



Department of Political Science

Chair of Sociology of Terrorism

# Does a terrorist mindset exist?

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## INTRODUCTION

This undergraduate thesis aims to show that a certain category of terrorists presents a typical mind scheme. The research question lies on the basic assumption that extremist militants act rationally and according to an ideology that guides them in day-to-day activities. To achieve the objective, the dissertation initially introduces the methodological principle used by Alessandro Orsini in his study of terrorism, in which he explains how militants form their line of reasoning. Orsini does so by using Max Weber's contribution to interpretative sociology - *verstehende Soziologie*.

This thesis has been constructed by following a scientific research methodology as best as possible, given the few tools that a bachelor's degree student may possess. The aim is to analyze three different ideologies to verify whether a terrorist mindset exists.

In the first chapter I present in depth the cardinal principle that supports Alessandro Orsini's study of terrorism, namely Max Weber's interpretive sociology. One of the key assumptions of *verstehende Soziologie* is that the subjective motivations of actors are assumed to be important because they are the factors that drive human behavior. Weber refers to the task of interpretation with the German term *Verstehen*, which is roughly translated into English as "understanding," in the sense of understanding social action from the actor's point of view. The goal of Weber's *Verstehen* is to make sense of any given action by looking at the situation as the actor understands it. For Weber, social action can only be explained by analyzing it from the perspective of the actor himself. This means that he seeks to uncover the social meanings that drive social action. For the purposes of my research question, this methodology is crucial, as it allows us to understand terrorism from the perspective of militants. I consider this chapter to be propaedeutic because it is necessary to understand the theoretical basis of this specific way of studying terrorism, that is from a sociological point of view. The typical approach of sociology to the study of the phenomenon of terrorism allows us to understand its complexity, bringing new points of view useful especially for effective policies and decision-making. A more "human" approach to the issue is undoubtedly more constructive as it highlights the protagonist of the phenomenon, namely the human being, and the human being who acts according to reason and a precise logic.

Having stated these premises, the second chapter basically presents the scholars and the elements used later to carry out the research. In the first section of the chapter, I have discussed the theories of Arie Kruglanski and Alessandro Orsini, as both share the hypothesis that violent extremism is a consequence of a series of traumatic events, hence a logical behavior and not one dictated by madness. For the purpose of the thesis, I found relevant the "motivational imbalance theory" of Kruglanski, which argues that, in some individuals, the choice to get involved in extreme activities is due to a lack of balance between the many biological and psychological needs of humans. When a person concentrates too much mental energy on a particular need, the "brake" that usually makes people not

have extreme behaviors will go missing. Then, I found it necessary to present parts of Orsini's contribution, including the concepts of "vocational terrorist" and "binary code mentality", and a part of the DRIA Model, in particular the "radical mental universe". Like Kruglanski, Orsini assumes that the path to terrorism is influenced by events that affect the lives of individuals, making the choice rational. The "binary code mentality" and the "radical mental universe", on the other hand, are patterns that I found extremely useful and relevant to conducting the research, as they describe some characteristics of the terrorist mentality in a manner akin to the other tools that have presented subsequently to these. In fact, I found similarities between the seven cognitive categories present in the "radical mental universe" and the typical characteristics of religious extremism described by the Doomsday Religious Movements report of the Canadian intelligence services and by sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer. Among these elements are the fact of conceiving the world fallen into immorality and divided into only two categories, namely "friends" and "enemies", of believing in the future of a "cleansing" apocalypse, and that the only ones who can come out victorious are the followers of the religious movement in question.

Thus, in the third chapter, three very different religious extremist ideologies are presented: jihadism, the radical Christian creed, and the theology of the Japanese group Aum Shinrikyo. For obvious reasons, this chapter describes only those aspects of the ideologies that may be relevant to the research, so that the characteristics described in chapter two, which we can call fixed variables, can be identified in a focused manner. The fourth chapter is where tables are given in which the fixed variables are schematically presented so that their presence or absence in the three ideologies can be identified.

The fourth chapter serves to verify the existence of a terrorist mindset by discussing the findings of the study and analysis of the three religious ideologies chosen. This section presents three tables, one for each ideology, constructed to methodologically analyze the similarities among the worldviews. This thesis concludes by answering affirmatively to the question "does a terrorist mindset exist?" by using all the categories and characteristics presented and discussed in the second chapter and by schematically comparing them.

The main sources used are articles published on the most authoritative specialized journals, monographs related to the issue, data platforms and reports.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *Weber's verstehende Soziologie*

#### Interpretative sociology

To study the mindset of terrorists, it is important to keep in mind the contribution of Max Weber to interpretive sociology. This preliminary theoretical foundation is crucial, as it provides us with the necessary tools to comprehend the methodological principle employed by those scholars who have tried to explain the mindset of terrorists. Among these are Jessica Stern, Alessandro Orsini and Mark Juergensmeyer. This principle, inspired primarily by the study of Weber, states that social actions depend on how individuals interpret reality. Consequently, this assumption can be applied to the violent actions of terrorists.

Considered as one of the founding fathers of modern sociology, Weber led the anti-positivist revolution, underlining that social sciences differ from natural ones. As a social scientist, he was concerned with constructing a conceptual scheme that would explain the nature and the determinants of social conduct. Social action (*soziales Handeln*) is central to his sociology, as he was not concerned with assessing social structures as good or bad, or as useful or useless, but rather with achieving the most objective understanding possible of how individuals evaluate, use, create and destroy their social relationships<sup>1</sup>. He in fact argued that studying the development of something only from the outside, without analyzing what man makes of it, is to omit one of the principal aspects of social life. In this perspective, when studying the evolution of a social relationship, one can also explain it through the purposes which the actor assigns to it, the benefits he derives from it and the various meanings he attaches to it in the course of time. From here comes the importance of what Weber called meaningful relatedness (*sinnhafte Bezogenheit*), through which we are able to understand the subjective meaning of a social relationship through which man guides his behavior.

According to Weber, any science can apply either the generalizing or the individualizing method, of classification, depending on the specific needs of the research<sup>2</sup>. The former is applied when one wants to discover general laws and relationships, while the latter is used when one needs to analyze specific aspects of a phenomenon. Explanation through general laws and interpretation of an individual case are equally legitimate methods and are mutually complementary, due to the infinite complexity of social reality. Preferring one method to the other would indeed limit adding knowledge in the field of

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<sup>1</sup> Julien Freund, *Sociology of Max Weber*, edited from the French by Mary Ilford, The Penguin Press, London, 1970, p. 88;

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi*, p. 38;

sociology<sup>3</sup>. Accordingly, when using the expression “interpretive sociology”, Weber did not want to place interpretation at a higher level compared to explanation and other approaches. He wanted to show that sometimes the latter have been found to be inadequate, meaning that his sociology is interpretative in the sense that it offers many more possibilities to traditional sociology<sup>4</sup>.

Modern sociology is considered to be founded mainly on the German and on the French traditions of thought and the principal architects are usually thought to be Max Weber, Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim<sup>5</sup>.

A fundamental element to understand the difference between these two traditions is the role of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment tradition of thought it has brought along. This historical event has profoundly affected the evolution of modern society and consequently is also crucial to the development of sociology, which is the science concerned with studying modern societies. The reason for this contraposition can be traced back to the historical rivalry between France and Germany and the consequent German reactionary response to the French Revolution’s principles.

On the one hand, the French tradition of thought is profoundly marked by the Enlightenment, and therefore by the basic credit given to science, and more generally, to an objective and unprejudiced knowledge, systematically emancipated from cultural prejudice. The French Enlightenment tradition, by its very nature, appears to pay little attention to the subjective profile of social relations of social action itself.

The German tradition, on the other hand, is marked by an insistent attention to subjective experience. When Stein and Humboldt created the University of Berlin in 1810, they called Savigny to lead the legal faculty. Savigny offered a methodological break with the Enlightenment, which was deeply appreciated by the German academics. The innovation in his approach was that in order to understand the *usus modernus* of Roman law, one must first understand such law in its original context<sup>6</sup>. This vision was then extended to the other faculties of the University of Berlin, including the social sciences, and was quickly adopted by all universities of the German Confederation<sup>7</sup>.

It is precisely from the perspective of this attention to the subjective profiles of experience that Weber's definition of sociology should be understood. In *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, he defines sociology as a “science that in construing and understanding social action seeks causal explanation

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<sup>3</sup> *Ivi*, p. 90;

<sup>4</sup> *Ivi*, p. 91;

<sup>5</sup> “Max Weber”, available on: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/weber/> (viewed on March 15, 2021);

<sup>6</sup> Eric R. Lybeck, *The French Revolution in Germany and the origins of Sociology*, in “Historická Sociologie”, n. 1, 2018, p. 37;

<sup>7</sup> *Ivi*, p.39;

of the course and effects of such action”<sup>8</sup>. In other words, sociology concerns itself with the interpretive understanding of human behavior.

As Weber writes:

“Sociology, in the meaning understood here of a word often used in quite different senses, shall mean: a science that in construing and understanding social action seeks causal explanation of the course and effects of such action<sup>9</sup>. By ‘action’ is meant human behavior linked to a subjective meaning on the part of the actor or actors concerned; such action may be either overt or occur inwardly – whether by positive action, or by refraining from action, or by tolerating a situation. Such behavior is ‘social’ action where the meaning intended by the actor or actors is related to the behavior of others, and the action is so oriented”

Weber refers to the task of interpreting with the German term *Verstehen*, which will be discussed thoroughly in the following sections. *Verstehen* is roughly translated into English as “understanding”, in the sense of understanding social action from the point of view of the actor. The goal of *Verstehen* is to make sense of any given action by looking at the situation as the actor understands it.

As defined in “Contemporary Sociology and Its Classical Roots”, *verstehen* is a methodological technique involving an effort to understand the thought processes of the actor, the actor’s meanings and motives, and how these factors led to the action (or interaction) under study<sup>10</sup>.

For Weber, social action can only be explained by analyzing it from the advantage point of the actor himself – which is very different, for example, from historical materialism conceived by Marx. What this means is that he tries to uncover the social meanings that guide social action. For the purpose of my research question, this methodology is crucial, as it enables us to understand terrorism from the militants’ point of view.

Weber made clear that *Verstehen* was not a less scientific method than others, such as, for example, the experimental methods employed by the behaviorist. Instead, it was a rigorous and systematic method for studying thoughts and actions. The advantage of using *Verstehen*, compared to other approaches, is that because subjects under scrutiny are indeed fellow human beings, the researcher can understand the reasons for which they decide to do what they do.

Weber’s application of *verstehen* can be observed in his analysis of the protestant ethic in relation to capitalism. In his book, namely, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber tried to

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<sup>8</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, edited by Keith Tribe, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 78;

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>10</sup> George Ritzer, *Contemporary Social Theory & Its Classical Roots: The Basics*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2010, p. 36;

understand the mindset of Calvinists, which are Protestants, in order to explain the motives that lead to the development of the capitalist economic model. He in fact argued, in opposition to Karl Marx, that it was indeed the cultural mindset of certain people that set the stage for the rise of capitalism, and not vice versa. Basically, using *verstehen*, he put himself in the minds of the Calvinists in order to understand their cultural context that they belonged to and what led them to behave in what we perceive as capitalist behavior, such as, for example, energetically seeking profits<sup>11</sup>.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argued that it is the cultural mindset that shapes and influences the economic system. Accordingly, it was the Protestant ethic that led to capitalism, through the doctrine of predestination. Predestination, in Christianity, is the doctrine that God has eternally chosen those whom he intends to save. It has been mainly associated with John Calvin and the Reformed tradition. According to the notion of double predestination, commonly identified with Calvinism, God has determined from eternity who he will save and who he will damn, regardless of their faith, love and merit<sup>12</sup>. However, as Giovanni Calvino argued, the will of God is inscrutable to human beings, who are “imperfect beings”, meaning that his will is unsearchable and therefore unknown to man in earthly life. This condition, according to Weber, led protestants to plummet in a deep state of anguish. So, to relief this distressful condition, individuals started to work in order to accumulate capital and glorify God. In their perspective, being economically successful was a sign, albeit not the certainty, that they were predestined to go to heaven. So, following this line of reasoning, the more the religious sentiment grew, the more the economics system developed and expanded.

Considering Marx’s contribution, objective material relations may or may not be a part of us in any given moment of time. In this perspective, the subjective point of view of the actor is irrelevant, and what matters are those objective material relations. Let’s take his analysis of capitalism. According to Marx, as long as you understand the objective material relations between the capitalist and the workers, you can understand the dynamics of capitalism. So, as long as you understand exploitation as the objective and external relationship between capitalists and workers, you can explain issues such as class struggle. Weber in contrast says the opposite, arguing that exploitation as such must be understood from the standpoint of the actors involved. Consequently, in order for workers to eventually make a difference and change the social and economic structure, they must first understand that they themselves are exploited and interpret what their role is in the process of exploitation. The retrospective of workers that observe how they relations themselves to exploitation is what Weber conceives as “interpretive understanding”.

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<sup>11</sup> Ivi, p. 36;

<sup>12</sup> “Predestination”, available on <https://www.britannica.com/topic/predestination> (viewed on March 15, 2021);



Like Weber has tried to observe the surrounding world through the lens of the protestants, in the same way Orsini proposes to observe the world through the mindset of terrorists. This has been achieved through the study of Max Weber's contribution to interpretative sociology.

One of the key assumptions of *verstehende Soziologie* – interpretative sociology - is that actors' subjective motives are assumed to matter because they are the factors that guide behavior. So, if for Marx, all you need to know in order to comprehend something are the objective material relations involved, for Weber it is important to understand what motivates people to behave in one way or another. In the latter perspective, social action is about individuals attaching subjective meaning to those actions and making reference to other people's behavior when engaging in those actions, developing particular motives for the courses of action.

Weber's main argument in this perspective is that the naturalistic method alone cannot make human conduct entirely intelligible to us, as it only deals with external, objective relationships. On the other hand, interpretative understanding aims at overcoming the ambiguities concerning the subjective approach in order to merge it in the normal procedures of scientific research<sup>13</sup>.

With this said, the question Weber raises is the following: "To what extent is interpretative understanding, as a sociological method, capable of establishing truths which are valid for all who want the truth?<sup>14</sup>".

If interpretative sociology always aims at grasping the meaning of a behavior, in other terms, understanding it, then we must grasp the context of meaning of such conduct. In this context, Weber analyzed the different ways of understanding the term "meaning".

As Weber writes:

"'Meaning' here is either

a) The actual meaning that is 1) subjectively intended by one actor in a historically given instance, or 2) subjectively intended by several actors in approximating the average of a given number of cases; alternatively, is

b) In a conceptually constructed pure type, the meaning subjectively intended by actor or actors conceived as a type<sup>15</sup>"

According to him, meaning cannot be objectively correct. It is here that lies the difference between what he defines as the "empirical sciences of action" – sociology and history – and the ones he defines

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<sup>13</sup> Julien Freund, *Sociology of Max Weber*, edited from the French by Mary Ilford, The Penguin Press, London, 1970, p. 94;

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>15</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, edited by Keith Tribe, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 79;

as “dogmatic sciences” – jurisprudence, logic and ethics – which on the other hand, aim at providing “correct” and “valid” meaning to their objects of study<sup>16</sup>. Being an empirical science, sociology is concerned with the interpretative understanding of subjectively meaningful action. In line with the research question, we as well are concerned with such meaningful action. So, how can we grasp such meaning?

As laid out by Weber in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, “understanding” a social action can mean either direct understanding or explanatory understanding.

As Weber writes:

“Understanding can mean

1) Direct and immediate understanding of the intended meaning of an action, including a verbal utterance. Our ‘understanding’ of the meaning of the proposition  $2 \times 2 = 4$  is immediate in this sense, since we hear or read it (the rationally immediate understanding of thoughts). We understand in like fashion of a fit of anger manifested in facial expression, interjections, or irrational movements (the irrationally immediate understanding of affect). Similarly, we understand the behavior of a woodcutter, or someone who reaches for the handle to close a door, or who aims a gun at an animal (the rationally immediate understanding of actions). But understanding can also mean

2) Explanatory understanding. We ‘understand’ in terms of a motivation the meaning that a person who has expressed, or written, the proposition  $2 \times 2 = 4$  associated with it, moving him to do just this now and in this context, if we see him to be involved in an accounting calculation, a scientific demonstration, a technical computation, or some other kind of action to which in this context the proposition ‘belongs’ in a sense that we understand. In other words, it acquires a contextual meaning that we understand (rational understanding of motivation). We understand the chopping of wood not only directly but motivationally, if we know that the woodman is working for a wage or is pursuing his own needs, simply taking some exercise (rational), or is possibly working off a fit of anger (irrational). Likewise, we understand the aiming of a gun motivationally if we know that the rifleman is under orders as part of a firing squad, or firing at enemies, (rational), or that he is acting out of revenge (affective, and therefore in this sense irrational). Finally, we understand motivationally a fit of anger if we know that jealousy, affronted vanity, or wounded honor underlies it (affectively determined; hence, motivationally irrational.) all of these are understandable context of meaning, understanding of which we treat as an explanation of the actual course taken by action. For a science concerned with the meaning of action, ‘explanation’ amounts to identification of the meaningful context to which directly understandable action belongs, corresponding to its subjectively intended

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<sup>16</sup> Julien Freund, *Sociology of Max Weber*, edited from the French by Mary Ilford, The Penguin Press, London, 1970, p. 95;

meaning. In all of these cases, including affective events, we shall call the subjective meaning of such episodes, together with their context of meaning, their ‘intended’ meaning. This goes beyond common usage, where ‘intention’ generally refers only to rational and purposively intentional action<sup>17</sup>.”

