Department of Political Science
Chair: Sociology of Terrorism

The role of ideology in the radicalization process

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Introduction

In the studies on terrorism and violence in their widest forms, there are two main positions on the role of ideology in the radicalization process. According to some scholars, ideology has a causal power in steering individuals towards extremist behaviours, while others argue that ideology is only used as a justification *a-posteriori*.

This research takes as guideline Alessandro Orsini’s paper “What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model”¹, published on the journal “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism”, which showcases all the masterpieces in the studies on radicalization. Drawing from this, the aim of the present research is to analyse different theories, among those cited by Orsini, with a particular focus on the importance that they attribute to ideology. His paper was particularly helpful in that it allowed me, in one glance, to have at hand all the most important works on radicalization. This has been a great advantage since the topic is highly disputed among the academic community and it would be easy to get lost in the research process.

Terrorism scholars are mainly polarised around two stances. On the one hand, there are those who believe that individuals would not commit terrorist acts without a strong ideological commitment. In this sense, extremism is interpreted as the final stage of a cognitive opening process, which enables violent ideas and consequently behaviours to translate into action. On the other, there is the pole of scholars who consider other factors as the trigger for radicalization, as the individual’s background, social relations and group dynamics, family bonds and so forth. According to them, ideology is not the driving force of fundamentalism, but it is only used by terrorists to legitimise their extreme acts.

The theories analysed in this research, which are among the milestones of the studies on terrorism, will be divided in two sections. The first gathers all the authors who attribute a secondary role to ideology, while the second reviews those who consider ideology to be the engine of radicalization. Furthermore, one last section will examine some of the theories applied to specific case studies that refer to real terrorists’ stories.

In detail, the first chapter explores six theories of radicalization. Beginning with Fathali M. Moghaddam’s “Staircase to Terrorism”, the attention is immediately drawn to the psychological and social context that surrounds the individual and that may encourage him to embrace terrorism. According to Moghaddam, extremism is a direct consequence of social exclusion that, by fuelling anger and frustration, motivates the individual to undertake drastic actions. Carrying on, John Horgan considers terrorism a very complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a single cause, as for

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instance ideology, but that has to be understood in light of multiple factors. The third author mentioned, Quintan Wiktorowicz, addresses the problem of radicalization with a costs-benefits analysis. From his standpoint, adhering to a terrorist organization involves several risks and costs. In this sense, the losses must be compensated by some benefits, which Wiktorowicz identifies in the strong process of socialization between the organization and its members. Another scholar that has developed his theory around the concept of socialization is Marc Sageman. Drawing from the social network theory, Sageman claims that the radicalization process is grounded in group dynamics rather than ideology. His thesis is summarized in the bunch of guys theory, according to which the adherence to terrorist organizations is a “problem of who you know” instead of “what you believe in”. In 2011, Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko published the book “Friction”, in which they deal with the complexity of the radicalization process by breaking it down into three levels (micro, meso and macro) and by identifying twelve mechanisms leading to extremism. The last author cited is Donatella della Porta, who also distinguishes three levels of radicalization (micro, meso and macro). Her analysis concludes that individuals who get involved in violent movements are not only moved by pre-existing conditions, but they also develop new motivations along the pathway.

The second chapter examines three models of radicalization which focus on the role of ideology as the driving factor. Although all the authors analysed recognise that also socialization processes are important for the purpose of terrorism, they argue that without a strong ideological commitment it would not be possible to move from a stage of cognitive radicalization to one of violent radicalization. Starting from Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, their model consists in four phases: Pre-radicalization, Self-identification, Indoctrination and Jihadization. Carrying on, the other studies analysed are Orsini’s DRIA model and Arie Kruglanski, Jocelyn Bélanger and Rohan Gunaratna’s theory of the “3Ns”, namely Need, Narrative and Network.

Lastly, the third chapter applies the three models described in the former section to real terrorists’ cases. Silber and Bhatt’s study will be examined with reference to Mohammed Bouyeri, the responsible for the murder of a Dutch filmmaker named Theo Van Gogh. Orsini’s model will be applied to the cases of Michael Bibeau and Mohammed Merah, two terrorists coming from different backgrounds, whose radicalization pathways both find an explanation in the DRIA model. Finally, Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna’s 3Ns theory will investigate the Tsarnaev brothers, the perpetrators of the attack at the Boston marathon in April 2013.
Chapter I
Secondary role of ideology in the process of radicalization

1.1 Fathali M. Moghaddam

To describe the pathway of an individual that goes through a process of radicalization, Fathali M. Moghaddam has developed the theory of “The Staircase to Terrorism”, published in 2005. This model aims at providing a more in-depth analysis of the processes leading to terrorism, with a particular focus on the psychological perspective. In this context, ideology is not seen as the trigger to radicalization. On the contrary, adhering to a terrorist organization is considered a consequence of social exclusion, which provokes feelings of anger and frustration.

In order to understand the concept behind his theory and given that the topic is highly controversial even among the academic community, it is important to clarify the view of the author on the subject of terrorism. According to Moghaddam, terrorism can be defined as “politically motivated violence, perpetrated by individuals, groups, or state-sponsored agents, intended to instill feelings of terror and helplessness in a population in order to influence decision making and to change behavior”.

Moghaddam believes that psychology plays a pivotal role in the study of radicalization. The reasons why an individual decides to embrace terrorism must be analysed through a psychological approach that here is described with the metaphor of a narrowing staircase.

1.1.1 The Staircase to Terrorism

The “staircase to terrorism” is imagined as a building with six floors, each of whom is marked by specific psychological processes. The ground floor is the largest, and there resides the vast majority of the people. The remaining floors become smaller and smaller as the individual climbs the staircase.

The transition to a higher floor depends on the perception of the singular individual. If he thinks that moving up the stairs will open him more doors, he will continue the journey. However, as the size of the floors reduces, also the possibilities to go back and abandon the radicalization process decrease.

Therefore, sometimes individuals engage in terrorist acts not because they want to continue the path, but rather because they cannot drop back.

Moghaddam describes the staircase to terrorism as follows:

**Ground floor: Psychological Interpretation of Material Conditions**

On the ground floor, feelings of justice and relative deprivation prevail. At this stage, there is a first distinction between who decides to move forward and who remains at the initial step. The root causes that push individuals to climb the staircase cannot be explained by absolute material conditions such as poverty and lack of education. For instance, the terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attack, affiliated with al Qaeda, did not come from a destitute background, nor did Bin Laden. Hence, the trigger has to be found elsewhere. The psychological analysis of Moghaddam indicates to look at individual’s subjective perception of the situation. It is defined as a condition of relative deprivation. In this case, the individual feels of being unjustly deprived of a legitimate reward. However, this consideration is not correlated to his social status or to the economic position he occupies but originates from the comparison with others.

**First Floor: Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment**

Individuals who reach the first floor seek for remedies to make up for the unfair treatment they perceive to have suffered. At this stage, two psychological factors determine whether the pathway to terrorism will continue or not. The first factor is the perceived possibility for social mobility. According to Moghaddam, evidence points out that societies that offer more opportunities to improve individuals’ social status are less likely to experience non-normative actions. This is due to the fact that under such circumstances, people feel to be treated fairly and they believe that if they are talented and deserving, they will be justly rewarded. On the contrary, a sense of deprivation arises when individuals believe that the world is unjust. Those who perceive that their voice remains unheard in society, have a greater likelihood of moving up the staircase, in order to assert their ideas. The second factor is the perception of procedural justice. In this regard, the fundamental element in perceived fairness in society is the accessibility to the decision-making process. If it is considered just, there is a higher probability that people will support central authorities. Otherwise, the feeling of deprivation will encourage anti-establishment attitudes.

**Second Floor: Displacement of Aggression**

On the second floor the phenomenon of displaced aggression towards the enemy takes place. At this stage, individuals research a target to blame for their unsatisfaction. Some countries in the Middle East exploits this tactic in order to redirect internal conflicts to the outside. In this sense, the prevalent target is the United States. Thereby, these countries promote an anti-American rhetoric to reinforce
their power and increase consensus, even though without the US’ aid they risk of collapsing. An example is Saudi Arabia, which fosters a rigid interpretation of the Koran, nourishing the us-versus-them view of the world. In this framework, individuals who identify their enemy as the source of their deprivation and search for an occasion to take action, ultimately will move to reach a higher level of the staircase.

Third Floor: Moral Engagement
On the third floor occurs the most important process, which is the progressive engagement with the morality of the terrorist organization. In this juncture, individuals start to perceive terrorism as a legitimate and appropriate reality. Terrorist organizations are able to attract recruits through different strategies, among which isolation, affiliation, secrecy and fear. Therefore, despite some terrorists continue to lead a regular lifestyle in their community, they develop a parallel life in total concealment. Recruits mature the ability to maintain their cover hidden even with their family, spouses and friends. The unlawful identity of their organization, the pressure of the government and the perceived hostility of society, on the one hand foster the detachment from the outside world, and on the other, strengthen the relationship between the comrades. Hereof, terrorist organizations are successful by acting on two levels. At the macro level, they claim to be the only alternative to reorganize society and counter corrupt and repressive governments. At the micro level, they appear as a “home” for disenchanted individuals.

Fourth Floor: Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization
Once reached the fourth floor, individuals enter the secret world of terrorist organizations. At this point, they have almost no chance to walk out alive. They have broken the law, therefore they are wanted by the police as dangerous individuals. In this phase, new members are divided in two groups. The first group includes all those who, to some extent, will become long-term components. These people will join small cells, containing about four or five members, and will be eligible only for information regarding their own cell. The second group includes what Moghaddam defines “foot soldiers”, namely individuals that will be deployed to perpetrate the attack. With regards to this category, the complete process of recruitment, preparation and execution of the terrorist act occurs in a short time, in some cases taking less than 24 hours. The small size of these cells encourages a change in members' perceptions. This leads to the legitimization of the terrorist organization and its objectives. It is in this particular phase that the us-versus-them thinking is completely consolidated. At this point, recruits are pressured on two sides. From the inside, they are constrained by the terrorist
organization, which punishes any form of deviance. From the outside, they are persecuted by the government, which intensifies their belief that there is no alternative to the use of violence.

Fifth Floor: The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms

Terrorists feel no regret, nor guilt for their victims. They are trained to kill the enemy as if it is the absolute evil, and therefore it is not deserving of any kind of sympathy. In order to do so, two psychological processes are fundamental: social categorization and psychological distance. The first consists in classifying individuals outside the terrorist organization as enemies. In this sense, terrorists legitimize the use of violence because these individuals represent “evil forces” that have to be destroyed. The second consists in detaching mentally from the target, by taking to the extremes the divergence between the outside world and their parallel reality. This process reveals how members of terrorist organizations overcome what Konrad Lorenz has defined “inhibitory mechanisms” when committing an attack. Considering that oftentimes terrorists find themselves in direct contact with their targets, they might be conditioned by victims’ pleas or by any gesture that can unleash inhibitory mechanisms. Humans have no natural inclination for killing each other, in particular at close range. Hence, they have to develop techniques for sidestepping such tendency. Once achieved that, individuals are ready and committed to perpetrate a terrorist attack.

1.1.2 The concept of relative deprivation

In his study, Moghaddam focuses on the social and psychological sphere in order to analyse the pathway to terrorism. The underlying theme is that of relative deprivation. The trigger that pushes an individual to become involved in the process of radicalization is the mismatch between what a person believes he or she is entitled to, and what he can actually achieve. Hence, inequality is not conceived in absolute terms, but is subject to individual’s perception. According to Ted R. Gurr, relative deprivation can be defined as the discrepancy between people’s expectations and their accomplishments. The higher the expectations, the more disappointed people will become when they remain unfulfilled. The greater the disappointment, the stronger will be the motivation to climb the staircase in search for opportunities. For the purposes of Moghaddam psychological analysis, the contribution of the sociologist Walter Runciman has been extremely important. Runciman

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3 *Ivi*, p. 166.
distinguishes two types of deprivation. The first, named egoistical deprivation, occurs when a person experiences a feeling of deprivation within the group in which he or she belongs. The second, named fraternal deprivation, refers to the situation in which the sense of exclusion and unjust treatment is shared among an individual’s group in comparison with others. In particular, the latter has greater likelihood to emerge in societies where a specific group believes its ambitions are being stymied, while others have achieved theirs. For instance, in the case of terrorism, a desired goal by extremist organizations could be the right to self-determination, which is denied by governments.

Furthermore, Moghaddam contextualizes the concept of relative deprivation in a wider framework. In the last decades, globalization and mass communication have fostered the spread of western culture and lifestyle worldwide, in particular with the regard to the United States. The diffusion of such information has sparked a double effect: on one side, the charm of the American society has drawn the attention of the vast majority of the population, especially in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. But at the same time, it has fuelled a sense of relative deprivation when these expectations of freedom, economic growth and improvement of life conditions are not satisfied. The increasingly diffusion of frustration and anger have contributed in favouring the share of tactics and methods of terrorist organizations.

According to Moghaddam, the most successful strategy to fight terrorism is prevention. Despite the effort of governments, there will always be individuals willing to reach the top of the staircase. In light of this observation, an effective counter-terrorism plan should focus on the start of this pathway: the ground floor. Therefore, a policy that improves the conditions of individuals at the initial stage of the “climb” is considered the most productive solution to fight terrorism in the long-term.

1.2 John Horgan

Another important scholar that in his studies deals with the radicalization process is John Horgan. In “The Psychology of Terrorism”6, whose first edition came out in 2005, Horgan points out that individuals adhere to extremist movements for multiple and diversified reasons. In this sense, it would be misleading to reduce to a single cause a complex phenomenon such as terrorism. Oftentimes, when interviewed, terrorists themselves are unable to provide a clear answer to explain what triggered them to get radicalized. The reason is that they are influenced by a variety of factors, and sometimes ideology is used only as a justification a-posteriori to glorify their actions. Moreover, in some cases

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the decision is not even affected by the individual’s background. For instance, several terrorists, who have not experienced episodes of injustice or violence during their childhood, opt nonetheless to join extremist groups. This shows that men undertake a process of radicalization regardless of the fact that they are driven by ideology, social exclusion or a painful past.

In this context, a terrorist organization needs some distinctive features to allure new members. An element of attraction can be the possibility to move up the hierarchy within the organization to assume the power. Notably, new recruits, who are often moved by the desire of self-affirmation, may find fascinating the aspects of acquisition of power, acceptance by the group and improvement of their status in a community granted by the extremist movement.7

In his research, Horgan is interested in analysing what happens after a person joins a terrorist organization. According to his studies, violence is more effective when it is executed by a group that disposes of a large amount of resources. In the last years, this observation has been confirmed by several cases. The comparative analysis of all the massacres perpetrated by ISIS in western Europe has highlighted that the attacks carried out with the support of the chiefs of the organization, as the Paris attack of November 13, 2015, were far more deadly than lone wolves’ attacks. For the scope of his analysis, Horgan developed the IED model, which describes the phases of involvement, engagement and disengagement in a terrorist organization.

1.2.1 The IED Model

Involvement
The involvement in an extremist organization can assume different forms. It ranges from hiding a terrorist wanted by the police to lending him money to facilitate his escape. Therefore, being involved does not necessarily entail the use of violence or the participation in the attack. The contribution to a terrorist act can be so wide that it is complicated even to assess in legal terms.8 In most of the cases, in order to prosecute an individual, the court has to demonstrate that he or she has broken the law. However, on questions of involvement judges have a hard time in finding proofs of the relationship between the defendant and the extremist organization, resulting in a deadlock.

7 Ivi, p. 100.
Engagement

In the IED model, the execution of the terrorist act marks the transition from the phase of the involvement to the one of the engagement. At this stage, the role of the organization is fundamental in order to carry out the operation smoothly. The strategy behind a terrorist act is extremely precise and requires the support of a group. According to Horgan, the planning of the attack consists of four steps: decision and search activity, “pre-terrorist” activity, event execution, and post-event activity and strategic analysis.\(^9\)

In the step of decision and search activity, the terrorist organization carefully selects the target to hit though a theoretical elaboration. This decision is never left to chance because the choice of the victim has to be coherent with the aim of the mission and has to send a message to the community. Target selection is mainly influenced by two factors: the political context and the organizational pressure. In order to guarantee the effectiveness of the mission in the long-term, the objective has to be proportional to the resources available to the organization and to the authorities’ degree of control. For instance, an important element to evaluate is the supervision of security forces, which could undermine the success of the operation. Once all these aspects have been examined, the “pre-terrorist” activity begins. Here, militants deal with the logistics of the attack. After the target selection, the risk assessment and the development of a strategy, the following move is the identification of the most suitable militants to carry out the mission. Subsequently, members start training in order to acquire the necessary skills. At this stage, Internet plays a key role in providing the technical instructions for the construction of devices. If deemed necessary, terrorists can try out the explosive in order to ensure its good functioning during the real attack. This procedure is extremely complex to be accomplished by single individuals, therefore the support of a group is needed. After having settled these different aspects, members move to the event execution. In the case of shootings, the planning is easier. On the contrary, when terrorists have to employ explosives, the devices need to be hidden beforehand in a safe place in order to be detonated in a second moment. Hence, members must transport the material, and eventually assemble it, avoiding the detection of the security forces. For this purpose, coordination within the organization is crucial. Every area requires the supervision of the group so as to elude police checkpoints. In this phase, the presence of other members also helps to prevent someone from pulling out. The duty of the organization is to ensure that every militant remains focused and carries out his tasks effectively. Assuming that the mission has been accomplished as planned, the step of post-event activity and strategic analysis begins. Unless it was a suicide bombing, terrorists have to escape to avoid being caught by security agents. At this point, the support of the

\(^9\) John Horgan, *The psychology of terrorism*, cit., p. 94.
group is again essential in order to get rid of any evidence that might relate the organization to the attack, as weapons, mobile phones or other materials employed.

