916, with the aim of fighting British rule in Northern Ireland and for Irish Independence. There was disagreement among some components of the Army over the treaty that was supposed to end the war, which caused subsequent division in the movement. The Original IRA split in 1969, resulting in the creation of the Provisional IRA⁴⁶, which has been recognised as one of the most organized terrorist groups of the century. Its structure, organization and strategy of attack are important subjects of study for sociologists of terrorism. The PIRA group's target was British rule and its aims were specific. As stated in the PIRA Constitution, it wanted:

1. To guard and honour and uphold the sovereignty and unity of the Republic of Ireland.
2. To support the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic based on the 1916 Proclamation.
3. To support the establishment of, and uphold, a lawful government in sole and absolute control of the Republic.

The PIRA's terrorist strategy included bombings, beatings, shooting attacks, high-profile assassinations and kidnappings.⁴⁷ Despite limited number membership, the PIRA could count on a large network at different levels of society. Its structure was very complex, hierarchically organized and internally divided into many different departments and commands. The IRA's evolution and history is extremely complex and for John Horgan is still highly relevant in understanding terrorism.

2.1.2 Physical or Psychological warfare?

It is important to analyse the nature of terrorism. Because it implies violence, it could be considered a form of physical warfare. Its violent actions carried out to achieve social or political change, makes many people think that there is actually a sort of war between people. Choosing a target, strategically planning an attack and killing hundreds of people, are all characteristics of a physical clash. However, terrorism cannot be considered as war in these terms because if terrorists engaged in a real symmetrical war, they would simply be destroyed. They do not have any particular abilities or significant military or economic resources compared with Western countries. They are also small in number and therefore need to carry out a type of warfare that plays on terror and strategic situations. In addition, while war is based on some honour and equity rules, terrorism does not respect these rules and carries out whatever it takes to destabilise Western society. If civilians are untouchable in war, terrorists use them as incidental victims of their own fight. Here is the first fundamental conclusion

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*

⁴⁷ John Horgan, Max Taylor, *The Provisional Irish Republican Army: Command and functional structure*, "Terrorism and Political Violence", 9/1997

about terrorism: it is based on psychological warfare. Since a terrorist organization could never defeat an entire country economically and physically, they need to create strategic theatres in which to spread terror and uncertainty. This is what makes terrorists strong; they build their power on a permanent sense of anxiety, terror and dread transmitted to the population. This is what distinguishes terrorism from any different kind of conflict; it has a strong psychological nature that allows it to acquire strength. Alex Schmid, researcher at the International Centre of Counter-Terrorism, provides a very clear definition of terrorism referring to the IRA's attacks: "*Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi) clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby the direct target of violence are not the main target. The immediate human targets of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative targets) from a target population, and serve as message generators. Threat –and violence- based communication processes between terrorist, victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target, turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought*".⁴⁸ Quoting this definition, Horgan identifies terrorism as a form of psychological terror based on controlling society using randomly exercised violence.

2.1.3 The psychology of terrorists

Before analysing the main characteristics of each phase identified by the author, the terrorist must be understood. As many other authors have already proved, the common tendency to consider them simply as psychopaths is completely wrong. In fact, even though their willingness to cause suffering and death is a common point, there are many characteristics that prove the contrary. In particular, Horgan highlights some main psychopathy features that do not match those of terrorists. Firstly, carrying out an attack requires remaining focused, adrenaline control and strong discipline. On the contrary, a psychopath is dominated by emotions and adrenaline while committing a violent act. In addition, in this case, the victim is usually someone carefully chosen by the killer. Terrorists do not choose their target according to emotional preferences, but only strategically to maximise the result. Moreover, terrorists do not share the satisfaction that a psychopath usually experiences while killing their victim. For terrorists, the target is a way of proving something and fighting for a cause, but usually with no special reason for killing one person in particular. This fact, together with the considerable evidence that terrorist biographies provide, means that there is no traceable link between mental infirmity and terrorism. From a psychological point of view, there is a difference between a terrorist and a non-terrorist, but it is not easy to identify. Horgan attached importance to three main characterizations that might explain a terrorist.

⁴⁸ Alex P. Schmid, *The response problem as a definition problem*, "Terrorism and Political violence", 4/1992

1. “The frustration-aggression hypothesis”

In this case, terrorism is understood as a consequence of strong social and personal dissatisfaction which triggers a desire for revenge. Horgan argues that, even if frustration can generate aggressiveness towards society, it does not explain why relatively few individuals embrace terrorism. The number of people who experience a period of personal dissatisfaction and loneliness is much higher than the number of people who become terrorists. In conclusion, there must be some other suitable reason.

2. “Narcissism and narcissism-aggression”

According to this hypothesis, violent action is triggered by a narcissistic disappointment, which pushes the individual to defend himself from what he interprets as an injury. In other words, the individual observes the world blinded by narcissism, which leads to a distorted interpretation of facts and to the use of violence as a sort of defence from a personal attack.

3. “Psychodynamic accounts”

This hypothesis underlines the fact that human actions are often pushed by unconscious and unresolved internal conflicts. Psychodynamic theories are extremely relevant to explain the psychological aspect of terrorism. Some violent acts apparently triggered by a feeling of anger towards society, might be the reflection of some personal conflict the person has experienced in the past. Some people experience a feeling of revenge against authorities because they are unconsciously fighting someone perceived as authoritarian belonging to their past. Others might join extreme movements following the desire to create their own identity. The strong values and ideas proposed by the movement are extremely attractive for an individual who is searching for guidelines. It also offers the possibility to belong to a group, which is a focal point if an individual is searching for identification.

Even if, in many cases, these are good guidelines to analyse a terrorist personality, no one has ever been able to come up with a single formula. If it is a fact that terrorists are different from non-terrorists, there is no specific characteristic that can help distinguish the two categories. Research has explained why some people become terrorists, but has not identified the personality characteristics common to all terrorists. From a psychological point of view, it is undeniable that terrorists can be identified as normal people.

2.1.4 The IED Model

Involvement

Previous theories and models came up with many possible triggers that might push individuals to adopt extreme ideologies. From a socio-political point of view, it is not hard to imagine how lack of democracy and

inequality could generate a sense of exclusion. As authors such as Moghaddam, Silber and Bhatt have maintained, this sense of alienation and frustration might be a trigger of involvement. However, Horgan wants to analyse whether it is possible to identify a single psychological pathway to terrorism. He believes that individuals must be evaluated according to the fact that they are totally different from each other. Even if it would be easier to choose a pattern and imagine it as common among terrorists, this is not possible according to Horgan. Not everyone has experienced some tragic or unjust event, and not every terrorist was pushed by ideology. The reasons are so varied, that it would be reductive to justify adherence to radical movements with a limited range of triggers. For example, the common idea of individuals experiencing victimization and embracing terrorism can be proven wrong. As Horgan himself proved, taking *“46 Pakistani militants from the Swat Valley, over 90 percent of the sample cite the role of US drone strikes as part of their narrative for becoming involved. Upon closer inspection, however, not a single person in the sample has actually experienced direct victimization, or has a family member or friend who has actually been affected by drone attack”*⁴⁹. This shows that what can sometimes be interpreted as a possible trigger can be just the most logical factor, but not the real one. In addition, it demonstrates that sometimes what the individual himself presents as a trigger is just something acquired after embracing the movement, which proves that even interviewing terrorists may not give any clue about the psychological reasons for radicalization. This is why, according to Horgan, it can be difficult to understand what is a personal ideology and what is acquired from the movement itself. Given that understanding personal predisposition to extremism is extremely complicated and hard to generalize, Horgan underlines the allure of the movement. Whatever reason causes the individual to become interested in the movement, it is undoubtable that it has some attractiveness. The way in which the movement presents itself helps the individual to legitimize and justify their involvement and aim to become part of a new community. No matter whether the desire to belong derives from ideology, personal loneliness or exclusion, the movement represents a fascinating reality. One important aspect that helps build allure is the possibility of progression inside the terrorist group. The diversified range of roles that an individual might cover provides the opportunity to progress inside the movement. What attracts the individual towards higher positions is psychological satisfaction and a sense of achievement. In conclusion, Horgan maintains that because involvement is a complex pattern, research cannot give a simple answer. It is reductive to think that some common trigger might affect individuals in predictable ways and lead them towards extreme affiliation. Nevertheless, at the end of his analysis, he does identify some general features that might positively influence engagement : *“an increased sense of empowerment; purpose and self-importance; an increased sense of control, which appears to reflect the common effect of ideological control and auto-propaganda; the use of particular involvement steps, mirroring the point made about distinctions between degrees of involvement; a*

⁴⁹John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, Routledge, London, 2014, p. 88

tangible sense of acceptance within a group; and, in combination with this, the acquisition of a real status within the broader community, often expressed via identification with the broader community."⁵⁰

Engagement

Involvement in a terrorist organization does not always mean carrying out a violent act. The line between involvement and engagement is exactly this, the implementation or not of an attack. Usually, to pass from involvement to engagement, it is necessary to find an organization that helps in carrying out the attack. In fact, even if a single individual could accomplish a violent action, the strength and resources provided by the organization are an extremely important contribution. It is possible to identify four different phases of this process:

1. Decision and search activity;
2. "Pre-terrorist" activity;
3. Event execution;
4. Post-event activity and strategic analysis.

Decision and search activity:

An attack must be well organized and never left to chance. The strategy behind this is extremely detailed and requires a lot of research. Firstly, the target must represent the group's goals and the message that they want to transmit. Horgan highlights that the main factors influencing the selection of the target are: "political context" and "organizational pressure", which means the internal needs of the organization, usually economic. In addition, to ensure goals are reached, long-term objectives must be coherent with an organization's resources and the dynamics of the situational context. There are many constraints that terrorists must take into account before developing a good strategy, for example security forces, who might be an important risk factor. Having verified the proportionality between aims and possibilities and having found the target, the preparation of the attack can begin.

"Pre-terrorist" activity:

Here the group moves to the logistical part of the planning. This phase is fundamental in order to ensure that the goal fixed in the previous stage will be reached. Having identified the target and evaluated the risks, the group needs to select the personnel. It may be a single individual, or more probably a team, considered capable of committing the planned attack. Usually, different tasks are assigned to each component of the group to

⁵⁰Ivi, p. 100

allow them to specialize in that single function. Having defined personnel and duties, the training phase begins. Horgan provides a clear example of the training of IRA members. They trained in North Africa and Lebanon with some Palestinian organizations, and in turn, supplied training to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)⁵¹. This is a clear example of the significant training network an organization may offer to its militants. In addition, especially for the design and manufacture of attack devices, the Internet plays its role. Starting from simple devices and ending with complex bombs, the Internet provides members with the technical information they need. If necessary, the group tests the devices realized in order to assure good functioning during the real attack. Having verified that the group is strategically and technically ready, the pre-terrorist phase is completed.

Event execution:

The execution of the attack is obviously a very sensitive phase. The group need to assemble material and eventually deposit it in a place that is strategic for personnel, while avoiding controls and detection. For simple attacks, such as shootings, this is quite easy to accomplish. However, when the material consists of a 225-kilogram bomb, as in the IRA's 1998 Omagh attack, the transportation is much more complex and requires a long-term setting-up phase. The communication between members must be perfectly coordinated and cannot be traceable. For safe transportation of the material, surveillance needs to cover every area to avoid police checkpoints and controls. Having reached the selected destination, the personnel are ready to complete the attack. Here, situational context, emotional stability in controlling adrenaline, and group solidity are fundamental. Sometimes one member is less convinced than others. The group role is to make sure that everyone remains focused on his task and that nothing will prevent a member from accomplishing his mission. If everything works as planned, the attack takes place.

Post-event activity and strategic analysis:

If the attack has been planned successfully, the terrorists will use available escape routes to get away. Of course, this is not the case in a suicide attack. However, in those plots in which the terrorist is not supposed to die, the last step is to escape successfully, sometimes on foot, or by vehicle and to have access to a safe area. In this step, the weapons need to be hidden or destroyed to eliminate all evidence that might connect the group to the attack. This includes not just the possible weapon, but also any vehicle, cell phone or other material used in the event.