Let’s take into consideration a numerical multiplication. The expression will be immediately, therefore directly, understood as it has been written. On the other hand, the indirect, explanatory understanding relies on the meaning that the person who has written the numerical expression has attached to it. Analogically, let’s consider a terrorist attack. The violent action will be directly understood as something dangerous, as a threat, and as a violation of freedom. However, the explanatory understanding will depend on analyzing the motives attached to the attack by the perpetrator.

Each of these ways of understanding can be either rational or irrational. The direct understanding of the meaning of the numerical multiplication is rational and also understanding why a person wrote it is rational. On the other hand, the direct understanding of a violent action done for revenge purposes, as well as its motivational understanding, are irrational. Even though these ways of understanding differ among each other, they are based on certainty, which may vary in degree according to the various circumstances. The highest degree of certainty corresponds to the intellectual understanding of a rational activity, for example, of a numerical multiplication. An adequate degree of certainty is characterized by the understanding of the experiences of others by empathizing them, for example, of mistakes that we would commit as well.

In general, the certainty of understanding a social action diminishes the more the activity in question deviates from our own usual behavior. On the contrary, we are more incline to understand seemingly irrational behavior linked, for example, to fear, jealousy and vengeance, the more we are susceptible to such emotions. In fact, Weber argues that social scientists are not always capable of understanding the self-evidence of the values that give direction to human behavior. This is the case for those actions that diverge largely from what is socially conceived as “normal”.

As Weber points out, alleged “motives” of a course of action are often not evident to the actor himself, meaning that only a limited amount of value can be given to the true personal expression of the actor’s motivation<sup>18</sup>. It is here that sociology has the task to investigate and construe the context of motivation, even though the intention has not been entirely fixed in the consciousness of the actor<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, edited by Keith Tribe, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 83;

<sup>18</sup> *Ivi*, p. 85;

<sup>19</sup> *Ivi*, p. 85;

According to Weber, a “motive” is the meaningful context that appears to be the relevant and appropriate foundation for social behavior, in the eyes of either the actor himself or the observer<sup>20</sup>.

As Weber writes:

“A ‘motive’ is the meaningful context that appears, to the actor himself or to an observer, to be the relevant and appropriate ‘basis’ for a form of behavior.<sup>21</sup>”

Weber here provides the example of mystical events, which by definition are partially communicable in words and cannot be fully understood by those who have not experienced them. However, he argues that one’s capacity to reproduce action is not a condition for it to be understood<sup>22</sup>, as he famously states: “One must not be Caesar to understand Caesar<sup>23</sup>”. Even though the capability of re-experiencing something (*Nacherlebbarkeit*) is surely important for clarity (*Evidenz*), it is not an absolute condition for constructing its meaning. This argument is extremely relevant when studying why terrorists become such, and how do they have the courage to do things that are ordinarily unthinkable. Clearly, a scholar who wishes to carry out such research is neither capable of empathizing with such behavior, nor does he wish to replicate it in order to understand it.

To summarize, Weber argues that academics are generally not capable of understanding the self-evidence of the ultimate values and purposes of a given action, to which, in their experience, human action can be oriented<sup>24</sup>. While they may be capable of doing so intellectually, they will never be able to understand them by empathetically imagining such action if it radically diverges from their own personal principles and morals. Accordingly, scholars will have to be satisfied with construing them intellectually or by accepting them as data.

Weber further delves this mechanism by arguing that the more these actions are linked to emotional reactions such as anger, anxiety, ambition, vengefulness, pride or love, and their irrational consequences - which humans are generally prey of – the greater is the extent to which scholars are capable of re-experiencing them emotionally as self-evident<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, even though these actions far exceed their capacities, they are nonetheless able to take into account the orientation and the means of action empathetically and intellectually.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*, p. 87;

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>22</sup> *Ivi*, p. 79;

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>24</sup> *Ivi*, p. 80;

<sup>25</sup> *Ivi*, p. 81;

Weber points out that interpretation is a logical method that may enable us to grasp the meaning of social action. Even though we may not be able to understand something with rational certainty because of our inability of reliving it empathetically, such for example white supremacism or jihadi extremism, these are nonetheless meaningfully oriented social actions. Hence, we must try to understand them.

### Social behavior

Recalling Weber's definition, sociology is the study concerned with understanding social behavior. Until now, we have largely discussed about what interpretative sociology is and what it's the role of understanding in social research. Now, we will discuss the other fundamental element that is presented in the definition: social behavior.

According to Weber, action, is intended as "human behavior linked to the intended subjective meaning on the part of the actor or actors concerned"<sup>26</sup>. Such action can either be overt, or occur inwardly, whether by positive action, or by tolerating a situation, or by refraining from action. Such conduct is considered *social* when the meaning intended by the actor or actors is linked to the behavior of others, and the action is oriented in their direction<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, it distinguishes itself from the simple notion of behavior.

As Weber writes:

"Not every form of action – or even overt action – is 'social' action in the sense defined here. Overt action is not social action when it is solely oriented to the anticipated behavior of material objects. Inner comportment is only social action when it is oriented to the behavior of others. Religious behavior, for example, is not social action when it assumes the form of contemplation, or solitary prayer, and remains so."<sup>28</sup>

Because it has to be oriented toward someone else's behavior, action towards an inanimate object does not fall under the definition. In general, the fundamental requirement for social behavior is its meaningful relatedness to the conduct of others.

Here is Weber's passage:

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<sup>26</sup> *Ivi*, p. 78;

<sup>27</sup> *Ivi*, p. 79;

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi*, p. 99;

“Social action (including refraining from an action or tolerating a situation) can be oriented to the past, present, or future anticipated action of others (revenge for earlier assaults, resistance to present assault, defense measures taken with respect to future assaults)<sup>29</sup>.”

Social action is human conduct meaningfully oriented towards the past, the present or expected future behavior of others<sup>30</sup>. Weber here provides us with a – casually – pertinent example with terrorism: social action can be revenge for earlier assaults, resistance to present assault, defense measures taken with respect to future assaults. In different terms, it is action that we engage in, by observing how other people acted, are acting or how we expect them to act, based on our own behavior. So, it basically means that we establish a relationship between our conduct and the one of others. We orient ourselves, and consequently our behavior, towards the behavior of others that we are referring to.

In order to continue the discussion, a distinction must be made. In interpretative sociology, behavior which merely consists in simultaneous or successive conduct of a number of individuals differs from behavior that is meaningfully oriented towards others. The latter is indeed in the interest of interpretative sociology, as it is the primary form of complex types of behavior, such as those of groups, associations and institutions. The former, on the other hand, can simply be studied by causal sociology<sup>31</sup>.

This argument made by Weber shows the true aim of interpretative sociology. Its purpose is not to replace traditional sociology, but to provide an auxiliary method to study more complex aspects of social action<sup>32</sup>. In his comprehensive analysis of Weber’s sociology, Julien Freund notes that even though meaningful relatedness associated to social conduct is essential to the sociologist, the actor himself does not necessarily need to be aware of it. In fact, in many cases, it is the task of the researcher to discover such unacknowledged relatedness, by making a certain type of social action intelligible.

At this point, according to Freund, a question arises. Is the meaning attributed by the sociologist the same of the one attached consciously, or not, by the agent?

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<sup>29</sup> *Ivi*, p. 99;

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>31</sup> Julien Freund, *Sociology of Max Weber*, edited from the French by Mary Ilford, The Penguin Press, London, 1970, p. 103;

<sup>32</sup> *Ivi*, p. 104;

Since all interpretation aims to achieve the highest degree of certainty, it is necessary to define social behavior in the most rationally verifiable way. For this reason, As Weber states<sup>33</sup>, social action can be determined either by:

1. Purposive rationality (*zwerckrational*)
2. Value rationality (*wertrational*)
3. Affect, especially emotion (*affektuell*)
4. Tradition (*traditional*)

In case (1), it refers to social actions that are carried out to achieve a certain goal. In case (2), it refers to social action determined by the conscious belief an inherent type of behavior. In case (3), it refers to social action determined by one's specific affections and emotional state, and the consequences are therefore not thought through. In case (4), it refers to social actions controlled by tradition and habituation. Weber points out that social action is rarely oriented only to one of the above-mentioned types, as they have been conceived solely for sociological ends. Therefore, they cannot be exhaustive with respect to the types of action, and they only describe conceptually pure types that to which real action more or less conforms.

These four cases represent Weber's ideal types of social action.

In sociology, as in all social sciences, concepts must be defined precisely. Weber introduces the use of ideal types for this precise reason. According to him, ideal types are concepts that are created and classified for purposes of research<sup>34</sup>. As Jurgen discusses in his analysis, the function of these instruments is to offer a means to construct concepts and does not itself ensure their precision<sup>35</sup>. Accordingly, an ideal type of rational behavior enables the sociologist to see the effects of the intervention of irrational elements – any of the four mentioned above – to measure how much the conduct has deviated between the actual course of the action and its attached subjective meaning<sup>36</sup>.

Before moving on, it is important to mention one last theoretical aspect.

According to Weber, when studying social action through interpretative sociology, one must analyze the individual and not the collective group. The latter is not an independent variable in sociological

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<sup>33</sup> *Ivi*, p. 101;

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi*, p. 60;

<sup>35</sup> *Ivi*, p. 61;

<sup>36</sup> *Ivi*, p. 108;

terms: “Action, in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behavior, exists only as the behavior of one or more individual human beings<sup>37</sup>”

Weber does not even consider the action of collectivities as a hypothesis, as he argues that the means in terms of a goal, choosing the goal, evaluating the consequences, pursuing a decision and executing it is a process with which only the individual is concerned. In interpretative sociology, such assumption is a postulate, as proving the opposite would lead to incoherence and confusion in the field<sup>38</sup>.

The relevance of the individual as opposed to a group indeed explains the reason for which Orsini has chosen the “terrorist by vocation”, therefore an individual, as a starter point for his analysis. This concept will be further discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>37</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, edited by Keith Tribe, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 89;

<sup>38</sup> Julien Freund, *Sociology of Max Weber*, edited from the French by Mary Ilford, The Penguin Press, London, 1970, p. 113;



## CHAPTER TWO

### *The need to resort to sociological theory to study terrorism*

Having explained Weber's contribution to interpretative sociology, I am a step closer to showing how a sociologist explains the worldview of terrorists. However, it is important to clarify why understanding a violent and extremist militant's point of view.

As Orsini argues, ISIS leaders are men like other, and therefore also their way of reasoning depends on how they perceive the surrounding world.<sup>39</sup> When explaining the motives behind the preference of ISIS to attack France and Germany compared to other European countries, Orsini provides us with what he calls the "Weberian explanation". It is based on his analysis of the attacks successfully perpetrated and claimed by ISIS in the West from 2004 to 2018, and states as follows:

"We ISIS Muslims would like to be free to lash out at moderate Muslims. The problem is, every time we are ahead, Westerners rush to the defense of moderate Muslims and force us to retreat. This is the reason why we attack you."<sup>40</sup>

He further discusses that what terrorists think is not that complicated to understand, as their thought follow normal lines of reasoning, common to all people. Orsini identifies their elementary psychological processes, which can be summarized as follows:

1. "If you bomb me, and destroy what I have built, I hate you."
2. "If you bomb me, and kill my companions, I hate you."
3. "If you bomb me, and let my attack at the hotel<sup>41</sup> fail, I hate you."

The analysis of the pedagogy of intolerance, of the binary code mentality and of the radical mental universe, fall into the phase of the explanatory study of a social research, which is different from the descriptive study in that it explains why social phenomena happen, and does not merely describe

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<sup>39</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *L'ISIS non è morto*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2018, p. 89;

<sup>40</sup> *Ivi*, p. 98;

<sup>41</sup> Referring to the terrorist attacks of January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in the center of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso;

them<sup>42</sup>. As Orsini states in the introduction of his book, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades*, during the explanatory stage, the *Weberian* method of understanding and empathizing plays a central role. However, Orsini points out that, in Weber's lesson, sociological inquiry cannot be resolved by recourse to the categories of understanding, empathy and intuition alone. The sociologist is required to legitimize what he believes or has discovered through an objective, controllable and repeatable method of inquiry. This empirical method is clear in Orsini's DRIA model, which will be discussed later on.

The need to resort to the sociological theory of understanding derives from a specific academic point of view, enunciated by Orsini in *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades*. He states that in order to understand – in the particular case of the book - the Red Brigades and the Black Brigades, one must listen to its militants. The basic idea of his research is founded on the fact that extremist militants are not “crazy”. Accordingly, Orsini writes: “The category of insanity serves to condemn and distance one from understanding<sup>43</sup>.” On the contrary, we need to approach their mentality and immerse ourselves in the social phenomenon of terrorism in order to understand it thoroughly. However, one must not share the ideas and views of militants in order to understand them.

As Jessica Stern points out, it is important to distinguish empathy from sympathy. While empathizing is “to understand and share someone else's feelings by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation<sup>44</sup>”, sympathy can be defined as feeling pity or sorrow for one's misfortunes or even agreeing with their opinion. Empathy is a crucial element for understanding how individuals can become radicalized up to the point that they are willing to kill, and to be killed, for a greater cause.

A very interesting and relevant observation has been made by Kathleen Norris, who has been cited in the introduction of “Why Religious Militants Kill. Terror in the name of God”, which is an excellent book written by terrorism expert Jessica Stern. The remark states the following:

“Any creative encounter with evil requires that we do not distance ourselves from it by simply demonizing those who commit evil acts. In order to write about evil, a writer has to try to comprehend it, from the inside out; to understand the perpetrators and not necessarily sympathize with them. But Americans seem to have a very difficult time recognizing that there is a distinction between understanding and sympathizing. Somehow, we believe that an attempt to inform ourselves about

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<sup>42</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *Anatomia delle Brigate rosse. Le radici ideologiche del terrorismo rivoluzionario*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2009; English edition: Alessandro Orsini, *Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mindset of Modern Terrorists* p. 285;

<sup>43</sup> *Ivi*, p. 287;

<sup>44</sup> Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God. Why Religious Militants Kill*, Harper Collins, New York, 2003, Introduction, p. XVI;

what leads to evil is an attempt to explain it away. I believe that just the opposite is true, and that when it comes to coping with evil, ignorance is our worst enemy<sup>45</sup>”.

Not only is this an eye-opening truth, but it is also the basic assumption that one must accept in order to really understand the reasons that lead to engagement in terrorist activities. A scholar, on anyone interested in this specific issue, must follow the line of reasoning of terrorists in order to understand the subjective motives attached to such actions.

The third chapter of this dissertation focuses on the analysis of three different radical ideologies, which may seem very different at first, but that actually present many similarities. The first common feature is that they all belong to apocalyptic terrorism, the gravest form of terrorism today<sup>46</sup>. As defined in Nilay Saiya’s article, “*Confronting Apocalyptic Terrorism: Lessons from France and Japan*”, apocalyptic terrorism is a subset of religious terrorism whose perpetrators, motivated by transcendent aims, carry out attack uninhibited by political moral, or pragmatic constraints that guide most other terrorists. The motives behind this type of extremism are different from the one of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which instead engage in terrorist activities to fight for the liberation and the independence of Palestinian occupied territories.

Essentially, apocalypticism comprises structured theologies that emphasize endemic world corruption and depravity, and, most importantly, the belief that, for this very reason, the world must be cleansed through some sort of event that enables the return of a messiah that can reign a holy utopia.<sup>47</sup> These groups do not have material goals, such as the PLO, but rather spiritual ones which are derived by the interpretation of their religion’s texts and practices.

The reason for which apocalyptic terrorism represents such a challenge is because, as sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer explains, its perpetrators have placed religious images of cosmic war and divine struggle in the service of political battles, making the violence relentless<sup>48</sup> and any sort of political compromise is impossible.