Disengagement

The final phase of the IED model is disengagement, which is a different concept than deradicalization. Notably, in this stage the individual stops participating in the organization’s activities due to the natural course of events or causes of force majeure, as the dissolution of the group or the arrest of the militant. On the contrary, deradicalization involves abandoning the previous beliefs. A person can be disengaged without necessarily deradicalize. However, sometimes the opposite also occurs. In many cases, terrorists maintain their activity in the organization despite being deradicalized.

Although Horgan does not recognize ideology as the leading factor in the radicalization process, he neither attributes a primary importance to group dynamics. As a matter of fact, this would imply wondering about why individuals join terrorist organizations, while he is interested in reconstructing the pathways that lead to terrorism. For this purpose, the analysis of the IED model focuses on the stages following the entry into a terrorist group and does not account for the reasons that pushed the individual in taking such decision.

1.3 Quintan Wiktorowicz

In “Radical Islam Rising”\textsuperscript{10}, published in 2005, Quintan Wiktorowicz aims at analysing why a rational individual decides to adhere to an extremist movement despite the risks and costs that are involved. For instance, in the West, radical Islamic groups are exposed to a hostile environment, due to the severe counter-terrorism policies enacted by the governments and the society’s disapproval. In addition to this, members also have to face material costs to participate in a terrorist organization. In the case examined by Wiktorowicz, the al-Muhajiroun Islamic movement, affiliates are required to hand over one third of their salary to the group and are compelled to attend seminars and to study at home. Nonetheless, al-Muhajiroun, founded by Omar Bakri Mohammed in the United Kingdom, at the time of Wiktorowicz’s analysis counted 160 “formal members”, more than 700 “students” that engaged in group lessons and activities, and around 7,000 “contacts”, intended as individuals that

\textsuperscript{10} Quintan Wiktorowicz, \textit{Radical Islam Rising: Muslim extremism in the West}, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2005
might be potentially interested in joining the movement.\textsuperscript{11} Considering the effort required, why do so many people find al-Muhajiroun attractive? The reason lies in the movement’s ability to develop a strong process of socialization between the group and the members, who start conceiving their life in function of the group’s interests. The social exclusion experienced by those left at the margin of the society enables the extremist movement to become the only alternative possible and intensifies the sense of identification with the group. Moreover, the new environment influences the individual’s previous system of beliefs, who learns to categorize the world in good and evil in accordance with the rest of the movement. In his analysis, Wiktorowicz attempts to identify the trigger that pushes an individual to join an extremist group. According to the author, a moderate person undertakes a process of radicalization mainly due to the mechanisms of cognitive openings and religious seeking, credibility and sacred authority, culturing and commitment.

1.3.1 The radicalization process

\textit{Cognitive openings and religious seeking}

The concept of cognitive opening is central in many studies on radicalization. It is explained as the consequence of a trauma that makes the individual start questioning the values in which he or she previously believed in. Henceforth, the person becomes more susceptible and vulnerable to external influences. In this stage of life, extremist movements play a crucial role. They offer certainties to those who have lost their way and feel a sense of bewilderment in the outside world. In this sense, Western societies are the main cause to the problem. According to the author, the vast majority of Muslims has witnessed discrimination.\textsuperscript{12} Moreover, there is a high perception of exclusion from the labour market and underemployment. In this context, mostly young people stop believing in the material success promoted by the western lifestyle and become interested in a more extremist view of the world. However, despite the fact that in the majority of the occasions the cognitive opening is driven by personal experiences, Wiktorowicz highlights that in the case of al-Muhajiroun it is the movement itself that fosters the process. For this purpose, the group relies on a twofold strategy. On the one hand, militants exploit their personal relationship with family and friends to spread their radical worldview and guide them towards a cognitive opening. The emotional bond enables the activist to have the unprejudiced attention of the audience and to discuss in a spontaneous environment. On the other, when it comes to the recruitment of strangers, trust has to be built. This

\textsuperscript{12} Quintan Wiktorowicz, \textit{Radical Islam Rising: Muslim extremism in the West}, cit., p. 88.
process needs more time and capabilities to establish social relationships. Public demonstrations, conferences and other activities are the main strategies to attract potential recruits and “raise public awareness” on the condition of Muslims. In these occasions, militants exploit provocative rhetoric and raw images to trigger moral shock and indignation. Some people walk away and carry on with their daily life, others are interested in getting to know more and engage in conversations with the activists. The latter are most likely to be recruited by the movement.

*Credibility and sacred authority*

In deciding whether to become radicalized or not, individuals are highly influenced by the extremist group’s reputation. In the West, specifically in the United Kingdom, there are several radical Islamic movements with whom al-Muhajiroun is in competition. Therefore, in order to prevail against the others, it needs credibility. The main strategy to achieve this goal is to give the society the best possible impression of the movement, its comrades and especially its leader. In this aspect, Omar Bakri has been particularly successful. The charm of its leader has allowed al-Muhajiroun to stand out from the rest of the radical movements. According to Wiktorowicz, those who decided to join the group were mainly motivated by Omar Bakri’s rhetoric. Even afterwards, the reason why many activists participated in long religious seminars was the leader’s reputation. Members describe him as a very educated scholar, who excelled the vast majority of the other teachers in the knowledge of Islam. Nevertheless, he was amenable to everyone and always willing to debate about religion with the movement’s followers. These features made him a trusted and reliable leader for al-Muhajiroun members.

*Culturing and commitment*

Despite the fact that militants recognize and respect the authority of Oman Bakri, this does not exclude the possibility that some individuals might still be tempted by the option of free riding. This phenomenon implies to be part of al-Muhajiroun, attend lessons and follow the Islamic doctrine, but to draw back when the situation becomes too dangerous. In this way, members only enjoy the benefits of being part of the radical group, dumping the responsibilities on the others. To avoid this from happening, the movement fosters a culturing process that persuades and stimulates members to study ideology more in depth. Those who do not sacrifice themselves in the name of Islam are deemed to be bound for hell. Through this approach, al-Muhajiroun limits the problem of free riding.

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13 *Ivi*, p. 92.
14 *Ivi*, p. 137.
15 *Ivi*, p. 167.
1.3.2 Costs-benefits evaluation

Considering the effort required in the activities of the movement and the high rate of participation, the benefits of adhering to al-Muhajiroun must overcome the risks and the costs involved. In order to explain this concept, Wiktorowicz resorts to Max Weber’s distinction between instrumental and value rationality.\(^{16}\) The former is defined as the pursuit of personal interests, while the latter of value. For Weber, an act driven by self-interest would put first material preferences. On the contrary, actions moved by value do not account for the possible costs and the individual is willing to take whatever risk to honour his values. The logic underpinning extremist Islamic movements, such as al-Muhajiroun, must be understood both in light of value and self-interest. Those who are influenced by the radical group’s doctrine, start perceiving high-risk involvement as a rational choice. Therefore, activists do not evaluate costs and benefits in terms of material utility but based on the spiritual blessing. For the movement, faith requires dangerous actions. Individuals then come to acquire and accept this condition through a process of socialization promoted by al-Muhajiroun. Sacrifice in the name of Islam is the only way to salvation and ideology is the guide that shows the individual how to reach the Paradise.

1.4 Marc Sageman

Marc Sageman’s contribution to the study of radicalization revolves entirely around the idea of socialization. His first publications “Understanding terror networks”\(^{17}\) (2004) and “Leaderless Jihad”\(^{18}\) (2008) are fundamental to analyse terrorism. Drawing from the social network theory, Sageman claims that the radicalization process is grounded in group dynamics rather than ideology. This thesis is summarized in the bunch of guys theory, according to which the adherence to terrorist organizations is a “problem of who you know” instead of “what you believe in”. To conduct his analysis, Sageman built a scientific database to test several conventional wisdoms on terrorism.\(^{19}\) The vast majority of people believes that terrorists are poor and ignorant, therefore more vulnerable to brainwashing.\(^{20}\) However, the results showed that three quarters of the sample came from middle class families and 62% of them went to university. Likewise, the hypothesis of religious brainwash

\(^{16}\) \textit{i}vi, p. 199.


\(^{19}\) \textit{i}vi, p. 25.

\(^{20}\) \textit{i}vi, p. 20.
has been rejected. As the data point out, the main field of studies were scientific subjects as engineering and informatic. Moreover, the 87% of militants did not attend Madrasa, the Islamic boarding school, and those who did come mainly from the Southeast Asia.

What is then the driving factor of the radicalization process? According to Sageman, social relations and group dynamics. In particular, terrorist movements are founded by the spontaneous aggregation of a “bunch of guys” through a bottom-up process. For instance, al Qaeda does not have a recruitment program to attract militants. On the contrary, the selection of volunteers is main problem for the organization, since there are plenty of followers that would like to join al Qaeda because of its reputation.

1.4.1 Friendship and kinship

Sageman database revealed that around two thirds of the individuals recruited in a terrorist organization had personal ties with people that had already embraced terrorism. In these terms, radicalization is understood as a consequence of social relations and mechanisms developed within the group. But how do people join terrorist organizations in practice? Sageman maps out two trajectories: the first regards the expatriates who come to the West to study, while the second includes homegrown individuals who come to the West as children.

The first answer traces back the origin of radicalization in what is referred to as the second wave of Muslims. Young Muslims from elite families of the Middle East were sent to the West to attend the best universities. However, most of the expatriates felt that the western lifestyle did not suit them. They became homesick, lonely and alienated from the rest of society. At that point, in order to meet people more similar to them, those youths started to frequent the mosque. It was not out of religiosity and spiritual belief but for companionship. In some cases, the social relationships created become very strong and comrades decide to move together to save money. In their apartments, the friendship consolidates, and through intense interaction and talks they reinforce their common beliefs. It is at this stage the process of radicalization takes place.

The second trajectory refers to the second and third generation of Muslims, namely the sons and grandsons of Muslims’ immigrants, but it includes also those who came to the West when they were still children. These individuals were raised and radicalized in a foreign country. From the beginning, they felt excluded by society and witnessed discrimination in school as well as in the workplace. Due to the realization that they were not given the same opportunities, many teenagers dropped out of

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21 Ivi, p. 66.
school and joined small gangs. After some years, they realized that such conduct would have led them nowhere and therefore they turned to religion to escape the hardship of life. Over time, the resentment towards the western society, from which they felt marginalized, increasingly grew and they became more radical.

1.4.2 Radicalization in the Diaspora

The 9/11 events have marked the evolution of the terrorist’s threat in the West. Beforehand, Islamic attacks were perpetrated by militants that had been trained in the Middle East. However, since the Twin Towers’ offensive, the threat no longer comes merely from the outside, but the new wave of terrorism has also “local” origins, in the sense that individuals were born, raised and radicalized in the West. In the fourth chapter of his book, Leaderless Jihad, Sageman explains the dynamics that lead these individuals to undertake a process of radicalization. The four mechanisms identified are: moral outrage, war against Islam, resonance with personal experience and mobilization by networks. Although he illustrates these dimensions in sequence, it does not entail that they have to follow a precise order. Each aspect of this path can proceed at its own rhythm and sometimes also in parallel with the others.

Moral outrage
Witnessing the injustices suffered by other Muslims can trigger an individual to radicalize. For instance, one of the most widespread videos used to draw people’s attention displays a twelve years old Palestinian boy, Mohamed al-Dura, who was killed with his father in a crossfire between Palestinian shooters and the Israeli Defense Forces in Gaza on September 30, 2000. Among others, Mohamed’s video has inspired Sanae Laghriss, a fourteen years old Moroccan girl, who was planning a suicide bombing attack with her twin against Rabat’s parliament, but was arrested in August, 2003.

War against Islam
In some cases, moral outrage is not sufficient to push Muslims to embrace terrorism. The indignation has to be contextualized at personal level and to involve the individual first-hand. In order to do so, a religious background is not required. The approach adopted by Islamic militants is political rather than spiritual. It is guised under religious terminology, but it hides a different scope. On the one hand,

22 *Ivi*, p. 72.
23 *Ibidem*.
24 *Ivi*, p. 52.
extremist movements condemn the West for being immoral and corrupt. On the other, they present themselves as the only advocates able to protect Islam from moral degradation. In this way, terrorists succeed in portraying themselves as at war against the enemies that manipulate the world.

**Resonance with personal experience**

The Islamic view of the world is far more effective when it reflects the struggle of individuals in their daily life. If an extremist movement is able to spread the idea of a war against Islam, the indignity provoked at global level translates as well at local level, making Muslims feel involved in the conflict. In the West, expatriates continuously compare themselves with the rest of the society. If there is the perception of being marginalized, they contextualize it within the bigger framework of the injustices suffered by Muslims all over the world. Their discrimination in the community is therefore interpreted as part of a broader resentment against Islam.

**Mobilized by networks**

The previous mechanisms do not envisage a method to remedy the situation. Up to this point, Muslims can only complain about their frustration but cannot act in concrete terms. In order to become terrorists, it is necessary to take a further step in the process of radicalization and to be willing to employ violence. There is a greater likelihood that individuals will be motivated to mobilize when they are influenced by a group. One network that is successful in this regard is that of radical Muslim students’ associations. Young expatriates that come to the West to attend university look for companionship and these groups represents a vehicle to create social relations. Among them, some decide to continue the pathway to terrorism and join violent extremist movements.

In his research, Sageman downplays the role of the ideology in the radicalization process. Instead, he recognizes that socialization lies at the basis of the path. In the first place, what attracts Muslims expatriates to the West, or those who were born there, is not the spiritual message of Islam. They begin to attend mosques out of a sense of exclusion from the society and to create social bonds. In this perspective, radicalization from a cognitive point of view occurs only after the individual has established a network of friendships and social relations. Extremism develops in intense small group dynamics, characterized by militants’ reciprocal interaction. On the one hand, the role of the comrades is to support one other in overcoming the adversities of life. On the other, they promote an ever more radical view of the world. Over time, the Islamic extremist set of beliefs takes over and they stop feeling unsatisfied by their social position. The lack of even opportunities and the disparity of material
resources are no longer a problem. In the end, they are compensated by the feelings of gratification and satisfaction of being part of a terrorist organization.

1.5 Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko

“Friction”25, whose first edition was published in 2011 by Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, is one of the most important reference in the study of terrorism. In the book, the two authors address the complexity of the radicalization process, which cannot be relegated to a single cause. Therefore, ideology cannot be the only reason why individuals embrace terrorism. Several religions, among which Salafism, do not preach for violence against non-believers or other innocent people. It rests with the individual whether to distort the original message of religious scriptures and confer it a more extremist meaning. In this sense, many precepts are susceptible to ambiguities and can be twisted to serve as a justification for terrorism. According to McCauley and Moskalenko, this disconnects ideology and radicalization, and prevent the former to be the leading factor of the process. The individual interpretation of a religious creed cannot be controlled, thus the trigger must be found elsewhere. In detail, radicalization develops on three levels: micro, meso and macro. In turn, each level takes into account a different actor: the individual, the group and the mass.

1.5.1 Individual radicalization

The mechanisms of individual radicalization are six: personal victimization, political grievance, slippery slope, love, risk and status, unfreezing.

*Personal victimization*

The first mechanism occurs when an individual feels to have been damaged on a personal level and therefore seeks for revenge. Oftentimes, the sense of hatred can be extended to the individual’s entire social class.

*Political grievance*

Political grievance is activated when an individual empathizes with other people’s grievances. The injustices suffered by the group, in which the person does not even belong, become the trigger for

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radicalization. In this case, the individual embraces terrorism out of sympathy towards others’ suffering.

_Slippery slope_

The slippery slope is a step by step process of joining a terrorist group. It is progressive and to some extent unintentional. In this case, the individual does not get involved in a terrorist organization with the intention to use violence but turns out being radicalized after a series of events from which he cannot pull back.

_Love_

Some people embrace terrorism in order to follow their partner, a friend or a family member. Love and devotion to comrades can lead an individual to join an extremist group.

_Risk and status_

At the basis of this mechanism there are love for risk taking and the pursuit of social prestige. Some individuals are fascinated by the idea of doing something very dangerous, while others are moved by the desire of fame. This mechanism is mostly common among the lower social classes. People exploit terrorism in order to become famous and get the recognition and prestige that they cannot achieve in their community.

_Unfreezing_

The last mechanism of individual radicalization is unfreezing. Everyday life commitments, as work or family, are an obstacle to people that want to join terrorist organizations. However, in the case an individual suddenly loses his social restraints he is _unfreezed_ from the performance of these duties. When the ordinary life falls into pieces, a person can experience a sense of bewilderment. In this sense, terrorist organizations offer a new net of friendship and protection besides a new ideology to believe in.

1.5.2 Group radicalization

After having investigated radicalization at micro level, the analysis focuses on the explanation of social dynamics within small groups. The mechanisms of group radicalization are three: group polarisation, group competition, and group isolation.
Group polarisation

At the outset, it may happen that some individuals join an extremist group despite not being as radicalized as the other members. However, over time they begin to acquire a more radical inclination as a result of discussions and talks held between the comrades. This mechanism, known as group polarisation, highlights the power of the group over the individual. Militants who are willing to sacrifice their lives in the name of terrorism are considered the most committed members and enjoy the respect of the group. Therefore, during a discussion, nobody wants to appear weaker and in order to receive the same appreciation ends up sharing radical ideas.