⁵¹Ivi, p. 112

Psychological aspects of engagement:

From a psychological point of view, the engagement phase is much more complex to explain. According to Horgan, a relevant factor that makes the individual move the plan forward is obedience to an authority. It has been proven that human beings are capable of extreme behaviour in cases in which a superior imposes that they do it. In other words, the task of obeying an authority is perceived as more important and reduces the severity of the action itself. In addition, it should be remembered that it is not always easy to withdraw from terrorist activities. Usually organizations provide a manual about being part of the group, what must be done and what is forbidden. This creates psychological guidelines and instils a strong sense of obedience and belonging. As quoted by Horgan, the IRA's Green Book had a strong motivating force based upon "*strong convictions, convictions of justification. It is these strong convictions which bonds the Army into one force before any potential volunteer decides to join the Army he must have these strong convictions. Convictions which are strong enough to give him confidence to kill someone without hesitation and without regret.*"⁵²

Psychologically, what is fundamental at this point, is to overcome any inhibitory mechanism. Dehumanization and target categorization are processes that help individuals to concentrate on the organization's ideological goal, sidestepping human inhibitions. Thinking of the enemy as a target to be destroyed helps eliminate any possible sympathy or empathy that might not legitimize the attack. Exaggerating differences between the in-group and the out-group allows the terrorist to forget any similarity or compassion towards the target. Also the right use of language is important. Talking about "target" instead of "people" is fundamental in the dehumanization process. Having destroyed every possible connection with the enemy, terrorists apply a neutralization process, which consists in learning justifications and denials in order to avoid guilt and perceive their behaviour as rational. In order to reduce negative feeling, they deny their action, condemning the victim as guilty and they justify their behaviour as a need in terms of group loyalty and rightness. However, whenever beliefs and convictions are not rooted enough inside the individual, hesitation is more than a possibility. As the words of Abdul Samat, a 13-year-old Pakistan boy prove, individuals may not be able to handle the amount of distress psychologically: "*When I opened my eyes, I saw it was a very black thing they wanted me to do. I began to cry and shout. People came out of their houses and asked what was wrong. I showed them I had something in my vest. Then they were scared too and called the police who took the bombs off me*"⁵³. This case, which is not uncommon, proves that often, people are not able to overcome inhibitory mechanisms. When beliefs, ideology and convictions are not rooted enough, and the dehumanization process is not internalized, the amount of psychological stress may not allow justification of extreme actions.

⁵²Ivi, p. 121

⁵³Ivi, p. 123

Disengagement

The final step of the IED process is disengagement, which means how and why individuals abandon terrorism and terrorist organizations. It is necessary to highlight the difference between disengagement and de-radicalization. Disengagement means to stop being involved in a terrorist organization, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes due to the extinction of the organization or to incarceration. This clearly means that disengagement does not always mean that ideology and beliefs have changed. A person can be disengaged but not de-radicalized. The opposite is likely to happen. In many cases, an individual experiences de-radicalization, but is not able to give up on the organization for reasons of force majeure. Having underlined this distinction, it is possible to identify two different kinds of disengagement: physical and psychological. The occasions in which it is appropriate to talk about physical disengagement are clearly pointed out by Horgan as follows:

- *Apprehension by the security services, perhaps with subsequent imprisonment;*
- *Forced movement into another role as a result of disobeying orders;*
- *An increase in “other role activity” whereby commitment to the original role becomes displaced;*
- *Being ejected from the movement;*
- *A change in personal priorities;*
- *Being targeted for killing.* ⁵⁴

In these cases, the individual has no lack of beliefs, and he is not losing interest in the organization. Except in the case in which personal priorities are the ones changing, disengagement is involuntary and does not always mean to abandon the organization.

In cases of psychological disengagement, the circumstances are completely different. The individual starts doubting his own beliefs and does not feel that being engaged in a terrorist organization is right. The individual's perception may change at any stage of the radicalization process and this process is not uncommon. There are many triggers for this change of belief. In many cases, disillusion about false expectations is a reason for the individual to stop believing in the legitimacy of the movement. The costs in terms of time and effort may no longer be proportional to the benefits. In addition, it can happen that the individual does not find his priorities met by the movement, and he starts searching for something else in his life that fulfils this lack of satisfaction. It is not always easy to leave this kind of organization in which involvement is at very high levels, and even in cases in which giving up is possible, restarting a new life may not be easy. Some ex-terrorists decide to cooperate with justice; they contact the intelligence community and

⁵⁴Ivi, p. 140

provide information or evidence about their criminal organization. Many others, unfortunately, just turn to other criminal activities, which is easier because they are usually well connected to criminal networks. Others do not succeed in finding a new pattern of life and end up falling into isolation, depression or addiction problems. Some are able to rebuild their own life, finding employment and building new relationships far from the old criminal network. It should be underlined that extreme organizations are not flexible realities, and sometimes leaving them is more dangerous than remaining involved, which is why, often, de-radicalization does not match with disengagement. Moreover, even in the cases in which voluntary disengagement happens, it is not always easy to rebuild a personal social sphere, since being part of these organizations usually presupposes the destruction of it.

In conclusion, even if research about the psychological aspects of terrorism is still in its early days, some main features have been identified. Terrorists have some psychological differences from non-terrorists, although it is not simple to list all of them. The human mind can be extremely complex and analysing what is behind a life choice is not always easy. That broader conditions do have a role is a fact, but the perception that leads some people to embrace extreme ideologies is not simple. The terrorist organization's appeal to some individuals leads to engagement and to committing violent attacks. However, the reasons why people are ready to kill in the name of some organization are extremely varied and in many cases are the combined result of an organization's ability to attract those people and an individual's need to belong. With this book, John Horgan has laid the foundations of research that has many dark corners and shortcomings by providing an accurate analysis of the IED process.

2.2 Marc Sageman

“Misunderstanding terrorism”, 2016

Marc Sageman, forensic psychiatrist and government counterterrorist consultant, has published some of the best-known works about terrorism and jihadism. His previous bestsellers “Understanding Terror Networks” (2004) and “Leaderless Jihad” (2008) have described his point of view. In his last book, “Misunderstanding Terrorism” (2016), he completes his theories analysing the nature of the global jihad. What he wants to prove is that the conception of terrorism as linked to a centralized organization as it was Al-Qaeda must be considered extinct. In order to understand Sageman's view, the differences between the so-called *Formal Al-Qaeda* and the *Global Salafi Jihad* must be analysed. Sageman denies great influence by *Formal Al-Qaeda* in the West, underlining the fact that most Western radicalization has been bottom-up and not top-down recruitment. He clarifies that the scope of Al-Qaeda as an organization in the West is quite limited compared with the number of autonomous jihads. In other words, the problem in the West is not top-down recruitment by Al-Qaeda itself,

but independent radicalization carried out bottom-up by a “bunch of guys”.⁵⁵ With this expression, Sageman wants to represent a normal group of people, who meet together and, for some reasons, become radicalized. Through mutual self-recruitment, the group experience radicalization without any need for indoctrination by Al-Qaeda militants. As Sageman wrote: “*they became a ‘bunch of guys,’ resenting society at large, which excluded them, developing a common religious collective identity, and egging themselves on to greater extremism.*”⁵⁶ This process, according to the author, is behind the majority of the attacks carried out in the West. What is perceived as recruitment is often an individual searching for Al-Qaeda.⁵⁷ Of course, in some cases, Al-Qaeda is involved, but this cannot be considered the rule.

Starting from these assumptions, in his last book, he focused on the nature of Global Jihad, based on a detailed survey he carried out. The criteria he considered are:

- Time → post 9/11 decade
- Space → in the West
- Attack → belonging to the global neojihadi trend, including the ones connected to Al-Qaeda
- Typology → violent attack, both successfully carried out or just serious planned plots
- Reasons → political; mental disorder is not a variable in this survey
- Not included attacks → whose accomplishment has been favoured by the government (sting operations)

According to these criteria, he found 66 attacks or plots carried out in Western countries, 220 victims and an average of 3.3 terrorists per attack. The number of attacks realized by Al-Qaeda or other criminal organizations compared with the number of loner or independent attacks was significant. The total number of autonomously organized attacks was 42, compared with 16 Al-Qaeda attacks, and 8 by other organizations. This first data confirms Sageman’s theory of bottom-up radicalization in the West. Observing the survey and the trend of attack characteristics, Sageman found a pattern in global jihadism development:

1. It is possible to identify three peaks in the number of attacks in the West. The first corresponds with the year that followed the 9/11 events. The second was between 2004 and 2006, years in the middle of the war in Iraq and the last increase was in 2009, a year of increased fighting in Afghanistan.
2. The “Al-Qaeda factor”, which means the level of involvement of Al-Qaeda in an attack, considerably decreased after 2001, maintaining a stable level for the rest of the decade. Looking at the survey, the number of attacks controlled by the organization is no more than 2 per year. The number of Al-Qaeda

⁵⁵Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2008

⁵⁶Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004, p. 6

⁵⁷Simon Cottee, *Jihadism as a subcultural response to social strain: Extending Marc Sageman’s “Bunch of guys” thesis*, “Terrorism and Political Violence”, 23/2011

terrorists more than halved in the years after 2001. This proves that the vast majority of attacks are committed by homegrown terrorists that have no link with terrorist organizations.

3. There is no particular geographical target that is more exposed than others. The place chosen for attacks is extremely variable; sometimes it is the homeland of a group and sometimes a foreign country.

From the survey, it is undeniable that what makes the number of attacks in the West so high is the presence of loners or independent groups involved in an autonomous jihad. After 2001, it is possible to witness a shift from top-down Al-Qaeda plots to bottom-up radicalization. According to Sageman, this means that it is necessary to reassess the idea of terrorist threat in a more domestic dimension. Overstatement of the phenomenon is one of the main reasons why governments are not efficiently dealing with it. The nature and structure of terrorism is changing and it is wrong to think that Al-Qaeda is the only leader of this wave. Given the assumption that the protagonists of terrorism are a “bunch of guys”, it is necessary to identify the reasons why individuals autonomously decide to embrace political violence against others.

2.2.1 Alarmism vs Probability theory

Sageman cites the United States in order to show how alarmism has affected the perception people have of terrorism and the repercussions that this has on society and counterterrorism strategy itself.

Government’s attempts to calculate the probability of exposure to terrorism have become more serious in the last decade. The “base rate” of terrorism, which means the probability of someone becoming a terrorist, is calculated in proportion to the population. The calculations predict three new terrorists per 100 million Westerners each year. Despite the low numbers, a sense of anxiety and fear has spread among the Western population fuelled by national governments. The rush to prevent terrorism, without serious analysis, has generated a loss in democratic terms without any positive effect. The need to screen the population and avoid any form of possible radicalization has translated into some limitations of freedom that, not being correctly addressed, have meant more loss than gain.