As explained in Saiya’s article, conventional counterterrorism, focused on several approaches to eradicate or neutralize terrorism, has its limits, because militants operate according to their own

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<sup>45</sup> *Ivi*, p. XIII;

<sup>46</sup> Nilay Saiya, “*Confronting Apocalyptic Terrorism: Lessons from France and Japan*”, in “*Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*”, n.9, 2020, p. 776;

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>48</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2003, p. 148;

mental structure, which may, or may not, coincide with the calculus of policy makers.<sup>49</sup> Governments have developed a wide range of counterterrorism approaches, including law enforcement, political negotiations, repression, and war<sup>50</sup>. Each of these methods presents problems, or better, limits.

For example, law enforcement treats terrorism like a crime and therefore solves it using the criminal justice system. However, by doing so, governments cannot address the root causes of terrorist activity.

Another method is the use of repression, which, by the very definition of liberal democracy, is quite a paradox for Western countries. In some cases, repression, as in brute force, assassinations and punishment has been proven to be a successful strategy. Groups such as Argentina's Montoneros and People's Revolutionary Party, Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers, or Russia's Narodnaya Volya, among others, have been eradicated through this approach. However, the movements did not present the characteristics of either religious or apocalyptic world views<sup>51</sup>.

Countries that undertake war as methods to combat terrorism, such as the United States, when President George W. Bush declared the "Global War on Terrorism" to eliminate al-Qaeda and related groups after the 9/11 attacks, as concluded by Saiya, take a counterproductive path. Indeed, such actions, which include military invasions, missile strikes, occupations and special operations, feed the narrative of the "good" against the "evil" forces, which will be discussed in the next section. This argument has been proven by the course of action of the American government. The "Global War on Terrorism" essentially consisted in the overturn of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the 10-year invasion of Iraq that started in 2003 and the drone wars in Pakistan and Yemen. Instead of neutralizing it, these actions generated even more terrorism activities in the region. According to the Global Terrorism Database, before 2003, Iraq basically witnessed no terrorism<sup>52</sup>. After the removing of Saddam Hussein and the end of American occupation in the country, the number of terrorist attacks increased exponentially: from 2014 to 2016, Iraq experienced an average of 3,400 attacks per year, mostly perpetrated by ISIS. This same scheme can be observed in Afghanistan, which, before 2001, witnessed about 8 attacks per year. Then, from 2014 to 2016, 1,600 attacks on average per year were recorded.

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<sup>49</sup> Gregory D. Miller, *Confronting Terrorisms: Group Motivation and Successful State Policies*, in "Terrorism and Political Violence", n. 3, 2007, pp 331–350;

<sup>50</sup> Nilay Saiya, "Confronting Apocalyptic Terrorism: Lessons from France and Japan", in "Studies in Conflict and Terrorism", n.9, 2020, p. 779;

<sup>51</sup> *Ivi*, p. 780;

<sup>52</sup> Data found on the Global Terrorist Index, available on: [https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?page=1&casualties\\_type=b&casualties\\_max=&start\\_yearonly=1970&end\\_yearonly=2003&ctp2=all&country=4&charttype=line&chart=overtime&ob=GTDid&od=desc&expanded=yes#results-table](https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?page=1&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=&start_yearonly=1970&end_yearonly=2003&ctp2=all&country=4&charttype=line&chart=overtime&ob=GTDid&od=desc&expanded=yes#results-table) (viewed on March 27, 2021);

Another reason for which resorting to war and repression may is not the most effective strategy lies in the very nature of extremist education. For example, jihadist terrorists will say that they value death as we, as in Westerners, value life. They are not interested in our individualistic cultural values, they do not care about having cars, clothes and expensive devices. They consider death as a heroic action, and therefore killing their friends will only escalate their desire to keep on fighting. In *Friction*, Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, among other things, explain the mass radicalization mechanism of “martyrdom culture”, which is typical of Islamist terrorist groups. Suicide bombers force those Muslims who claim to be true servants of Allah to commit extreme acts and therefore creating the “mobilizing by sacrifice” phenomenon. This, in turn, creates competition among terrorist groups, intensifying attacks, leading to the “outbidding phenomenon”<sup>53</sup>.

Given the complexity of radical ideologies, especially ones related to religious beliefs, identifying an enemy and subsequently trying to eliminate it is quite simplistic, both from the part of terrorists and of who wants to fight them. Attempting to annihilate extremist militants by killing them will not eradicate the phenomenon from the roots. According to much of the literature on radical ideologies, this can only be done if policy makers and leaders undertake the effort of interpreting extremist worldviews from the perspective of the militants themselves. In the light of this evidence, as Saiya similarly concludes, scholars must use a different approach in order to figure out the root causes of terrorism in order to guide politicians to define effective strategies for counterterrorism. At this point of the discussion, Orsini’s insight to combine Weber’s contribution to interpretative sociology to the study of terrorism should seem more logical.

### *Arie Kruglanski*

Before moving on to the analysis the specific cognitive characteristics and mind schemes of terrorists, it is worth discussing about the role of ideology in the process of radicalization. It is important to do so because ideology serves as a lens to understand the logic that drives extremist to behave such as they do and to carry out horrible attacks that seem unthinkable to regular people. The literature on the role of ideology in the process of radicalization is very rich, however, for the purpose of the next sections, this paper only discusses about the contribution of Arie Kruglanski.

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<sup>53</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*, in “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism”, 2020, p. 16;

According to him, every kind of behavior, including extreme versions, depends on motivation and ability<sup>54</sup>, which are, respectively, the inner and external determinant of individual conduct. Kruglanski's research shows that the degree to which a specific need comes to subjugate the others is the fundamental factor that leads to extremist behavior. This mechanism is what he defines as "motivational imbalance". Human beings are guided by basic biological and psychogenic needs that reciprocally balance each other, meaning that satisfying one need while hindering another is generally avoided behavior. An example that perfectly suits this thesis is proposed by Kruglanski himself. If a man is in desperate need for admiration and esteem, he will probably seek for satisfaction in heroic fighting in battle. However, survival instinct and concerns for safety usually constraints such desire. Scientific evidence proves that the majority of people tends to behave following such moderate pattern, and that people who engage in extremist behavior are indeed a minority.

The question that arises naturally is, how does extremism start? According to Kruglanski, no person is born a revolutionary, a terrorist, or an extreme dieter<sup>55</sup>. The motivational imbalance must be triggered during one's lifetime following a traumatic event. As will be discussed further on, this activation process is also present in Orsini's work. The episode that leads to behavioral deviance may take place when one realizes that one specific and important need has been neglected. While looking for the solution to satisfy it, one may not pay attention to other considerations, opting for the extreme behavior. As Kruglanski argues, the neglected need is often of social nature. Pivotal in his contribution is his theory on what he calls the "quest for significance", or rather the need to matter, to be achieved, to be important and so on. With this said, Kruglanski concludes that it is the deprivation of such needs that leads to radicalization and extreme deviance in behavior. Most of the times, the loss of significance is triggered by the loss of social identity or by an identity crisis. This, too, will be discussed at length in the next sections regarding the contribution of Alessandro Orsini when analyzing the specific examples of "terrorists by vocation".

Kruglanski concludes that resorting to violence as a response for the loss of significance is related to the fact that it represents the "primordial, raw, and direct use of power, inflicting hurtful costs on the targets of one's aggression. Violence is the 'great equalizer' capable of obliterating the significance of venerated individuals and turning them into disempowered victims."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Arie W. Kruglanski, Katarzyna Jasko, Marina Chernikova, Michelle Dugas, David Webber, "To the fringe and back: violent extremism and the psychology of deviance", in AA. VV. *The Motivated Mind: the selected works of Arie W. Kruglanski*, edited by Arie W. Kruglanski, Routledge, London, 2018, p. 345;

<sup>55</sup> *Ivi*, p. 346;

<sup>56</sup> Arie W. Kruglanski, Katarzyna Jasko, Marina Chernikova, Michelle Dugas, David Webber, "To the fringe and back: violent extremism and the psychology of deviance", in AA. VV. *The Motivated Mind: the selected works of Arie W. Kruglanski*, edited by Arie W. Kruglanski, Routledge, London, 2018, p. 351-352;

Concept of “terrorist by vocation”

After presenting Kruglanski’s “motivational imbalance theory”, it is necessary to discuss the concept of the “terrorist by vocation”, as it should be clear by now that not all individuals have the potential to turn violent and to join terrorist groups.

The DRIA model conceived by Alessandro Orsini is the result of extensive research and deals with the process of radicalization of only one specific anthropological type, the “terrorist by vocation” or “vocational terrorist”. The concept of “vocational terrorist” has been defined by Orsini on the basis of the distinction between an individual who lives “for” politics and “off” politics, drawn by Max Weber. One who lives “for” politics, is one who makes a career out of it, hence has a material recompensating in exchange for public service. One who lives “for” politics, makes the latter it’s life purpose, therefore enjoy being part of a greater, more noble cause, which is unrelated to a permanent income.<sup>57</sup>

Accordingly, “terrorist by vocation” refers to all those women and men who have decided to sacrifice their lives, and the life of others, in order to fulfill a deep and interior spiritual need. More specifically, the term describes those who seek to satisfy an inner need for redemption, but who are also obsessed with the idea of punishing others for their alleged moral corruption<sup>58</sup>.

To formulate the DRIA model, Orsini analyzed the life of 39 vocational terrorists who successfully carried out attacks in the West, from 2009 to 2016. The list of names can be found in his article “*What Everybody Should Know About Radicalization and the DRIA Model*”. In order to make the concept of the “vocational terrorist” clear, I will present some of these very interesting profiles.

Among the ones studied by Orsini, I will describe the lives of Mohamed Lahouiaej-Bouhlel and Muriel Degauque.

Muriel was born and raised in Charleroi, a gritty coal and steel town in Belgium. In order to better understand her background, it is worthy to mention that Charleroi is the third poorest municipality in Brussels, and the absolute poorest in the Walloon area. Her family was Catholic. Young Muriel was very spoiled by her mother, both with love and material things. Always well-dressed and well-behaved, Muriel was only a middling student, nothing exceptional. After her third year of high school, she started using drugs. She then joined a motorcycle gang, the “Apaches”, of which her older brother

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<sup>57</sup> Dagman Waters, Tony Waters, *Politics as a Vocation by Max Weber*, in “Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society”, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2015;

<sup>58</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *L’ISIS non è morto*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2018, p. 78. The concept of “terrorist by vocation” has been defined in his article, *La radicalization des terroristes de vocation*, in “Commentaire”, n. 156, p. 783-790;

was already a member. Always out drinking and taking drugs with different boys, riding on the back of a motorcycle wearing a leather jacket, the little Catholic girl was unrecognizable. Here comes the crucial moment that culminated in her identity crisis, which subsequently led her to the path of radicalization: the death of her brother in a motorcycle accident. Testimonies later revealed that she herself said “It should have been me to die, not him”. The pain and suffering were too much to handle for her at that point. Later on, Muriel met and married an older man of Turkish origin. It was rather obvious that the marriage was a strategic move to help her husband get full legal citizenship. After the marriage fell apart, she lived with another man of North African origin, who is alleged to be the man who introduced her to radical Islamist beliefs. Her conversion was actually perceived in a positive way, especially from her mother, who admitted that she was happy to see that Islam had helped Muriel stop using drugs and drinking alcohol.

Things started to become extreme when she married Hissam Goris, a Moroccan man already known for being sympathizing to radical Islam. They moved to Belgium and then to Morocco for her to properly study Arab and the Qur’an. They soon returned in Belgium so they would not lose unemployment benefits and settled down around the Gare du Midi where many Muslims live. "Muriel became more Muslim than a Muslim," her mother told *Le Parisien* newspaper. "When she first converted she wore a simple veil. But with her last husband she wore a [head to toe] chador." Eventually relations became impossible. "When we saw them they imposed their own rules," her mother told *La Dernière Heure* newspaper. "We would be at home but my husband had to eat in the kitchen with Hissam while the women stayed in the sitting room. The last time we saw them we told them we had had enough of them trying to indoctrinate us<sup>59</sup>." In August 2005, Muriel Degauque called her parents from Syria, announcing that she would have been gone for more than a year. A couple of months later, on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Muriel Degauque, wrapped in explosives, carried out her planned suicide bomb attack in the streets of Iraq, becoming the first European female suicide bomber.

Another biography worth describing is Mohamed Lahouiaej-Bouhlel’s, the perpetrator of the July 14, 2016, Nice massacre. He had come to France from Tunisia in 2005 and on that July 14 decided to launch himself into a crowd with a truck, killing 86 people. Mohamed embodied a life of failures and disappointments. According to his father's testimony, his son abused drugs and alcohol and had been the victim of a violent nervous breakdown. The police, going through his cell phone after the attack, also discovered that Mohamed had a promiscuous sex life with both women and men<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Nicholas Watt, *From Belgian cul-de-sac to suicide bomber in Iraq*, “The Guardian”, December 2, 2005, available on <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/dec/02/iraq.islam> (viewed on March 27, 2021);

<sup>60</sup> Peter Beaumont, *Mohamed Lahouiaej-Bouhlel: Who Was the Bastille Day Truck Attacker?*, “The Guardian”, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, available on: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/15/bastille-day-truck-driver-was-known-to-police-reports-say> (viewed on March 27, 2021);



"He is not religious, he does not practice at all, he eats pork, drinks alcohol. He smokes from time to time. I have never seen him pray or do anything related to religion," swears Hajer, his wife, herself not very religious and categorical in her condemnation of terrorism. Even though she had only seen him once a week since their separation a year earlier, this woman, who gave birth to their three children, had "not noticed anything special in his behavior". Until his mad dash on the Promenade des Anglais, where he drove the truck on the crowd, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhleb left the image of a troubled and ambivalent man. "He seemed perverse, a look both lamb and wolf. I saw him as troubled, fragile and unstable but not at all dangerous, let alone with a terrorist profile", said the manager of the gym he went to from 2012 to 2014. "Sometimes he is calm, other times he is excited, angry, even paranoid," confirms a childhood friend of the 31-year-old Tunisian. His former martial arts teacher also rubbed shoulders with this two-faced character. "It was someone serious and even respectful," says the teacher, admiring this student who won the Provence Championship and whom he did not hesitate to hire as a delivery driver in his company. "As time went on, I began to get negative feedback from customers who complained about his attitude. He tended to be a bit of a show-off. He was the mythomaniac type," he lamented. He was later forced to fire him for serious misconduct in 2011<sup>61</sup>. These are clear example of what Orsini calls "vocational terrorists". Both Muriel and Mohamed had troubled, unsatisfactory and meaningless lives, which they decided to overturn, or better, to end, in because of their craving to be part of something great.

The desire to engage in terrorist activities is, according to the arguments of Megan McBride, a consequence of an existential-terroristic feedback loop. Existential anxiety is a state of mind that derives from the recognition of human mortality.<sup>62</sup> In this sense, radical ideologies, being meaning-giving constructs, give value and purpose to human life, therefore alleviating existential anxiety. However, supporting and taking part into violent activities unambiguously put death closer to the eyes of the terrorist seeking for meaning in life, therefore making him, or her, re-enter the vicious cycle leading to further anxiety, that will eventually need to be once again relieved by taking part into more terrorist activities<sup>63</sup>. This is, in sum, McBride's psychological perspective, which is useful to understand more in depth how the mind of a vocational terrorist operates.

Drawing inspiration from McBride's contribution, Orsini argues that engagement in terrorist activities of the to-be vocational militant follows an existential crisis of triggered by a traumatic

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<sup>61</sup> Timothée Boutryéric Pelletier, Jean-Marc Ducos, Valérie Brioux, Geoffroy Tomasovitch, *Terrorisme : Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhleb, le sadique de Nice*, "Le Parisien", October 1, 2016, available on: <https://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/le-sadique-de-nice-01-10-2016-6166219.php> (viewed on March 27, 2021);

<sup>62</sup> Megan McBride, *The Logic of Terrorism: Existential Anxiety, the Search of Meaning, and Terrorist Ideologies*, in "Terrorism and Political Violence", 2011, p. 561;

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*;

experience. For the purpose of this section, it is however necessary to present the first stage of the DRIA model, which corresponds to “D”, as in “Disintegration of Social Identity”, defined by Orsini in the following manner:

“Due to a series of traumas, or personal failures, the individual begins to experience a period of existential unease that drives him to question their values they have always believed in and, therefore, their place in the world.”<sup>64</sup>

This argument has been made years earlier by Magnus Ranstorp in his article “*Terrorism in the Name of Religion*”, published in 1999. Here, Ranstorp cites a survey regarding all the major religious terrorist groups present in the 1990s, showing that the majority of the members of such groups experienced a grave sense of crisis in their own social environment. However, it must be kept in mind that, in making their assertions, the two scholars refer to different historical and political contexts. According to Ranstorp, the sense of crisis has been triggered by the end of the Cold War which determined the end of the bipolar world power balance and the gradual shift to “one worldism”<sup>65</sup>. Recalling the Weberian interpretative approach, this political disorientation shapes the perceived threat to one’s identity, which in turn defines the crisis. An example which fits both the 1990s and the present times are, for example, white supremacist groups in the United States. These organizations discern a menace from the African American community and Jews and derive a paranoid view from a mixture of racism, anti-Semitism and general distrust of the government. On the other hand, Orsini’s DRIA model has been conceived through the study of the lives of contemporary terrorists, such as Muriel Degauque and is Mohamed Lahouiaej-Bouhlel, whose identity crisis stem from disappointments, failures and traumas. In both scholar’s contributions, the essential idea is that a discomfort related to the social or political dimension is a source of an existential crisis, that, in the case of the vocational terrorist, leads to radicalization.