Group competition

Competition between rival political groups helps creating a powerful political identity. This is due to the fact that having to face an opponent enhances group cohesion. If militants have to stand together to detect a political enemy, their alliance will become stronger and it will intensify intragroup relationships. As a consequence, also the binary code mentality of “us against them” comes out stronger.

Group isolation

When an individual loses all his certainties in his daily life, the terrorist organization becomes the only possible reality. In this regard, the relationship with other group’s members intensifies up to the point that they start to consider themselves as brothers. Moreover, having limited or almost no contact with the outside would ensures that nobody can challenge the group’s ideas, fostering even more the radicalization process.

1.5.3 Mass radicalization

Terrorist organizations operate underground and are isolated from the outside world. However, in order to spread their message and achieve their goals, they need a broad popular support. There are three mechanisms promoting mass radicalization: Jujitsu Politics, Hatred, and Martyrdom.

Jujitsu Politics

Terrorists adopt the strategy of Jujitsu Politics, which consists in delivering a huge amount of violence, to dare governments to counterattack. In this way, the indiscriminate reaction of the State motivates even the most moderate individuals to radicalize. For instance, al-Qaeda has employed this
mechanism to incite the American government to intervene militarily in the Middle East, in order to provoke a reaction even of those who previously were against terrorism.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{Hatred}

The second mechanism that triggers a radicalization process among the masses is hatred against the enemy. In this context, terrorist organizations describe their rivals as the absolute evil, therefore they are not deserving of any compassion. Defecting the enemy becomes a source of relief and consolation among the mass, which for that purpose condones the use of violence. In order to eliminate any inhibitory mechanism that may hold back the militant from killing their rivals, terrorists discredit them by using dehumanizing adjectives. Therefore, if they don’t have human features, they are not worthy of any sympathy.

\textit{Martyrdom}

The last mechanism of mass radicalization is related to the martyrdom culture. Militants are forced to commit extreme acts because they are thought that personal sacrifice is required by Allah. This creates a phenomenon of mobilisation by sacrifice. Martyrdom also enhances competition between different terrorist organizations who, in order to prevail over the others, escalate violence in their attacks generating an “outbidding” phenomenon. For instance, when an extremist group resorts to suicide bombers, the rival organizations feel constrained to employ the same strategies so as to prove that they can be just as radical, or even more.

In spite of having sectioned their theory in three different levels, McCauley and Moskalenko believe that the radicalization process is the consequence of multiple mechanisms combined, with the exception of cases like lone wolf-terrorists. In the first place, the pathway towards terrorism needs to be considered at individual level. Frequently, several mechanisms occur at the same time. For instance, a person can simultaneously go through a process of political grievance and of slippery slope. In the second place, group dynamics play a major role in radicalization. The feeling of mutual support between comrades encourages them to conduct violent acts. Lastly, the purpose of mass radicalization is to provide militants with ideological support. Although masses are hardly ever involved in violent actions, they are indispensable for the Jihadi cause in order to emphasize that the terrorist fight is morally right. The most important distinction that has been highlighted is between cognitive and violent radicalization. The first refers to the individual’s interpretation of the world,

\textsuperscript{26} Ivi, p. 180.
which enters into conflict with the mainstream. The latter implies an additional step, which is the employment of violence to carry out the beliefs acquired through cognitive radicalism. The two types do not necessarily coexist. Oftentimes, individuals with extremist ideas are not violent in their behaviour. For this reason, McCauley and Moskalenko undervalue the role of ideology and conceive it only as a justification *a-posteriori*.

### 1.6 Donatella della Porta

Donatella della Porta published “Clandestine political violence”\(^{27}\) in 2013 with the aim of studying the causal mechanisms leading to radicalization. In her study, della Porta adopts a sociological standpoint by distinguishing three levels of radicalization: macro, meso and micro.\(^{28}\) At the macro level, she investigates the political context in which terrorism develops. The meso level is characterized by radical organizations and the dynamics between them and the governments. At the micro level, the analysis shifts to the personal relationship within the militants’ networks. For this purpose, the main focus of the research is the identification of some common factors in the evolution of the radicalization process. These mechanisms are defined as "*chains of interaction that filter structural conditions and produce effects*"\(^{29}\) and constitute the connection between the different levels of action. Starting from the case of social movements, violence is explained as something entrenched in social and political clashes, affected by the occasions accessible to the most privileged classes and the contenders, in terms of material resources and possibility to enhance one’s social position.

With the regard to violent clandestine movements, della Porta has identified three fundamental phases: onset, persistence and demise.

#### 1.6.1 Onset

*Escalating policing*

The radicalization of social movements is a consequence of the State’s extreme and indiscriminate use of force. The harshest the police’s actions, the less they are effective to prevent individuals’ radicalization. On the contrary, repression is more likely to provoke disappointment among the most

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28 *Ivi*, p. 21.
moderate people and in turn this can lead to two consequences. On the one hand, they may decide to withdraw from the conflict, paving the way for the most extremist members. On the other, repression may motivate them to radicalize and join the fight.

*Competitive escalation*

The competition that grows among the parties involved contributes in the escalation of the conflict. The fight sparks not only against the actors of the opposite front, but also within the same political group, between the movements that want to prevail on the others. In this phase, the radicalization process is even more intense due to the fact that every group wants to outbid its competitors and therefore it tries to develop ever more radical strategies.

*Activation of militant networks*

The third mechanism from which clandestine political violence is originated depends on the militant’s networks. Social relationships play a fundamental role in the recruitment process of clandestine organizations. These networks influence the militant’s view of the world though the pressure exercised by the group. For instance, if at first some activists do not share feelings of grievance and resentment, these are developed in along the way because of other comrades’ influence.

1.6.2 Persistence

Having explained the three mechanisms at the origin of clandestine political violence, della Porta moves on to describe the processes that guarantee its survival over time.

*Organizational compartmentalization*

The violent intervention of the State on the one side and the reduction of popular support on the other can lead to the growing isolation of the organization. At this point, the outside world constitutes a risk for the group’s survival, and this enhances clandestinity. The new environment forces the movement to adapt its structure to the situation. For this purpose, militants develop a more clandestine, compartmentalized and secluded organization.

*Action militarization*

The second mechanism is action militarization. On the onset, movements use violence to draw media’s attention and gain popularity. However, the more an underground group encloses in itself because of the risk of State’s repression, the more it abandons the aims of propaganda and focuses on securing its own existence. In this regard, the strategy adopted by clandestine groups over time is a
gradual increase of violence though action militarization. Oftentimes, the path of social movements begins from small-scale protests and ends up in murders or kidnappings due to political conflicts.

**Ideological encapsulation**

The third mechanism that favours the persistence of clandestine violence is ideological encapsulation. Della Porta highlights that, in the radicalization process, ideology is not important *per se* but in relation to how it is manipulated by violent groups. Clandestine organizations account for a binary distinction of the world based on good and bad, with a consideration of the enemy as an “evil essence”. The consequence is the widespread belief that the movement is involved in a holy war against its competitors and militants are required to sacrifice their lives for the cause.

**Militant enclosure**

The fourth mechanism is militant enclosure. Individuals who partake in political violence create personal bonds with other members of the organization. These networks strengthen political commitment and ensure the survival of the movement. The relationship between militants is particularly reinforced by the external environment. Being persecuted by the State and forced to hide in clandestinity brings members ever closer. Moreover, having no contacts with the outside world implies that it is impossible to challenge militants’ reality. All the information is "filtered" by the movement, which condemns any form of deviance. As conformity increases, it becomes less likely to challenge the group’s set of beliefs and this fuels the “us against them” binary code mentality.

1.6.3 Decline

Lastly, the narrative shifts on the analysis of violent movements defection. In particular, della Porta focuses on how previous mechanisms can be reversed.

**De-escalating policing**

Sometimes, State’s indiscriminate use of force to suppress protests enhances the willingness of individuals to radicalize. In light of this observation, della Porta claims that a de-escalating policing can be successful to prevent people’s participation in violent movements. Most of the times, the alternative of abandoning a clandestine group is being killed or imprisoned, which does not encourage militants to pull back. Providing a different option, as collaboration with the authorities, can induce some individuals to leave the organization.
Organizational disbandment

Another important mechanism can be the internal crisis within a clandestine organization, which leads to the disbandment of the same. Sometimes, it happens that a group breaks up, expels a militant or drastically changes its structure. These alterations may lead those who strongly oppose the new directions to abandon the movement.

Individual de-encapsulation

The exit process from an undercover organization is facilitated when the militants that grow tired of the clandestine life are brought together, in order to support and motivate each other to back out. The commitment to a clandestine organization depends above all on the personal relations created between the members. The fear of losing comrades’ friendship and respect must be compensated by the adherence to a new group that encourages the new path of life.

In the end, the analysis of della Porta wishes to focus on the causal mechanisms of the radicalization process. According to the author, individuals involved in violent movements are not only moved by pre-existing conditions, but they also develop new motivations along the pathway. In her study, della Porta identifies different levels in which the radical mechanisms develop. At the macro level, she is interested in explaining how the political context is influenced and, in turn, influences political actors at the micro level. The investigation of these factors enables the sociologist to illustrate a multidimensional evolution of clandestine political violence. In this context, ideology is not the pivotal factor in leading the individual to radicalize, but it serves as a subsequent justification for the use of force.
Chapter II
The causal power of ideology in the process of radicalization

2.1 Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt

One of the most cited models of radicalization is Silber and Bhatt’s report “Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat”\(^3\)\(^0\), published in 2007 by the New York Police Department. It is based on a comparative analysis of 11 jihadi cells that were responsible for the main attacks in Europe and in the United States between 2004 and 2007, among which the one to the Madrid railway on March 11, 2004 and to the London underground on July 7, 2005.

Their study aims at providing a clear framework of the personal and social dynamics that push Western citizens to join extremist organizations and embrace terrorism. Prior to the 9/11 events, jihadism was not very widespread among Muslims expatriates, but the Twin Towers attack served as a proof that also Western countries could be targeted for terrorist acts. Since then, Europe witnessed a rapid growth in the number of individuals undertaking a radicalization process and, consequently, an expansion of the terrorist threat. What stands out the most in the two analysts’ findings is the fact that the protagonists of the plot examined were not member of or controlled by al-Qaeda but were normal citizens who lived in Western societies. Hence, what is the reason that push people towards more radical behaviours? In their report, Silber and Bhatt clearly recognize that Jihadist or jihadi-Salafi ideology is the leading factor in motivating individuals to carry out violent acts against their host countries.\(^3\)\(^1\) In particular, when joining an extremist group, militants begin to conceive the terrorist attack as the apogee of their radicalization process, and their main political aim becomes the replacement of democratic governments with a worldwide Caliphate. Eventually, those Muslims mature a feeling of religious and political hate towards “infidels” of the West, due to the fact that they represent a threat for the persistence of the Islamic State. The Jihadist interpretation of this perceived “war against Islam” paves the way for terrorist organizations to spread ever more extremist ideas, according to which violence is justified to defend Islam from external enemies.

In order to explain the path towards radicalization, Silber and Bhatt break down the process in four phases: Pre-radicalization, Self-identification, Indoctrination and Jihadization. However, to divert eventual critics claiming that radicalization is not a linear process, the two analysts furtherly define their theory by using the metaphor of a funnel. In this sense, undertaking such pathway does not


\(^3\)\(^1\) Ivi, p. 6.
necessarily entail that every individual will undergo each stage and get to the final step. Some of them may turn back or remain in the same phase for a long time, without reaching Jihadization. Nevertheless, this is not less of a problem. Those who do not become terrorists represent still a threat due to the fact that they may serve as mentors or exert a degree of influence over potential jihadists of the future.

2.1.1 The four-phase model

**Pre-radicalization**

The first phase that individuals go through when undertaking a radicalization process is pre-radicalization. It describes a person’s background prior to the adherence to a terrorist organization. Although it would be misleading and erroneous to talk about a common “psychological profile” with regard to potential militants, it is true that terrorists share some similarities in the demographic, social and mental sphere, that render them more exposed to extremism.

Firstly, one of the main factors that influence the radicalization process is the demographic configuration of nations and cities. In districts mostly populated by Muslims, there is a greater likelihood that extremist ideas will pervade the social fabric of the community. In addition, the more those areas are secluded and marginalised from the rest of the society, the more they are vulnerable to the appeal of terrorism, which pretends to be the most devoted interpretation of Islam. From this perspective, isolation fosters the radicalization process. Individuals that feel excluded from the society tend to look for other people who share their same culture and beliefs. This mechanism favours radicalization, since individuals are more inclined to undertake the process when they enjoy the support of a group.

A second factor that affects the pathway to terrorism is the militant’s personal background. Oftentimes, individuals who adhere to extremist groups share some commonalities with regard to gender, age and social status. In their findings, Silber and Bhatt have reported that male Muslims between fifteen and thirty-five years are the most exposed to jihad.\(^{32}\) This is mainly due to the fact that in this age range individuals are constantly seeking to find their identity and ambition in life. Furthermore, extremism is more likely to spread among middle class families and individuals with a high level of education. The reason is that these people have to deal with the hardships of living in a society where they are discriminated and underemployed, and therefore they begin to bond with those who share the same feeling of frustration.

\(^{32}\) *Ivi*, p. 22.
**Self-identification**

Self-identification is the second phase of Silber and Bhatt’s model. At this stage, an initial approach to the jihadi ideology takes place. Henceforth, individuals begin to reshape their identity in light of the Salafi Islamic system of values. Most of the times, the driving factor of this religious research is the “cognitive opening”, which the two analysts interpret as an episode or crisis that stymies the individual’s previous set of beliefs and pushes him or her to embrace a more radical mentality. Typically, those who find themselves in an existential crossway, looking for their identity and the meaning of life, are the most exposed to this phase. Some of the triggers that can lead to cognitive opening are economic, social, political and personal crises.

Oftentimes, individuals start to question their identities due to political or personal struggles. A political conflict may arise from “moral shock” strategies that extremists employ in order to draw the attention of the public on some injustices that Muslims suffer in Western societies or in their own countries. These tactics are used to spread their message and to make people empathize with the jihadi cause. On the other hand, a personal crisis may be the result of a family member’s loss or of a perceived discrimination by the society, which mainly affects homegrown terrorists in the West.

Eventually, these struggles motivate individuals to search for like-minded individuals who may relate to their crisis and, thanks to the social networks created, the commitment to Salafi Islam intensifies.

**Indoctrination**

The third phase of the model is represented by indoctrination. After having completely acquired the extremist ideology, the individual realize that action is required to back and promote the jihadi cause. The crucial point of this step is the adoption of a radical view of the world that condones and legitimises the use of violence against the enemy. The latter is not only represented by Western societies, but it also includes “infidels”, namely Muslims who do not support the Salafi crusade. In this regard, the final aim that jihadists pursue is the creation of an entirely extremist community of Muslims worldwide. There are two parameters to determine whether an individual is moving on or going through the indoctrination phase: the first is the withdrawal from the mosque, while the second regards the politicisation of new beliefs.

At the beginning, the mosque served either as an incubator where individuals started to approach the Salafi ideology and as a meeting place for those seeking out companionship. Oftentimes, the departure is induced by the fact that the mosque no longer answers to the individual’s needs, which have become more and more extremists. In other cases, the cult site is believed to stymie the radicalization process. Those who plan to take action consider mosques as risky environments, due
to the fact that they are regarded as the main incubators for potential terrorists and thus are subject to increased control by the security forces.

At this stage, individuals begin to interpret the outside world in light of the Salafi ideology and their radical mentality influences their behaviours. Consequently, the world is categorized in two groups: the enlightened believers, themselves, and the unbelievers, everybody else. The latter become their principal rivals and the ones to defeat.

If on one side the self-identification phase may be experienced at individual level, indoctrination is tightly linked to group dynamics. Personal relationships with like-minded people play a key role in promoting and intensifying radical ideas. Therefore, being part of an extremist organization fosters the retreat from the secular world and the new group becomes the individual’s only reality.

Typically, the indoctrination phase is characterised by the presence of a “spiritual sanctioner”, who is a figure that encourages the radicalization process, by providing guidance for strengthening one’s ideology or committing an attack. His importance derives from the fact that, sometimes, individuals who experience a drastic change in their lifestyle and a consequent isolation from the outside world may need a mentor that supports them throughout the path. In particular, the duty of the sanctioner is to enhance the “us-versus-them” mentality, which legitimises the use of violence for the purpose of the jihadi war.

Jihadization

The role of the group lies at the heart of the jihadization phase, in which terrorists begin to recognise their obligation towards the jihadi cause and to proclaim themselves as holy soldiers or mujahedeen. “Group think” is one of the most influential factors for driving militants to actually carry out a terrorist act. It serves as a force-multiplier for the extremist interpretation of Islam as well as for enhancing competition within the group, in order to be considered the most radical member. At this stage, everything is set for militants to start planning the attack. Albeit the first three phases may require a considerable amount of time, around two or three years, jihadization is often a more rapid process, which might take as little as a couple of weeks. This step can be furtherly divided in a series of sub-stages that spell out the strategy of the terrorist act, despite they do not have to occur consecutively. Those consist in accepting the decision to commit Jihad, training and attack planning.