The attempt to identify such a small percentage of terrorists in a population is almost impossible, or at least, involves a high margin of error. When this margin concerns innocent people, it is unacceptable in a liberal democracy. Accusing 99 innocents in order to find one guilty person has enormous repercussions on democracy. According to Sageman, a symbol of this phenomenon is the US No Fly or Selectee Lists. Originally created to identify “*known threats for civil aviation*”⁵⁸, they have often been updated according to the increased range of the threat. Today, this list includes all individuals who are “*engaged in terrorism and/or terrorist activities, including an individual who has been charged, arrested, indicted, or convicted for a crime related to terrorism*”⁵⁹. Even though this might seem reasonable, the definitions of terrorism and terrorist

⁵⁸Marc Sageman, *Misunderstanding Terrorism*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2008, p. 64

⁵⁹ *Ivi*, p. 65

activities are extremely vague and risk involving a huge spectrum of people. Because support means everything related to communication, transportation, or hosting anyone connected with terrorism, it is surprisingly easy to be suspected. Given that the suspicion of the Intelligence services is enough to include a person in the list, it is not at all uncommon to be wrongly accused. In 2013, 47,000 people were listed according to ten indicators. They are identified by Sageman as: “(1) attendance at a terrorist training camp, (2) attendance at a facility teaching a violent extremist ideology, (3) frequent contacts with the preachers of hate, (4) travel for known legitimate purpose to an area of terrorist activities, (5) training as a terrorist, (6) expression of desire to become a martyr, (7) indication of intent to participate in planning or conducting an attack (internet), (8) planning an attack, (9) contacts with terrorist facilitator, and (10) association with terrorists and accumulation of weapons.”⁶⁰ Comparing these criteria with his survey, Sageman has proved that just four of them should be considered real indicators of terrorism risk. For example, among all the attacks carried out in the US, none had an ideological factor as trigger. None of the terrorists had ever attended violent or extremist teaching, which contradicts the second criterion. The first factors that Sageman has found to be valid are attending camps and training, which signals at least a strong desire to acquire dangerous practical skills. Having the intention to realize an attack and planning it are also extremely significant indicators. An individual who manifests a strong urge to organize violent action, and who, in some cases, is even planning it, is extremely likely to go all the way. Except for these highlighted criteria, Sageman claims that the remaining six are not recurrent enough to be accepted as absolutes. The risk is that wrong evaluation of the phenomenon leads to false analysis of possible perpetrators. With such a vast and vague interpretation of terrorism and terrorists, combined with excessive alarmism, there is a great risk that racism, social exclusion and government persecution push individuals to desire revenge, which they would not have developed in different circumstances. In other words, an innocent Muslim who, despite his good behaviour, is wrongly listed might develop a sense of resentment towards the state, which may later function as a trigger of violence.

2.2.2 Insider and outsider’s misunderstanding of radicalization

Defining radicalization is extremely difficult. As a first step, the author underlines the difference between “cognitive radicalization” and “violent behaviour”. As many studies have highlighted, there is a huge difference between developing violent ideas and actually carrying them out. This means that, even if a large number of individuals may experience extreme thoughts during their life, the number that will actually put them into practice is quite limited. Marc Sageman focuses on radicalization as a pattern that ends up in violent actions. At this point, it is usually considered effective to look at radicalization both from the insider’s and outsider’s point of view. Sageman claims that both views, even if extremely helpful, are not totally reliable and objective.

⁶⁰Ivi, p. 75

Outsider's explanation of radicalization

The public tends to ignore contextual factors and to think of terrorists as a single category of people not belonging to any group. The attempt to create a “terrorist personality” in order to stereotype terrorists leads outsiders to a completely wrong interpretation. It has been proven many times that psychological disorder or innate sense of criminality are not valid explanations. Instead, peer influence has sometimes been an important factor in radicalization. For Sageman, this is a valid explanation but, because it is not always present, it must be considered more as evidence than as a generalization. A feeling of “self-glorification” is also a common hypothesis. However, egoism and narcissism are extremely frowned upon by the extreme group and a violent act does not aim to promote the image of the single attacker. Another popular opinion among scholars is the theory of “cognitive opening”. Considering a tragic event or shock as a trigger for violent behaviour may be acceptable, but cannot be a rule. It is easy to find a tragic event in a person’s life but it is not always a good reason to interpret it as a trigger for radically changed beliefs. Ideology may be a stimulus towards violent behaviours, but it is not clear why, since many people are exposed to extreme ideology but just a small number adopt it. Even if having extreme ideas can play a role in perpetrating violent actions, this does not explain how and why this ideology is able to push some people to suicide or murder while the vast majority do not get involved. Here the theory of vulnerable, ignorant and controlled personalities takes over. While history has shown many cases in which a mass of ignorant people are controlled by an extreme leader, terrorism is not coherent with this idea. In fact, there is no evidence in any evaluated attack that perpetrators were devoid of free will. It is evident that the outsider’s perception of terrorism as a phenomenon led by some emarginated and crazy people is incorrect. The attempt to describe a single terrorist stereotype is impossible and does not consider the relevance of contextual factors. Interpreting radicalization as a process totally inside the individual only provides a small part of the explanation.

Insider's explanation of radicalization

Insiders try to justify their violent act. The two most popular objects of blame are grievances and circumstances. In the first case, terrorists provide the need to bring a particular grievance to the attention of the public as motivation for a violent act. This theory is contradicted because the only effect that violent attacks produce in society is fear and indignation. No one seems interested in the possible grievance that functioned as trigger of the behaviour. Moreover, the same grievance is experienced by a multitude of people but few of them turn to violence. Another popular tendency among insiders is to blame circumstances, which means blaming others for their behaviour. In other words, Western society gives no alternatives but violence to those people. They blame the out-group for their violent action, underlining that it was the only possible response to the outsiders’ behaviour. This point is quite limited and subjective, but is an important observation.

According to Sageman, individual interpretation is more relevant than circumstances. Because external factors play a role in radicalization it is important to understand which interpretation leads to violent actions.

2.2.3 Sageman's model of political violence factors

Both the outsider's and insider's visions are limiting. While outsiders focus on violence as an internal predisposition of the individual, the insider's view only blames external conditions without considering personal triggers. Sageman insists that terrorism is a complex fusion of both individual dynamics and external and contextual factors that must be taken into account. Starting from this assumption the author studies people in context. For Sageman, the first important concept that must be understood is categorization. The categorization of self and others is a fundamental step towards radicalization. Self-categorization consists in the individual's feeling part of a group. Individuals categorise themselves as "anarchists", "liberators", and in many other ways. The feeling of being a fundamental link in a more complex chain transforms the individual into an interchangeable part of a group. In the opposite case, categorizing the out-group means depersonalizing and dehumanizing them. As the individual becomes part of the group, enemies are no longer perceived as people but as targets. The process of categorization implies that the out-group must be perceived as totally disengaged from any form of morality. This process ensures that the individual no longer acts as such but as part of a group whose aim is to fight a dehumanized target. For Sageman, the self-categorization that individuals experience has a political shape. Individuals build a new politicized identity, categorizing themselves as part of a social protest against the out-group. In this way, people start to feel part of a political community fighting for a common cause. Sometimes, the next step of this categorization is to interpret themselves as martyrs or soldiers that have to struggle in the name of the political cause. The building of a martial social identity may lead some people to turn to violence. The idea of sacrifice becomes reasonable in terms of reaching a group's political aim. Starting from this precondition, Sageman depicts three coexistent conditions necessary for turning to political violence:

1. Escalation of conflict;
2. Disillusionment with nonviolent tactics;
3. Moral outrage at state aggression.

Escalation of conflict

The starting point is always a peaceful conflict between a revolutionary in-group and an out-group, which is often the state. The context is that of two sides involved in a political conflict. What first triggers violence is that the perception of the conflict changes. Usually, the in-group is not well thought of by the state, which perceives it as a threat to stability and democracy. Due to this perception, the state's approach towards the

group changes from acceptance to repression of their protest. Consequently, the in-group intensifies the protest in response to the changed attitude of the state. Thus, the conflict starts to escalate, provoking the extremist part of each group. The immediate consequence of state repression is that extreme individuals of the in-group come forward to represent the political aim of the group. This shift from a peaceful and cooperative protest to a belligerent and hostile one, builds the basis for violence. The escalation is both physical and rhetorical. Physical pressure and punishments start to be applied against dissidents, and violent discourses and speeches are used to stimulate conflict. In this context, the Internet is an extremely important instrument for extremists to provide a polarised vision of reality. The concept of in-group versus out-group is fundamental to get people to join the political cause and to spread violent messages. However, until this point, the only violence exercised is verbal, which has been proven to be very far from actual physical violence. Many people can join a movement that shares a political aim, even if violent, but only few are ready to implement a violent act.

Disillusionment with nonviolent tactics

The level of involvement in the group is an important factor for participation in the protest. An individual can have low-level or moderate involvement, or be a fundamental part of the group and feel it as the only possible reality. Understanding how much individuals are actually involved is fundamental in order to know who will carry out the fight no matter how adverse the circumstances. There are two possibilities for a peaceful protest, success or decline. When the decline starts, usually the majority of individuals give up the cause, considering that their involvement was just partial. However, some of them, the category of people willing to sacrifice everything for that political cause, resolve to continue their fight. Sageman suggests that those who are disappointed by the results of peaceful protest turn to violence as the last possibility to reach their aim. They will join the extremist political reaction in order to see their cause finally accomplished and, considering that they have already sacrificed a lot, are prepared to continue.

Moral outrage at state aggression

Even if disillusionment may justify violence for some, it is very rarely the only trigger. Usually, a more specific episode generates the group's desire for revenge. The killing of a member of the group, for example, has enormous emotional repercussions on the group agenda. Each member who dies fighting for the common cause is considered a martyr or a hero and deserves justice. At this point, moral outrage pushes the group towards violence and the desire for revenge is mixed with a tendency to want to emulate the hero's action. The aggression suffered by one member is perceived as aggression against the group, their ideas and identity. This feeling is likely to lead the group to a first act of violence. After this step, violence becomes part of the group practice. From being an isolated episode, it becomes part of the repertoire of action the group uses in

order to affirm its political view. Of course, the number of people that belong to the group at this stage are few compared to the initial number. The extreme component of a political community is usually excluded from its moderate part, who want to cooperate and negotiate with the out-group. Individuals who have developed a martial identity are willing to sacrifice for their cause, perceiving it as necessary.

In conclusion, Sageman claims that terrorism is the result of the radicalization of a “bunch of guys” who are located in a political context that does not match their priorities. The pattern of moving towards violence, experienced by a group of friends or acquaintances, is due to the perception that the group develops about the surrounding context. The informal cluster created on the street lacks top-down control and bases its stability on personal bonds between individuals. According to Sageman, the process is bottom-up radicalization, resulting from a synergy between individuals and contextual reasons. The exaggeration of government’s role in this is important and can lead to a heightening of political and social tension. This, in turn, can spark a process of self-categorization as a martyr that justifies the use of violence against an out-group.

2.3 Alessandro Orsini

“The radicalization of terrorists by vocation”, 2017

Alessandro Orsini published the article “La radicalization des terroristes de vocation”⁶¹ in 2016, depicting a very clear framework of radicalization for one specific category of terrorists, “terrorists by vocation”, who decide to sacrifice themselves in a spiritual mission. These kinds of individuals can be distinguished from other terrorists by their particular mental universe. They read the world with a binary mind-set, seeing themselves as purifying individuals against others. The world is interpreted as a net division between good and bad. It is possible to identify five main concepts that constitute the terrorist by vocation mind-set:

- Radical catastrophism
- Waiting for the end
- Obsession for purity
- Identification of evil
- Obsession for purification

Following these main points, it is possible to trace the main narrative of the jihadi ideology. Orsini clearly describes it as the following mental flow: “*the world has fallen into an abyss of suffering and unhappiness (radical catastrophism) and is going towards a huge catastrophe (waiting for the end) for which a category of human beings is responsible (identification of evil), who must be exterminated (obsession for purification)*”

⁶¹Alessandro Orsini, *La radicalisation des terroristes des vocations*, “Commentaire”, 4/2016, pp. 783-790

*by a group of pristine men (obsession for purity).*⁶² Considering this as the common stream of thinking for terrorists by vocation, it is possible to understand how they usually perceive the surrounding world. Given that the main base of radicalization is identified in these kinds of ideals, it is necessary to understand how an individual comes to accept such an ideology. In order to provide a clear analysis of the radicalization process, Orsini identifies four main steps, which constitute the DRIA model.

D→ Disintegration of social identity

R→ Reconstruction of social identity through a radical ideology

I→ Integration with a revolutionary group

A→ Alienation from the surrounding world

Before analysing each phase, it is necessary to specify that the model only refers to the terrorist by vocation category and not to all radicalization experiences.