Likewise, in the specific case of religious terrorists, in order to understand why average individuals with normal lives and good intentions would want to be part of a radical and violent group, it must be kept in mind that they usually perceive themselves as victims of some kind of threat, as Jean-François Mayer writes in his article “*Cults, Violence and Religious Terrorism: An International Perspective*”, published in 2001. Feeling endangered, they are consequently able to rationalize the use of violence as a means to defend themselves from the threat, or even to react to it. This psychological mechanism is present in many extremist religious narratives, both in the mind of the

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<sup>64</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*, in “Studies in Conflict & Terrorism”, 2020, p. 23;

<sup>65</sup> Magnus Ranstorp, *Terrorism in the Name of Religion*, in “Journal of International Affairs”, 1996, n.1; p. 47;

members and of the leaders of violent groups. According to one of his former wives, Ervil LeBaron, leader of the Church of the Lamb of God, a violent Latter Day Saint group which is responsible for dozens of deaths over two decades, was “very paranoid”. He thought that “they” were after him, “they” stands for the Church of the Firstborn, another sect of the above-mentioned movement. LeBaron was convinced that the Church of the Firstborn was after his group, following them everywhere and always trying to kill them. This behavior came to justify murders, and, in fact, his message was: “We would never be safe as long as they were around to pose a threat to us. We had to get them before they got us”<sup>66</sup>. Another pertinent example is the Order of the Solar Temple, founded in Geneva in 1974 and known for the murder-suicide of 74 of its members. This group saw itself as a victim of a conspiracy because the leaders have convinced themselves that governments from around the globe and law enforcement agencies were after them<sup>67</sup>.

The perception and the belief that of being a target of persecution is, as is discussed in the next sections, a cognitive category of the “radical mental universe”. This scheme, conceived by Orsini, is one of the tools that will be used in this dissertation to support the thesis that a terrorist mindset exists. Bearing in mind all that has been discussed up until now, it is possible to furtherly argue that militants who belong to violent religious groups fit in the definition of the terrorist by vocation. Indeed, this category of militants is definitely willing to die in for a greater a cause or to satisfy an inner need, to recall Orsini’s definition.

#### Cognitive radicalization: the “binary code mentality”

For the purpose of the research question, the discussion does not concentrate on Orsini’s sequential scheme of radicalization, the DRIA model, in its entirety. Instead, it focuses on the first part of it, namely the phase of “cognitive radicalization”. The DRIA model, first introduced in 2007 in *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades* and further developed in other articles, conceives ideology as the necessary, however not sufficient, variable that leads to radicalization<sup>68</sup>. DRIA is the acronym of the four sequential steps of the process, and it stands for:

1. Disintegration of Social Identity
2. Reconstruction of Social Identity through a Radical Ideology

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<sup>66</sup> Jean-François Mayer, *Cults, Violence and Religious Terrorism: An International Perspective*, in “Studies in Conflict & Terrorism”, 2001, p. 367-368;

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>68</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*, in “Studies in Conflict & Terrorism”, 2020, p. 20;

3. Integration in a Revolutionary Sect
4. Alienation from the Surrounding World

The model describes two phases of the radicalization process. The first, which corresponds to the first two stages and is the one which will serve the purpose of the research question, deals with “cognitive radicalization”. The second, corresponding to the last two stages, concerns “violent radicalization”. The former is the psychological phase of the process in which the aspiring terrorist undergoes a “cognitive opening” after some sort of traumatic experience or personal failures. This can lead, although not always, an individual to put into discussion and to abandon all of its previous set of values and beliefs, therefore leaving it with the imminent need to embrace a new ideology, a new *modus vivendi* which could again give meaning to his, or her, life. In this context, radical ideologies fit this need perfectly, as they give a complete set of rules to follow, that enunciate how one should, among other things, eat, love, speak, think and talk.

However, Orsini, in his comprehensive article “*What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*” published in 2020, clearly states that those who experience an identity crisis do not necessarily move onto the next stage of radicalization. One can cope with existential trauma in many ways and adopting a “binary code mentality” is just one of them. With the definition “binary code mentality”, Orsini means the mechanism of simplifying reality that encourages the deployment of political violence.<sup>69</sup>

In his book, *The Anatomy of the Red Brigades*, published in 2007, he uses this expression to describe the typical mentality of the members of the Red Brigades, the most lethal extreme-left terrorist group operating in Italy in the Seventies. According to Orsini, this mentality is elementary, instinctive, and brutal in its immediacy. It is for these very characteristics that the “binary code mentality” is so successful<sup>70</sup>. Dichotomous thinking consists in reducing even the most complex phenomenon to only two categories, namely “good” and “evil”. This reduction enables terrorist to dehumanize their victims and to create a strong collective notion that defines the enemy that must be eliminated at all costs.

In his book, *Terror in the Mind of God*, Juergensmeyer argues that militants belonging to terrorist groups motivated by a belief in a future apocalypse perceive themselves to be engaged in a so-called “cosmic war”. This concept is very important and is useful to explain the binary code mentality. As Juergensmeyer argues, the term “cosmic” is used because the images that apocalyptic militants evoke

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<sup>69</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *Anatomia delle Brigate rosse. Le radici ideologiche del terrorismo rivoluzionario*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2009; English translation: Alessandro Orsini, *Anatomy of the Red Brigades: The Religious Mindset of Modern Terrorists* p. 34;

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*;

are “larger than life<sup>71</sup>”, as they recall legendary battles of the past and depict an esoteric war between good and evil.

A great example of how violent militants construct a reality that is based on the notion of cosmic war is presented in Orsini’s book, *Sacrifice: My Life in a Fascist Militia*, in which is an ethnographic research about an extreme right-wing militia currently operating in Italy. The group, called “Sacrifice” for safety reasons, constructed their parallel world by imagining that they were living in a world at war. Specifically, they were evoking the environment of Italy from 1919 to 1922, the years when Benito Mussolini’s regime expressed itself in revolutionary fascism, which, according to the Sacrifice comrades, is the purest form of fascism. As Orsini explains in the book, the construction of the parallel world is successful only if four conditions are satisfied. Firstly, the militants must interpret reality through an ideology that recalls the principles enunciated by Mussolini and Adolf Hitler during their rule. Referring to Max Weber’s interpretative sociology, Orsini defines Fascism as an “interpretative procedure”. Secondly, there must be two movements prepared to fight each other, who consider one another as the representation of pure evil. Thirdly, the conflict between the two groups must be paired with contrasts with the police, which symbolizes an external danger in the imagined battlefield. Lastly, this narrative has to be supported not only locally, but also nationally. Recalling George Simmel’s “system of interaction”, Orsini concludes that the parallel world of the Sacrifice comrades, as the one of members of other extremist groups, is a complex of interactions that depend on the anticipated or actual responses of others.<sup>72</sup> This mechanism refers exactly to Weber’s definition of “social action”:

“Social action (including refraining from an action or tolerating a situation) can be oriented to the past, present, or future anticipated action of others (revenge for earlier assaults, resistance to present assault, defense measures taken with respect to future assaults).<sup>73</sup>”

To summarize the concepts discussed so far, a certain category of terrorist groups, namely apocalyptic ones, view the world through a *cognitive schemata* that enables them to view the world as a theatre of an ongoing esoteric conflict. This so-called cosmic war forces the militants to distinguish only two categories of people, the good and the evil, the comrades and the enemies, just like real soldiers would do in a real war. This is, in sum, is the explanation of the binary code mentality.

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<sup>71</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California, Berkley, 2003, p. 149;

<sup>72</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *Sacrifice. My Life in a Fascist Militia*, Cornell University, 2017, pp. 68-68;

<sup>73</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, edited by Keith Tribe, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2019, p. 99;

The narrative of cosmic war, which is thoroughly discussed in the next sections, is present in different violent ideologies, such as, for example, radical Christian movements. In a brochure published by Aryan Nations, a group affiliated to Christian Identity, the following statement was printed:

“We BELIEVE<sup>74</sup> there is a battle being fought this day between the children of darkness and the children of Light, the Aryan Race, the true Israel of the Bible<sup>75</sup>”.

In this statement, the Aryan Nations militants identified the “children of darkness” with the Jews, and the “children of Light” as the legitimate descendants of God. After having served some time in prison, Christian Identity’s leader, Kerry Noble, rejected his radical views, but admitted that reminding his followers that “the Lord is a man of War” was necessary since his group “needed to know that it was time to cross the line into violence”<sup>76</sup>. In simple terms, to have a war, one must have enemies. Orsini’s “binary code mentality”, as we will see in the next sections, resumes many concepts proposed by Mark Juergensmeyer, such as “Martyrs and Demons”, and other characteristics of extremist religious movements presented in reports of security organizations.

#### The “radical mental universe”

Before moving on to the “radical mental universe”, a premise must be made. In his article, “*Poverty, Ideology and Terrorism*”, published in 2012, Orsini argues about a very important assumption, which is present throughout the entirety of his work. The assumption is, as he would define it, typically Weberian, and argues that “the actions of individuals depend on their mental states or their representations of the surrounding world”<sup>77</sup>. Terrorists have what sociologist Raymond Boudon has called “situated rationality<sup>78</sup>”, meaning that they use an ideology to interpret the world and to guide their social action, as they are influenced by their social context to which they can relate. With this in mind, it is possible to say that ideology both gives meaning and creates a program for the mind, which I interpret as being respectively the *modus vivendi* and the *modus operandi* for militants. For this very reason, when trying to figure out what drives individuals to commit atrocities, as Orsini stated, “it is essential to understand the ideologies or worldviews of practitioners of terrorism on their own terms,

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<sup>75</sup> Bruce Hoffman, “*Holy Terror’: the implications of Terrorism motivated by a Religious Imperative*”, Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, 1993;

<sup>76</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2003, p. 149;

<sup>77</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *Poverty, Ideology and Terrorism: The STAM Bond*, in “*Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*”, n.10, 2012, p. 671;

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*;

and not to exclude them from analysis because they appear ‘irrational’ in a conventional sense”<sup>79</sup>. This statement is crucial, as it realizes the *verstehende Soziologie* conceived by Max Weber. In these regards, it is worth to mention that terrorists “accept the idea of killing because killing is right and proper”<sup>80</sup>. Hence, the origins of terrorist actions must not be traced from alleged psychological disorders, but rather in their own perception, more precisely, in the perception of the revolutionary sect, of the surrounding world and how one should conduct action within it. This perception is guided by radical ideology. As Cynthia Miller-Idriss argues in an article that comments on extreme right terrorists, mental illness is not a cause that leads to radicalization, it is just a vulnerability that contributes to the process<sup>81</sup>

With this said, the worldview of terrorists and how they perceive their surrounding world perfectly suits Orsini’s “radical mental universe”, which is one of the fundamental concepts that lies behind the research question of this thesis. Following the steps enunciated in the DRIA model, after the vocational terrorist has experienced an identity crisis or a traumatic event, the following step is unlocked, namely the *Reconstruction of Social Identity*. This corresponds to the moment when the individual embraces an extremist ideology in order to find new existential references to conduct his life. In such manner, the to-be terrorist acquires what Orsini calls a “radical mental universe”, which he argues is based on seven cognitive categories, described hereafter:

- 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<sup>82</sup>.

In the above-mentioned article, Orsini provides an explanation of what the radical mental universe of the jihadist ideology consists of. The latter indeed produces a characteristic discourse that he has outlined in the following manner:

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>81</sup> Cynthia Miller-Idriss, *Stop calling far-right terrorists ‘crazy’*, “Politico”, February 10, 2020, available on: <https://www.politico.eu/article/stop-calling-far-right-terrorists-crazy/> (viewed on March 15, 2021);

<sup>82</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*, in “Studies in Conflict & Terrorism”, 2020, p. 24;

“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*).”<sup>83</sup>

Before moving on, it is worth making a note. The inspiration for the research question proposed by this paper came after reading multiple articles written by Orsini in which he used the “radical mental universe” to explain the radical ideologies of both Jihadist groups and the Red Brigades. The logic that lies behind the way I will attempt to support the initial hypothesis, namely, “does a terrorist mindset exist?”, is that if two apparently very different violent narratives, one religious, derived by an extremist interpretation of Islam, and one discerned from the Socialist-Communist idea of revolutionary armed struggle, have been successfully spelled out by the same scheme, it is likely that similarities can be found as well among other ideologies. After coming across more literature from different scholars on the issue, from Mark Juergensmeyer to Jessica Stern, the possible link between different radical worldviews, hence proving that a terrorist mindset exists, became even more clear. Hence, the next sections will focus on presenting instruments necessary to analyze three different extremist religious ideologies.

### ***“Doomsday” Religious Movements***

On December 18, 1999, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service published a report dealing with the ever-growing threat of “millenarianism”, defined in the document as “the belief that human suffering will soon be eliminated in an imminent apocalyptic scenario, ensuring that the collective salvation of humanity is accomplished<sup>84</sup>”. The necessity to discuss this issue was urgent in the period that preceded the year 2000, as many groups, or cults, were approaching millenarianism, transforming it in their central doctrine according to which they would shape their beliefs. In fact, the year 2000 AD was turned into an important date in the narratives of many modern cults. It must be clarified that

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>84</sup> Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *Report #2000/03 on Doomsday Religious Movements*, December 18, 1999;



not all cults who support millenarianism turn to violence. For the purpose of simplicity, the report of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service calls religious cults that turn to violence as “Doomsday Religious Movements”. Because these groups derive their narratives from religions, this presupposes that they differ greatly in beliefs. However, as the document points out, they all have some commonalities, linked to apocalyptic theories, which are listed and explained below:

- 1) *Dualism*: the belief that the world is fractured into opposing camps of Good and Evil, which confers a profound significance on small social and political conflicts as evidence of this great cosmic struggle, and which could precipitate a violent response;
- 2) *The Persecuted Chosen*: movements view themselves as prophetic vanguards belonging to a chosen elite but feel persecuted by wicked and tyrannical forces, which push the group to make concrete preparations to defend their sacred status;
- 3) *Imminence*: because movements believe that the apocalypse is unfolding before their very eyes, the “last days” are experienced as psychologically imminent and pressure them to take immediate action to ensure their salvation;
- 4) *Determinism*: since a group devoutly believes that it will be the ultimate winner of the final battle, if it believes that a catastrophic scenario is being actualized, the group may feel it has no choice but to trigger the apocalypse through violence;
- 5) *Salvation Through Conflict/ Enemy Eradication*: as salvation depends entirely upon direct participation of the apocalyptic struggle, a group is always on the verge of anticipating confrontation, which justifies action to eliminate evil and eradicate enemies.<sup>85</sup>

After carefully going through the apocalyptic beliefs enunciated above and the typical ideological discourse of Jihadist terrorists, it is clear how the characteristics proposed by the Canadian report have similarities with Orsini’s “radical mental universe”: “dualism” coincides with the “identification of evil”, “the persecuted chosen” with “desire to be persecuted”, and “determinism” meets the definition of “radical catastrophism”.

An example provided in the report by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, which meets the above-mentioned criteria, is the one of the Order of the Solar Temple, a millenarian group that had members in Quebec, in the United States, in Switzerland and in France. Their belief was that an imminent ecological apocalypse was going to occur and that the members of the group were the “chosen ones” to repopulate planet earth after the catastrophe, only after they had been persecuted by the so-called “non-believers”, namely the people who were not part of the cult<sup>86</sup>. The analysis on

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*;

Doomsday Religious Movements concluded with some considerations to be made, at the time, in order to address the threat in Canada. The report states as follows:

“The irrationality which underlines the threat posed by Doomsday Religious Movements constitutes a different threat to public safety than posed by the calculated terrorism traditionally manifested in the last 50 years, usually in support of an identified political cause<sup>87</sup>”.