Firstly, once having embraced fundamentalism, militants are often searching for a final stimulus to become fully-fledged holy warriors. In many cases, homegrown terrorists in the West travel abroad in order to seek this motivation. In this sense, the most common destinations are Pakistan, Iraq,

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33 Ivi, p. 36.
Afghanistan and Somalia. Here, Muslims look for further religious legitimation and encouragement to start acting in the name of jihad. As a matter of fact, being away from the Western environment enhances the individuals’ willingness to commit extreme and suicidal acts under the guise of religion. Secondly, during the preparation of the attack, terrorists tend to cut off ever more their contacts with the outside world, enclosing themselves within the group. The other members become the only trust-worthy people, and this increasingly intensifies their bond. At this point of the radicalization process, each individual assumes a different role in the execution of the attack and has to develop the skills and the capabilities required. For instance, those who will commit suicide must be firmly determined to sacrifice their life for the mission’s success. However, this conviction can be easily undermined by the Western context, which is mostly a secular environment that cherish life, condemns suicide and exalts material wealth. In order to prevent any form of deviance, oftentimes terrorists recur to the Internet and other extremist media to strengthen their commitment to die.

Thirdly, when a fundamentalist group decides to carry out an attack, the members start debating about the logistics, which include the choice of the target, the modality, the operational scenario and the task of each militant. As all of the details are meticulously planned, the group is ready to get into the action and to reach the final stage of the jihadization phase, the terrorist act.

2.1.2 The role of ideology

According to Silber and Bhatt, ideology is the pivotal reason underpinning individuals’ decision to radicalize. In the West, the phenomenon of terrorism is mainly associated to the social context in which Muslims live. However, contrary to what is commonly believed, Silber and Bhatt claim that extremism is not driven by oppression, misery or retaliation. As a matter of fact, individuals embrace terrorism because they feel bewildered by the Western society and, therefore, they begin to seek for a new identity that they find in the radical interpretation of Islam. Due to Europe’s fault to marginalise the second and third wave of Muslim immigrants, both at economic and social level, many young men and women found themselves torn between their religious traditions and the new secular environment. This internal clash renders them particularly exposed to radical ideas and, consequently, it increases the likelihood of joining a terrorist group. Islamic extremism combines the minor and more radical interpretation of the Salafi ideology, the jihad-Salafi, with a strong dedication, or obligation, to end the “war on Islam”. Jihadists’ final aim is to spread their vision of Islam worldwide and to create a global Caliphate based on their beliefs. Therefore, here ideology is contemplated as the cornerstone of radicalization. It underpins every
decision, from the recruitment to the choice of the actual attack. Oftentimes, ideology affects also the
target selection and determines the strategy behind the plan’s execution.
The jihadi-Salafi ideology to which Silber and Bhatt refers to is a radical interpretation of the Salafi
doctrine, which condones the use of violence to achieve political goals. Becoming jihadists or
mujahedeen is conceived not as a choice, but as a personal duty. Sacrificing one’s life in the name of
Islam is praised above every other ethical norm, which can be infringed for a higher purpose, as that
of terrorism.

2.1.3 The importance of Internet

Internet is a recurring theme in the radicalization process. It is considered as an “extremist incubator”
on a par with trips to radical madrasas and militant training camps abroad, particularly for the most
vulnerable Muslims who live in diaspora communities in the West. The Internet, due to the several
extremist websites and forums, represents a stand-alone virtual incubator. For instance, many
individuals have approached for the first time Islamic fundamentalism through research or casually
surfing online.

Moreover, as militants move forward in the radicalization process, the role of the internet changes
accordingly. In the phase of self-identification, the web is mainly used to seek unfiltered information
on extremist and radical ideologies, but it also acts as a virtual meeting place. Thanks to online
platforms and forums, potential terrorists are able to connect with other like-minded individuals
without risking detection by the police, while still enjoying the benefits of being part of a group. On
the other hand, during the indoctrination phase, people intensify their extremist beliefs via websites
and online chat rooms. In this sense, Internet becomes a sort of “echo chamber”, namely a virtual
place that enhances the group’s ideology thanks to the strict network created by like-minded
individuals. Thus, aspiring terrorists start developing new cognitive categories to classify the world,
which strengthen their commitment to jihad and justify the use of violence for the Islamic cause. In
the last phase of the radicalization process, jihadization, the role of the Internet is crucial to gather
technical skills, as information on how to build devices or details on the target.

In conclusion, Silber and Bhatt place ideology at the core of their radicalization theory, by claiming
that it constitutes the main trigger for terrorism. Furthermore, the two analysts recognise that the

34 Ivi, p. 86.
35 Ivi, p. 8.
36 Ivi, p. 37.
transition from extremist beliefs to violence hinges on group dynamics, as well as on the charm of the organization’s leader. In particular, according to Silber and Bhatt there are two types of leader: an operational and a spiritual one. With regard to the former, his role is to provide terrorists with the technical skills to carry out the attack, to ensure that everything goes as planned and to keep the group’s spirits high. On the other hand, the latter is entrusted with providing the moral categories in order to justify and legitimise the use of violence.

Most of the times, undertaking a radicalization process is a self-driven decision but, as individuals progress through the different phases, they start looking for people who share the same ideas. This results in the formation of social groups that are fundamental to move forward in the radicalization pathway and ultimately become fully-fledged terrorists.

In the West, Muslims usually grow frustrated and angry due to the society’s lifestyle or the local government’s politics. Therefore, those who perceive to be marginalised and excluded from the community begin to search for other like-minded individuals to create new friendship networks. Over time, these clusters go through a series of events that enhance their radicalization, whose catalyst point is the terrorist act. However, this does not necessarily mean that every individual or group who undertake this pathway will become a terrorist. In some cases, militants may leave the organization or stop progressing along the stages for several reasons.

2.2 Alessandro Orsini

The causal power of ideology is also crucial in Alessandro Orsini’s contributions to the study of radicalization. Orsini first published his theory, known as the DRIA model, in the book “Anatomia delle Brigate Rosse”37, in 2009, but he afterwards elaborated it in many other volumes and articles, as the one taken for reference in this thesis, entitled “What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model”.38

Orsini conceives radicalization as the process through which an individual acquires a radical mental universe, that is a particular kind of mindset based on seven main features: a) Radical Catastrophism; b) Waiting for the End; c) Obsession with Purity; d) Identification of Evil; e) Obsession with Purification; f) Exaltation of Martyrdom or Desire to be Persecuted; g) Purification of the Means through the End. When radicalization reaches its culminating point, it produces a characteristic

“discourse” that can be articulated as the following flow: The world has been plunged into an abyss of pain and misery (radical catastrophism) because of the actions of certain categories of people (identification of evil) who deserve to be exterminated (obsession with purification). Before the world ends (waiting for the end) one must isolate oneself to protect oneself from rampant moral corruption (obsession with purity) and rejoice in being persecuted, because the sacrifice of life is evidence of spiritual purity (desire to be persecuted). The end is such that it justifies the use of murder (purification of the means through the end).

Orsini’s sociological analysis is deeply affected by two milestones of the sociological thought, namely Max Weber’s interpretative sociology and Clifford Geertz’s interpretative anthropology.

2.2.1 Max Weber: interpretative sociology

Max Weber rejects both the positivist claim to define general and objective laws of society, and the Marxist view that proposes a unilateral explanation of historical events starting from the economic structure. On the other hand, Weber adopts an interpretative approach, whose focus is on the human action rather than on the whole society. Starting from this assumption, his analysis aims at understanding the objective sense on which social phenomena depend. Interpretative sociology is therefore based on techniques of interpretation that are repeatable and controllable in light of the scientific method’s criteria. The conditions that Weber consider fundamental to guarantee the objectivity of the historical knowledge are the value-freedom of science and the use of causal explanation. With regard to the first condition, as a preliminary requirement, scientific objectivity has to be value-free, thus deprived of any observer’s opinion. The latter refers to the ethical condition of the suspension of value judgments, in light of the view that values are neither absolute ideals nor even abstract, but are connected with the entire social, cultural and economic structure. Therefore, their knowledge is essential to study reality, which allows to be observed and understood from different perspectives. The singularity of values is a sign of their transcendentality and of how they are always contextual and disordered principles. Indeed, according to Weber, it is unfeasible to try to understand a historical-social phenomenon through the identification of all its causes. Hence, a scholar must focus on highlighting the main factors that produced the case study. For this reason, the causal explanation is not opposed to the understanding, but is its condition: it “therefore designates that a given observable process (internal or external) is followed by (or is presented together with) another

process, according to a probability rule that is to some extent determinable, and in the ideal case - that rarely occurs - formulable in quantitative terms".40

On this basis, the author states that interpretative sociology outlines the attitude, that is, the social action of individuals, whose meaning can be ascertained on an empirical basis, thanks to the elaboration of the forms of recurring social behaviours. In this regard, social action is defined in a subjective sense and, in particular, human action is considered social to the extent that, by virtue of the subjective meaning that the individual (or the community of agents) attributes to it, it takes into account the behaviour of others and is in turn influenced by it.41 Considering the Weberian definition, three requirements must be met in order to determine the social character of an action. Firstly, social actions must have a meaning that is not objectively correct but subjectively intentional. In other words, to define an action as “social” the process cannot be random, accidental or involuntary, but it must account for the presence of other individuals. Secondly, social actions must be integrated into a system of communication that is understandable by every social actor involved. Hence, individuals must speak with one another attributing a symbolic meaning to their gestures and words that can be easily understood by those to whom they are addressing. Finally, it is necessary that the actors involved in the social action demonstrate, through their conduct, to have grasped the intention of the others and fulfilled the expectations by accepting whether or not to correspond to it. The advantage of the subjective definition of social action derives from the possibility of understanding from the inside the facts studied. Due to this concept, Weber has been defined as the sociologist of the Verstehen, namely the understanding of historical and social events.

2.2.2 Clifford Geertz: interpretative anthropology

With regard to the definition of social action, Clifford Geertz, an heir of the Weberian tradition, does not recognize himself either in those who consider culture in a subjective sense or in those who interpret it with objectivity. In Geertz’s view, in their daily choices and actions, human beings, unlike other animal species, are not guided by innate instincts but by a system of knowledge and ideologies that are learned during the course of life: “One of the most significant facts about us may finally be that we all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of life but end in the end having lived only one".42

41 Ivi, p. 282.
Therefore, individuals come into the world as a clean slate and need to learn everything there is to do. “This explains why men need to find points of reference and guidelines of action outside of themselves”.\(^{43}\) This set of information and guidelines is not drawn from innate knowledge, but from culture, without which individuals would be a pure chaos of aimless actions and impulsive emotions, given their incomplete and unfinished nature. In this sense, “man is his culture”.\(^{44}\) Taking up Weber, for Geertz the individual is immersed in “webs of significance” and, as a consequence, culture is interpreted as a system of symbols and meanings to which one must learn to have access. For instance, a trivial gesture as squeezing the eye cannot be understood without referring to the meanings it can assume according to the circumstances. In this regard, the role of the anthropologist is to “see things from the actor’s point of view”.\(^{45}\) In contrast to any form of positivist scientism that would reduce anthropology to a generalizing science, Geertz developed an influential theory of interpretative anthropology. It is based on the assumption that the human experience’s symbolism and the existence of webs of significance, of which each culture consists, implicitly intervene in the individuals’ behaviour by conferring a meaning to it. The task of the anthropologist therefore consists in an activity of decoding the meaning of the actions, practices and rituals of individuals coming from particular communities. From the sociological perspective, the main advantage of considering culture as a set of texts is to avoid any form of symbolic reductionism that may attempt to explain symbols as a mere reflection of the social structure or the psychological processes within the individual. Typically, sociology tends to focus on the causes and effects of cultural objects, overlooking their intrinsic nature and structure, and one example is ideology.\(^{46}\)

\(^{43}\) Alessandro Orsini, *Isis. I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2016, p. 186. Translated by me.

\(^{44}\) *Ivi*, p. 187.


\(^{46}\) *Ivi*, p. 193.

\(^{47}\) *Ivi*, p. 201.
political issues to personal ones. Divergencies are present at political level, for instance in the decision of the allocation of government resources, but frictions may also arise at individual level, for instance in case of conflicting desires within families. In this sense, ideology serves to face those emotional imbalances caused by social disequilibrium.

2.2.3 The DRIA model

Starting from Geertz and Weber’s perspective, in the DRIA model, Orsini arrives to conceive ideology as the “webs of significance”. The new radical mental universe reshapes the way in which the individual builds his social world, by operating a distinction just between comrades and enemies, who are not human beings but only a semiotic construct to eliminate. In detail, the DRIA model is an acronym that indicates four phases:

- **D** → Disintegration of Social Identity
- **R** → Reconstruction of Social Identity through a Radical Ideology
- **I** → Integration in a Revolutionary Sect
- **A** → Alienation from the Surrounding World

*Disintegration of social identity*

The first stage of the DRIA model is the disintegration of the individual’s social identity. Typically, this process is the consequence of a series of dramatic experiences or childhood traumas that induce the individual to doubt his previous beliefs and, thereby, his place in the world. The persistent feeling of bewilderment urges a way to escape from reality that, sometimes, leads to a passive attitude whereas, others, drives the individual to embrace new values in contrast with the old ones. This new mental framework is known as “cognitive opening”, which fosters an alternative interpretation of the world and opens to the possibility of adhering to more radical ideologies. The necessity of finding a purpose in one’s personal life can motivate individuals even to explore the hypothesis of extreme changes. In this sense, the new set of beliefs comes to supersede the previous, which had plunged the individual into misery. Therefore, from that perspective, people start their radicalization process in complete autonomy, by seeking answers to overcome the hardships of life, and end up finding them in extremist ideologies.

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48 *Ivi*, p. 203.
Reconstruction of social identity

Those who witness an existential crisis go through the second stage of the DRIA model, which is the reconstruction of the social identity. Having rejected all their previous values, individuals need to build a new reality with a fresh set of beliefs. Hence, the phase of reconstruction entails an existential transition towards new worldviews, which can be understood as a re-birth on the grounds of a different interpretation of reality. At this stage, people pursue the meaning of life that they have lost over time, which has triggered the existential crisis in the first place. In this regard, jihadi ideology is just one of the many answers that individuals can seek to rebuild their social identity, and those who adhere to fundamentalism find their reference points in the extremist mentality.

Integration in a revolutionary sect

After having acquired a radical ideology, individuals start searching for other groups who share their same vision. The process of establishing social networks with like-minded individuals can unfold in two ways. The former option is to create a personal bond with other potential terrorists, by meeting first-hand with those who sympathise and share the same worldview. Joining a physical group made up of similar individuals provides with the opportunity of directly interact and discuss with other members, which fosters both radicalization and group dynamics. Nevertheless, sometimes daily life duties or circumstances as work, family or geographical distance can stymie the meetings in person. In this case, virtual or even imagined communities come to play a major role in the radicalization process of individuals. As a matter of fact, despite never travelling to the Middle East, militants have plentiful methods to approach jihadi ideology and join terrorist groups online.

Alienation from the surrounding world

In the last phase of the DRIA model, individuals isolate themselves from the surrounding world by cutting off any external frequentation. This point is crucial in order to get rid of the negative comments and judgments that may come from the outside world. The risk is that the mainstream ideology of rest of the society may influence the individual in pulling back from terrorism, while interacting only with group members will always enhance radicalization. Social alienation is also needed to go through an “anthropological transformation” so as to become fully-fledged terrorists by vocation.49 This isolation from the outside world serves mainly for two purposes, one explicit and the other hidden. The first entails the interruption of any social relationship with the Western society, perceived as deceptive and corrupt, in order to feel morally superior. The second aims at avoiding that potential

49 Alessandro Orsini, What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model, cit., p. 25.
interferences from the surrounding world may lead the individual to question his or her willingness to embrace terrorism. Therefore, alienation acts as a barrier from external challenges or doubts.

Nevertheless, the DRIA model does not apply to every terrorist, but only to those defined by Orsini as “vocational terrorists”, namely individuals who join extremist organizations to satisfy a spiritual and inner need. The terrorist by vocation is the “terrorist of the first hour”, who, in his choice of embracing terrorism, is driven by a strong ideological motivation. This is easily understood in light of the risks involved in such decision, among which the possibility of being arrested, tortured or killed.  

2.2.4 The role of ideology

Orsini analyses more in depth the weight of ideology in the radicalization process in the book “Anatomia delle Brigate Rosse”. After having studied the testimonies and biographies of several Red Brigades members, he concludes that poverty or lack of education play only a marginal role in the decision of becoming radicalized. On the contrary, in order to embrace the extremist idea of killing someone, a strong ideological support is needed. From this perspective, terrorists are not moved by the thought of improving their socio-economic condition, but rather by accepting the idea that murdering the enemy is right and necessary. Moreover, in the context of the Red Brigades, ideology assumes not only an abstract meaning, but it also serves as a means to encourage concrete action. In this sense, ideology is interpreted as a sociopsychological process witnessed by members of a revolutionary sect through their daily interaction. However, despite individuals would not carry out murders before having acquired a strong and radical set of beliefs, ideology alone is not enough. The assistance of a group is needed to provide members with the necessary support to perpetrate violent acts, ranging from the psychological motivation to the practical equipment to carry out attacks, as guns, false documents or financial resources. To accept the idea of killing someone, terrorists filter reality through a particular lens, which allows them to deprive the victim of his or her human features, so as to ignore the person living behind the symbol attached.