2.3.1 Method

In order to provide deep analysis of the radicalization process and to validate his model, Orsini considered twenty-one biographies of terrorists by vocation who were responsible for attacks in the United States and in Europe between 2004 and 2016. Comparing their lives and experiences it was possible to identify some common steps that prove the validity of the DRIA model. The four phases are, in fact, identifiable in all the 21 biographies. The terrorists examined are: Mohammed Bouyeri (killing of Theo Van Gogh, 2004); Mohammad Sidique Khan, Hasib Hussain, Germaine Lindsay, Shehzad Tanweer (London, 2005); Muriel Degauque (Iraq, 2005); Nidal Malik Hassan (Fort Hood, Texas, 2009); Arid Uka (Frankfurt airport, 2011); Mohammed Merah (Toulouse, 2012); Tamerlan et Dzhokhar Tsarnaev (Boston, 2013); Michael Adebolajo (killing of Lee Rigby, 2013); Martin Couture-Rouleau (killing of Patrice Vincent, Québec, 2014); Michael Bibeau (killing of Nathan Cirillo, Ottawa, 2014); Saïd et Chérif Kouachi (Charlie Hebdo, 2015); Amedy Coulibaly (Paris, 2015); Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez (Chattanooga, 2015); Omar Mateen (Orlando, Florida, 2016); Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel (Nice, 2016); Adel Kermiche (killing of Jacques Hamel, Normandy, 2016).

2.3.2 Social marginality and marginalisation

The distinction between social marginality and social marginalisation is very important in terms of understanding the original social situation of the individual. While many scholars support the idea that a situation of social marginalisation can trigger the radicalization process, Orsini points out the relevance of

⁶² *Ivi*, p. 784

social marginality is a condition that is independent from economic status. Social marginalization is to be understood as an objective condition linked to a state of poverty. Living without money, house or food is a condition of social marginalization, which is objective and not dependent at all on the psychological dimension. On the contrary, social marginality is independent from wealth or poverty and linked to a socio-psychological dimension. It can be experienced by anyone and lead to a feeling of disorientation and depression. The incapacity to give meaning to existence functions as a trigger for a psychological opening towards other world views, sometimes extreme ones. The distinction between these conditions is fundamental in order to highlight the link between psychological marginality and radicalization and deny the one between radicalization and poverty. In fact, according to Orsini, there is no connection between poverty and terrorism. On the contrary, as shown in his study “Poverty, Ideology and Terrorism: The STAM Bond”⁶³, the majority of people who join terrorism actually belong to the middle or high class.

2.3.3 DRIA Model

Disintegration of social identity

The first phase analysed is the disintegration of the individual’s social identity. This process is usually triggered by one or more traumatizing experiences that strongly influence the individual’s perception of the world. The permanent feeling of discomfort triggers an individual need to find an escape, which can sometimes stimulate a more open mind. Searching for new visions of the world, the individual experiences what is known as a “cognitive opening”. Past tragic experiences trigger the individual’s mind to open towards new interpretations of the world and create the possibility for extreme ideology to settle in his new mental framework. The need to feel good and find answers to a senseless life, leads people to consider the possibility of a radical change. New values and interpretations are ready to replace the old ones associated with suffering. The concept of jihadi ideology as a sort of imposition or brainwashing is completely wrong. Individuals search for answers independently and find them in extreme ideologies.

Reconstruction of social identity

Individuals who are experiencing existential crises enter this second phase in search of a new reality to trust. The destroyed social identity belongs to the past and a new one must be built. The reconstruction phase consists in an existential conversion towards a new system of values and beliefs. It must be interpreted as a sort of new birth of the individual, who starts to build a new identity on the basis of a different perception of the world. The objective of individuals entering this phase is to return a sense of meaning to their empty lives. Jihadi ideology is just one of the many different conceptions of the world in which lost people may find answers.

⁶³Alessandro Orsini, *Poverty, Ideology and Terrorism; The STAM Bond*, “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism”, 35/2012

Integration with a revolutionary group

At this stage, individuals have built their new social identity. As all human beings instinctively do, they start searching for people to share their vision. Embracing extreme ideologies pushes the individual to want to share with like-minded others, and this can happen in two different ways. The first possibility is to meet physically groups of people who understand and share the same view of the world. Being part of a physical group of similar individuals gives the possibility of confrontation and of feeling part of a new reality. However, work, geographical distance, family and many other circumstances can make physical encounters difficult. In this case, the role of an imagined and virtual community is fundamental. Orsini provides an extremely appropriate example of this concept, describing an adolescent who is a die-hard U2 fan, but who unfortunately lives in a very small mountain village. Of course, in this situation, meeting someone who shares the same passion could be difficult and, probably, they will never physical meet a member of the U2 fan club. However, wearing the band's t-shirt and being informed about them is enough to feel part of a community of fans. Of course, the community is virtual and imagined, but it is enough for the person to feel part of it. The same reasoning can be applied to jihadi supporters. In many cases, being part of a virtual community, it is sufficient to act as an active member of it.

Alienation from the surrounding world

Once the individual enters the new community, especially in the case of an extreme one, distance must be kept from others. A member of a jihadi group starts to interrupt any external frequentation. This step is extremely important because, according to Orsini, it removes the negative feedback from the individual's life. In other words, while society and people who are not part of the extreme group might try to stop an individual committing a violent act by giving negative feedback, members of the same group will always encourage it. In the case of jihadi group members, sacrifice is fuelled, and contacts with Westerners are interrupted following a feeling of moral superiority and disapproval.

2.3.4 The case of Michael Bibeau

Michael Bibeau was responsible for the killing of the soldier Nathan Cirillo during the National War Memorial ceremony in Ottawa in October 2014. He was killed by security agents the same day, after breaking into the national parliament. Michael's biography is one example of the practical experience of the four-phase model. He was born in Quebec but had Libyan origins from his father. Michael's difficult period probably started in 1999, when his mother filed for divorce. This destroyed Michael's family life and signalled the start of a rebellious life. He was involved in different criminal operations until he was arrested for a more serious one. He remained in prison for just 9 months but, after his release, he insistently tried to return to jail on different

occasions. Feeling lonely and lost in the world, even prison seemed a better option than living his life. At this stage, Michael was an individual who experienced a series of traumatizing events that destroyed his social identity, and even the identity of a prisoner became attractive to him. Searching for a reference point in his existential crisis, Michael entered the second phase of the DRIA model. He found jihadi ideology, which gave new sense to his life. Conversion seemed the best option in order to establish a new social identity and finally escape discomfort. As with many other terrorists analysed by Orsini, conversion is a fundamental turning point in their lives. Having accepted jihadi ideology, Michael was now ready to enter a community in which this new vision of the world was shared. His experience is the perfect example of individuals who feel part of an imagined community. He met the jihadi community on the Internet and started feeling like its soldier. He strongly felt part of it, even if not physically. The proof of this feeling of belonging was his attempt to join the Islamic State in Syria, which failed after authorities withdrew his passport. However, Michael felt his belonging was real even if the community was not physically surrounding him. As his mother and friends reported, after his conversion Michael refused to have any contact with them, considering them impure. He even chose to sleep in a homeless shelter rather than remain in his mother's house. He totally broke every link with his past and withdrew into a state of absolute loneliness. As his own mother reported in a letter written to the Postmedia News: *"My son did not want to have much to do with me or my husband. When he left for Vancouver 5 years ago, we had no contact till this year when he wrote a short e-mail to say he was well and he was only writing because his religion dictated to him to be good to his parents, it was his duty."*⁶⁴ In the same letter, trying to explain his son's experience she said *"If I try to understand the motivations of my son, I believe his passport was refused and that pushed him into action. He felt cornered, unable to stay in the life he was in, unable to move on to the next one he wanted to go to. He was mad and felt trapped so the only way out was death. I believe he wanted death but wanted it not at his own hand because that would be wrong according to Islam."*⁶⁵

2.3.5 Some fundamental conclusions

- The DRIA model only refers to the category of terrorists by vocation, and not to all of them;
- It denies the link between mental illness and terrorism, specifying that radicalization can be explained through specific phases;
- It highlights the relevance of ideology in the radicalization process;
- It does not imply a cause-effect relation between phases, individuals can experience one without necessarily becoming terrorists;
- It denies the link between poverty and terrorism, underlining the difference between social marginality and marginalization.

⁶⁴ Postmedia News, *Ottawa shooting by Michael Zehaf-Bibeau was 'last desperate act' of a mentally ill person*, "National Post", October 25, 2014

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*

2.4 Lawrence Kuznar

“The stability of the Islamic State (IS) narrative: Implications for the future”, 2014

Lawrence Kuznar’s last analysis of terrorism focuses on narrative. In 2017, Kuznar provided an accurate study of the different types of narrative used by the Islamic State during recruitment, and how they understand and explain events and how terrorism communicates according to historical periods and geographical areas. Recruiting a Westerner, an Asian or a Syrian requires different approaches and core topics. Alex Schmid, a well-known terrorism scholar, in his paper “Challenging the Narrative of Islamic State”⁶⁶, identifies as main narrative the responsibility for every Muslim to fight together against infidels in order to re-establish a pure and unadulterated caliphate. This is actually the most popular claim spread by the Islamic State but, looking closer, there are some variations of themes. Before looking at the findings of Kuznar’s study, it is necessary to clarify his idea about the progression towards terrorism in order to be able to compare him with previous scholars.

2.4.1 Risk Sensitivity and Prospect Theory

In his article “Risk Sensitivity and Terrorism”⁶⁷, Kuznar explains his own idea about radicalization. He starts from neglecting the assumption according to which terrorism has a strict correlation with poverty. Kuznar highlights a general link between social status and decision-making rather than a correlation between these two. For him, there is a connection between people whose social status is not satisfying them and involvement in a terrorist organization. He identifies two groups of people: *“those who face a loss of status or position due to ongoing changes in society and those who have an opportunity to gain a major advance in status or position. Both groups are more likely or more willing to take risks such as joining dissident terrorists.”*⁶⁸ Kuznar focuses on those people who experience circumstances in which their desire to progress encourages them to accept a higher level of risk. Given that terrorists’ backgrounds are not homogeneous, poverty cannot be considered a valid reason for radicalization. There are some other circumstances that poor people share with the middle or higher classes. Risk sensitivity is defined by Kuznar as *“a measure of an individual’s attraction or aversion to risk when an individual has some sense of the probability distribution of outcomes that confer satisfaction, or utility, upon the individual.”*⁶⁹ In these terms, he tried to identify which situations push the individual to shift from risk aversion to risk proclivity. According to him, people who are close to a social change, which can be a loss or a gain, are more willing to take a risk to avoid it or to ascend.

⁶⁶Alex P. Schmid, “Challenging the Narrative of the “Islamic State”, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, 2015

⁶⁷Lawrence Kuznar, James Lutz, *Risk Sensitivity and Terrorism*, “Political Studies”, 55/2007, pp. 341-361

⁶⁸ *Ivi*, p. 341

⁶⁹ *Ivi*, p. 343

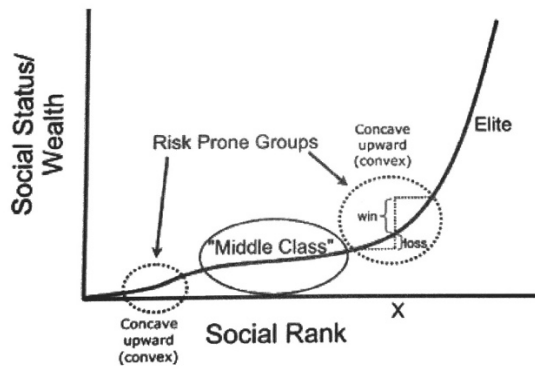


Figure 10: Typical Distribution of Social Status in Complex Societies⁷⁰

The graph shows that groups who are more risk prone are those nearer to a change in social rank. People that firmly belong to a class, tend to be risk averse. Those belonging to the Middle Class and Elite, who are not experiencing any possible change in their status, tend to avoid risk in order to keep their situation stable. Groups that are experiencing change and an unstable social situation, are more willing to accept a level of risk in order to progress in the curve. The proclivity to risk can be better explained by prospect theory, which means the study of decision-making in high-risk situations. Framing is a fundamental factor in these terms. The context in which the individual moves is fundamental for his perception of risk and his proclivity to it. Framing is usually combined with general loss aversion. Starting from the assumption that individuals are usually more hurt by a loss than satisfied by a gain, the dimension of the possible loss may positively or negatively influence an individual's proclivity to risk. In situations in which the gain is perceived as more relevant than the loss, high-risk decisions are more likely to be taken.