Given the necessary condition that holds the hypothesis of this thesis, namely that terrorists act in a rational and entirely logical manner, it is possible to consider this statement false. A consideration which is useful to support the argument presented in this paper has been made by Jean-François Mayer, in which he argues that, when dealing with terrorist threats, a new challenge must be faced, namely gaining the ability to understand forms of extremist violence that may be unfamiliar to traditional categories of thought, and, most importantly, without disregarding them as simply irrational<sup>88</sup>, which is similar to Weber’s assertion that sociology must explore new categories of thought that do not correspond to traditional ones. As Mayer points out, the human mind is complex, and the leaders of the groups such as Aum Shinrikyo, the Order of the Solar Temple, as well as the Church of the Lamb of God, while probably lying to some extent to their followers and exploiting them, at the same time they believed in the validity of their mission, up to the point to be willing to die for the cause<sup>89</sup>. What must be underlined is that even though the original narratives of groups, such as the ones mentioned above, did not rely on violence, over time, ideological justification is often needed to legitimize the path towards brutality and cruelty. Likewise, Magnus Ranstorp stated that, contrary to popular belief, the causes and objectives of religious terrorism is “anything but disorganized or random, but rather driven by an inner logic common among diverse groups and faiths who use political violence to further their sacred causes<sup>90</sup>”. Hence, in the light of these assertions, is it possible to conclude that religious terrorism is logic and rational, however it is not always driven by political motivations.

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>88</sup> Jean-François Mayer, *Cults, Violence and Religious Terrorism: An International Perspective*, in “Studies in Conflict & Terrorism”, 2001, p. 372;

<sup>89</sup> *Ivi*, p. 373;

<sup>90</sup> Magnus Ranstorp, *Terrorism in the Name of Religion*, in “Journal of International Affairs”, 1996, n.1; p. 62;

## *Mark Juergensmeyer*

Mark Juergensmeyer offers an in-depth analysis of the logic of religious violence in his book “*Terror in the mind of God*”. Among the many elements that he discusses, the ones that present similarities with the cognitive categories of Orsini’s “radical mental universe” and “binary code mentality”, and the apocalyptic beliefs listed in the report on “Doomsday” religious movements, are what he calls “Cosmic War”, “A Time to Kill”, and “Martyrs and Demons”.

### Cosmic War

On September 23, 1998, Osama bin Laden issued his famous fatwa in which declares that the world is at war:

“All these crimes and sins committed by the Americans are a clear declaration of war on Allah, his messenger, and Muslims. And ulema have throughout Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries. This was revealed by Imam Bin-Qadamah in ‘Al- Mughni,’ Imam al-Kisa’i in ‘Al-Bada’i,’ al-Qurtubi in his interpretation, and the shaykh of al-Islam in his books, where he said: ‘As for the fighting to repulse [an enemy], it is aimed at defending sanctity and religion, and it is a duty as agreed [by the ulema]. Nothing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life.’<sup>91</sup>”

In the fatwa, bin Laden makes clear that the war has not been declared by him, but indeed by the United States. In fact, from his point of view, the fatwa was a response to the actions of American foreign policy in the Middle East. As has been discussed in the previous sections, religious violence is conceived not as an aggression but as a means for defensive purpose. From al-Qaeda’s perspective, as stated in the declaration, war has commenced because of the following reasons:

1. the United States were occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, namely the Arabian Peninsula, allegedly exploiting resources and giving orders to the local rulers, among other things;
2. over 1 million people have been killed in Iraq, a country that has fallen in despair and devastation as a consequence of American military actions. Nonetheless, the United States was ready to inflict more pain and violence;

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<sup>91</sup> From Osama bin Laden’s fatwa pronounced in 1998, available on: <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm> (viewed on April 27, 2021);

3. the main objective of the United States was to destroy Iraq, Egypt, Sudan and Saudi Arabia in order to ensure Israel's survival, serving both an economic and a religious interest.

The proclamation of war has been repeated even after the attack of 9/11, as bin Laden wanted it to be clear that attacks like such were deliberate acts of war, and not merely criminal acts. As a consequence, President George W. Bush declared what he has defined as the "War on Terror".

However, bin Laden has not been the only leader to recognize the ongoing of a global armed struggle. Eric Robert Rudolph, the alleged abortion clinic bomber who operated in South Carolina, considered himself as a "soldier at war". Kerry Noble, the leader of Christian Identity, a terrorist movement that will be analyzed in the third chapter, used to remind his followers in the Arkansas compound that "the Lord God is a man of War", while an activist of the same group noted that the Bible is a "book of war, a book of hate". Not only is the concept of war a necessary image in order to create enemies to fight, but it is also a motive for physically using violence as a means to obtain an objective, and, most importantly, must be legitimized through religious texts. According to Noble, God was a "man of War" because it is written in the Exodus 15:3. Also, the statement of Aryan Nations, quoted in the previous sections, is based on the idea that there is an ongoing war between the Jews, referred to as the "children of darkness", and the "children of God", and that the legitimacy of the superiority of the Aryan race has been discerned from the Bible.

As proved by all these examples, the narrative of what Juergensmeyer calls "cosmic war" is present in virtually all the major religious radical ideologies, as the images of divine warfare evoke the grandiosity of the violent actions carried out by these terrorist groups. Juergensmeyer ultimately argues that such struggles and battles are motivated by death, which is the most uncertain aspect of reality. Many scholars recognize the fact that many violent religious narratives have been built around the awaiting of afterlife in order to "purify" the chaotic terrain life from the alleged evil forces, which, in turn, are those responsible for such human frailty and moral corruption.

### A Time to Kill

"There is a time to kill" declared Rev. Michael Bray, referring to a passage of the Bible from the book of Ecclesiastes, however without alluding to a specific date or time<sup>92</sup>. With this statement, he was referring to a period of time in which "defensive actions on behalf of the unborn" were justified. Jessica Stern describes Bray as the "intellectual father of the extreme radical fringe of the antiabortion movement which engages in terrorism<sup>93</sup>". He has been convicted for conspiring and possessing

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<sup>92</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2003, p. 138;

<sup>93</sup> Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God. Why Religious Militants Kill*, Harper Collins, New York, 2003, Introduction, p. 148;

weapons linked to 10 different attacks towards abortion clinics which occurred during the first years of the 1980s. Bray himself is the author of a book, published in 1994, entitled “*A Time to Kill: A Study Concerning the Use of Force and Abortion*”, as he, and his colleagues, were convinced that killing people who worked in abortion clinics was justified by the just-war theory in Christian theology, namely that a small act of violence is justified in order to prevent a more severe violence. According to the radical antiabortion movement, “unborn babies”, as Bray defined them, were in desperate need of an act of violence in their defense in order to stop the slaughter. The urgency to act was a consequence of a series of failed attacks that created a sense of frustration in Bray’s mind and, in turn, in the one’s of his followers. In fact, in aftermath of the attack carried out on July 29, 1994, by Dr. John Britton and his escort, James Barrett, Bray, who at the time was under police surveillance, argued that since the act had been completed, it was no longer necessary to do it again. The grandiose act had been completed, the message was made clear, and it was time to move on.

For the purpose of this paper, it is worth introducing the concept of Armageddon, which, in various forms and interpretations, is present in all major violent religious narratives. According to the definition given by Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the term derives from Megiddo, a hill in Northern Israel, which for over for thousand years has been the location of many fights. Initially, ancient cities were built on the plain of Jezreel, where Megiddo is situated, in order to serve as a fortress. However, battle after battle, the cities would have to be rebuilt, and, over time, a hill was formed. “Armageddon” is the Hebrew word that means “hill of Megiddo”, and in English the term has come to translate the concept of war itself<sup>94</sup>. The term has also been found in the Christian texts, as the last book in the New Testament of the Bible designates Armageddon as the assembly point in the apocalyptic setting of God's final and conclusive battle against evil. It is possible to argue that Armageddon provides the timing and the setting for religious narratives, as it provides an “end time” in which a fight between the forces of good and the forces of evil will take place, leaving only the former, as the only winners.

As explained by the reports of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and of the FBI, the arrival of the new millennium sparked a new wave of radical groups that conceived the year 2000 to be the Armageddon to be prepared for, raising many concerns among security agencies. In particular, the FBI’s report called “Project MEGIDDO” aimed precisely at analyzing all potential threats in the United States with the upcoming of the fatal year. The Bureau’s research has shown that greatest potential menace was posed by militias with strong racial beliefs, such as Christian Identity movements, which will be discussed in the third chapter as well. The FBI concluded that in general, the potential for danger and violence perpetrated by biblically driven individuals heavily depends on the leader of the group and how he influences his followers. The most striking example of such

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<sup>94</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Project Megiddo*, October 20, 1999, p. 4;

formulation is the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway in 1995 carried out by followers of Aum Shinrikyo, a terrorist group that will be analyzed in chapter three. What is important to mention here is that its leader, Shoko Asahara, predicted that the year 2000 would mark the start of World War III, which he called, exactly, Armageddon, and that only the followers of his cult, through his teachings, could be saved.

### Martyrs and Demons

As explained in the previous sections, the scenario of war enables the creation of enemies, which are the essential component of violent narratives. Consequently, from a terrorist's point of view, whoever dies while committing attacks is considered as a martyr. The sense of heroism conferred to such militants is discerned by the combination of the Biblical insights from which these ideologies take inspiration and the bellicose language associated to the scenario of cosmic battle.

As Juergensmeyer notes, "enemies have to be invented if they do not already exist"<sup>95</sup>. This statement refers to the fact that the point of having a bellicose scenario is to give a feeling of empowerment to those who believe in the struggle through the creation of an evil and negative opposite, to which they can hope to triumph over. In the context of terrorist ideologies, a recurring element in the process of defining antagonists is the demonization and dehumanization of the enemy, as the typical violent religious scheme forces reality into only two categories, namely what is good and what is evil.

Demonization, intended as the construction of an evil enemy in the context of cosmic war, has been explained very logically by Juergensmeyer through what he calls the "process of satanization"<sup>96</sup>, divided into three stages of symbolic empowerment:

1. *A world gone awry.* While most people are able to cope with situations such as the US military presence in the Middle East, the American support of the Saudi regime, the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the secularization of Arab countries, extremist individuals and rebels perceive them as indicators of a world gone wrong. This process therefore begins with real and practical problems.

2. *The foreclosure of ordinary options.* Individuals who take part in cultures of violence tend to be disenchanted with the possibility of using normal means, such as elections, rallies and political campaigns, in order to achieve their goals. Hence, militants resort to acts of terrorism as they consider it as the only viable option.

3. *Satanization of cosmic war.* To those who feel the frustration of living in a hopeless situation, religion offers the solution of cosmic war. By considering political opponents as "forces of

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<sup>95</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003, p. 174;

<sup>96</sup> *Ivi*, p. 186;

evil” or “black coated bachelors from hell”, the world makes more sense to them because at last they can attribute their despair to the oppressors.

4. *Symbolic acts of power.* The last stage consists in carrying out acts of terrorism in which they can publicly display the symbolisms that lie behind their perceived struggle and power. These actions include holding public demonstrations, publishing materials that humiliate the enemy and parading weapons in order to demonstrate military and violent capacity.

Juergensmeyer concludes that satanization is part of a wider pattern of reasoning in which the militants attempt to make sense of a world that they consider unjust while maintaining control over it. In this perspective, the motive behind terrorist acts is, among other reasons, to express power over what are considered as oppressive forces in order to regain a sense of nobility and human dignity.

Orsini as well describes a similar phenomenon in his article “*A Day Among Diehard Terrorists: The Psychological Cost of Doing Ethnographic Research*” while analyzing the main characteristics of diehard terrorists<sup>97</sup>. One of these features is feeling hatred toward a group that they regard as the portray of absolute evil and to whom they attribute the responsibility for humanity’s sufferings. For these reasons, terrorists aim at eliminating them through action and the use of dehumanizing words, following the cognitive category of “identification of evil”. In the above-mentioned article, Orsini provides the example of the extreme-left beliefs of the Red Brigades, according to which evil is embodied by capitalism and by the people who are against the dictatorship of the proletariat and the abolition of private property. A specimen of a wrongful and immoral person for the Red Brigades is Pietro Ichino, an important professor of labor law who has been insulted and threatened many times for allegedly contributing to the exploitation of workers and therefore being responsible for the misery and pain of humankind. During the trial of the new Red Brigades, the militants shouted behind the bars “Ichino is a murderer of workers<sup>98</sup>”. In a different trial, Alfredo Davanzo, also regarded as the ideologue of the terrorist group, said: “(Ichino) represents capitalism, he is the executor of this system, and we will perform the duty of ridding ourselves of this system<sup>99</sup>”. In doing so, the Red Brigades

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<sup>97</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *A Day Among Diehard Terrorists: The Psychological Cost of Doing Ethnographic Research*, in “*Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*”, 2018, p. 338;

<sup>98</sup> “Nuove BR, al processo insulti a Ichino,” *La Repubblica*, January 23, 2009, available on: <http://www.repubblica.it/2009/01/sezioni/cronaca/brigata-rosse/brigata-rosse/brigata-rosse.html> (viewed on April 12, 2021)

<sup>99</sup> “Nuove BR, minacce a Pietro Ichino: 11 condanne fino a 11 anni e mezzo”, *Corriere della Sera*, 28 May, 2012, available on: [https://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/12\\_maggio\\_28/processo-nuove-br-davanzo-ichino-brigate-rosse-terrorismo-201362475728.shtml](https://milano.corriere.it/milano/notizie/cronaca/12_maggio_28/processo-nuove-br-davanzo-ichino-brigate-rosse-terrorismo-201362475728.shtml) (viewed on April 12, 2021)

members were reducing the victim to a mere symbol. As Ehud Sprinzak argues, it is the process of dehumanization that allows terrorists to “commit atrocities without a second thought”<sup>100</sup>.

By reducing even innocent victims to symbols and insults, extremist militants take part in what Juergensmeyer calls the “phenomenon of the faceless collective enemy”<sup>101</sup>. Most terrorist acts unfortunately target civilians and people who do not directly take part in what the “oppressive forces” carry out. Some of the many examples are the Hamas suicide attack on the bus in Jerusalem on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the 9/11 attack to the World Trade Center and the assault of the “Real IRA” in the village of Omagh, in Northern Ireland. In all of these cases, the attackers acted on the basis that the target did not possess individual personalities, and that were rather part of the hostile collectivity, the system that is considered as an enemy as a whole.

The notion of “cosmic war” similarly gives the message that if one dies for a noble cause, he or she will become a martyr of the divine conflict. This attitude is perfectly embodied by Hamas’ members who, during the funerals of the young Muslims that sacrifice their lives for the objectives of the organization, repeatedly recur to the idea of “self-martyrdom”<sup>102</sup>. These events are recorded on videotapes and accompanied by the last statements pronounced by the militants who are planning to die the next day in an attack, which will then be free to circulate among the population of Gaza and the West Bank as a sort of recruitment tool. These celebrations are not actually funerals, and this is confirmed by the fact that the participants drink sweetened rather than bitter coffee and the singing of wedding songs. The ritual is rather a modern version of the sanctification of martyrs, as it is a combination of a religious event and a marriage.

The word “martyr” derives from the Greek term for “witness”, in the sense of being the witness of one’s own faith<sup>103</sup>. In many cases, martyrdom is linked to the performance of a religious act and, in particular, to an action of self-sacrifice. Sacrifice as a form of religiosity can be found in every faith in the world. The Latin word “sacrificium” which means “to make holy”, suggests that the gesture of destroying possesses a spiritual connotation. In such manner, the sacrifice of life, generated in a religious context, transforms dying and killing as a noble deed.

The concept of sacrifice is also present in Orsini’s ethnography concerning a violent right-wing militia that operates in Italy, entitled: *Sacrifice: My Life in a Fascist Militia*. The monography aims at showing how much time and to what extent the militants of this organization put in effort in order

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<sup>100</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, *The process of delegitimation: Towards a linkage theory of political terrorism*, in “Terrorism and Political Violence”, 1991, p. 56;

<sup>101</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2003, p. 178;

<sup>102</sup> *Ivi*, p. 169;

<sup>103</sup> “Martyr”, from the Online Etymology Dictionary, available on: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/martyr> (viewed on April 25, 2021);



to give an ideological meaning to their radical actions and ideas. As Orsini observed in his research, the members of the group followed three very precise values that constitute the core of the education of what they call “revolutionary Fascism”: courage, sacrifice and honor<sup>104</sup>. Here, sacrifice is intended as the will to fight even though it is clear that winning is impossible in the context of physical fight through mixed martial arts. In fact, the militants live in a parallel world, constructed by themselves, in which combat is necessary in order to fight the arch enemy, who, in this case, is represented by the collectivity of left-wing extremists. In this context, the action is not intended as a holy one. However, the logic that lies behind it is similar to the ones previously discussed: one must prove that the struggle is being made for a cause so noble that it is worth sacrificing life.

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<sup>104</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *Sacrifice: My Life in a Fascist Militia*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2017, p. 26;

## CHAPTER 3

After discussing the theological basis of interpretative sociology and describing a series of typical characteristics of extremist religious movements, this last chapter will present a comparison between the ideologies of jihadist organizations, Christian Identity movements and of the Japanese group Aum Shinrikyo. For each ideology, I will construct a table that identifies all of the elements explained in chapter two, in order to have a clear and methodological view of the similarities of the worldviews of these groups, which look very different at first, in order to verify if a typical religious terrorist mindset does exist.