Although Orsini attributes a primary importance to ideology, the latter is not conceived as an extensive and profound knowledge of an extremist movement ideas, like the Capital or the Koran, but he rather focuses on the causal power of ideology. This requires an attention shift from how much individuals effectively know and understand the group’s beliefs to the depth of their commitment,

50 Alessandro Orsini, Poverty, Ideology and Terrorism; The STAM Bond, in “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism”, 35/2012, p. 678.
which motivates them to carry out extreme acts as murders. Thus, ideology is envisaged as a relational process that cannot be reduced only to a set of books, but it has also to account for the personal dynamics that develop within the group. Hence, as to understand the factors that trigger the causal power of ideology, it is necessary to analyse it by distinguishing four dimensions: Social, Temporal, Affective and Moral, which Orsini describes as the STAM Bond.\textsuperscript{51}

**Social dimension**

When individuals join terrorist organizations, they cut off every tie with the outside world. The decision to isolate themselves from other social groups lies at the heart of the social dimension of the ideological bond. Due to the detachment from the rest of the society, their worldview cannot be challenged by other system of beliefs, and this produces people who live “outside of the world”.\textsuperscript{52} Additionally, seclusion fortifies the radicalization process by denying any negative feedback that may cast doubts in the militants’ mindset. For instance, members of the Red Brigades are bounded by strict rules even in their personal life, so as to prove that their commitment to the cause of the revolution is right and real.

**Temporal dimension**

The temporal dimension is characterized by the timeframe spent with other members of the revolutionary sect. In the case of the Red Brigades, the comrades share every aspect of their life, from eating to sleeping together. Moreover, as a consequence of the interruption of family relationships, the bond between members becomes ever closer, and they start seeing each other as brothers. By making the militant’s survival to depend on the sect, the likelihood of backing out of the group decreases, as the comrades are the only individuals he can rely on.

**Affective dimension**

The affective dimension regards the relationship with other group’s members. Due to the bond created with other comrades, nobody is willing to question the sect’s ideology so as not to lose the group’s trust and friendship. For instance, when a “pentito” of the Red Brigades, Patrizio Peci, decided to collaborate with the police by exposing everyone he knew from the sect but his girlfriend, she turned herself in to demonstrate that she would have never turn her back to the group and the cause of the revolution.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51} *Ivi*, p. 674.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibidem.

Moral dimension

The moral dimension of the ideological bond pertains to the content of ideology. The latter is crucial since it points out what to believe and how to act. In the context of the Red Brigades, this moral dimension is developed through a pedagogical process made up of different stages, which results in the dehumanization of the opponent. In particular, this system has been defined by Orsini as the “pedagogy of intolerance”.\footnote{Ibid.}

According to the STAM model, Red Brigades militants are prompt to murder their enemies only after having deprived them of their human nature. From this perspective, ideology precedes action and serves not as a mere justification for violence but as its pivotal cause. Red Brigades members never consider their victims as real persons. Rather, they attach to their enemies a semiotic construct that strips the individual’s humanity. In this way, the relationship between the killer and his victim is downgraded to one between a human being and an animal, making it easier to eliminate the enemy.

The four dimensions constituting the STAM bond are strictly correlated. This implies that if one of them is undermined, the others will suffer a similar weakening. In other words, the role of ideology as primum movens is proportioned to the strength of its social, temporal, affective and moral ties.

Taking up a different perspective, thus considering far-right movements, Orsini observed that also in that context ideology plays a crucial role in the decision of committing violent acts. After having experienced first-hand being a member of a fascist militia, as described in the book “Sacrifice: My Life in a Fascist Militia”\footnote{Alessandro Orsini, \textit{Sacrifice: My Life in a Fascist Militia}, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2017.}, published in 2017, Orsini concluded that, besides left-wing terrorists like the Red Brigades, also right-wing extremists build a parallel world in which they project a new radical reality. The underlying theme is the escape from the bourgeoisie society and the creation of an alternative system where they can exhibit their bravery and honour through personal sacrifice, commitment to the group and respect of the leaders’ rules. In particular, when constructing the parallel world, fascists try to recreate an environment similar to the one in which Italy lived between 1919 and 1945, during Mussolini’s regime. This parallel world consists of three pillars: sport, fight and brawling.\footnote{Ivi, p. 49.}

Sport

Violent sports, as martial arts, served to display the courage of Sacrifice militants. Those included being locked up in iron cages where competitors had to fight each other with no or minimal
protections, just as the gladiator used to do in the ancient Rome. The types of martial arts performed were among the most violent sports in the world, due to the fact that fighters were authorized to use harsh techniques as elbow or knee strikes. Moreover, to make the show more ruthless in the eyes of the yelling spectators, competitors were not allowed to wear any clothes, except for shorts, so as to better display the blood coming from their wounds.

**Fight**

The second pillar is the violent confrontation with left-wing extremist fringes. By provoking communist groups in order to start a fight, fascist militants aim at recreating the same environment that existed in Italy between 1919 and 1925, which saw fascists and communists in conflict with each other.

**Brawling**

The third way of building the parallel world is through brawling. What matters for the purpose of ideology is not the clash itself but what happens once it is over. After a brawl, the comrades enter in a new reality built on the values of honour, bravery, self-sacrifice, commitment to the group and respect of the leader’s orders.

Just as the Red Brigades, also fascist’s militants are subject to a strict degree of control in their private life. With the regard to the organization of their daily duties, the most important point of reference is the book “The Nest Leader’s Manual” by Corneliu Zela Codreanu, a political figure who praised Hitler and Mussolini and founded the Legionary Movement in interwar Romania. Codreanu identified six fundamental laws to which all comrades have to adhere, as the law of discipline and of reciprocal help. It is of utterly importance that every militant reads, studies and understands fascist books, in which is outlined the sacrifice ideology. The underlying values of right-wing extremists have already been set by highly esteemed figures of the past, as Niccolò Giani, Léon Degrelle and Dominique Venner, and they only have to be hand down and taught to the next generations of militants. From this perspective, individuals do not adhere to fascism out of ignorance but, on the contrary, they have

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57 *Ivi*, p. 42.
58 Niccolò Giani was both an Italian intellectual and soldier. He was highly valued by fascists because he symbolized the death of the bourgeois spirit. *Ivi*, p. 27-30.
59 Léon Degrelle fought alongside the Nazis and wrote the book “Militia”, in which he denounced the moral corruption of the world and the need to save it by sacrificing for humanity. *Ivi*, p. 32.
60 Dominique Venner shot himself in the mouth in front of Notre Dame when the French parliament approved a law permitting same-sex marriages. *Ivi*, p. 33-35.
to go through an educational pathway that teaches them how to conduct their lives in line with fascist values. In light of this, ideology assumes the crucial role of providing guidelines on how to act and interpret the world. In particular, the Sacrifice cell analysed by Orsini attributed great relevance to the cultural training of its recruits and the main objective was to instil the basic values of warrior societies: courage, sacrifice and honour.61

The first value, courage, is displayed by engaging in harsh conflicts with the adversaries. As it reflects in the construction of the parallel world, courage is tightly related to violence, therefore educating young fascists to be brave inevitably implies the use of force.

The second value is the sacrifice demonstrated by taking part in fights despite the fact that they are impossible to win.

The third value is honour: it is regarded as the direct result of the previous values, courage and sacrifice. The more militants show a commitment to fight against more powerful opponents, the greater will be their honour. In this sense, true fascists are never afraid to lose a brawl. Conversely, they fear more the possibility of losing the group’s esteem for not taking part in the fight. Despite the three values are inextricably linked, they are hierarchically ordered: courage and sacrifice serve as “means” to reach the highest goal, which is honour.

In conclusion, Orsini analysed the motivation to join extremist groups from different perspectives, accounting both for left-wing terrorists, as the Red Brigades, and for right-wing ones, as neo-fascist movements. His findings show that, in either circumstances, individuals undertake a radicalization process moved by ideology. Starting from an identity crisis, terrorism is perceived as one of the many ways out. Those who embrace it begin to conceive the world as divided in two main categories: good and evil. The latter have to be eliminated at any cost but, in order to do so, individuals need a strong motivation, which is found in a strong ideological commitment. For disoriented people there is nothing more valuable than some practical guidelines that perfectly mark their lives, as jihadi ideology does.62 However, in assigning an absolute meaning to an individual’s life, it must necessarily deprive another of the same. This is called the "trap" of radical ideologies: on the one hand it gives, on the other it takes away. It attaches a very high value to the militants’ life, while a very low value to the enemies’ one.63 Therefore, the DRIA model assesses that terrorists are not mentally ill. Instead, their willingness to get radicalized derives from personal traumas, which push them to search for new set of values able to provide a meaning to their lives. From this perspective, terrorist organizations

61 Ivi, p. 25.
62 Alessandro Orsini, Isis. I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli, cit., p. 168.
63 Ibid.
are firstly ideological phenomena, namely ideas, worldviews and cognitive categories, and consequently violent acts as shootings or suicide bombings.

### 2.3 Arie Kruglanski, Jocelyn Bélanger and Rohan Gunaratna

In “The Three Pillars of Radicalization”\(^{64}\), published in 2019, Arie Kruglanski, Jocelyn Bélanger and Rohan Gunaratna spell out their psychological theory of radicalization, which aims at explaining why individuals start adopting extremist behaviours. In particular, in their analysis, extremism is contextualized in a wider framework, which also includes different conduct variations, as extreme diet or extreme sport. However, this thesis will only focus on the aspect of violent extremism. In general, Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna suppose that every version of extremism is the result of a motivational imbalance in which a singular basic need is placed disproportionately above the others. Consequently, the remaining needs end up stymied by the predominant one that is no longer subject to constraints. This implies that, for instance, violent behaviours commonly outlawed are nonetheless pursued. In this perspective, extremism derives from a profound need that generates a motivational imbalance. In order to explain this phenomenon in general terms, the question to ask is why some individuals adopt conducts that the vast majority of people repudiate. More in detail, with regard to violent radicalization the focus is on what drives a person to carry out aggressive actions that can potentially harm others. The answer provided by the three authors consists in the theory of the 3Ns, which stand for the needs, the narratives and the networks.

#### 2.3.1 The 3Ns of radicalization

**The Need**

The underpinning theme behind the willingness to embrace terrorism is an intense dedication to the cause, which correspondingly diminishes the concerns about other questions, the so called “focal goal” to which jihadists are committed. According to Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna, there are a variety of goals that explain the individuals’ pledge to jihad, but they all share a common ground: the quest for significance.\(^{65}\)


\(^{65}\) Ivi, p. 42.
The quest for significance is the inherent desire to be important and esteemed by the community. From a psychological point of view, this aspiration represents a widespread incentive also defined as need for respect, consideration, appreciation and admiration. In this light, all the different causes that account for explaining terrorism are considered as “special cases” of significance quest. For instance, oftentimes devotion to the group’s leader is deemed among the triggers for radicalization. From the psychological perspective, this loyalty and veneration conveys into the desire for his or her approval, which can lead the individual to carry out extreme acts only to obtain the leader’s blessing. Alternatively, in view of revenge, the principal quest is to counterattack those who damaged someone or a specific group. Aside from the material harm provoked, injustices render the individual vulnerable and decrease his or her confidence not only at personal level but also in the others’ eyes. Therefore, revenge serves to re-establish the balance of power by returning the humiliation suffered and reclaiming the quest for significance lost.

There are three factors that can trigger the significance quest: its deprivation, avoidance and incentive.

**Significance loss: Personally based.** Significance can be lost in case of personal mortification, failure or due to an outrage to someone’s social identity that is shared by a specific group. Sometimes, personal humiliation may be the result of a violent clash with individuals external to the group and it may stem from personal losses caused by the rivals. Others, the loss of significance can arise out of economic, social or political circumstances present in a specific society, notably ethnic conflicts, government’s instability and financial uncertainty. At the individual level, all these elements translate into a perception of impotence and powerlessness, which can be eventually exploited by terrorist organizations.

**Significance loss: Socially based.** Oftentimes, episodes of significance loss experienced by an individual are shared by his or her social group. An example of this kind may be the situation of Muslim expatriates living in the West, who are frequently subject to marginalisation and discrimination from the society.

**Avoidance of significance loss.** A simple threat to significance loss may trigger individuals to take action against the perceived danger in order to impede it. For instance, only the thought of possibly being humiliated or discredited by the group can motivate individuals to adopt radical behaviours.

**Opportunity for significance gain.** Sometimes, people embrace terrorism because it is deemed to grant an opportunity for significance gain. In the martyrdom culture, militants who are willing to sacrifice their life for the jihadi cause are considered as heroes and enjoy the respect and the esteem of their community.
The Narrative

However, the quest for significance alone cannot lead to violent extremism. An individual may display all the characteristics above mentioned and still direct his or her ambitions to be admired and become famous in several productive and peaceful ways. On the contrary, the resort to violence to exhibit power is condemned by the vast majority of societies. In this sense, those who want to take radical actions against their enemies need a form of popular consensus and endorsement. Such authorization is provided by ideology. In general, a narrative that legitimises violence serves for two main purposes. First, it fortifies the individual’s quest for significance by emphasizing and taking advantage of the injustices that he or she might have suffered. Second, ideology creates the vital link between violence and significance, implying that commitment to terrorism is determined by the acquisition of extremist ideas.  

Whether implicitly or not, the violence-justifying narrative points out that individuals who adopt radical behaviours and perpetrate violent acts will receive the respect and the recognition of the group. Somehow, it looks as if the worth attributed to the cause shifts to the person that has shown self-sacrifice. The pivotal suggestion of this analysis is that what prompts extremism is not the cultural value in itself, nor even its protection, but the individual’s conviction that the cause’s defence will grant him honour and worship within the group. In this light, the commitment to a cause or a value reveals to be not an end in itself but a means to fulfil the individual’s needs.

Some researches tend to attribute the propensity to share extremist beliefs to a lack of education. From this point of view, low tuition is considered to decrease one’s possibilities to find a well remunerated job, thus enhancing narratives that promise significance through the use of violence. However, for Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna there is no such correlation. The effects of education on radicalization are extremely subjective and they only depend on the value that individuals attach to it.

The Network

The relevance of social networks in the radicalization process has been acknowledged by several scholars over the years. Its role is to make the individual interface with the narrative shared by the extremist group, which will channel their desire to re-establish or gain their sense of significance. Oftentimes, people get in contact to violence-justifying ideology via friends or family members. Thus, given the fact that typically individuals tend to approve and conform with those who are near them, they are more vulnerable and exposed to extremism. Due to the trust placed in these relations, the

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66 Ivi, p. 48.
viewpoint of relatives and friends is taken very seriously by potential terrorists, and the narrative that they embrace is acquired without any doubt or question. Under such circumstances, it is unluckily that individuals will challenge the ideology of those close to them. As a consequence, the critical thinking alone is not sufficient to balance the influence of radical narratives, because it does not discourage an individual to agree with the ones that he or she trusts the most. Moreover, the social process behind radicalization not only regards family members and friends with whom a person has face to face interaction, but it also extends to those charismatic figures met online, through chat rooms or propaganda videos, or first-hand, in mosques or madrasas schools. It follows that radicalization cannot be explained without taking into account the friendships and kinships that interplay in group dynamics. Charming leaders and their persuasive rhetoric are pivotal factors in convincing people to adopt extremist ideologies and embrace terrorism, since they are particularly able to influence listeners and channel them towards more radical beliefs.

Recently, several terrorist attacks have proved the existence of a close correlation between the perpetration of the violent act and family networks. For instance, the Paris attacks of November 2015 were carried out by the Kouachi brothers; in the Brussels attacks of March 2016 saw the involvement of the Bakraqui brothers; the Boston marathon massacre of April 2013 was perpetrated by the Tsarnaev brothers. According to the estimates reported by Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna, almost the 30% of Western militants involved in jihad are related, both by family members living in the Middle East or by other personal ties to terrorists from previous conflicts or attacks. It is more likely that these social networks are created in families with a very strong cohesion between their members, which fosters a more intense worldview based on radical narratives. From an organizational perspective, family bonds provide a series of strategic benefits. The members are frequently in contact with each other, which enhances mutual radicalization as well as collaboration during the actual attack. Family relations also discourage potential defections from the group, since individuals are very committed to one another, and it can be an advantage in case of high-risk missions.

2.3.2 Relations between the 3Ns

Despite the three factors of need, narrative and network all constitute the phenomenon of violent extremism, their contribution may vary with regard to singular pathways. In general, individuals have very different characteristics, and these reflect in the impact that each “N” has in the radicalization process. For instance, those who are more ambitious will be more influenced by a narrative that

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67 Ivi, p. 51.
68 Ivi, p. 52.
promises them the recognition and the esteem of the group, while others may rely more upon their family or friends, hence giving more weight to personal networks. Furthermore, these differences can either be steady categories and typical traits of the individual or fuelled by the circumstances. A personal failure might trigger the individual’s quest for significance and foster his or her search for a compensating ideology, while experiencing marginalization from society might render the individual more vulnerable to a group’s influence.

2.3.3 A model of radicalization

Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna’s radicalization process and its determinants are illustrated in the scheme below. The left side analyses extremism at individual level by showing its potential cause, namely significance loss, which may be a result of societal stigma, personal failure and humiliation, or economic loss.