Kuznar points out that individuals who experience isolation and social instability, independently from their effective wealth, can shift from being risk averse to risk prone. Framing can influence an individual towards a precise decision that involves higher risk, such as terrorism. In circumstances in which group context make gains seem higher than losses, an individual can be ready to take a risk. Having briefly summarized Kuznar's main analysis of radicalization, it is now possible to analyse the main topic of his most recent article: The Islamic State narrative.

2.4.2 Islamic State Narrative

It is clear that Islamic State's capacity to recruit people by attracting their attention is one of their main strengths. The role of a successful narrative must be recognized as important in gaining support. The narrative has changed with time and space. Important historical happenings and different geographical areas have

⁷⁰Source: Lawrence Kuznar, James Lutz, *Risk Sensitivity and Terrorism*, "Political Studies", 55/2007, p. 343

affected the choice of some themes over others. The success of IS recruitment completely depends on their capacity to select the right theme and build the right story about the IS mission. In his article, Kuznar identifies the main themes that form the IS narrative and how they have evolved during time. As Casebeer and Russell highlight in “Storytelling and terrorism”, narratives play a fundamental role in the life of a terrorist organization. *“During genesis/gestation, stories (1) provide incentives for recruitment, particularly by providing justice frames which serve to mobilize discontent, (2) help justify the need for an organization to the community in which it will be embedded, and to first-round stakeholders, (3) reinforce pre-existing identities friendly to the nascent organization, (4) create necessary identities where none exist, (5) set the stage for further growth of the organization, (6) solidify founding members into leadership roles, and (7) define the possible space of actions as the organization blossoms. During growth, narratives do all this and also (1) reinforce role-specific obligations so as to ensure group members continue to accomplish their functions, (2) provide “fire walls” against attempts to discredit foundational myths, (3) articulate ideological niches for the organization, and (4) make salient to organization members the environmental conditions conducive to organizational growth.”*⁷¹

2.4.3 Core Narrative

As Kuznar clearly summarises *“IS ideologues utilize highly emotional language to invite recruits to join a special community that is apart from all others and is on a divine mission to set the world right; furthermore this mission can be accomplished only through violence and only the IS worldview is tolerable; all others, including and especially other Muslims’ must be oppressed.”*⁷² This is the core narrative of Islamic State, which remains stable over time and space. The main idea is to emotionally involve people to join a high risk movement on the basis of a just cause. However, recruitment is a very complex phase and the core narrative is not sufficient to build support. Four main theme areas have been identified as the most frequent in involvement phase:

- Emotional
- Religious
- Enemy
- Political

⁷¹William D. Casebeer, James A. Russell, *Storytelling and Terrorism: Towards a Comprehensive ‘Counter Narrative Strategy’*, *Strategic Insights*, Center for Contemporary Conflict, 4/2005

⁷²Lawrence Kuznar, *The stability of the Islamic State (IS) narrative: implications for the future*, *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 10/2017

Generally, some of these topics are more popular than others. Emotional themes and rhetorical devices are commonly used. As Kuznar reports, they are 60% to 90% more popular than religious topics, which are the second most common themes. Religious aspects are fundamental but usually not the first device used for recruitment. Next, the enemy narrative is used. Although 50% less than other themes, it is still important to identify targets to the recruiter. Not as common as the others, political themes are the most complex. When the audience changes, the core narrative does too and this means that these themes are always interchanged. “*Western foreign fighters were primarily motivated by emotional appeal, a search for identity, and religious justification. Arab foreign fighters were more motivated by thrill seeking, the desire for social status, and a sense of duty as a Muslim. Fighters from Iraq and Syria, however, were motivated more by emotive themes such as sense of injustice and a desire for revenge rather than religious themes.*”⁷³

Religious Narrative

The religious theme has remained stable, according to Kuznar’s study. The vast majority of religious topics are based on the idea of establishing a caliphate as an opposition to evil through the use of violence. This concept is known as *Qitaal* and its use during the recruitment phase did not change between 2001 and 2014. Together with the core point of *Qitaal*, Kuznar identifies some other religious topics whose use is recurrent: “*Judgment Day, duty to God and the caliph, apostates, God-destined action and victories, methodology for being a Muslim, and the oneness of God.*”⁷⁴ Rhetorical devices used by religious extremism are also quite stable. The accusation of authorities to support the rightness of their cause and its supernatural dimension, the importance of sacrifice, the sacred role of violence, intolerance against the enemy, are all rhetorical strategies spread for recruitment.

Political Narrative

Political narrative is one of the less popular in the IS recruitment narrative. Its utilization rate has not changed significantly over time. What affects political narrative in terms of change is especially the place. Recruitment in Syria or Egypt must focus on different core narratives from those used in the West. Among the more common political topics used by IS is political grievance connected with Muslim victims in Syria and Iraq.⁷⁵ Especially in those geographical areas, war victims are used as main subjects to justify engagement. The portrait of innocent Muslim civilians that suffer the war reality is important in terms of recruitment and justification. In fact, this kind of narrative legitimized the organization ideals and acts. Otherwise, in the West,

⁷³ Ivi, p. 44

⁷⁴ Ivi, p. 45

⁷⁵ Daniel Cunningham, Sean F. Everton, Robert Schroeder, *Social Media and the ISIS Narrative*, Institutional Archive of the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, 2014

discrimination and experienced racism are usually more effective topics to justify political fight against authorities. Muslims' lives are always affected by racism in Western countries, which do not allow enough space to their religious beliefs and traditions. Exclusion from the labour market or society in general are usually successful topics to trigger political resentment against the Western government.

Emotive Narrative

Emotional topics are the most used and effective in terms of recruitment. Activating the emotional sphere of the individual makes the cause more deeply felt. Examples of emotional topics are sacrifice, revenge, slavery, honour, humiliation, sexual abuse or victory and success. Victory and success has been one of the most used and recurrent narratives of Islamic State. As the graph shows, the density of the victory and success topic was quite stable between 2001 and 2017. This means that the core topics, especially on an emotional level, are generally distributed at the same level of density.

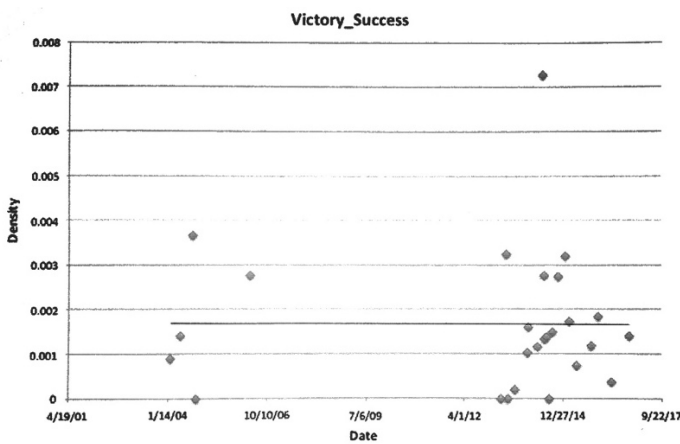


Figure 11: Density of Victory Success⁷⁶

Another emotional device used by recruiters is graphic violence. Showing pictures of Muslims that are suffering violence, which are generally extremely gory, helps IS to wake emotional individual spheres through dismay.

Enemy Narrative

As previously shown, identifying the target is an important recruitment phase. Using the bad nature of the enemy to justify a violent cause is a common strategy among terrorist groups. Applying the concept of enemies or infidels to some religious categories or populations helps identify the organization aim as a fight against a bad faction. With regard to Islamic State, some enemies are mentioned more than others. Kuznar provides a

⁷⁶Source: Lawrence Kuznar, *The stability of the Islamic State (IS) narrative: implications for the future*, Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict, 10/2017, p. 46

graph that clearly depicts this popularity.

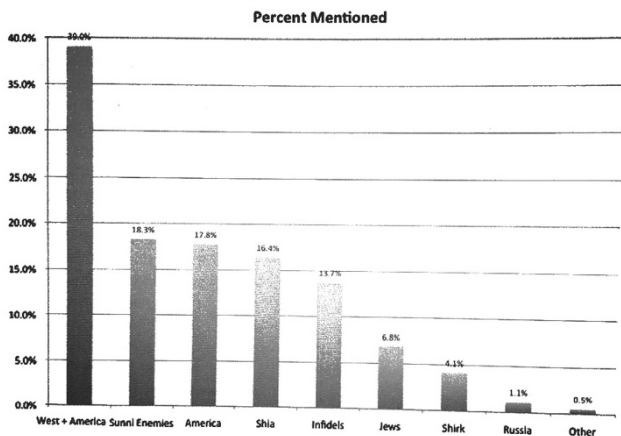


Figure 12: Density of Mentions of IS Enemies, 2004-2016⁷⁷

In conclusion, Kuznar provides a new way of looking at radicalization. Firstly, he claims that it is possible to build a relation between individuals' proclivity towards risk and their social status. The concept of social status must be distinguished from poverty itself. The individual's perception of his own status is connected with the idea of disparity with the highest classes more than with the concrete amount of money gained. Social instability and exclusion can be experienced generally at any level of wealth and this explains why the link between poverty and terrorism is not valid in practice. After the general lines of his radicalization theory, Kuznar focuses on Terrorists' group narrative. He studied data about the Islamic State narrative between 2001 and 2017 in order to analyse how they adapt it according to time and space. He underlines that it is possible to identify some core narratives that tend to remain stable during the recruitment phase. Emotional and religious narrative are generally the most commonly used, even if the internal topics always change. A good strategy should also meet people's interests and feelings. Support is built on the basis of a strong and functioning narrative that is not only able to involve people but also to justify the violent cause.

⁷⁷ Source: *Ivi*, p. 47

Chapter Three

This analysis has shown that there is a wide range of radicalization theories with fundamental differences. Some give great importance to ideology, while others highlight the social network an individual builds around him or psychological aspects. Given the complexity of human beings, it is impossible to find a theory that provides a single and universally valid account of radicalization. Each process involves different steps and, even if each of these theories contains part of the picture, in reality, individual patterns are always unexpected. However, it is illuminating to apply two of the theories to a real case. From a sociological point of view, it helps understand the practical experiences that can lead to radicalization. In particular, the comparison will focus on a pre-ISIS theory applied to a pre-ISIS terrorist and a post-ISIS theory applied to a post-ISIS terrorist. This will highlight the changes not just in a theoretical level but also in a practical one.

3.1 The profile of Mohamed Atta, 9/11 2001 attack, following Silber and Bhatt's theory

3.1.1 Pre-Radicalization

For Silber and Bhatt, the pre-radicalization stage refers to the individual's background, age, education, social context and his experiences.

Mohamed Atta was born in Egypt in 1968. His family moved to Cairo when he was 10 and he grew up under his father's rigid rules. He was not allowed to socialize much with other children and he spent a lot of time studying at home. However, his family must be considered relatively modern compared with other Muslim families at that time. His sisters in fact, were both able to obtain a university degree and to pursue successful careers.⁷⁸ Mohamed, who was the youngest in his family, started studying engineering at Cairo University in 1985.⁷⁹ During the first period of his studies, he proved to be an excellent student and was admitted to a very prestigious architecture's university. He succeeded in graduating in 1990 but contrary to expectations, with very mediocre results. Two years later, under pressure from his father, he moved to Hamburg, Germany to continue his university career.⁸⁰ His move was forced and very rushed. Finding himself in a new country and having a lot of pressure on him from his family, Atta faced a difficult period.

3.1.2 Self-Identification

During his stay in Hamburg, Atta became frustrated and extremely religious. Despite his degree in architecture, he was working in the same place as an uneducated labourer. He was unable to integrate in German society and did not shared its culture. Because of his closed personality, he was unable to socialize with other students.

⁷⁸ Pamela L. Valemont, *Mohamed Atta 9/11 Hijackers*, Lulu.com, Raleigh, 2016, p.42

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*

⁸⁰ *Ivi*, pp. 44-46

This, according to Silber and Bhatt, may have functioned as a trigger of cognitive opening, as loneliness, frustration and social exclusion can provoke a personal crisis that leads the individual to embrace extreme ideals. Atta started following a strict diet and frequenting the Al-Quds mosque. He was described as too religious, extreme and intolerant. As previously indicated, extreme mosques are ideological incubators for terrorism. Al-Quds was known to be strongly fundamentalist, where an extreme vision of Salafism was shared. As Silber and Bhatt reported, “*The mosque would regularly sponsor radical imams, who encouraged killing unbelievers, martyrdom and jihad*”⁸¹. There he met some dissidents who became his only acquaintances in Hamburg and later formed the Hamburg cell. Their names were Marwan al-Shehni, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, and Ziad Jarrah.⁸² At the time, they met in the mosque and in the student apartment Atta used to have in the city. In 1995, Atta spent three months in Cairo with two German students, and then remained there with his family for some time. When he came back to Hamburg, he joined a pilgrimage to Mecca, following his, now rooted, extreme affiliations.