### *Jihadist organizations*

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Americans tormented themselves trying to figure out why 19 men, who hated the United States, carried out a horrible attack in which three thousand innocent civilians lost their lives. Scholars and analysts provided a series of motivations, including American policies in the Middle East, the support for Israel, cultural, political and economic imperialism, poverty and oppression. On the other hand, people such as former President George W. Bush stated that the cause of the attack was the envy that Arab countries had towards the principles and values that are intrinsic in the United States, such as freedom, wealth and democracy<sup>105</sup>. According to this—simplistic—perspective, these reasons were enough to explain what had happened. This vision has created and diffused the common misconception that all Arabs despise the United States, and that Islam plays a major role in shaping terrorists. Hence, two considerations must be made in order to disentangle from baseless facts and open up to a true understanding of jihadist ideology. First, not all Muslims and Arabs are willing to carry out terrorist attacks, indeed, we can now conclude that only one anthropological type is capable of doing so, namely, the terrorist by vocation. The few thousand militants who fought American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan do not hold the comparison with the hypothetical massacre that would happen if all Muslims and Arabs would revolt against the United States<sup>106</sup>. Second, even though Western media tend to show the opposite, the relationship between Islam and Jihadism is not a direct one, as the religion in question, professed by over a billion people, is practiced in many different ways, from secular forms in Tunisia and Syria, to traditional versions

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<sup>105</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006;

<sup>106</sup> *Ivi*, p. 9;

in Egypt, Iran and Asia. While it is wrong to assert that the hijackers responsible for 9/11 and radical militants in general are not linked to Islam, it is true that none of the above-mentioned versions practiced around the world declared war against the United States. Hence, to confuse all Muslims under one category only leads to further rage and frustration that could possibly lead to more radicalization, and those who are defined as “jihadis” belong to a very specific group of Muslims with equally specific views concerning how to revive Islam, how to put Muslims in power and how to deal with enemies<sup>107</sup>.

### Islamic thought and its interpretations

The ideas supported by jihadis are inspired by dogmas that claim that Islam is the only religion destined to rule the world, that Arab rulers, if Muslim, have to govern following solely the *shari'a*, that there must be no separation between religion and all the other spheres of life, that the Qur'an and hadith enclose the truth to live a righteous life and, finally, that Muslims are in a perennial state of conflict with the unbelievers. These dogmas are deeply rooted both in the discussion about Islamic law and theology that came after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and in their interpretation from ideologues such as Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703/4–1792), Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935), Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903–1979), and Sayyid Qutb (1903-1966). However, jihadis have also been influenced by the contemporary political and social contexts and by the interaction between Arab and Western countries. Modern jihadis draw most of their inspiration from Ibn Taymiyya, a famous and respected interpreter of the *Qur'an* and *sunna* coming from the Hanbali school, one of the four orthodox schools of Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence). His contribution is in fact considered as the valid interpretation of the *shari'a*, given that he lived in a time that led him to support the armed struggle against all those outside the world of Islam. Hence, he became the leading proponent of *jihad*, considered as the primary Islamic duty which is central to jihadist extremist ideology.

Before moving on, it is necessary to clear the meaning of this concept due to its importance. *Jihad* comes from the Arabic root for “struggle” and not, like many believe, from the word “war”. According to the Qur'an and the hadith, *jihad* has never meant “warfare” per se, but rather the internal individual struggle to follow God. What has probably led to confusion is the second meaning it carries, namely the engagement also in an external struggle, as in fighting, to bring Islam, considered to be the Truth, to humanity. It is important to underline that the latter connotation deals with opening up to all the countries in the world so that the oppressed people who lived in them could hear the Truth (Islam) and have the privilege of being governed by the laws of Islam.

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<sup>107</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 9;

After five hundred years ‘Abd al-Wahhab added his contribution influenced by the historical context. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire was living in a period of economic and military stagnation, suffering some defeats against European powers. Wahhab attempted to convince other Muslims to follow him, but it only led to his exile, during which he made an alliance with the Saudi family in order to spread his vision of Islam across the Arabian Peninsula.

Wahhab claimed that most Muslims did not practice correctly the principal doctrine of Islam, the *tawhid*, which is the belief in the unicity of God. His main argument was that believers had to reject the blind leadership of the clerics and learn how to think for themselves following the *tawhid*.

After World War I, when the British and the French divided the territories of the Ottoman Empire through the Sykes-Picot Treaty, all Islamic lands were under European rule except for Turkey, leading to a substantial split among Arab leaders and scholars. While some embraced secularization, women’s liberties and liberalism as the cure of their ills, others stated that the only way to empower the community was to revive Islam and to end European domination. It is in this context that the figure of Rida entered the scene. Initially supportive of the transformation of Islam to meet the necessities of modernity, he began to retrieve from this point of view, considering the changes as too extreme. Hence, Rida pressured Muslims not to follow foreigners, calling Islamic modernizers “false renewers” and “heretics”<sup>108</sup>, condemning the Turks for secularizing and considering the liberation of women and other social reforms as destructive forces for Islam. After becoming a sustainer of Wahabbism, he argued that the *Qur’an* and *sunna* were plentiful to explain and define all aspects of life.

During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, three ideologues named al-Banna, Mawdudi and Qutb took the contributions of Ibn Taymiyya, Wahhab and Rida and turned them into a consistent set of views regarding Islam, warfare and politics, transforming them into the most significant source for jihadist ideology. Al-Banna contributed to jihadism with the idea that the West in general had to be identified as both the intellectual and physical threat that Muslims had to fight. Especially disturbed by Western education and sexual and eating habits, among other things, he incited his fellow Muslims to end their “mental colonization”<sup>109</sup>. Only through *da’wa*, a proper Islamic education, could Muslims be freed by such moral aberrations. The Quranic term *da’wa* refers to the call to Islam made by Prophet Muhammad in which he commanded all Muslims to carry out their duty in the world. The second part of al-Banna’s contribution has to do with the other side of *da’wa*: *jihad*. While Wahhab had pivoted the fighting towards heretical Muslims, al-Banna argued that the war was between the faithful Muslims and the unbelievers, namely all people who do not believe in Islam. He argued that:

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<sup>108</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 22;

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*;

“Our task in general is to stand against the flood of modernist civilization overflowing from the swamp of materialistic and sinful desires. This flood has swept the Muslim nation away from the Prophet’s leadership and Qur’anic guidance and deprived the world of its guiding light. Western secularism moved into a Muslim world already estranged from its Qur’anic roots, and delayed its advancement for centuries, and will continue to do so until we drive it from our lands. Moreover, we will not stop at this point, but will pursue this evil force to its own lands, invade its Western heartland, and struggle to overcome it until all the world shouts by the name of the Prophet and the teachings of Islam spread throughout the world. Only then will Muslims achieve their fundamental goal, and there will be no more “persecution” and all religion will be exclusively for Allah.<sup>110</sup>”

Here, we can see the first time that *jihad* is intended as an external fight against Western civilization. Al-Banna believed that this struggle would start in Egypt and then expand in the rest of the world, as, in his view, European culture and values were rotten and on the path of decadence<sup>111</sup>. In the light of the elements presented in the second chapter, it is possible to conclude that this very passage embodies what Orsini calls “radical catastrophism”, which is the belief that the “world has plunged in an abyss of moral corruption<sup>112</sup>”. Al-Banna interestingly justified to the need of the use of violence not to avenge Muslims nor to destroy the unbelievers, but rather to save humankind from its misery, as the Qur’an appointed Muslims as the only people who could guide people to the Truth. It is in this context that *jihad* obtained the connotation as Islam’s duty to rescue humankind<sup>113</sup>.

According to Habeck, Sayyid Qutb, had the greatest impact on jihadist ideology<sup>114</sup>. Born in Egypt, he was a literary critic who initially appreciated the influences from the West, however, this changed when he traveled to the United States between the 1940s and the 1950s. After witnessing racism and the role women played in American society, he returned to Egypt and joined the Muslim Brotherhood,

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<sup>110</sup> Fathi Yakan, *To Be a Muslim*, p. 21, available on:

<https://zulkiflihasan.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/tobeamuslim-fathi-yakan.pdf>;

<sup>111</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 24;

<sup>112</sup> Alessandro Orsini, *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*, in “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism”, 2020, p. 24;

<sup>113</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 24;

<sup>114</sup> *Ivi*, p. 26;

becoming more extremist in his views by arguing that the only way to return to greatness, Muslims had to return to “true” Islam. The most important contributions Qutb brought to jihadist ideology were a new articulate interpretation of the worship of God, a more contemporary meaning to *jahiliyya*, the Islamic word for “ignorance”, and his standpoints on *jihad*. In sum, he believed that only God has the right to make laws, the *shari’a*, and that, on the basis of this premise, liberalism and democracy are flawed systems that Muslims must reject. Qutb also argued that the people living in a country not regulated by Islamic laws were still in a state of “ignorance”, which is the expression that the Prophet Muhammad used to describe the Arabs before they heard the call to Islam. Accordingly, all of these “unbelievers” could be fought and killed. Regarding *jihad*, he believed that Muslims had to engage in both an intellectual and physical fight against Muslims and non-Muslims who refuse to recognize all of these assertions.

Together with al-Banna, Qutb was influenced also by Sayyid Abul A’la Mawdudi. According to him, Islam could find the solutions to its problems only through Muslims, therefore encouraging the creation of Islamic nations regulated by *shari’a* where religion is encompassed in the state. Mawdudi was actually the first to refresh the meaning of “ignorance”. Differently from Qutb, he argued that it was modernity and liberalism that represented ignorance and that Muslims had to fight against the replacement of their core values<sup>115</sup>.

#### Interpretation of the *Qur’an* and *hadith*

As mentioned before, the *Qur’an* and the *hadith* are the only sources of jihadist ideology, as they consider it to regulate and have the answers for the problems of every aspect of human life, from the social to the private sphere. The goal is to discover these answers solely through the sacred texts by linking them to a consistent all-embracing ideology. Qutb in fact regarded Western ideologies, which are political in nature and hence separate religion from public life, as a “hideous schizophrenia”<sup>116</sup>, which would eventually lead to their downfall and consequent replacement by Islam. As mentioned in the previous sections, *tawhid* is the principle according to which there is no other divinity but God, that Muhammad is his prophet, and that God has no equals. Jihadis themselves have given a different connotation to the doctrine making it their central belief. Qutb argued what *tawhid* means for extremist militants:

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<sup>115</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 27;

<sup>116</sup> *Ivi*, p. 37;

“Islam is the religion of unity among all the forces of the universe, so it is inescapably the religion of tawhid, it recognizes the unity of God, the unity of all the religions in the religion of God, and the unity of the Apostles in preaching this one religion since the dawn of life. Islam is the religion of unity between worship and social relations, creed and Shari‘a, spiritual and material things, economic and spiritual values, this world and the afterlife, and earth and heaven. From this great unity issue its laws and commands, its moral directives and restrictions, and its precepts for the conduct of government and finance, for the distribution of income and losses, and for rights and duties. In that great principle are included all the particulars and details.<sup>117</sup>”

The extremist interpretation of *tawhid* is important because it is through it that jihadis justify violence. Indeed, they assert that God only is sovereign and only His laws can be considered as normative. On the basis of this redefinition, jihadis argue that Western values such as democracy, liberalism, personal freedoms and international institutions, among other things, are not only sinful, but also illegal and illegitimate<sup>118</sup>. Because the United States is regarded by extremists to be the center of democracy and liberalism, it must be destroyed. It is in symbols such as this one that jihadis identify the arch enemy that they must fight at all costs in order to save humanity from sin and moral corruption. The series of enemies that they must defeat is quite vast: the West, the Jews, the Christians, the Hindus, and all those “agent rulers” and all Muslims who do not agree with their version of Islam<sup>119</sup>.

The perennial struggle against the alleged absolute evil has been discerned by certain verses in the *Qur’an* that call for a fight against the infidels. The two most quoted are:

“Fight against those who believe not in God, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by God and His Messenger and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth among the people of the Scripture, until they pay tribute with willing submission and feel themselves subdued;<sup>120</sup>”

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<sup>117</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 37, quote from Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, 1964;

<sup>118</sup> *Ivi*, p. 94;

<sup>119</sup> *Ivi*, p. 79;

<sup>120</sup> Al-Tauba 9:29;

“Fight them until there is no more dissension and all worship is for God alone.<sup>121</sup>”

The *Qur'an* also has verses that command Muslims to respect Jews and Christians because they are fellow believers. However, it is worth to mention that the sacred text was not revealed all at once, but rather over a period of twenty years, as it was “sent down” to suit the evolving historical and cultural circumstances. Therefore, passages that seem to contradict each other are resolved by a verse on *naskh* (abrogation), which states that a later revelation can change or nullify an earlier one<sup>122</sup>.

While the *hadith* are less known than the *Qur'an*, they are equally important in order to understand jihadist thought. When Muhammad was alive, his followers reported what they saw to pass it to the next generation, who in turn gave this information to the next and so on. Important scholars among the *Salaf* put together all the reports of the Prophet's life and discourses in six collections, and each one is considered as sacred and canonical by the *Sunni* Muslims, while the *Shi'a* have their own. The *hadith* are important because they provide an explanation for everything that seems unclear in the *Qur'an*: how to become a Muslim, how to pray, the fact that women must wear a veil and men have beards, any much more. Each *hadith* contains also sections that discuss, among other things, about *jihad*, how to relate with non-believers and how to treat non-combatants and prisoners of war<sup>123</sup>.

What is crucial to remember when trying to understand jihadist views is that the *Qur'an* and the *hadith* are conceived as the definitive statements of God's will, meaning that the two texts are immutable, rigid and can never be altered. Hence, by extension neither can Islam, *shar'ia* and jihadist ideology be changed. For this very reason, jihadis believe that all those archetypes described in the texts represent, even today, the eternal truths about the forces of good and evil<sup>124</sup>. For example, Ayatollah Khomeini argued that like Moses confronted the Egyptian ruler, also Muslims had to oppose the “Pharaoh of our age”, referring to the Shah of Iran<sup>125</sup>. Jihadis view the United States as the newest Pharaoh that must arrive to its decline, just like the sacred texts predict. Undoubtedly, the most important archetype present in the scriptures are the Jews and the unbelievers, defined by jihadis as the “eternal enemies of Islam”<sup>126</sup>. Therefore, it is possible to argue that, similarly to most extremist

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<sup>121</sup> Al-Baqara 2:193;

<sup>122</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 30;

<sup>123</sup> *Ivi*, p. 31;

<sup>124</sup> *Ivi*, p. 33;

<sup>125</sup> Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, translated by Hamid Algar, Mizan Press, Berkley, 1981, p. 225;

<sup>126</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 34;



religious ideologies, jihadism asserts that humanity is engaged in a conflict between two opposing forces “light” and “darkness”. Accordingly, it is in these passages that Orsini’s “identification of evil” can be spotted in jihadist ideology.

As discussed previously, jihadis justify their choice of targets and enemies because of the values that they represent. Osama bin Laden allegedly selected the World Trade Center and the Pentagon for the attacks of 9/11 because, in his view, they were symbols of secular political and economic power. Reasonably, it may be the same motivation for the choice of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania which were attacked on August 7, 1998, and the American military residence hall in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, bombed in 1996.<sup>127</sup> Generally, jihadis have always chosen both symbols of Western political values and emblems of secular life, such as shopping malls, buses and office buildings.

An attempt to identify “radical catastrophism” in extremist jihadist ideology can be made by analyzing the assertions regarding capitalism, or what jihadis call “secular liberism<sup>128</sup>”. One of the main criticisms regards the charging of interest, as the Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad rejected any form of usury and moreover declared war against Arab tribes that did so. In fact, one of bin Laden’s first judgements towards the Saudis was the permission they gave to banks to charge interests on loans and the “sea of debt” in which the country had drown, emphasizing the Qur’anic command to fight those who engage in usury activities. In bin Laden’s 1996 declaration of war against the United States, the Jews are regarded as being the true leaders of the country, as they owned and controlled many financial institutions.

A different twist to this perspective has been described by a draft constitution for an Islamic state, proposed by Hizb al-Tahrir, entirely outlaws cooperatives and companies, forbids the sale of any land “opened up” by the *jihad*, and obligates that all mineral resources are controlled by the state. This last point supports the jihadist criticism towards the Saudis and the Arab governments which sell their oil resources to the West, instead of using it as a weapon or even selling it at higher prices<sup>129</sup>. Another interesting aspect, common to some Christian Identity movements, which will be discussed further on, jihadist rejection of liberalism leads them to condemn also paper money as evil, because the Prophet Muhammad only used gold and silver money<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>127</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2003, p. 61;

<sup>128</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 46;

<sup>129</sup> *Ivi*, p. 48;

<sup>130</sup> *Ivi*, 47;

“We are at war”<sup>131</sup> stated Dr. Abdul Aziz Rantisi, one of the founders of Hamas, adding that the war was not against the Israeli government, but rather against Israel in its entirety. “We’re not against the Jews just because they’re Jews”, Rantisi argued. According to his point of view, Hamas was against Israel in a bellicose manner because of the latter’s stance toward Palestine, and, in particular, toward the idea of an Islamic Palestine. As is illustrated in this particular example, targets and objectives of jihadis can also be of political nature, such as in the case of Hamas. However, as will be discussed in the following sections, also this group makes enormous references to religious beliefs, especially regarding martyrdom and self-sacrifice.