![Figure 1: Determinants of radicalization](image)

The loss of significance arises when individuals perceive that their possibility to achieve certain goals is being stymied and therefore their main objective becomes to re-establish it, as it is displayed in the

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69 Source: *Ivi*, p. 57
central part of Figure 1. In some cases, if a person is particularly willing to restore significance, there is a greater likelihood that all the other values and needs will end up suppressed, resulting in a form of extremism. The latter’s degree will be determined by how much the remaining concerns matter to the single individual and, in this sense, radicalization is expected to escalate alongside people’s commitment to extremist narratives.

2.3.4 The role of ideology

The focal goal alone is not enough to trigger radicalization, but a means to achieve it is required. Usually, this means corresponds to ideology, which serves as a legitimation for individuals’ extremist behaviours. According to Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna, ideology is a “prescriptive belief system shared by members of a group and articulated in the group’s narrative”.70 In case a group is under duress, whether real or perceived, ideology helps shaping the individuals’ idea that the survival of the organization is their main mission and that the actions carried out to ensure it will be highly admired and glorified. The group’s persistence is one of the most sacred values to its militants, and those who are willing to do their utmost, even sacrificing their life, enjoy the respect and the esteem of the group. The role of ideology in the radicalization process is therefore to justify extreme behaviours as the means to pursue the goal of personal significance.

When individuals lose this significance, they are more inclined toward radical activities and conduct. For instance, after experiencing a humiliating event, someone may feel a sense of bewilderment that fosters the need for cognitive closure and new certainties to believe in. Here, cognitive closure is meant as an aspiration for reliable and undoubted worldviews, which favour more simplistic narratives as the “us-versus-them” mentality. Frequently, when the individual’s confidence is undermined by self-distrust and insecurity, it triggers a mechanism to get rid of this feeling, hence leading toward a cognitive closure. On its side, cognitive closure may nurture the propensity to adopt extreme and unbalanced worldviews that only validate the group’s ideas and condemn the rest of the world, against which it is legitimate to use violence.

Although the importance of ideology in the radicalization process has been questioned by several scholars, as illustrated in the previous chapter, Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna believe that it is the motivating factor for terrorism. In their view, ideology represents a shared reality to which members of a social group adhere. Kinships and friendships are not effective without the underlying support of a common worldview. Ideology is the underpinning reason behind the creation of social

70 Ivi, p. 48.
bonds and networks, and it ultimately serves as a justification for the use of violence. According to the authors, extremist ideologies typically presents three basilar features: grievance, culprit and morally warranted and effective method.

The first factor, grievance, is the harm or injustice that a group perceives to have suffered due to its religion, ethnicity or other reasons, while the second, culprit, is the responsible for such injustices. The last factor is the morally warranted and effective method of eradicating the shame caused by the injustice, namely terrorism.

In the end, Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna believe that the path toward radicalization begin from the quest for significance, which drives the individual to search for possible means to achieve it. Among them, the most important is the collective ideology shared by the group, which contributes in promoting extremism and violence as legitimate means to pursue significance. If individuals start adopting radical narratives it is more likely that they will embrace terrorism.

The radicalization theory proposed by the authors is founded on three factors: the need, the narrative and the network, which influence the individual to undertake the pathway to extremism at different degrees. The need, or the motivational determinant, that arises from the quest for personal significance describes the aim pursued by the individual. The ideological narrative determines and justifies the means used to achieve the goal set, while the social network enables the individual to enjoy the support of a group during the practical enforcement of the ideology, which mostly serves as a legitimation for the use of violence.

However, the impact of these elements on potential terrorists is utterly subjective and depends on what the single individual weights the most. For instance, in some cases, people may respond better to the fact that their friends or family is already involved in an extremist organization, while in others they might be more easily persuaded by an incisive and attractive ideology. Therefore, what Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna value the most in analysing radicalization pathways is not the process itself, which may vary from one person to another, but the individual’s commitment to the cause or the degree of their extremism.
Chapter III
Case studies: how radicalization models apply to terrorists’ lives

The analysis presented hitherto has shown that, in the field of terrorism, there is a wide range of radicalization theories. In particular, in this last section, I will investigate more in depth those who place ideology at the heart of their models by directly applying the theories to real terrorists’ cases. The chapter will proceed as follows: firstly, starting from Silber and Bhatt’s radicalization process, based on four phases, the reference will be to the case of Mohammed Bouyeri, a member of the Dutch Hofstad Group, who had the intention of carrying out several terrorist attacks in the Netherlands, including one against the Parliament, and who murdered a Dutch filmmaker, Theo Van Gogh. Secondly, I will apply Orsini’s DRIA model to Michael Bibeau and Mohammed Merah, apparently two opposite cases in terms of background conditions, which however find a common explanation in the four phases indicated by the acronym. Lastly, the 3Ns theory of Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna will be exerted to analyse the case of the Tsarnaev brothers, who conducted the attack at the Boston marathon in April 2013.

3.1 Silber and Bhatt four phases model: Mohammed Bouyeri

3.1.1 Pre-radicalization

For Silber and Bhatt, the pre-radicalization step pertains to the individual’s background, age, education, social context and his experiences. Mohammed Bouyeri was born in Amsterdam from a Moroccan family of immigrants. After having completed high school, he became interested in social work and was very esteemed by his teachers, who described him as a promising young man. Bouyeri strived to assist other young Moroccans in a youth centre in his neighbourhood, Eigenwijks, and even planned to open his own community centre. Despite running in some troubles with the local authorities over minor theft and assault crimes from time to time, in late 2001 or 2002, he started attending a course in social work at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences. Bouyeri’s behaviour allegedly began to change in the aftermath of his mother’s unexpected death, in 2002. At the end of the year, he abandoned his studies and started relying on government welfare. During this period, Bouyeri matured a much more conservative
religious stance. As a result, he could no longer carry out his work at the youth centre due to some of his newly adopted conservative views and behaviours, as a refusal to serve alcohol.71

3.1.2 Self-identification

At that stage, Bouyeri started attending a fundamentalist mosque called Al-Tawheed, in which the imam praised suicide bombers and sold literature that advocated the killing of homosexuals, where he also met other Muslim integralists. As Silber and Bhatt noted, “The mosque would regularly sponsor radical imams, who encouraged killing unbelievers, martyrdom and jihad”.72 Bouyeri began dressing more conservatively, changing his name in Abu Zubair, and writing fundamentalist and anti-Western texts of his own, some of which he published online. He also allegedly began attending regular meetings with a group of extremists based in The Hague and frequently hosted many guests, who a neighbour claimed would arrive “dressed in traditional robes”, at his home. Bouyeri first came to the attention of the authorities in relation with a man called Samir Azzouz, who was arrested in 2003 with the suspect of planning a terrorist attack. The police later asserted that he belonged to a group of mostly Dutch terrorists and extremists called the Hofstad Network. Bouyeri’s journey to radicalism appears to have begun during his seven months stay in prison. This, according to Silber and Bhatt, may have triggered the cognitive opening, since prisons serve as one of the main incubators in the radicalization process. After being released from prison, Bouyeri changed his academic pathway from accounting to social work and began volunteering at his local community centre. His friends say he began to wear “traditional” clothing and grew a beard. He was also more sensitive to political issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict. Bouyeri’s transformation continued with a deepening of his religious convictions while his views on social issues began to be ever more conservative.73

3.1.3 Indoctrination

As Silber and Bhatt point out, this stage entails the fortification of the beliefs acquired, and the individual finally begins to contemplate jihad as a reality and starts acting with the aim of enforcing it. Moreover, as the individual grows ever more radical, the mosque no longer satisfies his needs. In the case of Mohammed Bouyeri, the withdrawal from the Al-Tawheed mosque was influenced by the

Available on: https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/mohammed-bouyeri
72 Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat, cit., p. 78.
73 Ibid.
decision to leave made by the entire radical group to which he belonged. The cluster, which included several members of the Hofstad Group, was mentored by Redouan Al Issar, a Syrian fundamentalist who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood. Al Issar was the group’s “spiritual sanctioner”. The group began holding both prayer and political discussion sessions in Bouyeri’s apartment. During these private sessions, the group also watched jihadi videos and was active online promoting and debating jihad. Mohammed Bouyeri’s progression from the self-identification stage to indoctrination was rapid. The articles that Bouyeri would write for the community centre, where he volunteered, became increasingly more radical, as Bouyeri’s religious and political views became intertwined. As the group’s “communication coordinator”, Bouyeri further nurtured his political agenda by hosting a chat room for like-minded individuals, and translating/posting essays by prominent jihadist thinkers, including Abu Ala Maududi and Sayid Qutb, on websites.

3.1.4 Jihadization

The individuals who reach the final stage of the radicalization process have developed a set of beliefs strong enough to push them towards the practical organization of the plot. Having acquired the mentality according to which jihad is the highest purpose in life, the next step is training for the actual attack. As Silber and Bhatt highlighted, usually groups travel to Middle East countries so as to have the opportunity to reinforce both their ideology and their practical skills. Afterwards, once obtained the necessary competences, they are ready to conduct the terrorist act. By October 2004, Mohammed Bouyeri had become convinced of his personal obligation to do jihad himself, and after having acquired his own gun, he began to practice shooting. As the group started plotting the realization of several major operations, without warning, on the morning of November 2, 2004, Bouyeri brutally shot and killed a Dutch writer and filmmaker, Theo Van Gogh, on a street in Amsterdam. This led to the arrests of the other members of the group within days and effectively rolled up the leaders of the Hofstad Group.

Bouyeri first fired shots at van Gogh from across the street, then stabbed him multiple times with a knife and slit his throat. Bouyeri pinned two notes to van Gogh’s body with the knife, then fled to a nearby park, where he entered into a gunfight with police before his arrest. Both him and a policeman suffered injuries from the gunfight. Bouyeri’s trial took place in July of 2005. During his hearing, Bouyeri confessed the killing and professed that he targeted van Gogh due to his religious convictions. Van Gogh was a prominent critic of Islamic fundamentalism, and had directed a short film called “Submission,” which criticized Islam’s treatment of women. One of the notes left pinned
The other note suggested that Bouyeri expected to be shot dead after the attack. During the trial, Bouyeri brought a Koran to court and did not attempt to argue a defence. At one point, he addressed van Gogh’s mother directly, telling her he did not feel her pain because she was a “nonbeliever,” and professed that he would commit such an attack again if given the chance. Bouyeri was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison with no possibility of parole.

3.2 Orsini DRIA model: Michael Bibeau and Mohammed Merah

As asserted in the previous chapter, Orsini’s DRIA model revolves around four phases, which individuals experience when undertaking a radicalization process, namely Disintegration of social identity, Reconstruction of social identity through a radical ideology, Integration with a revolutionary group and Alienation from the surrounding world.

3.2.1 The background of the study

In detail, the DRIA model is based on the comparative study of 39 terrorists’ biographies, who conducted several attacks in the United States and Europe between 2004 and 2018: Mohammed Bouyeri, who murdered Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam (2 November 2004); Mohammed Sidique Khan, Hasib Hussain, Germaine Lindsay, Shehzad Tanweer, the culprits of the London Bombings (7 July 2005); Muriel Degauque, who is deemed the first European female suicide bomber. She blew herself up in Iraq, after she became a jihadist, (9 November 2005); Nidal Malik Hassan, a former American Army Major condemned for the murder of 13 people in the Fort Hood mass shooting (5 November 2009); Mohammed Game, who tried to commit a suicide bombing in front of the Santa Barbara military barracks in Milan (12 October 2009); Zouheir Jelassi, the commander of an al-Qaeda-affiliated Tunisian cell that was active in the Milan area (Buccinasco) in the late 1990s and early 2000s; Arid Uka, who carried out the attack against the Frankfurt airport, provoking the death of two US soldiers (2 March 2011); Mohammed Merah, who perpetrated the massacre against the Hebrew school of Toulouse (19 March 2012); Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, who conducted the massacre against the Boston marathon (15 April 2013); Michael Adebolajo, the killer of the soldier Lee Rigby happened in London (22 May 2013); Giuliano Delnevo, a 23-year-old Italian convert to Islam who died as a martyr on 12 June 2013 in al-Qasayr, Syria, while fighting with a group of
Chechen Islamic extremists against Asad forces; Martin Couture-Rouleau, who killed the policeman Patrice Vincent, in Saint Jean sur Richelieu, in Quebec (20 October 2014); Michael Bibeau, who assassinated the soldier Nathan Cirillo in Ottawa (22 October 2014); Said and Cherif Kouachi, the responsibles of the attack against the offices of Charlie Hebdo (7 January 2015); Amedy Coulibaly, who carried out the massacre against the kosher supermarket in Paris (9 January 2015); Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez, the perpetrator of the Chattanooga massacre (16 July 2015); Omar Mateen, who conducted the slaughter against the night club Pulse in Orlando, Florida (12 June 2016); Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, the author of the Nice massacre (15 July 2016); Adel Kermiche, one of the two culprits for the murder of Jacques Hamel in the Catholic church in Normandy (26 July 2016); Larossi Abballa, the perpetrator of the Magnanville stabbing (13 June 2016); Mohammad Daleel, the author of the Ansbach bombing (24 July 2016); Khaled Babbouri, the culprit of the Charleroi Police Officers stabbing with a machete (6 August 2016); Anis Amri who committed the Berlin truck attack (23 December 2016); Khalid Massod, who carried out the Westminster truck attack and stabbing (22 March 2017); Rakhmat Akilov, the author of the Stockholm truck attack (7 April 2017); Karim Cherufl, the perpetrator of the Champs-Elysées shooting (20 April 2017); Salman Abedi, the terrorist who committed suicide at the Manchester Arena at the end of Ariana Grande concert (22 May 2017); Abderrahman Bouanane, the murderer of the Turku stabbing (Finland, 18 August 2017); Ahmed Hanachi, the culprit of the Marseille stabbing (1 October 2017); Younes Abouyaaqoub who drove a van into pedestrians on La Rambla in Barcelona (17 August 2017); Redouane Lakdim, perpetrator of the Carcassonne and Trèbes assaults (23 March 2018); Khamzat Azimov, responsible of the Paris knife attack, near Palace Garnier (12 May 2018); Benjamin Herman, who stabbed two female police officers and a civilian in Liège, Belgium (28 May 2018); Chérif Chekatt, the author of the Strasbourg attack (11 December 2018).

The following section will particularly focus on the figures of Michael Bibeau and Mohammed Merah by highlighting that, despite the different background, the former belonging to a middle-class family while the latter coming from a poorer and inhospitable social environment, the DRIA model is able to provide a common denominator for both cases.

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3.2.2 The case of Michael Bibeau

Michael Bibeau is a young man who, defining himself an ISIS soldier, murdered the guard Nathan Cirillo as he was supervising the National War Memorial in Ottawa before breaking into the Canadian Parliament, where he was killed by security guards after a shooting on October 22, 2014. Franco-Canadian on his mother’s side and Libyan by his father, the information concerning his adolescence reveal that he embraced the jihadi ideology after having experienced an intense phase of disintegration of his social identity.

Disintegration of social identity

Orsini retraced this process through the direct testimonies that Bibeau’s friends released during interviews, but mostly thanks to a letter that Bibeau’s mother wrote to apologise for his son and to describe the personal trauma experienced by the young man. In 1999, Michael’s parents got divorced and he was entrusted to his mother. Since the dissolution of his household, Michael began to show a rebellious behaviour in contrast to the education received from his parents. This process became even more noticeable when he started high school. Between 2001 and 2005, Bibeau was arrested on several occasions: for stealing a credit card, possession of marijuana and for driving under the influence of narcotics. He received the heaviest sentence, two years in prison, for being found in possession of a gun used in a robbery. Released after nine months in prison instead of the twenty-four he was sentenced to, Michael was again detained for six months for possession of marijuana and PCP, a drug also known as “angel dust”, which provokes dissociative and hallucinogen effects.75

Passing from one trauma to another, Michael became a marginalised individual, who manifested deviant behaviours that lead him to experience prison. One of the most striking features of individuals who experience a disintegration of their social identity is the willingness to find a way out that, oftentimes, translates in the adherence to new worldviews, even extremist ones.76

Once discharged, Michael started embracing a violent and intolerant conception of Islam. In 2007, he travelled to Libya using the passport obtained thanks to his father’s citizenship. The date of his conversion to Islam is not certain, but it seems to have begun in 2011. Back then, Michael started frequenting a mosque that was also open to non-Muslims, which provoked his anger to the point that he was asked to leave because of his excessive fanaticism. The disintegration of social identity can be better understood in light of the existential drama experienced by Bibeau at the end of 2011.77

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76 Alessandro Orsini, *I risori più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*, cit., p. 155.
77 Alessandro Orsini, *La radicalisation des terroristes des vocations*, cit., p. 786.
Once, in December, Michael entered a police station in Burnaby, a Canadian city in the Vancouver area and asked to be arrested for an armed robbery that he claimed to have committed ten years earlier in Montreal. However, he was released by the policemen who could not find any trace. The following night, after attempting to rob a Mc Donald’s, instead of escaping, Michael waited for the police to arrive, sitting on the steps at the entrance of the station. The words he pronounced before the judge are significant of his socio-psychological condition: “I am addicted to crack and at the same time I am a religious person, and I want to sacrifice my freedom and the good things for maybe a year, so that when I get out, I can better appreciate the things of life and be clean.”

Michael was considered capable of committing other crimes. After a psychiatric evaluation, the doctor found him capable to stand trial, and he spent sixty-six days in prison. When Michael was released, he was so lonely and bewildered that he asked the police to be imprisoned again, without succeeding. Finally, Bibeau managed to get back behind bars though for a short time. After his release, he started looking for new ways out of his existential drama.