3.1.3 Indoctrination

As Silber and Bhatt highlight, this phase consists in the intensification of the acquired beliefs, when the individual starts to consider jihad as a reality and starts acting in terms of realising it. As the group became increasingly close, the Mosque was no longer the right place to meet. Atta, together with the others, withdrew from Al-Quds and they started meeting in Atta’s apartment. During this phase, they met Mohammed Haydar Zammar, a man of Syrian origin, with German citizenship, who was close to Osama bin Laden and who was the recruiter and “spiritual sanctioner” for the Hamburg cell.⁸³ The importance of this figure must be remembered at this stage of the radicalization process. He legitimizes jihad, providing the group with a wide range of justifications according to which committing the attack is the right thing to do. He assures a good level of conviction and group cohesion. Zammar chose Atta to be the leader of the 9/11 attack. He appeared trustworthy due to his considerable experience in Afghanistan and Bosnia, and he was able to provide legitimacy and validity for his point of view about jihad. He covered a fundamental role in the attack but especially in the planning phase. Because Atta was studying a lot about terrorism and Salafism, meeting such an expert figure provided a lot of support for his extreme views.

3.1.4 Jihadization

Having reached this stage, the beliefs are rooted enough in the individual for him to move to the practical organization of the plot. Having acquired the mind-set according to which jihad is the highest aim of the group,

⁸¹ Mitchell D. Silber, Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The homegrown threat*, The New York City Police Department, New York, 2007, p.78

⁸² Pamela L. Valemont, *Mohamed Atta 9/11 Hijackers*, Lulu.com, Raleigh, 2016, p. 49

⁸³ Maurizio Molinari, *Il califfato del terrore: Perché lo Stato Islamico minaccia l’Occidente*, Rizzoli, Segrate, 2015

the next step is training. As Silber and Bhatt underlined, usually groups move to Middle East countries in order to have the opportunity to train psychologically and physically. Then, having obtained the necessary material, they are ready to carry out the organized plot. In 1999, Mohamed Atta, together with Shehni, Shibh and Jarrah, decided to leave Hamburg. Zammar organized their travel. Even if the first destination was supposed to be Chechnya, they actually changed it to Afghanistan in order to train. From there, they took a plane and flew to Pakistan, where the planning of the 9/11 attack started. All were fluent in English, well-educated and accustomed to Western traditions, and they soon attracted the attention of bin-Laden affiliates. They easily obtained visas, considering their life spent in the West, and they were engaged enough in jihad to carry out the attack. They met Osama bin-Laden at the House of Ghamdi in Kandahar, where they swore loyalty to the leader and readiness for the suicide mission and then started to plan the attack. Every step of the plan had already been identified by Al-Qaeda in the years before. The nineteen operatives succeeded in obtaining US visas in Saudi Arabia, and then came back to Afghanistan between 2000 and 2001 for some detailed training. This consisted in theory and practice about how to conduct hijackings and to disarm air marshals, and also some basic vocabulary for those operatives who were not used to English.⁸⁴ After training, they were all sent to the United States. From his arrival, Atta started planning every detail of the operation. There were four groups of hijackers, the first of which was headed by Atta himself and the other three by Shehni, Jarrah and Hani Hanjour.⁸⁵




















Name	Age	Nationality	Flight
Mohamed Atta	33		
Abdulaziz al-Omari	22		
Wail al-Shehri	28		American Airlines Flight 11
Waleed al-Shehri	22		
Satam al-Suqami	25		
Marwan al-Shehhi	23		
Fayez Banihammad	24		
Mohand al-Shehri	22		United Airlines Flight 175
Hamza al-Ghamdi	20		
Ahmed al-Ghamdi	22		
Hani Hanjour	29		
Khalid al-Mihdhar	26		
Majed Moqed	24		American Airlines Flight 77
Nawaf al-Hazmi	25		
Salem al-Hazmi	20		
Ziad Jarrah	26		
Ahmed al-Haznawi	20		United Airlines Flight 93
Ahmed al-Nami	24		
Saeed al-Ghamdi	21		

Figure 13: 9/11 hijackers⁸⁶

⁸⁴ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 2004, pp. 235-236

⁸⁵ Pamela L. Valemont, *Mohamed Atta 9/11 Hijackers*, Lulu.com, Raleigh, 2016, pp. 59-61

⁸⁶Source: Pamela L. Valemont, *Mohamed Atta 9/11 Hijackers*, Lulu.com, Raleigh, 2016, p. 61

In the morning of September 11, 2001, one of the most devastating attacks in the history of terrorism was carried out. Flights 11 and 175 crashed into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, and Flight 77 flew into the Pentagon. The fourth plane failed to hit the White House thanks to a counter-attack carried out by passengers and crew members, and crashed into a field in Pennsylvania.⁸⁷

Mohamed Atta, without being a veteran mujahedeen, was able to carry out one of the best-planned and tragic attacks that the West has ever suffered. Although Western educated and belonging to the middle-class, Atta never integrated into German society. Overwhelmed by feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration and social marginalization, he found a foothold in religion. His condition of loneliness during his studies put him in a cognitive opening condition, which favoured his approach to extreme ideals. He found a group of like-minded individuals, who shared his views and fomented his beliefs. Together, they decided to train in Afghanistan, searching for an opportunity to put their desire for jihad into practice. He approached Al-Qaeda in a bottom-up way and recruiters were able to recognise his capabilities. His brilliant intelligence helped him to distinguish himself from many other Al-Qaeda aspirants. He was extremely disciplined, and trained thoroughly before proceeding with the attack. He was supported economically and technically by an organization that allowed him to use a wide network of contacts who facilitated the planning. All these factors, led Atta to be the protagonist of the infamous 9/11 attack and to be remembered as one of the most representative figures of terrorism.

3.2 The profile of Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, Nice attack 2016, following the DRIA model

Mohamed L. Bouhlel was born in M'saken in Tunisia in 1985, and lived and worked in Nice. Not much information is available regarding his childhood and adolescence but it is known that he moved to Nice in 2005 with a regular residence permit. He married a girl from there and built his life in the city, working as a truck driver. He was not known by the police forces as a probable terrorist. He was involved in small crimes linked with his bad economic situation and his violent attitude, but nothing comparable to the attack he carried out on July 14th, 2016.

3.2.1 Disintegration of social identity

From 2008, he lived with his wife and his three children in the city, seeming perfectly integrated. Then, something changed this reality and caused extremely rapid radicalization. His marriage began to deteriorate and he is described by many neighbours as being very violent during the fights he had with his wife. They said he was extremely violent and sometimes almost crazy. "He did some very strange jokes" said a neighbour

⁸⁷CNN.com, *September 11: Chronology of terror*, Atlanta, 2001
Available on: <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/chronology.attack/> [Accessed: 27 April 2019th]

“Once, he urinated and defecated on his apartment floor. Once, he even slapped his mother-in-law”.⁸⁸ Everybody described him as insane. It is impossible to know if he suddenly changed his personality or if violence had always been part of it. His wife filed for divorce and it is plausible to imagine that this triggered the disintegration of his reality. It is important to highlight that he had never shown any interest in religion. His reality was falling apart and, before that period, religion had never been an answer for him. Some people living in his neighbourhood reported that divorce was not the only problem he was facing. He was fired from work for falling asleep while driving and started facing many economic problems. Also, his father reported that he was addicted to alcohol and drugs. Two points should be underlined here. Firstly, he was experiencing an extremely difficult period, which is a plausible cause of cognitive opening in the individual. Secondly, he was not the personification of the perfect Muslim. He never followed Islamic rules, he drank, used drugs and even had sexual relations with older women and men. He became totally lost, not integrated at all in society and not belonging to any form of social reality.

3.2.2 Reconstruction of social identity through a radical ideology

As the DRIA model highlights, this is a very significant turning point in an individual’s life. The individual crisis experienced in this moment can easily trigger a cognitive opening, which leads the individual towards extreme ideas. His priorities and beliefs start to change, embracing radical and violent ideals and his reality is reconstructed in a new mental framework. At this point, according to Orsini, what happens is the rebuilding of an individual dimension into a new conception of reality. Starting from the assumption that his reality had disintegrated, Mohamed began to search for a new one and found extreme ideals. The approach to religion as a form of answer to a cognitive opening was very rapid. The time between his life crisis and the violent act was extremely short, which indicates a fast radicalization. He found religion and immediately approached an extreme form of it, changing his clothing and started attending a mosque, building a new social reality around him. A reality made of anger and extreme ideals.

3.2.3 Integration in a revolutionary group

As Orsini pointed out, at this point, the search for like-minded individuals begins. The necessity of confrontation and of finding support for the extreme ideals developed pushes the individual towards a community that accepts him. This, as shown in the DRIA model, can happen both physically and virtually. Bouhleb is a typical example of an imagined integration process. He was not physically part of an extreme community but he felt part of one. There are different hypotheses about the influences he had during his

⁸⁸ Stéphanie Harounyan, Sylvain Mouillard, *Qui était Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhleb, l’auteur de l’attentat de Nice?*, “Libération”, 16 July 2016. Available on: <https://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/07/16/qui-etait-mohamed-lahouaiej-bouhleb-l-auteur-de-l-attentat-de-nice-1466632> [Accessed: 18 May 2019th]

radicalization process. Some people talk about some physical contacts with extremists, who may have influenced his ideas, exploiting his difficult period. As an example, a French television programme talks about his relationship with Chokri Chafroud, a 37-year-old Tunisian who is considered to be Bouhlel's mentor in his radicalization process. An exchange of texts between the two in the hours that preceded the attack provides evidence of their connection. The following macabre text has been found in Bouhlel's phone "Load the truck, put in 2,000 tons of iron (...) cut the brakes my friend, and I'll look".⁸⁹ However, even if the relationship between the two is proved, there is no proof of manipulation. The French journal "Le Monde" declared that "Some interesting names appeared among his contacts. Another source evokes common relations with Omar Diaby, a figure of jihadism in Nice close to Al-Nusra and not the IS".⁹⁰ Some other sources support the idea of virtual radicalization through propaganda videos and photos. This theory is supported by some violent material found on his computer by the police. All these hypotheses can be considered valid and can coexist in an individual's experience. There is no doubt that Bouhlel felt part of a community. This is proved by the fact that after his death, the news agency Amaq, supporting Islamic State, declared that "The person who carried out the operation in Nice, France, to run down people was one of the soldiers of the Islamic State."⁹¹ Whether this represents a real connection to the Islamic State or not, it underlines the fact that there is a huge virtual community that support extreme initiatives and that it is ready to welcome people who are developing violent ideals.