Moving on, as all major violent religious movements, jihadis believe in the inevitable conflict that depends on their dichotomous view of the world. A majority of them indeed agree that, fundamentally, the world is divided into two hostile factions that incompatible under any circumstances: the supporters of *al-Haqq* (true Islam) and its enemy, *batil* (falsehood) or *kufir* (unbelief). In their perspective, this eternal struggle is part of God’s will and is laid down in the *Qur’an*. As discussed in the second chapter, many violent movements argue that their fights are defensive in nature, and therefore always need to identify the aggressor, which normally coincides with the enemy. Hence, jihadis have to prove that contemporary enemies of Islam are the attackers who started the war in the first place due to their actions. The result of this search is the elaboration of three different theories that basically blame anyone who is not a “true” Muslim<sup>132</sup>.

The first claims that individuals, or groups of people, mentioned in the *Qur’an* and the hadith, are exactly the same in contemporary times as they were fourteen hundred years ago. Based on the archetypes discusses in the previous sections, jihadis are able to state that Christians and Jews, both embracers of liberalism, have the same characteristics and objectives, principally to destroy Islam, as the communities that clashed with Prophet Muhammad. The main proposer of this theory is Qutb, who argued that the Jews were the unbelievers *par excellence* that initiated the struggle against Muslims during the time of Muhammad and are the same exact people as they were fourteen centuries ago. Hence, according to Qutb, the nature of both Christians and Jews, as literally described in the sacred scriptures, proves that they are the ones aggressing Islam and therefore responsible for initiating the eternal war.

The second perspective offers a view of such conflict through the lens of *taghut* (tyranny). Men like George W. Bush, Tony Blair and Silvio Berlusconi were considered as tyrants, as, according to jihadis, they share the same attributes as the tyrannical figures described in the sacred texts.

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<sup>131</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2003, p. 74;

<sup>132</sup> Mary R. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006, p. 52;

The third theory argues that different nations and populations have exemplified unbelief throughout time, starting from the Jews and the early Christians to the Crusaders, British colonizers, and Western powers in more contemporary times. All three perspectives offer a key of reading that asserts the aggressive nature of the actions of the enemies of jihadist, therefore giving them the needed justification to resort to violence to defend themselves.

Going towards the end of the analysis of jihadist ideology, it is fundamental to discuss about a concept that has become, over recent years, the emblem of Islamist terrorism: martyrdom. The practice is common to all groups, however, Hamas has become the representative figure of suicide missions. In an interview to one of the founders of Hamas, Dr. Abdul Aziz Rantisi, Juergensmeyer was corrected by the former for using the formula “suicide bombings”<sup>133</sup>. Indeed, Dr. Rantisi preferred the term derived from the Arabic, *istishhadi*, which means “self-chosen martyrdom”, as “suicide bomber” implied an impulsive and deranged connotation to the act. On the contrary, Hamas’s member argues that the decision to carry out suicide missions is deliberate, and that the organization’s leaders only decide when and where the act will take place.

The value given to such acts of martyrdom can be witnessed by viewing the videotapes of young Muslim men, sometimes even boys, that are made the night before the missions. Juergensmeyer writes about a tape, gathered by American scholars Anne Marie Oliver and Paul Steinberg, where a boy, named by the two as “the smiling boy”, stated, the day before he would have committed suicide, that “tomorrow is the day of the encounter, the day of meeting the lord of the Worlds”, going on to say that he and his companions would “make our blood cheap for the sake of God, out of the love for this homeland and for the sake of the freedom and honor of this people, in order that Palestine remain Islamic, and in order that Hamas remains a torch lighting the roads of all the perplexed and all the tormented and oppressed and that Palestine might be liberated”<sup>134</sup>. Other volunteers, on different videotapes, affirmed that “all people have to die at some time, so one is indeed fortunate to be able to choose one’s destiny”, implying that choosing martyrdom was a fortunate and rare opportunity to grasp<sup>135</sup>.

To conclude, recalling the stage of “the foreclosure of ordinary options” in Juergensmeyer’s “process of satanization”, it is worth to mention the contribution of contemporary Egyptian writer Abd al-Salam Faraj. He argued that the concept of *jihad* was meant to be understood literally, and not allegorically, adding that duty of Islam, neglected for a long time, is *jihad* itself in its most bellicose

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<sup>133</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2003, p. 74;

<sup>134</sup> *Ivi*, p. 71;

<sup>135</sup> *Ivi*, p. 72;

and bloody form<sup>136</sup>. The writer concluded that what he called “peaceful and legal means” for fighting the eternal struggle are insufficient, and that “the true soldier of Islam is allowed to use virtually any means available to achieve a just goal”<sup>137</sup>. Indeed, in the light of the discussion made at the beginning of the chapter, jihadis find the justful connotation of their cause in their own extreme interpretation of the *Qur’an* and the hadith and consider themselves as the appointed people responsible for saving humanity, through all the means that they regard as adequate.

### The evolution of jihadism: ISIS and its differences with al-Qaeda

This last section will discuss about the important development of jihadist ideology that came with the birth of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its differences with al-Qaeda, considered to be as the traditional Jihadi-Salafist movement. The former group first originated after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. At the time, the organization, led by Abu Musab Zarqawi, was called al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and was part of the many Sunni groups fighting against the U.S. forces, while attacking Iraqi Shiite civilians. After Zarqawi was killed by the United States in 2006, AQI was almost annihilated, until the group managed to reset itself in American controlled prisons in Iraq. It is in this context that the figure of Abu Bakr Baghdadi emerged as the self-proclaimed “caliph” and leader of the group. The scenario of the Syrian civil war, started in 2011, provided a fertile ground for the rise of the organization which subsequently renamed itself as ISIS. Because of the power vacuum left by the descend in chaos in Syria, ISIS successfully seized many territories and managed to cross borders into Iraq, where it consolidated its power, intensified its activities and weakened the Baghdadi government. The peak of their capacity had been reached on June 29, 2014, after the capture of Mosul, with the official declaration of the revival of the Caliphate and Baghdadi’s auto-proclamation as the Caliph. With the worsening of the Syrian civil war, ISIS managed to expand its ideology globally as well as recruit many militants from the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

For the purpose of this thesis, the main concept to underline in the evolution of jihadist influence from al-Qaeda to ISIS, is the difference in which the two groups approach certain issues. Generally, from a theoretical point of view, both ISIS and al-Qaeda can be considered as jihadist Salafism, which, as has been discussed in the previous sections, is an ideology based on strict interpretation of the *Qur’an* and on the belief that the only possible Islamic state is one that enforces *shar’ia* law. As Cole Bunzel argued<sup>138</sup>, the worldview of ISIS must be understood on two different levels. The first

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<sup>136</sup> *Ivi*, p. 82;

<sup>137</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>138</sup> Jaynal Abedin, *The Principles of ISIS’s Ideology: An Academic Debate*, in “European Journal of Political Science Studies”, 2019, p. 147;

consists of the political doctrine based on the above-mentioned principles regarding the *Qur'an* and *shar'ia*. The second one is the group's in compliant direction with regard to the Jihadi-Salafist school of thought, which is the fundamental reason that led to the division between ISIS and al-Qaeda.

As discussed in the article "*Doctrinal Differences between ISIS and Al-Qaeda: An Account of Ideologues*", by Aida Arosoaie, the three main issues that divide ISIS and al-Qaeda are: the interpretation of the purpose of *jihad*, who to identify as the enemy, and how to gain consensus from the masses.

In May 2014, ISIS' spokesperson, Abu Muhammad al Adnani, criticized al-Qaeda because of its aversion to create an Islamic State, and, most importantly, put into discussion the latter's legitimacy precisely because of the lack of possession of territory. This point is crucial and has been well-explained by the ideologue al Maqdisi, who fought against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the settled in Jordan where he became the mentor of al Zarqawi. Al Maqdisi argued that *jihad* takes the form of *qital al-nikaya* or *qital- al-tamkin* according to the scope of the fight. The former materializes when the main objective is to attack the enemy, while the latter deals with strengthening the group's presence in a given territory<sup>139</sup>. ISIS' ideology seemed more concerned with the practice of *qital- al-tamkin*, which can be considered as one of the main differences with al-Qaeda's strategy. Another key figure that influenced ISIS to adopt such doctrine is Abu Bakr Naji with his book, *The Management of Savagery*, in which he encouraged that *jihad* must be enacted with the goal of establishing an Islamic State in which it would be possible to legitimate one's power. Differently, al-Qaeda believed that consolidating power and people in one place could be dangerous, and instead advocated for autonomous cells to fight individually and on a non-specified battlefield<sup>140</sup>.

The second divisive element is the slight difference in the identification of the enemy. While al-Qaeda believed in the fight against the so-called "far enemy", such as American troops and the Soviet Union, ISIS ideology defines the enemy according to the target, and therefore linked to the expansion of territory. This consequently leads to ISIS fighting the "near enemy", as it is a necessary condition in order to gain terrain<sup>141</sup>.

The last issue that divides ISIS from al-Qaeda is the manner in which they gain popular consensus. In al-Qaeda's case, the goal was to obtain approval and support from the people from Iraq and doing so by attacking Shiites. On the other hand, ISIS ideology aimed at achieving popular endorsement by exploiting the absence of a universal Islamic eschatology that stated an apocalyptic narrative of the Endtimes. ISIS therefore created one itself in order to gain consensus from Muslims. In fact, the

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<sup>139</sup> Aida Arosoaie, *Doctrinal Differences between ISIS and Al Qaeda: An Account of Ideologues*, in "Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses", 2015, p. 32;

<sup>140</sup> *Ivi*, p. 33;

<sup>141</sup> *Ivi*, p. 34;

choice of *Dabiq* as the name of the organization's propaganda magazine comes from the name of a city on the Turkish-Syrian border that is cited in the *hadith* as the location of the battle of the end of times, where the *mahdi* (the guided person) will fight the *dajjal* (the Islamic version of the anti-Christ). This apocalyptic theology, which is not present in al-Qaeda's version of Jihadi-Salafism, is one of the fundamental elements that enabled ISIS to gain so much support locally and globally<sup>142</sup>.

### ***Christian terrorism***

As discussed in the second chapter, the coming of the year 2000 has inspired a wave of religious violence all around the world. In the United States, the phenomenon took place especially among extremist armed militias that based their ideology on reconstruction theology and principles of Christian Identity. Many groups, each in their different, yet similar way, adhered to the movement, and America suddenly became a fertile ground for Christian-based attacks, such as the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and the attacks to abortion clinics that took place during the first 1980s. Moreover, the country experienced the proliferation of many organized militias that shared convictions regarding the coming of the end of times, also defined as "Armageddon", the imminent duty to protect America from an evil government controlled by Jews, the moral corruption that characterized the country and the vision that only through violence and sound Christian principles could humanity be saved.

The reason for which I have chosen to analyze extremist Christian theology is because the common and popular perception is that only Islam has led to terrorism. Not only is this assertion false, but it also underestimates the influence that virtually all religions may have on extremist behavior.

This section discusses the theology of Christian Identity that lies behind the actions of groups such as Aryan Nations, the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSO), and individuals such as Timothy McVeigh and Michael Bray, in the attempt to identify the elements presented in the second chapter. As for all three ideologies analyzed, the aim is to find the similarities among them in order to prove that a terrorist mindset exists.

#### The basis for extremist Christian theology

What is common to all organizations who adhere to Christian Identity values is that the United States' secular political order is thought to be trapped in satanic conspiracies involving spiritual and personal

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<sup>142</sup> *Ivi*, p. 35;

control. Because of this perceived threat, these groups find ideological justification for the use of brutal violence to fulfill the Christian mission to save the country from the absolute forces of evil. Similarly to jihadis, and as we will discuss later on, also to Japanese group Aum Shinrikyo, extremist Christian militants criticize the secular principle, discerned by the Enlightenment, that the state is separate from the religious sphere<sup>143</sup>. The coming of the new millennium has scared these groups as the process of modernization and industrialization seemed to destroy their religious beliefs and to attempt to replace with the ideas of the arch enemy, which for some is the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG), a definition used to refer to the American government, while for other it's the Jews or the staff of abortion clinics. Christian extremism in America is particularly connoted by a belief in a cosmic warfare and in an ongoing struggle with the above-mentioned opposing factions. This characteristic is not new, as Christianity has always had a violent side, which has been shown on several occasions, such as the Crusades, the Inquisition and the holy wars.

Extremist Christianity theology ultimately has its roots in the Bible. However, some positions derive from Protestant reformation theology, such as the ones embraced by one of the perpetrators of the abortion clinic bombings, Reverend Micheal Bray. Bray has been convicted of numerous abortion clinics attacks across the United States through the use of lethal weapons such as gasoline to set fires, guns, and explosive materials. When Mark Juergensmeyer had a conversation with Reverend Bray in his home in Bowie, in April 1996, the former noted no kind sinister behavior nor anything fanatical about his way of speaking<sup>144</sup>. He was in fact, a cheerful and charming man, that didn't resemble at all to a narrow-minded terrorist. Juergensmeyer of course had his legitimate reasons to think the opposite. Bray was the leader of the Defensive Action movement and advocated for the use of lethal weapons and violence against staff and doctors who worked in abortion clinics. The ideological justification for his beliefs can be found in his book entitled "*A Time to Kill*", where he defended the terrorism perpetrated by his colleagues and himself. Like all extremist Christian militants, over time, Bray became consumed with the idea that the American government was organizing a colossal plot to blunt morality and individual freedoms, that federal official had a "satanic disregard" for truth and human life and that society was in a complete state of degradation<sup>145</sup>.

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<sup>143</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Christian Violence in America* in "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science", 1998, p. 89;

<sup>144</sup> *Ivi*, p. 90;

<sup>145</sup> *Ivi*, 91;

## The hidden warfare

As Bray argued, the United States was living in a condition of silence warfare “comparable to Nazi Germany”<sup>146</sup>, as society was dulled by the comforts of mundane life and had no tangible awareness of what was really going on. It is in this context that, according to Bray, extremist Christian militants had the duty to speak the truth about the demonic rule of the government and lead the revolutionary struggle against it that could eventually result in the establishment of a moral order in compliance with their beliefs. These consist in replacing secular and modern values with ones discerned from biblical law and spiritual norms. Until this moment arrived, Bray and his followers had the moral duty to defend the life of unborn children, a role that is indeed central in the ideology of abortion clinic bombers.

Bray rooted his positions in the study of German theologian and Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a researcher who joined a plot to assassinate Hitler in Nazi Germany, but was then killed shortly after, becoming a heroic martyr both for his actions and his theological writings. His basic argument was that Christians can carry out violent acts if it is to pursue a just cause or to follow a higher purpose. Also, Reinhold Niebuhr, one of Bonhoeffer’s colleagues, wrote abundantly about the permission to use violence on behalf of a righteous cause, which is considered to be one of Christianity’s oldest ethical questions. Niebuhr managed to prove just war theory in the contemporary age by arguing about a duty, first stated by Cicero and then later developed by Augustine, that Christians are required to accomplish social justice. In this perspective, moral propaganda is not enough to liberate a society from injustice, hence force is occasionally necessary “to extirpate injustice and subdue evil within a sinful world<sup>147</sup>”.

Obviously, these theological positions were a response to the context of the time, namely Nazi Germany. The clever way in which Bray adapted these theories to contemporary times in order to make them credible, was by comparing the United States government with Nazism. For this very reason, he argued to his followers that the only way to get rid of the sinful rule was to employ biblical law and the theories elaborated by Bonhoeffer and Niebuhr. However, the two ideologues differed from Bray’s thought on one very important issue: they both believed that the separation between state and religion was necessary to preserve the integrity of both institutions<sup>148</sup>. Hence, to find total support for his ideas, Bray studied also dominion theology which asserts that Christianity must impose God’s

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<sup>146</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Christian Violence in America* in “The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science”, 1998, p. 91;

<sup>147</sup> *Ivi*, p. 93;

<sup>148</sup> *Ibidem*;



will on all aspects of public and private life, politics and society, similarly to the concept of the enforcement of *shari'a*.

Randall Terry, the founder of Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion militia, signed the famous Manifesto for the Christian Church, which stated that the United States should “function as a Christian nation” and opposes the evils of secular society, such as “abortion on demand, fornication, homosexuality, sexual entertainment, state usurpation of parental rights and God-given liberties, statist-collectivist theft from citizens through devaluation of their money and redistribution of their wealth, and evolutionism taught as a monopoly viewpoint in the public schools”<sup>149</sup>. This reconstructionist theology that advocated for the creation of a theocratic Christian state seemed to Bray as an adequate ideological foundation to justify his beliefs, reason for which he encouraged his followers to carry out an armed revolution.