**Reconstruction of social identity**

In the case of Michael Bibeau, the events that characterised his earliest stages of life contributed in destroying his social identity. In order to find a way out of his existential crisis other than prison, Michael began looking for new points of reference, which he eventually found in the jihadi ideology. The feeling of discomfort and bewilderment towards the outside world was gradually replaced by the certainties that a radical and extremist mindset provides. This kind of doctrines are characterised by strict norms and rules that every member has to follow, therefore they tend to control every aspect of life. In this sense, it is easier for disorientated individuals to found in jihad a safer environment.

This stage marked Michael’s entrance in the second phase of the DRIA model.

The phase of reconstruction of social identity consists in an “existential conversion”. All the young men who then became vocational terrorists went through it and ultimately converted. Whether they were Christians or Muslims, their previous lives were conducted in violation of the Koran’s precepts. These individuals decide to convert because the set of beliefs they grew up with is no longer able to respond to their existential anguish. Every conversion, whether ideological or religious, implies a “reconstruction” of the past identity that culminates in the change of the militant’s name, as a sign of inner rebirth.

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78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
Integration with a revolutionary group

The new identity acquired urges for the search of other like-minded individuals, who share the same set of beliefs and with whom it is possible to fortify the radical mentality.

Having found in fundamentalism his new purpose of life, Michael joined an imagined community and began to see himself as an ISIS activist. This is the third phase of the DRIA model: the integration of a revolutionary sect through the power of imagination. Moreover, in order to foster his radicalization process, he tried to reach Syria so as to become radicalized also from a violent point of view. However, being aware of his extremist ideologies, the Canadian government refused to grant him the passport, fearing that he aimed at joining the ranks of the Islamic State.81

Alienation from the surrounding world

Notwithstanding this, Michael continued his radical pathway by completely excluding himself from the outside world. As declared by his mother and friends, since Michael’s conversion to Islam, he cut off any ties with them, considering them infested with an impure essence. To enclose himself even more from the rest of the society, Michael chose to sleep in a homeless shelter, although his mother continuously begged him to come back home. This phenomenon can be explained as the alienation from the surrounding world.

In a long letter addressed to Douglas Quan, the director of Postmedia News, Michael’s mother revealed that, given the loneliness in which he found himself, he wanted to go to Syria in the hope of finding other individuals who would share his ideas. As an excerpt from this letter reads: “What about Michael, if I try to understand his actions, for me he was an unhappy person at odds with the world. [...] Religion and Islam what his way of trying to make sense of the world, I don’t think he succeeded. It did not bring him peace.”82 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.”83

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83 Ibid.
3.2.3 The case of Mohammed Merah

Mohammed Merah was born on October 10, 1988 from an Algerian family. His childhood was rather difficult: he grew up in a low-income household in a northern neighbourhood of Toulouse, Les Izards, mainly inhabited by citizens of North African origin and deeply affected by social degradation. Mohammed was raised by a single mother who had to look after five children. Over time, he and his family moved to the quieter area of Côte-Pavée, in the south-east of the city, in the rue du Sergent-Vigné. A BBC broadcast on March 22, 2012 reported that Mohammed worked as a mechanic and that, according to the French magazine “Le Point”, he loved scooters. Although the BBC literally defined him a “young delinquent”, he was also a passionate football player.84

In 2012, Mohammed carried out a series of unparalleled gun attacks. Firstly, on March 11 he shot to death a paratrooper of the French Army, who was off-duty, in Toulouse. Secondly, on March 15 he killed two French soldiers in uniform, also off-duty, in Montauban, and lastly, he opened fire at the Jewish school of Ozar Hatorah, again in Toulouse, killing a rabbi and three children.

Disintegration of social identity

Since adolescence, Mohammed displayed a violent inclination and was involved at least fifteen times in criminal acts. He was arrested for the first time in 2005, while still a minor, and subsequently spent two periods in prison, in 2007 and 2009. When the French police killed him, Mohammed was 23 years old. Hitherto, he was arrested and released eighteen times.

From the documents analysed by Orsini it emerges that before approaching the jihadi ideology, Mohammed was a young man profoundly afflicted by a sad and unhappy life. On December 25, 2008, he tried to hang himself in prison, where he had been detained since December 2007. After being rescued, he was interned in a psychiatric clinic for ten days. Alain Penin, who carried out his psychiatric examination in mid-January 2009, reported that Mohammed had a “normal” intelligence but a predisposition to antisocial behaviours. In particular, a video displays him while rushing against one of his victims on March 15, 2012 in Montauban and yelling “Allah is great!” According to Le Point, he got radicalized in prison, shortly before committing these massacres.85

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84 Alessandro Orsini, La radicalisation des terroristes des vocations, cit., p. 787.
85 Ibid.
Reconstruction of social identity through a radical ideology

During the course his life, despite an initial detachment from the precepts of the Koran, Mohammed converted to Islam. When interviewed, his childhood friends affirmed that they were upset none of them had ever realized that their friend might have had radical ideas. According to them, Mohammed was not a religious fanatic at all. In particular, a childhood friend, Nico, remembers that Mohammed had never been interested in religion, and certainly not in Islam since he had never entered a mosque.  

Integration with a revolutionary group

Before his radicalization, Mohammed had already tried to commit suicide, driven by the thought that his life was worthless, and there was no reason to go on living. In this sense, the jihadi ideology and the “imagined community” offered him a new identity and a universal mission to fulfil. His lawyer, Christian Etelin, declared that he was aware of his client’s radicalization and of his related trip to Pakistan. Moreover, in 2010, Mohammed also travelled to Afghanistan. There, he was apprehended by the Afghan police near Kandahar, at the time a stronghold of the Taliban. According to “La Dépêche”, Mohammed was then handed over to the American authorities in Afghanistan and sent back to France. The French police collected information about this trip and classified him among the radical Muslims potentially dangerous for the country’s security. According to the statements of the then Minister of the Interior, Claude Guéant, the police questioned Mohammed about his trip to Afghanistan, but the young jihadist showed that his trip was purely of tourist nature. In this light, Mohammed’s process of radicalization must be traced back to the existential crisis that pushed him to attempt suicide.

Alienation from the surrounding world.

Even Mohammed’s mother, when interviewed, reported that she had no longer influence over her son’s behaviour. Mohammed reportedly established networks with Forsane Alizza, a pro-al Qaeda group in France with a group of supporters in Toulouse. The organization was declared illegal in January 2012 for inducing French citizens to reach Afghanistan so as to join the ranks of the jihad fight.

The stories of Michael Bibeau and Mohammed Merah clearly display that the DRIA model can be applied to a wide range of cases. As a matter of fact, although the two terrorists come from very

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
different backgrounds, their pathways toward radicalization converge. It does not matter where they come from, whether it is a poor family or not. The existential crisis is the common denominator of their fundamentalism. Bibeau and Merah both believed to lead a worthless life and that prison was a far better option than their daily reality. They also converted to Islam. In a society where they did not feel to belong to, religious extremism provided new certainties and reference points to cling. However, a primary distinction between the two radicalization processes is given by the fact that, unlike Merah who went to Pakistan and Afghanistan, Bibeau was never able to travel abroad and join the terrorist ranks in the Middle East. He could only adhere to virtual communities and, despite this, Michael still defined himself as an ISIS soldier. Such mental universe requires a strong and intense ideological commitment, without which it seems impossible to embrace the jihadi cause and to perpetrate terrorist attacks in homegrown countries.

3.3 Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna 3Ns model: the Tsarnaev brothers

Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev were Chechen citizens with Muslim origins. They were raised in the Russian Caucasus, but in 2002 their family emigrated to the United States, settling in Massachusetts. On April 15, 2013 the Tsarnaev brothers conducted the Boston Marathon bombings, in which three people died and more than 250 were injured, of whom 17 remained amputees. The attack was carried out by placing two pressure-cooker bombs near the race’s finish line. Three days after the event, the brothers shot a police officer, Sean Collier, and stole his vehicle to run away to Watertown. It was there that after a gunfight the police killed Tamerlan and arrested Dzhokhar, who was hiding in a boat.89

On April 8, 2015 the jury found Dzhokhar guilty on 30 charges, including causing death by use of a weapon of mass destruction. As a result, he was convicted to death penalty by lethal injection and transferred to a maximum-security prison in Colorado. In December 2015, when the sentence was confirmed, Dzhokhar’s lawyer asked for a re-trial, arguing that his client did not receive a fair judgement and building the defence on the fact that Tamerlan was the mastermind behind the plot, while Dzhokhar just came along his brother.90

90 Ibid.
3.3.1 The Need

Tamerlan’s personal life reflects the quest for significance described in Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna’s model. In this sense, the failures experienced during the course of his life may have triggered his radicalization process.

In the United States, Tamerlan’s family depended on the government welfare and his parents were on the way to divorce. Moreover, he was unemployed and had to rely on his wife, who had dropped out of college. Notwithstanding this, Tamerlan tried to become a professional boxer. This aspiration shattered when he was disqualified from the US Olympic team based on some bureaucratic grounds, allegedly the denied request for the American citizenship. Besides, he was carrying on a squabble with his uncles, Alvi and Ruslan, who were very successful in Maryland and labelled the Tsarnaev brothers as “losers”. All these humiliating circumstances translated in the desire to matter and stand out. If he could not succeed in fulfilling his dreams of glory, the only option left was to become mujahedeen. With regard to Dzhokhar, a note found in the place where he was arrested revealed that the younger brother looked up to the older, who he considered a hero and a martyr, and aspired for a similar recognition.91

3.3.2 The Narrative

One of the main conflicts between the Tsarnaev brothers and their uncles concerned the role of religion. According to them, the latter was more important compared to work and school.

Reportedly, Tamerlan approached fundamentalism by consuming videos online that promoted the jihadi cause, and by studying radical Islam through the al-Qaeda magazine “Inspire”. In the aftermath of his exclusion from the Olympic team, Tamerlan started attending the Islamic Society of the Boston Mosque and stopped smoking and drinking. Moreover, he was allegedly a member of the online community “World Association of Muslim Youth”. Tamerlan first caught the attention of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) in March 2011, when the authorities asked the FBI to monitor him fearing that he was a jihadist who aimed at carrying out a terrorist attack in Russia. Despite this, Tamerlan was still able to travel to Russia in January 2012. On his departure, he managed to get past the control untroubled because of the countless individuals who had to be monitored that day, while on his return, the FBI was not alarmed due to an error in his last name spelling. As reported to the Committee on Homeland Security, during the six months spent in Makhachkala, Dagestan, Tamerlan

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established networks with Russian extremists. When he came back to the United States, he started following jihadists on social media and watching Chechen militants’ videos on YouTube. Apparently, his radical ideology may have been influenced by mujahedeen in the Caucasus. Moreover, both Tsarnaev brothers were exposed to Islamic rhetoric. They meticulously followed the sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki, an al-Qaeda Islamist preacher, who was killed in 2011 by a US drone strike ordered by President Obama.  

3.3.3 The Network

The last component of Kruglanski, Bélanger and Gunaratna’s radicalization model regards the Tsarnaev brothers’ personal contacts with extremist individuals. The first person to have allegedly encouraged Tamerlan and Dzhokhar toward extremism was their mother, Zubeidat Tsarnaeva. After the disappointment of being excluded by the US Olympic team, Tamerlan began drinking and smoking out of control, until his mother convinced him to start studying Islam. The Tsarnaev family believed that the United States were involved in a “war against Islam” and that the military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as other interventions in the Middle East, were unjust. For this reason, the Tsarnaev started supporting violent jihad against the US. In 2012, as a consequence of her own issues with the law, Zubeidat decided to run away in Russia where she remains a fugitive. In particular, she is accused of shoplifting and destruction of property. Moreover, American authorities included her in the Terrorist Identities Datamart Environment, or TIDE, database, which contains more than a half-million names on behalf of the National Counterterrorism Centre.  

Conclusion

In the final remarks of this thesis, I would like to make some reflections on terrorism studies, which I have initially approached during the course of “Sociology of terrorism” chaired by Alessandro Orsini and then with this final research. In doing so, I will touch upon four main points. Firstly, I would like to explain why the present work focuses on radicalization at individual level. In the second place, I would like to illustrate how challenging are studies on terrorism, by mentioning two controversial disputes, namely the “Sageman-Hoffman-gate” and one, more recent, sprung up between John Horgan and Clark McCauley. Thirdly, I would like to recall the phenomenon of homegrown terrorists, already cited in reference with Sageman’s theory, but this time by briefly analysing it with regard to a specific case study, that is the United States. Finally, I would like to spend a few words on the alleged “stagnation” of radicalization studies. Yet again, this is a very divisive subject among the academic community, that sees on the one side, Sageman and Horgan, who uphold this thesis, and on the other, Orsini and McCauley, who believe that in the last years new theories have been brought to light, which are fundamental to the evolution of the research on terrorism.

To begin with, in my initial approach to the subject, I mostly grew interested in radicalization at individual level or, as scholars would say, at micro level. This has to do with two reasons. Firstly, as a sociological phenomenon, I wanted to address the complexity of terrorism in relation to the complexity of the human being. As a matter of fact, the individual’s plurality of facets also reflects in the plurality of radicalization theories. Some of them favour a socio-economic approach, thus pointing the finger at the individual’s social conditions and all the factors that may motivate him to embrace terrorism in order to seek a better life. Others suggest investigating a person’s background with regard to past traumas or dramatic events. Painful experiences can scar an individual to such an extent as to induce him to question his own identity. This results in the search for new systems of values that oftentimes end up aligning with extremism. In this regard, a key aspect of extremist organizations is the ability to fill in the individual’s void that, in most of the cases, does not have a material nature, but it is rather steered by a sense of bewilderment, a self-loss that leads straight in the arms of religious fundamentalism. The more one gets lost, the more he will seek a tighter hug. Similarly, the more one is disoriented, the more he will find pre-set values as lifesaving.

Secondly, when undergoing the research, I realised that terrorism theories have gradually shifted their focus, from tackling radicalization as a process related to the influence of centralized organizations, to more individualistic stances. After all, as every sociological phenomenon, terrorism is constantly evolving, and the task, both for researchers and governments, is to rapidly adapt to the nature of the
threat. As I learnt from Moghaddam’s study, it is easier to find another mujahedeen willing to sacrifice his life if a jihadist gets killed by an anti-terrorist strike. Thus, according to the psychologist, a more beneficial strategy in the long-term would be to prevent people from occupying the ground floor in the first place. In other words, unless counter-terrorism policies deal with the problem of radicalization at individual level, they cannot succeed in interrupting the flow of fanatics willing to die in the name of jihad. Therefore, the investigation has to begin at the individual level.

However, this is easier said than done. In their studies, researches have to face several constraints. As a matter of fact, there is no such thing as a “terrorist playbook” that scholars can consult to trace the phenomenon of radicalization, nor jihadists are inclined to “volunteer” in order to explain their reasons. This implies that a recipe that lists all the elements required to “make the perfect terrorist” does not exist, but the ingredients vary according to the approach assumed.

This brings us to the second remark of the thesis. Given that terrorism is not a purely empirical science, but it feeds on the continuous confrontation between its scholars, it is not rare that, through pen strokes, researchers “argue around” with each other on various academic journals. For instance, one of the most controversial topics regards whether al-Qaeda leadership still plays an important role in the West or not. Two remarkable scholars have provided two opposite views. On the one hand, drawing from the bunch of guys theory, Marc Sageman argues that the expansion of the Islamic integralist network leads to a leaderless jihad.94 Under this perspective, radicalization is conceived as a bottom-up process. In particular, Sageman envisions al-Qaeda as a prestigious college that everyone aspires to attend but that does a rigid vetting of candidates. In this sense, the major problem of terrorist organizations is not recruitment but rather selection. On the other hand, Bruce Hoffman clearly underplays Sageman’s contribution. In analysing the July 7, 2005 bombings and the 2006 Airline bombing plot, Hoffman upholds the thesis of a leader-led jihad. In the words of the scholar, despite being dismissed at first, and classified as “the work of amateur terrorists — untrained “bunches of guys” later evidence suggested that the two incidents were tightly linked to senior Al Qaeda commanders located in Pakistan, thus endorsing the hypothesis of a still solid control by the organization.95

Another open dispute has arisen starting from John Horgan’s study, intitled “The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism”, and recently recalled by Clark McCauley in “The ABC Model: Commentary from the Perspective of the Two Pyramids Model of Radicalization”, both published by the journal “Terrorism and Political Violence”. In his research, conducted with other

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94 Marc Sageman, Leaderless Jihad, cit., p. 143.
two scholars, Horgan draws a distinction between individuals’ ideas and actions. The extremism of the former does not entail the extremism of the latter. In other words, even if a person preaches the jihadi cause, it does not imply that he will blow himself up in the name of Islam. As observed by Horgan, this disconnect between attitudes and behaviours, after which his model is named, had already been highlighted by other researches in the past, and it does not pertain only to the field of political violence.⁹⁶ To name one, Randall Collins, in his micro-sociological approach, argues that in order to carry out violence it is not necessary to be radicalized from a cognitive point of view. What matters according to the sociologist is rather a method of overcoming the “barrier of confrontation, tension and fear”, which otherwise would slow down the combat behaviour and render ineffective the use of violence.⁹⁷ Overall, also McCauley agrees that terrorist attacks are not a direct consequence of extremist ideas. However, the critiques moved against Horgan’s paper regarded the lack of clarity of his theory, for instance on how to practically measure the dimensions of attitude and behaviour in the ABC model.⁹⁸ Another discordant point, perhaps relative to the stagnation in radicalization studies, will be discussed later on in the section.