3.2.4 Alienation from the surrounding world

Considering the rapidity of Bouhlel's radicalization, this stage happened also very quickly. Just a few weeks before the attack, he cut all his relations with the external world, grew a long beard and started attending the mosque. With reference to the DRIA model, this corresponds to the moment in which the individual cuts every link with his old life and focuses on jihad. His new values are completely incompatible with the surrounding environment and the immediate consequence is to eliminate every connection with it. He has been described as always being surly and unfriendly, but in the days before the attack, he was particularly far from his old life. Friends were shocked by his assumptions about the right for the IS to conquer his own territory and by his sudden long beard with its religious significance, especially since Mohamed had never cared about Islamism. The alienation from his world happened very quickly; people report that they noticed big changes

⁸⁹ Didier Brignand, Anne Le Hars, *Ce que l'on sait de Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel auteur de l'attentat de Nice*, "France 3- regions", 10 July 2017 Available on: <https://france3-regions.francetvinfo.fr/provence-alpes-cote-d-azur/ce-que-on-sait-mohammed-lahouaiej-bouhlel-auteur-attentat-nice-1288311.html> [Accessed: 10 May 2019th]

⁹⁰ Soren Seelow, *Le profil inédit de Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, auteur de l'attentat de Nice*, "Le Monde", 15 July 2016 Available on: <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/michael-zehaf-bibeau-mother-says-killing-was-last-desperate-act-of-a-mentally-ill-person> [Accessed: 25 April 2019th]

⁹¹ Richard A.L. Williams, *Nice terror attack: Isis claims responsibilities for lorry massacre in French coastal city*, "The Independent", 16 July 2016. Available on: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/nice-terror-attack-isis-claims-responsibility-lorry-massacre-france-coastal-city-a7140381.html> [Accessed: 25 April 2019th]

just during the 8 days preceding the attack.⁹² Partly, he was already alienated, having lost his family and his job. When he realized that the pattern he wanted to follow was that of sacrifice, he reconstructed his reality in that framework and rapidly completed this alienation, so that no one could stop it.

Bouhlel's case is extremely different from Mohamed Atta's. Bouhlel was a desperate man who had clearly lost sense of how to conduct his life. He failed in his family ambient as he also failed at work. He found himself in a foreign country experiencing loneliness and frustration. He had never proved to be a particularly intelligent or brilliant man. He was not devoted to religion, but had a lot of addiction problems and sexual partners. His radicalization happened very fast, although it was not guided by his strong beliefs nor by his capabilities in terrorism. He never trained, and according to the evidence, he had never tried to reach a training camp. The only link with terrorism is some personal contact and virtual propaganda. He was the clear example of a lone wolf, acting independently and without any close connection to a terrorist organization. It is plausible to think that, even if he had reached an organization, he would not have been chosen to carry out an attack. He was not particularly intelligent, skilled, disciplined or lucid. He had so many addictions, which were totally against Islamic rules, so that he would never have been the ideal operative in terms of a top-down organization. On the contrary, years before, a figure like Mohamed Atta was ideal for Al-Qaeda. He was brilliant, disciplined and searching for action. His radicalization was a long and gradual process, of prayer, debating and training. He was lucid in what he was doing, so lucid that he was able to direct the attack. Even if the recruitment was bottom-up, given that he went to Afghanistan searching for a cause, he worked in top-down planning. He was a great organizer, completely loyal to the group.

The two terrorists have little in common. It is true that both radicalization patterns were triggered by some life experience that scarred them. They both experienced loneliness, social exclusion and frustration, they met failure and reacted to it, reconstructing their reality in an extreme framework. They share in some senses the emotional trigger that pushed them towards radicalization. However, the two patterns that followed were totally different. Atta's lasted years; he studied, debated and finally trained to accomplish his cause. It was not a moment of loss of lucidity, or just a dark period in his life. He worked to carry out one of the most devastating terrorist attacks in history. Bouhlel's pattern was completely different. He cannot be considered an expression of terrorism like Atta. He lost everything and, in some weeks, became extremely radicalized. He was known to be violent, to have many problems and to have experienced a period of total chaos. It is clear how the two characters differ in terms of terrorist profile. It is appropriate to say that nowadays, the second type of terrorist is the most common. Top-down recruitment is becoming increasingly rare in the West, but lone wolves who are radicalized on their own sofa are increasing.

⁹² *Attack on Nice: Who was Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel?*, BBC News, 19 August 2016
Available on: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36801763> [Accessed: 18 May 2019th]

This comparison is effective in sociological terms on the basis of the huge difference between the two terrorists. One is the portrait of a successful terrorist led by an organization, economically and strategically; the other is the portrait of a lone wolf, desperate and independently organized. They perfectly reflect a change in terrorism in the last decade. These theories illustrate that the last ten years have been a period of great evolution for terrorism research. Theories that were immediately formulated after the events of 2001 focused on the relevance of top-down organizations that indoctrinated people and offered them the opportunity to act violently. With time, theories have shifted from terrorist organizations to single individuals. The spread of the Internet has been identified as a fundamental factor in autonomous radicalization. However, terrorists like Atta had the strength of organizational support that helped them economically and technically, giving them all the instruments to carry out a huge attack. Lone wolves are more limited in this sense. In many cases, they have no idea how to carry out violence, or face difficulties in acquiring the means to do it. Of course, this does not mean that they abort their mission, considering the number of attacks that Europe has experienced in recent years, but this means that they are usually not professional terrorists with a lot of organization behind them. This is significant in terms of the extent of an attack and the number of victims. One lone terrorist will always be able to hit one single point, probably using a car or a gun, causing only a limited number of victims in many cases. Violence is badly organized and, even if still fatal, is not carried out efficiently. An example of this is the Cambrils attack, carried out on August 18, 2017. There were five attackers, all in the same vehicle with fake explosive belts. They had no experience with explosive materials and no organizational skills. Five professional terrorists would have hit five different points in the city, causing a huge number of victims and bringing the city to its knees.⁹³ They closed themselves all in the same car with no possibility to defend themselves. On the contrary, having an organization behind means having a large range of weapons and learning how to use them effectively, which can result in hundreds if not thousands of victims.

⁹³Alessandro Orsini, *L'Isis non è morto; ha solo cambiato pelle*, Rizzoli, Segrate, 2018

Conclusion

It is clear from the research that the range of theories is vast. In this work, terrorism is evaluated as a sociological phenomenon based on the individual. The variety of hypotheses to explain it is proportional to the variety of facets presented by human beings. Actions, especially extreme ones, are not always dictated by the same trigger and a scholar must inevitably choose to favour a particular approach.

An assumption which is generally neglected by scholars is craziness. The link between a clinical psychological disturbance and terrorism is denied by almost the entire community of scholars, highlighting the fact that case studies have almost never shown psychopathic or similar tendencies. The percentage of cases is extremely low and never represents significant data in terms of generalization. This leads to the deduction that there are no terrorists by nature but only normal individuals who become terrorists. If terrorism is generated and not innate, it makes it all the more important to understand the process. Starting from the assumption that all the theories discussed may be considered valid, some main profiles can be identified.

Firstly, a category of individuals who are led by ideology. Even if not generally admissible, it is undeniable that ideology is in many cases the effective trigger for a violent action. In fact, it is considered in many cases to be a fundamental condition in order to shift from cognitive to violent radicalization. Ideological conviction is extremely relevant to legitimise a violent action and to embrace a high risk activity. As Wiktorowicz pointed out, next to the leader's charisma, what pushes an individual towards sacrifice is the ideological conception according to which he is able to justify and interpret it as a form of salvation. Historically, strong ideals have been a recognized condition for terrorism, and this is still valid today.

A second category of individuals are triggered by social factors. For example, some second and third generations of Muslims are disappointed by the West and excluded by the labour market and from society. They are bored people, who develop a strong feeling of hate towards exclusive Western society. As Marc Sageman highlights, the importance of boredom must not be underestimated. For excluded individuals who are not able to find their place in the secular society, taking part in extreme action can be attractive, both in terms of excitement and gaining revenge from a world that refused to integrate them. The situation in which a well-educated Muslim man finds himself working in unskilled labour, can easily trigger a high level of resentment which builds the basis for involvement in terrorism. Even if Sageman denies any link between terrorism and lack of opportunities, he points out the fact that, especially in Europe, young Muslims are experiencing underemployment or unemployment, which is an important factor that can push them to aggregate and develop extreme views.

In addition, there is a category of individuals triggered by loss of meaning in life. The loss of a close person, a divorce or an economic crisis are all circumstances that can distort an individual's perception of reality. Usually, the consequence is a feeling of disorientation involving extremely subjective reactions. Some people

find a new hobby or engage in a demanding activity, while others find answers in religion. The important factor is that individuals find themselves in a position of opening towards new initiatives, including extremism. The choice clearly lies in the individual's psychology. They can embrace terrorism as a consequence of a moment of psychological disorder, or as a product of rational reasoning according to which terrorism is the best alternative in life for the person concerned.

Many particular cases can be added to these three macro-categories. Love, coercion and family ties are just a small number of the many micro-conditions that can lead an individual into terrorism. Even if the three categories are still a simplification of an extremely complex phenomenon, they help in summarising the main causes identified as triggers.

In conclusion, terrorism continues to evolve and this, of course, leads to the continuous updating of research. However, it is extremely important to have a clear understanding of its past evolution. Since 2001, the kind of terrorism we have been facing has mutated. The individual sphere is becoming increasingly relevant. If in the years before and just after 2001 the individual's role ended with involvement in a group, nowadays the whole plot can be an individual decision. This clearly gives even more importance to the personal dimension in which terrorism becomes an individual opportunity. On the basis of this evolution, it is increasingly necessary to understand terrorism both as a social and individual phenomenon, in order to fully comprehend its sociological dimension.

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Sintesi

Questa tesi si propone di analizzare le teorie più accreditate nello studio della radicalizzazione Jihadista. A tal fine, sono stati individuati gli autori più autorevoli sulla base del percorso didattico seguito da Alessandro Orsini nel corso “Sociology of terrorism”. L’obiettivo di questa analisi è comprendere quale sia il percorso di radicalizzazione intrapreso dagli individui responsabili di attacchi terroristici in Occidente e quali ne siano i fattori scatenanti.

L’analisi si sviluppa seguendo una divisione in due periodi con riguardo alle teorie sulla radicalizzazione in Occidente. Un primo periodo, immediatamente successivo alla strage di New York, e un secondo, convenzionalmente fatto iniziare con la proclamazione da parte di al-Baghdadi della nascita dello Stato Islamico⁹⁴. Secondo tale divisione, verranno illustrate in una precisa dimensione cronologica le più importanti teorie sulla radicalizzazione in Occidente, da prima riferite ad Al-Qaeda e successivamente all’ISIS. Il primo capitolo, relativo al periodo 2001-2014, prende in considerazione l’analisi dello psicologo iraniano Fathali Moghaddam, che ha elaborato un modello secondo cui la radicalizzazione viene paragonata ad una scala composta da sei gradini. Gli individui che per varie ragioni non si sentono soddisfatti dalla propria permanenza in uno dei gradini iniziali, si spingono a quello successivo. Coloro che giungono fino all’ultimo, completando il processo di radicalizzazione, sono quelli che potenzialmente prenderanno parte ad un’azione violenta. Il terzo gradino concerne gli individui che scelgono di aderire ad un’organizzazione terroristica come risposta ad uno stato di frustrazione sociale. L’impegno di carattere terroristico, in questo senso viene visto come un mezzo per giocare un ruolo nella società, anche se implica un livello elevato di rischi. Cosa spinga alcuni individui ad accettare tali sacrifici e i pericoli è quesito a cui molti esperti hanno cercato di rispondere. Tra gli altri, particolarmente interessante appare la tesi di Quintan Wiktorowicz. Il noto esperto di radicalismo Islamico, nel volume “*Radical Islam Rising: Muslim extremism in the West*” dopo aver esaminato i costi materiali, sociali e psicologici accettati dall’individuo durante il processo di radicalizzazione, fornisce una spiegazione convincente sulle motivazioni. In primo luogo, egli sottolinea come non vada sottovalutato il ruolo del leader dell’organizzazione, la sua credibilità e il suo carisma sono strumenti fondamentali in termini di capacità di coinvolgimento. Oltre a ciò non si può dimenticare che l’ideologia proposta da tali organizzazioni è fondata anche sullo specifico tema del sacrificio. Più lo sforzo è oneroso e maggiori sono i sacrifici, tanto più l’individuo sarà gratificato dai suoi commilitoni e finanche destinato al paradiso. L’idea di avere una missione da compiere fa sì che gli sforzi non siano altro che uno strumento per la salvezza e ne allevia l’aspetto gravoso. L’importanza dell’ideologia come motore del processo di radicalizzazione viene ripresa anche dagli analisti statunitensi Mitchell Silber e Arvin Bhatt nel loro “*four-phase radicalization model*”. Nella loro analisi, appositamente condotta per il Dipartimento di Polizia di New York, i due esperti analizzano il processo

⁹⁴ Franco Iacch, *Al-Baghdadi annuncia la nuova evoluzione dello Stato Islamico*, “il Giornale.it”, 4 Settembre 2018, Milano

di radicalizzazione sulla base di un confronto tra cinque casi studio: l'attacco a Madrid nel 2004, il gruppo Hofstad di Amsterdam, l'attacco a Londra nel 2005, l'Operazione Pendennis in Australia e il caso "Toronto 18" in Canada. In essi, rintracciano una serie di costanti, che vengono inserite in un modello comprensivo di quattro fasi distinte: "Pre-radicalization", "Self-identification", "Indoctrination" e "Jihadization". Seguendo questa periodizzazione, un individuo comune può, solitamente in risposta a un'esperienza traumatica, adottare ideologie estreme e pianificare, insieme a soggetti a lui affini, un atto violento. Il modello di Silber e Bhatt indaga l'esperienza individuale da prima della radicalizzazione fino all'implementazione pratica dell'attacco. Tutto il processo, dall'avvicinamento a gruppi radicali all'addestramento vero e proprio, è contraddistinto dalla prevalenza di elementi propri dell'ideologia Salafita⁹⁵. È però evidente che il richiamo a questa interpretazione dell'Islam sunnita non sia che una delle diverse motivazioni alla base della radicalizzazione. Altri possibili fattori trainanti sono messi in evidenza da Clark Mccauley e Sophia Moskalenko, noti psicologi, nel libro "Friction: How conflict radicalizes them and us". L'amore, il desiderio di vendetta, di adrenalina o di affermare il proprio status, sono tutti possibili cause dell'avvio del processo di radicalizzazione. Sfruttando un parallelismo tra i terroristi nella Russia zarista del 1879⁹⁶ e gli odierni jihadisti, i due autori a loro volta approfondiscono come la partecipazione al terrorismo possa essere innescata da spinte di diversa natura, sottolineando come si possa parlare di radicalizzazione su due differenti livelli: di opinione e comportamentale. Come condiviso da molti altri esperti, quali Silber, Bhatt, la radicalizzazione ideologica di un individuo può certamente sfociare in effettiva violenza, ma vi sono altrettante probabilità che rimanga circoscritta alla sfera dell'opinione. In altre parole, non sempre un individuo che abbraccia ideali estremi è effettivamente in grado di compiere un attentato terroristico. Questo, almeno sotto certi aspetti, permette di ridimensionare il livello di minaccia attribuito alla diffusione di ideali radicali. A concludere il primo capitolo è l'analisi di Donatella della Porta che nel suo libro "Clandestine political violence" analizza i principali meccanismi legati all'insorgenza, persistenza ed estinzione di gruppi terroristici. Più in particolare, di quei gruppi che, come Al-Qaeda, si organizzano clandestinamente con l'obbiettivo di commettere azioni di violenza collettiva.

Il secondo capitolo della tesi si apre con l'analisi svolta dal giornalista americano John Horgan, con specifico riguardo all'ISIS. L'analisi del suo libro "The psychology of terrorism", evidenzia come la reale potenza del cosiddetto "Stato Islamico" in termini fisici sia alquanto modesta. La guerra che il terrorismo porta avanti si fonda piuttosto sulla forza psicologica generata dalla paura e dall'instabilità che provoca. Il potere reale, a

⁹⁵ Per Salafismo si intende la visione di una società chiusa, la cancellazione di ogni forma di innovazione e di progresso da cui nascono i movimenti fondamentalistici che rispondono al nome di Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab, Boko Haram e, più tardi lo Stato Islamico. Sostenitori di un Islam puro, non contaminato dalle influenze coloniali occidentali, i salafiti hanno come obiettivo il ritorno all'Islam degli antenati e la restaurazione della Sharia. Sul punto si veda: Riccarda Lopetuso, *Salafismo le origini del terrore*, "Geopolitica.info, centro studi di geopolitica e relazioni internazionali", Roma, 18 febbraio 2016

⁹⁶ Narodnaja volja (in inglese "The people's Will") fu un'organizzazione rivoluzionaria russa, nata nel 1879 con l'obbiettivo del passaggio al socialismo attraverso una preventiva democratizzazione della società russa da ottenere con una vasta azione terroristica mirante ad abbattere il regime zarista. Sul punto si veda: Derek, Offord, *The Russian revolutionary movement in the 1880s*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986

cominciare da quello militare, di cui le organizzazioni terroristiche dispongono non è neanche lontanamente paragonabile a quello degli Stati che le fronteggiano e in tal senso sarebbe sbagliato parlare di un vero e proprio stato di guerra. Più propria sarebbe, secondo Horgan, la definizione di guerra psicologica, e in base a tale assunto egli ha a sua volta elaborato un modello imperniato su coinvolgimento, appartenenza e abbandono dell'organizzazione terroristica da parte dell'individuo. La sua analisi è volta all'indagine non solo degli aspetti materiali, ma anche psicologiche dell'attraversamento di queste tre fasi.

Un'accezione altrettanto connessa all'elemento psicologico della radicalizzazione viene fornita da Marc Sageman, ex ufficiale della CIA, che, confutando molte delle valutazioni prefate, afferma come l'ideologia non sia in alcun caso il vero motore di tale processo. La vera spinta sarebbe da individuare, invece, nella ricerca di conoscenze e amicizie da parte di individui socialmente esclusi o frustrati, che li porterebbe ad abbracciare ideali estremi. Il cammino verso la violenza viene infatti spesso percorso da gruppi di individui legati tra loro da un rapporto di amicizia. A suo parere, nessun reclutamento formale o lavaggio del cervello sono sufficienti per spiegare la radicalizzazione e ancor meno lo è la mancanza di opportunità sociali; a muovere gli individui è il bisogno di appartenere a un gruppo.

Il ruolo dell'ideologia viene invece ripreso in considerazione dal sociologo Alessandro Orsini, nella sua analisi del modello DRIA (“Disintegrazione, Ricostruzione, Integrazione, Alienazione”)⁹⁷. Esso, sviluppato attraverso lo studio comparato delle biografie di 21 attentatori, fa riferimento alla categoria dei “terroristi di vocazione”, ovvero coloro che commettono un atto violento per adempiere a un loro bisogno spirituale. In questi termini, l'ideologia ricopre un ruolo essenziale durante il percorso di radicalizzazione. Il modello presentato da Orsini si sviluppa in quattro fasi e presenta la radicalizzazione come un processo generato dalla disintegrazione della realtà individuale. In seguito a un avvenimento traumatico, l'individuo ricostruisce la propria realtà in una cornice di carattere radicale. Nella teoria esposta è inoltre interessante evidenziare la distinzione fatta tra marginalità e l'emarginazione sociale. La marginalità è una condizione oggettiva nella quale un individuo si trova, solitamente legata al suo status sociale. L'essere un senzatetto, per esempio, pone l'individuo in una condizione di marginalità sociale. Quest'ultima secondo Orsini, non ha alcun legame con il terrorismo. Al contrario l'emarginazione è una condizione psicosociale in cui l'individuo, indipendentemente dalla sua realtà economica, sente di vivere una forte esclusione dalla società. Questa condizione può, in determinati casi, degenerare e causare una necessità di appartenenza che porta l'individuo a prendere parte a visioni estreme. Al tal proposito, Orsini nega, per quanto riguarda la radicalizzazione in Occidente, qualsiasi nesso con la povertà.

Una visione analoga viene ripresa da Lawrence Kuznar, insegnante e ricercatore presso l'Università dell'Indiana, che a sua volta nega un possibile legame tra la povertà e una maggiore tendenza a compiere atti

⁹⁷ Alessandro Orsini, *La radicalisation des terroristes des vocations*, “Commentaire”, 4/2016, pp. 783-790

terroristici. La sua teoria infatti si concentra sulla propensione al rischio del singolo individuo, sostenendo che la tendenza a commettere azioni violente e quindi rischiose non derivi tanto dalla povertà, quanto più in generale da uno status sociale instabile. Più precisamente, coloro che hanno appena vissuto un regresso rispetto alla loro posizione sociale precedente o coloro che sono vicini a un progresso notevole sono tendenzialmente più disposti a rischiare rispetto a chi si trova in una posizione stabile. In aggiunta a tale osservazione, Kuznar fornisce un'analisi estremamente dettagliata della narrativa utilizzata dallo Stato Islamico durante il processo di reclutamento. Le tematiche su cui viene posto l'accento variano infatti in relazione al luogo e al periodo, valutando quali temi, se religiosi, politici o emozionali, facciano meglio presa sulle possibili reclute.

Come accennato, i due periodi presi in considerazione fanno riferimento a momenti molto diversi della storia del terrorismo. Tale differenza è ancor più chiaramente identificabile nella pratica, come messo in evidenza nel terzo capitolo della presente ricerca, che sviluppa un'analisi comparata tra due terroristi appartenenti rispettivamente al primo e al secondo periodo. La prima biografia è quella di Mohamed Atta, uno dei direttori dell'attentato dell'11 settembre, analizzata attraverso il modello proposto da Silber e Bhatt. Il secondo personaggio preso in considerazione, con evidenti elementi di differenziazione rispetto al primo, è Mohamed Bouhlel, responsabile dell'attentato a Nizza il 14 luglio 2016, la cui storia viene analizzata seguendo il modello DRIA proposto da Orsini. I due terroristi sono specchio di un'innegabile evoluzione del fenomeno terroristico e della sua organizzazione. Atta, tra i più noti terroristi della storia moderna, era un uomo di spiccata intelligenza e capacità organizzativa, con un alto livello di istruzione, scelto da Al-Qaeda perché considerato all'altezza di una strategia tanto complessa. Sostenuti ideologicamente ed economicamente da una possente organizzazione, Atta e i suoi compagni si sottoposero ad anni di addestramento e preparazione prima di portare a termine l'attacco terroristico più famigerato della storia occidentale. La storia di Bouhlel è profondamente diversa. Individuo violento la cui realtà familiare venne distrutta dal divorzio, con dipendenze da alcol e droga e licenziato poco tempo prima dell'attentato. Una trasformazione repentina di un uomo perso e senza valori in un musulmano improvvisamente molto osservante. La sua radicalizzazione è stata fulminea, frutto di una serie di eventi traumatici cui la vita lo aveva sottoposto. La rapidità di questo processo si è riflessa nell'attacco, scarsamente organizzato e sicuramente non pianificato da un'organizzazione centralizzata.

Il terrorismo che ad oggi minaccia il panorama occidentale vede come artefici dei lupi solitari che, proprio come Bouhlel, autonomamente portano a termine attacchi contro la popolazione. Figure come la sua sono indice di come il concetto di terrorismo diffusosi dopo gli avvenimenti del 2001 sia oggi necessariamente da modificare. Il processo di radicalizzazione a sua volta, se originariamente era generato da forme di reclutamento verticale concentrate nelle mani di un'organizzazione, attualmente presenta forme più orizzontali. I rapporti intrapersonali e le dinamiche interne all'individuo assumono un ruolo fondamentale nel processo, lasciando all'organizzazione un ruolo più di ispirazione che di leadership. In questi termini, non va sottovalutato il ruolo di Internet. La facilità di accesso a propaganda estremista e la diffusione di messaggi incitatori di violenza sul web consente a molti individui di prendere parte ad una comunità virtuale che li

accompagna durante il percorso verso la violenza. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter sono solo tra i più noti esempi di piattaforme che forniscono alle organizzazioni terroristiche un diretto accesso ad un pubblico estremamente vasto. Il numero di possibili terroristi è, in questo senso, impossibile da stimare in quanto i limiti fisici tra singolo e gruppi estremisti sono completamente superati. Questo come molti altri fattori hanno comportato un'evoluzione notevole del fenomeno terroristico. Le teorie citate fanno parte del vasto panorama che riguarda la radicalizzazione e tentano di sistematizzarne la complessità e varietà. Non è possibile affidarsi ad un unico modello, entro cui sussumere una casistica sterminata e assai eterogenea. È opportuna, invece, ed a ciò è dedicato, seppure in estrema sintesi, questo studio, un'analisi delle diverse teorie, sì da poter comprendere a fondo il fenomeno, quantificarne il livello di minaccia e poterlo combattere efficacemente.