Now, I would like to turn to the third point of the analysis and to recall the attention on homegrown, or domestic, terrorism. Before 9/11, the United States were considered somewhat untouchable by terrorist acts conducted by its own citizens, due to the degree of inclusiveness of the Muslim community in the society, in comparison to the same in Europe.⁹⁹ However, the Madrid and the London attacks, respectively in 2004 and 2005, carried out by European homegrown extremists, rang an alarm bell that echoed up even in the US, where policymakers and security analysts grew increasingly worried about homegrown terrorism. The possibility that the threat could come from within, rather than “being imported” is often overlooked, as it clearly appears from Donal Trump stance towards the problem. Since his election in 2016, Trump has mainly focused the efforts of the war against terrorism on systematic attacks towards Muslim immigrants and Islam abroad. This position ultimately translated in a travel ban, signed on January 27, 2017, with whom the American president banned foreign citizens from several predominantly Muslim countries – namely Yemen, Syria, Iran, Libya and Somalia – plus Venezuela and North Korea, from visiting the US for 90 days, suspended entry to the country of all Syrian refugees indefinitely, and prohibited any other refugees

⁹⁸ Clark McCauley, The ABC Model: Commentary from the Perspective of the Two Pyramids Model of Radicalization, in “Terrorism and Political Violence”, May/2020, p. 7.
from coming into the nation for 120 days. The countries targeted by the ban were further increased on February 1, 2020, with the addition of other six nations – namely Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania – which, according to the White House, were not able to meet US security and information-sharing standards on terrorism suspects. However, a study conducted by RAND has shown that the majority of American jihadists are US born, not foreign nationals. The research examined 86 plots and 22 actual attacks carried out in the United States from 9/11 to 2017. It revealed that of the 178 terrorists who had planned or executed attacks in the country, 86 were American-born citizens. Among the others, 46 were US-naturalized and 23 had a legal residence permit, thus who had long lived in the country before the arrest. These data highlight that the terrorist threat in the nation, despite its rareness after 9/11, has mainly homegrown roots. Nonetheless, Washington still spends a fortune to wage war against terrorism overseas. According to the US Department of the Treasury’s data, since September 2011 the federal government has employed 6.4 trillion dollars on wars and military actions in the Middle East and Asia. Certainly, one can argue that the terrorist threat is psychological, thus linking the reduced number of attacks to the fear of the army’s presence. However, even this cannot justify the enormous amount of federal funds invested in counter-terrorism policies abroad, which have only caused relatively few gains in comparison to the resources spent, that could have been better invested in other ways. To name one, among the issues at the heart of US social inequalities there is the uneven access to healthcare, a problem that has increased ever more after the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic. The data of the Department of Defence for the year 2018, published on March 2019, reveal that the wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have costed in total 1.5 billion, around 7.500 dollars per taxpayer. Despite the price for health insurances can vary substantively, the national average estimated for an individual’s coverage is 6.400 dollars. With this I am not implying that the US need to withdraw all their troops from the Middle East and shift the resources to the healthcare system. Rather, the

intention behind the long overview of numbers is to show that enough funds to implement structural social reforms are already available, it is just a matter of priorities on how to employ them.

Lastly, I would like to conclude this journey with a final remark on a subject strongly linked to my work of the past few months, namely the alleged “stagnation” of radicalization studies. Despite the fact that I have just began my study path on terrorism, I feel entitled to tackle the topic. First of all, because to neglect the importance of the recent radicalization theories would mean to neglect the entire sense of this thesis. And secondly, because this is the field in which I would like to work in the future, and the thought that there is no longer something worthy to say gives me the shivers.

It all started when, in 2014, Marc Sageman published an article entitled “The Stagnation in Terrorism Research” on the journal “Terrorism and Political Violence”. According to the scholar, the problem of the new studies on radicalization was attributable to the lack of empirical data’s support, which reduced the theories to a bunch of speculations. Sageman considered the majority of the progresses in the field as a consequence of “historical archival research and analysis of a few field interviews”.

The same idea was presented from a different perspective in the paper “The Attitudes-Behaviors Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism”, in which Horgan and the other authors pointed out that advances in the sphere of terrorism continue to stall, partially due to the fact that scholars are often unsuccessful in adequately conceptualize the issue. However, several researchers have intervened in response to these assumptions. Among them, in the final essay of the book “Il terrorismo in Africa”, Orsini addressed the problem of the alleged stagnation by summarising all the major contributions of the study on terrorism of the last years, starting from Fathali Moghaddam, passing through McCauley and Moskalenko, and concluding with Donatella della Porta. All this to show that, on the contrary, research is more fervent than ever. McCauley too, in his Commentary of Horgan’s article, expressed the disagreement towards the perceived stall in terrorism analysis. According to the author, in writing “Radicalization to Terrorism: What Everyone Needs to Know” with Sophia Moskalenko, it was even hard to acknowledge all the recent developments in the field in just one book.

In the end, terrorism has proven to be in continuous evolution and this, consequently, requires a constant update of the research. Nonetheless, it is inconceivable to leave the past aside since, without it, we could not have the perception of the present. In this sense, the events of 9/11 have deeply changed the ordinary understanding of terrorism. Since then, the individual has been placed ever more

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at the centre of the attention. If before his role was only conceived in function of the terrorist organization, nowadays individuals are able to carry out deadly acts on their own, as shown by Brenton Harrison Tarrant, who killed 51 people and injured other 49 during two attacks, at the Al Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, 2019. Therefore, it is now undoubted that the individual sphere has acquired ever more importance, in a framework where terrorism can represent a personal window. Drawing from these assumptions, it is crucial to evaluate terrorism both as a social and individual phenomenon, so as to comprehensively contextualize all its sociological facets.
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Sintesi

Negli studi sul terrorismo e la violenza nelle loro forme più ampie, ci sono due posizioni principali sul ruolo ricoperto dall'ideologia nei processi di radicalizzazione. Secondo alcuni studiosi, l'ideologia ha un potere causale nell'indurre gli individui ad adottare comportamenti radicali, mentre altri sostengono che i terroristi si servono dell'ideologia solo come una giustificazione a posteriori per i loro attentati.

Il presente elaborato poggia le basi sull'articolo di Alessandro Orsini "What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model", pubblicato su "Studies in Conflict and Terrorism", una delle principali riviste americane sul terrorismo, che riassume le “pietre miliari” degli studi sulla radicalizzazione. Sul modello di Orsini, l'obiettivo di questa analisi è di presentare un quadro generale, seppure in estrema sintesi, sulle diverse teorie riguardanti i processi di radicalizzazione alla luce dell'importanza che esse attribuiscono al valore dell’ideologia.

Principalmente, negli studi sul terrorismo esistono due schieramenti. Da un lato, c'è chi crede che gli individui non commetterebbero atti terroristici senza una forte motivazione ideologica alla base. In questo senso, l'estremismo è interpretato come la fase finale di un processo di apertura cognitiva, che permette alle idee più violente e, di conseguenza, ai comportamenti più violenti di trasformarsi in azione. Dall'altro, c'è il polo degli studiosi che considerano altri fattori alla base della radicalizzazione, come il vissuto dell'individuo, le relazioni sociali e le dinamiche di gruppo, i legami familiari e così via. Secondo questi ultimi, l'ideologia non è la forza trainante del fondamentalismo, ma essa viene solo invocata dai terroristi per legittimare i loro attentati. Le teorie analizzate in questa ricerca saranno suddivise in due sezioni. La prima raccoglie tutti gli autori che attribuiscono un ruolo secondario all'ideologia, mentre la seconda prende in esame coloro che considerano l'ideologia il motore della radicalizzazione. Infine, un'ultima sezione sarà dedicata all’applicazione di alcune teorie a casi specifici riguardanti la vita dei terroristi.

Nello specifico, il primo capitolo esplora sei teorie di radicalizzazione. A partire dalla "scala verso terrorismo" di Fathali M. Moghaddam, l'attenzione viene immediatamente richiamata sul contesto psicologico e sociale che circonda l'individuo e che può incoraggiarlo ad avvicinarsi al terrorismo. Secondo Moghaddam, l'estremismo è una conseguenza diretta dell'esclusione sociale che, alimentando rabbia e frustrazione, motiva l'individuo ad intraprendere azioni drastiche. Moghaddam immagina la scala verso il terrorismo come un edificio a sei piani, ognuno dei quali è caratterizzato da specifici processi psicologici. Il piano terra è il più vasto, e vi risiede la maggior parte delle persone. I restanti piani diventano sempre più piccoli man mano che l'individuo procede lungo la scala. Coloro che giungono all’ultimo gradino, ultimando dunque il percorso di radicalizzazione, sono
potenzialmente i più propensi ad intraprendere azioni violente. La transizione verso un piano superiore dipende dalla percezione del singolo individuo. Se quest’ultimo ritiene che proseguire la scalata gli aprirà altre porte, continuerà il viaggio. Tuttavia, così come le dimensioni della scala diminuiscono quando si avvicina alla cima, anche le possibilità di tornare indietro e abbandonare il processo di radicalizzazione diminuiscono progressivamente. Attraverso questa metafora, Moghaddam vuole sottolineare che, a volte, gli individui arrivano a commettere attacchi terroristici non per portare a compimento il loro processo di radicalizzazione, ma piuttosto perché non possono più tornare indietro. Un altro autore che pone al centro della sua tesi la dimensione psicologica è John Horgan. Nel suo libro “The Psychology of Terrorism”, egli affronta il tema del terrorismo evidenziando la complessa natura del fenomeno, che dunque non può essere ricondotto ad una singola causa, ad esempio l’ideologia, ma deve essere compreso alla luce di molteplici fattori. In questo senso, l’ideologia viene interpretata non come un fattore scatenante ma come una giustificazione a-posteriori per esaltare il valore dell’attentato. Maggiore importanza è invece attribuita al ruolo delle organizzazioni terroristiche, le quali hanno bisogno di alcune caratteristiche distinctive per “affascinare” possibili reclute. Tra questi elementi, Horgan riconosce l’opportunità di scalare le gerarchie interne all’organizzazione per raggiungere posizioni di comando, per consentire ai nuovi membri di conseguire un’auto-affermazione personale. Il terzo autore citato, Quintan Wiktorowicz, in “Radical Islam Rising” affronta il problema della radicalizzazione attraverso un'analisi costi-benefici. Dal suo punto di vista, aderire a un'organizzazione terroristica comporta diversi rischi e costi materiali. Pertanto, è necessario che queste perdite vengano compensate da altri benefici, che Wiktorowicz identifica in un profondo processo di socializzazione tra l'organizzazione e i suoi membri. Questi ultimi sono portati a concepire la propria vita in funzione del movimento estremo, che diventa così l’unica realtà possibile, e ciò fortifica il senso di appartenenza al gruppo. In aggiunta, il nuovo ambiente, più ristretto e alienato dal mondo circostante, favorisce l’apertura cognitiva dell’individuo che, nel mettere in discussione le proprie credenze precedenti, impara a scindere il mondo in due sole categorie: il bene e il male. Tra gli studiosi che hanno sviluppato la propria tesi intorno al processo di socializzazione, spicca sicuramente la figura di Marc Sageman. Partendo dalla teoria delle reti sociali (social network theory), Sageman sostiene che i processi di radicalizzazione poggiano le basi sulle dinamiche di gruppo piuttosto che sull'ideologia. La sua tesi è riassunta nella “teoria del gruppo di amici” (bunch of guys theory), secondo cui l'adesione alle organizzazioni terroristiche è un problema di conoscenze e amicizie piuttosto che di idee e credenze. Secondo l’autore, ciò che attrae i musulmani espatriati in Occidente, o coloro che vi sono nati, non è il messaggio spirituale dell'Islam. Al contrario, essi iniziano a frequentare le moschee perché si sentono esclusi dalla società e cercano dunque di conoscere altre persone con cui hanno qualcosa in comune.
In questa prospettiva, la radicalizzazione da un punto di vista cognitivo avviene solo dopo che l'individuo ha stabilito una rete di amicizie e relazioni sociali. L'estremismo si sviluppa in dinamiche di piccoli gruppi intensi, caratterizzati dall'interazione reciproca dei militanti. Da un lato, il ruolo dei compagni è quello di sostenersi a vicenda nel superare le avversità della vita. Dall'altro, promuovono una visione del mondo sempre più radicale. Col tempo, il fondamentalismo islamico prende il sopravvento e smettono di sentirsi insoddisfatti dalla loro posizione sociale. La mancanza di opportunità e la disparità delle risorse materiali non sono più un problema. Alla fine, sono compensati dai sentimenti di gratificazione e soddisfazione di far parte di un'organizzazione terroristica. Nel 2011, Clark McCauley e Sophia Moskalenko pubblicano il libro "Friction", in cui affrontano la complessità dei processi di radicalizzazione. Questi ultimi vengono suddivisi in tre livelli (micro, meso e macro), che si dispiegano a loro volta in dodici meccanismi che portano all'estremismo. A livello micro, viene analizzato il percorso dei singoli individui. I relativi meccanismi sono sei: risentimento personale, risentimento politico, scivolamento progressivo, amore, amore per il rischio e "scongelamento". A livello meso, McCauley e Moskalenko esaminano la radicalizzazione di gruppo. In questo caso i meccanismi sono tre: polarizzazione di gruppo, competizione di gruppo e isolamento di gruppo. Infine, a livello macro, vengono indicati tre meccanismi di radicalizzazione di massa: la politica del Jujitsu, l'odio e il martirio. La distinzione più importante evidenziata dai due autori è tra radicalizzazione cognitiva e violenta. La prima si riferisce all'interpretazione del mondo da parte dell'individuo, che entra in conflitto con quella canonica della società. La seconda invece implica un ulteriore passo, che è l'impiego della violenza per mettere in atto le convinzioni acquisite attraverso la radicalizzazione cognitiva. Le due tipologie non necessariamente coesistono. Spesso, gli individui con idee estreme non riflettono tale violenza nel loro comportamento. Per questo motivo, McCauley e Moskalenko sottovalue il ruolo dell'ideologia e la concepiscono solo come una giustificazione a posteriori. L'ultimo autore citato è Donatella della Porta che, allo stesso modo, nel suo libro “Clandestine political violence” distingue tre livelli di radicalizzazione (micro, meso e macro). A livello macro, indaga il contesto politico in cui si sviluppa il terrorismo. Il livello meso interessa le organizzazioni radicali e le dinamiche tra queste ultime e i governi. A livello micro, l'analisi si sposta sul rapporto personale tra i militanti. A tal fine, l'obiettivo principale della ricerca è l'identificazione di alcuni fattori comuni nell'evoluzione dei processi di radicalizzazione. Nello specifico, della Porta esamina i meccanismi che danno origine a una catena di interazioni che contraddistinguono le tre fasi principali di un movimento clandestino violento: insorgenza, persistenza ed estinzione. La sua analisi conclude che gli individui coinvolti in movimenti violenti non sono solo mossi da condizioni preesistenti, ma sviluppano anche nuove motivazioni lungo il

Il modello di Orsini è stato invece applicato ai casi di Michael Bibeau e Mohammed Merah, due terroristi provenienti da contesti sociali differenti, il primo dalla media borghesia canadese mentre il secondo da una famiglia povera francese. Tuttavia, nonostante questa profonda discrepanza, entrambi i percorsi di radicalizzazione trovano una spiegazione nel modello DRIA. Questo a sottolineare che le condizioni socio-economiche dei terroristi non rientrano tra le cause scatenanti del loro processo di radicalizzazione. Al contrario, il comune denominatore del loro fondamentalismo è dato dalla crisi esistenziale in cui precipitano dopo un evento traumatico. Bibeau e Merah credevano entrambi di condurre una vita inutile e che la prigione fosse una scelta di gran lunga migliore alla loro realtà quotidiana. Tutti e due convertiti all'Islam, in una società in cui non si sentivano di appartenere, l'estremismo religioso ha fornito loro nuove certezze e punti di riferimento a cui aggrapparsi.


In conclusione, il presente elaborato si propone di dimostrare che il terrorismo è un fenomeno in continua evoluzione e questo, di conseguenza, richiede un costante aggiornamento della ricerca. Tuttavia, è inconcepibile lasciare il passato da parte poiché, senza di esso, non potremmo avere la percezione del presente. In questo senso, l’attacco alle Torri gemelle ha profondamente cambiato la comprensione ordinaria del terrorismo, ponendo l'individuo sempre più al centro dell'attenzione. Se in precedenza il ruolo del singolo era concepito solo in funzione dell'organizzazione terroristica, oggi
gli uomini sono in grado di compiere attentati anche da soli, come dimostrato da Brenton Harrison Tarrant, che ha ucciso 51 persone e ferito altre 49 durante due attacchi, alla Moschea di Al Noor e al Linwood Islamic Centre di Christchurch, Nuova Zelanda, il 15 marzo 2019. Pertanto, è ormai indubbio che la sfera individuale ha acquisito sempre più importanza, in un quadro in cui il terrorismo può rappresentare una vetrina personale. Partendo da questi presupposti, è fondamentale valutare il terrorismo sia come fenomeno sociale che individuale, in modo da contestualizzare in modo completo tutte le sue sfaccettature sociologiche.