The theology of Christian Identity, slightly different from the ones discussed until now, was more properly embraced by militants such as Timothy McVeigh, the perpetrator of the Oklahoma City bombing. The terrorist acted according to William Pierce’s book entitled “*The Turner Diaries*”, which he treated as a bible and as a *modus operandi*, distributing it at rallies and encouraging people to read it<sup>150</sup>. The anti-Semitic novel, set in America, tells the story of the invasion of state control over society and the resistance of the Order, a violent militia that attacked federal buildings, similarly to what McVeigh did in Oklahoma City. Pierce, an intellectual who received a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado and that also taught physics, was once a writer for the American Nazi Party, denied any sort of affiliation to Christian Identity, however, his writings were very similar to the movement’s. In fact, like many Christian Identity militants, he disliked regular Christian churches as they were liberal and lacked in bravery. Moreover, he argued that missionary efforts were indispensable to destroy the secularist mindset of American society imposed by the Jews and the liberals, who were ready to do anything to obliterate Christian morality, a rhetoric that is very similar to the jihadist one.

Christian Identity theology is deeply anti-Semitic and holds a strong apocalyptic vision of history, as its origins can be traced down to British Israelism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. John Wilson, one of the main ideologues of the movement and the author of “*Lectures on Our Israelitish Origin*”, first brought the creed to British and Irish middle-class people and argued that Jesus and the nomad Israelite tribes from Northern kingdom of Israel were not Semite, but Aryan. Following the narrative, the tribes, called the “Lost Sheep of the House of Israel” ended up in the British Isles. Consequently, the people who adhere to this theology assert that whoever claims to be a Jew is an imposter who pretends to be

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<sup>149</sup> *Ivi*, p. 93-94;

<sup>150</sup> *Ivi*, p. 95;

Jewish to control the world<sup>151</sup>. The current of thought first arrived in the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through different writers. Interestingly, Henry Ford supported these views and published an anti-Semitic essay written by William Cameron, but attributed to him, entitled “*The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem*”. Central in this work is the idea that the Anglo-Saxon race in America had to preserve its purity and political domination in order to establish an order based on biblical law.

Christian Identity in the United States adapted to the social and political context of the time and helped relieve anxieties of many Americans. Many of them believed that the United Nations and the Democratic Party, the liberals *par excellence*, were accomplices of the Jewish-Freemason conspiracy to take over the world<sup>152</sup>. Other things identified by the theology as parts of “Satan’s Plan” were the International Monetary Fund, the introduction of magnetized credit cards and, interestingly, the use of paper money instead of gold and silver money<sup>153</sup>. As discussed in the section concerning jihadist ideology, also the jihadist, or at least, some of them, regard the use of paper cash as something immoral.

Both the supporters of reconstructionist Christian theology and of Christian Identity viewed the world to be in a state of constant warfare in the style of Juergensmeyer’s “cosmic war”. To justify this vision, Christian Identity militants made references to the biblical narrative of Michael the Archangel’s destruction of evil, which pointed out to a cosmic struggle of the forces of darkness against the ones of light<sup>154</sup>. In their perspective, the hidden warfare in question was a war between the monstrous factions allied with the American government and the United Nations, and a small group of people enlightened by the truth of what was happening: satanic powers committed to world domination. While Reverend Bray did not share the anti-Semitic beliefs of Christian Identity, he did appreciate the commitment to this colossal struggle. In fact, he argued that what he did was part of an effort to re-create a crusade guided by the Christian movement against American society.

The defensive connotation of the cosmic war belief of abortion clinic bombers can be found in their choice of target. As Bray explained, executing a retired abortionist doctor is different from doing the same to a practicing one, since killing the first would essentially be a punitive action, while assassinating the second is a defensive one<sup>155</sup>. The extremist Christian subculture in general justifies

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<sup>151</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Christian Violence in America* in “The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science”, 1998, p. 97

<sup>152</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>153</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>154</sup> *Ivi*, p. 98;

<sup>155</sup> *Ivi*, p. 92;

its attacks by regarding them as defensive actions carried out in response to the violent repression waged by the liberal, secular and Jewish related “satanic forces”<sup>156</sup>. Just like the jihadis, these militants need to believe that their actions are not attacks in order to justify the exacerbation of the struggle and the demonization of their chosen enemy.

Through the 1980s and the 1990s, the Christian Identity movement in the United States was mostly concentrated in Idaho, where Aryan Nations had a compound near Hayden Lake, and in proximity of the Oklahoma-Arkansas-Missouri borders, where a group called the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSA) had established a community<sup>157</sup>. One of the leaders of the CSA was Kerry Noble, a man who has been interviewed by Jessica Stern between 1998 and 1999. The group believed that communists, socialists and the Jews had taken control of the federal government, and that the latter were collaborating with the Antichrist forces, made up of, among others, the Illuminati, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the Council on Foreign Relations. According to CSA members, all of these actors were planning to execute Satan’s master plan, namely the creation of a world government. Moreover, the group joined forces with other extreme right factions in the United States, in order to eliminate the so-called Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG), a name that they all used to refer to the American government, allegedly taken over by the Jews<sup>158</sup>. When Stern called Noble on the phone, in March 1998, the leader reported that the group was preparing for an incoming war because of the approach of Armageddon. While the apocalyptic moment is theoretically decided by God, Noble argued that if the militants started acting, God would follow up and accelerate the process:

“We believed that once those signs were there, it was time to act, to make judgements against those who were doing wrong or who refused to repent. The original timetable was up to God, but God could use us in creating Armageddon. That if we stepped out, things might be hurried along. You get tired of waiting for what you think God is planning<sup>159</sup>”.

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<sup>156</sup> *Ivi*, p. 98;

<sup>157</sup> *Ivi*, p. 97;

<sup>158</sup> Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God. Why Religious Militants Kill*, Harper Collins, New York, 2003, Introduction, p. 11;

<sup>159</sup> Kerry Noble, interview with Jessica Stern, March 2, 1998, quoted in Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God. Why Religious Militants Kill*, Harper Collins, New York, 2003, Introduction, p. 11;

Followers of the doctrine of Christian Identity give great importance to the Endtimes and believe that they will take part in the upcoming apocalypse. Following this logic, the militants are expected to engage in a fight against the forces of the Antichrist who, they believe, was controlling the world by promoting international institutions and a single world government<sup>160</sup>. Following the beliefs of past apocalyptic groups, also Identity Christian militants think that they are experiencing the tribulations, as illustrated in the Revelation, in the present times in which they are living, considering America as the same scenario of corrupted and immoral Babylon.

One way the militants of the CSA alienated from the rest of the world in order to strengthen their extremist views was by getting rid of all personal items that reminded them of their precult identities<sup>161</sup>, such as old clothes, books, pictures. Moreover, they were asked to destroy televisions and radios. Apart from isolating from the outside world, both physically and mentally, militants had to do what military psychologist David Grossman called desensitizing training. This activity, also carried out by terrorists, consists in learning how to regard the enemy as something as less than human, a subhuman, just like the jihadis consider Jews and liberals as “forces of darkness”. Noble and his followers had similar views of the Jews. Stern reports significant phrases to comprehend their point of view pronounced by one of the group’s members in 1998:

“The Jews have declared war on our race, promoting race-mixing and thereby polluting the pure seed of God. This ZOG, this Zionist Occupied Government, is killing our white babies through abortion! It is destroying white minds with its humanistic teachings of evolution! I tell you this – niggers may be descended from apes, but my ancestors never swung from trees by their tails. In order to preserve the Christian heritage and race, it is our right, our patriotic duty, to overthrow the Antichrist government!”<sup>162</sup>”

As argued by Stern, and as it should be clear from the above-mentioned quotation, extremists often underline the fact that they are actually protecting their own militia from the “pollution of impure outsiders”<sup>163</sup>, and that joining the cult purifies one from the immoral outside world. This line of reasoning underlines the defensive connotation of their notion of warfare and at the same time

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<sup>160</sup> *Ivi*, p. 17;

<sup>161</sup> *Ivi*, p. 15;

<sup>162</sup> *Ivi*, p. 18;

<sup>163</sup> *Ibidem*;

coincides with one of the cognitive categories of the “radical mental universe”: obsession with purification.

### *The Japanese case of Aum Shinrikyo*

Perhaps one of the most interesting and unexpected cases of terrorism is the one represented by Aum Shinrikyo, a violent religious sect based in Japan which perpetrated the famous sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway in 1995. It became world known because it was one of the first times a terrorist act was carried out through the use of weapons of mass destruction, therefore marking a turning point. What is striking about this group is that it discerned justification for violence from Buddhism, a religion that is commonly regarded as far from extremism and violence. However, it is worth to mention that also Christianity and Islam, if interpreted correctly, are peaceful religions as well. At first, Aum Shinrikyo started out as a non-violent cult through which its founder, Chizuo Matsumoto, who then changed name to Shoko Asahara, helped its members to achieve physical and mental enlightenment.

#### Origins of the cult

Matsumoto was born in 1955 and suffered from a congenital glaucoma that left him virtually blind. After his youth, he became an acupuncturist and a masseur and opened his own clinic. Meanwhile, he discovered his interest for New Age religions and extrasensory perception, since he was blind, and read many old Buddhist texts, before entering in the Agonshu sect in 1981. The group advocated for strict applications of Buddhist values and the isolation of its members from the outside world and even their families. After Matsumoto was jailed for a short period in 1982, he started intensifying his spiritual yoga practice and started learning about mysticism and the writings of Nostradamus. In 1985, after a trip to a mountain located in Northern Japan, he met an old man who told him that an apocalypse was coming and that only who survived it would become a benevolent *shinsen* (mountain hermit). The next year, in 1986, Matsumoto travelled to India where he declared to have met a group of men who prophesized that the world was going to experience a catastrophe, without giving him clear guidance on how to respond to it. Consequently, Matsumoto decided that it was him, with his spiritual guidance, who was a warrior and hero responsible of saving the world<sup>164</sup>. Moreover, he argued that, during his mission, he had the sacred duty to restore “original Buddhism”. With the

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<sup>164</sup> Richard Danzig, Marc Sageman, Terrance Leighton, Lloyd Hough, Hidemi Yuki, Rui Kotani, Zachary M. Hosford, *Aum Shinrikyo. Insights Into How Terrorists Develop Biological and Chemical Weapons*, Center for a New American Security, 2012, p. 10;

financial donations of the member of his cult, called Aum Shinsen no Kai, he managed to buy land in order to establish his communes, known as the “Lotus Villages”. In these priestly communities, his followers would alienate from the outside world and completely renounce their previous lives to prepare for the Armageddon through moral and spiritual enlightenment. It is in 1987 that the cult changed its name to Aum Shinrikyo, literally “Aum Teaching of Truth”, and that Matsumoto renamed himself Shoko Asahara. In 1988, the sect established a center near Mount Fuji, as the group decided to save only the enlightened community from the apocalypse, rather than humanity in its entirety. To give some perspective on the size of the group, it is worth mentioning that from 1987 to 1989, the number of members grew from 1,300 to 4,000<sup>165</sup>.

Like many of the new religious movements that were arising with the coming of the new millennium, Aum was a mixture of different traditions, mixing his own experiences, readings, literature and ideas in order to “compose” a worldview suitable for him and his followers<sup>166</sup>. Even the name of the cult itself is a combination of Japanese and Indian symbols. “Aum” comes from Sanskrit and refers to the forces of creation and destruction of the cosmos, while “Shinrikyo” is Japanese for “teaching of the supreme truth”<sup>167</sup>. In general, the spiritual ideology of the group is based on concepts of Hindu and esoteric Buddhist cosmology, and, in particular, to the notion of a route to the elevation of consciousness through different practices, such as yoga, meditation and the alienation from contemporary society. Not least, the group focuses on the complete rejection of the modern world with its materialist and superficial values.

Aum Shinrikyo also drew some inspiration from Tibetan Buddhist ideas. The concept of *poa*, central to the sect’s ideology, which will be discussed later on, is connected to the idea of *bardo*, defined as a period of 49 days in which the spirit of a dead person transmigrates and in which it is possible to guide it towards a positive rebirth<sup>168</sup>.

### Justification for violence

According to a report published by the Center for a New American Security, published in 2012, and co-authored by Marc Sageman, among many other academics, certain forms of Buddhism, such as Zen Buddhism practiced in Japan, embrace the idea that bad karma has to be extracted from new practitioners. This, in their view, sometimes implies the use of force and violence to purify one’s body from bad spirits. One key example is how Shoko Asahara treated his own wife, Tomoko Ishii,

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>166</sup> Ian Reader, *A Poisonous Cocktail? Aum Shinrikyo’s Path to Violence*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, Copenhagen, 1996, p. 25;

<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>168</sup> *Ivi*, p. 16;

to which he ordered to become a member of Aum. However, the woman refused, and he had ordered for her to be beaten 50 times with a stick only to then be put in isolation in the darkness for seven weeks. Eventually, she followed Shoko Asahara's orders and even elevated to the highest levels of moral and spiritual enlightenment.

In a sermon pronounced on April 7, 1989, Shoko Asahara attempted to provide his followers with religious justification for violence and killing. Hence, he developed the notion of *poa*, which meant that if an individual was accumulating bad karma that would eventually lead him to hell, it was mandatory "transform", namely kill, the person in order to secure rebirth and salvation<sup>169</sup>. According to this logic, enlightened member of the group could legitimately kill people to save them from eternal ruin and bad karma. As mentioned before, the concept of *poa* has been derived from Tibetan Buddhism and has been defined as "the transference of consciousness from the living to the dead, so as to enable the dead to attain a higher rebirth than they would have otherwise merited<sup>170</sup>".

### Armageddon

As argued in chapter two, the end of the millennium has sparked the birth of numerous religious movements focused on the spirituality of the upcoming event. The writings of Nostradamus not only inspired the leader of Aum but attracted many people all over Japan who not linked to the group as well. This was due to the fact that the prophecies of the French astrologer had been translated in 1973 into Japanese and therefore became accessible and very popular<sup>171</sup>. On their part, religious sects based much of their beliefs on Nostradamus for two reasons. First, it predicted an apocalypse in 1999, and second, because, according to the Japanese translation, he asserted that the savior would come from the East, therefore fitting Aum's predictions and ideology.

As argued previously, the leader of Aum Shinrikyo claimed that he was the designated hero to prevent the world from drowning in a cataclysm through his spiritual teachings. Through these, whoever followed him would be able to guarantee salvation for himself as the leader was the only one to know the "supreme truth". What Asahara meant with the upcoming of the apocalypse was the influence of materialist and modern values into Japanese traditional culture. However, this will be discussed in the following sections.

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<sup>169</sup> Richard Danzig, Marc Sageman, Terrance Leighton, Lloyd Hough, Hidemi Yuki, Rui Kotani, Zachary M. Hosford, *Aum Shinrikyo. Insights Into How Terrorists Develop Biological and Chemical Weapons*, Center for a New American Security, 2012, p. 14-15;

<sup>170</sup> Ian Reader, *A Poisonous Cocktail? Aum Shinrikyo's Path to Violence*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, Copenhagen, 1996, p. 16;

<sup>171</sup> *Ivi*, p. 14;

In 1989, Asahara concentrated on his study of apocalyptic literature and consequently decided not to let Armageddon devolve by itself and turn him and his followers into victims, but rather to incite the event, defining himself as the New Christ. This moment is when the sect transformed from religious to more militarized.

Asahara attempted at first to take over the Japanese government instead of attacking society as a whole through the participation to the elections of February 1990 for the Diet. If this plan was to fail, then it was a sign sent by God that it was time to carry out his ultimate plan of destruction. Hence, in July 1989, Asahara established the Shinrito Party, the “Supreme Truth” party, and presented 25 candidates. The decision of the leader was not accepted by many members of the cult, as the aim of their membership was to alienate from society and not to actively participate in it. However, even in this occasion, the leader managed to justify the action by claiming that they had little time left before Armageddon arrived. Even though the campaign started with positive expectations, the results turned out to be costly and disastrous, as they received only 1,783 votes out of approximately a million<sup>172</sup>. The loss of the elections marked a turning point in the evolution of Aum Shinrikyo, as, according to the leader, this was a clear sign that the members should take action and initiate the destruction plane thought out by Asahara himself. In a sermon, pronounced on March 11, 1990, the leader that the blame of the elections was on Jews and Freemasons, both involved in an evil international conspiracy aimed at eliminating all the members of the sect and dominating the world with their capitalistic and materialistic values. He also stated that he had predicted a dramatic event that would fall upon the entire world population, such as a nuclear attack or a massacre carried out through biological weapons. As mentioned before, the sect despised the “unenlightened” and therefore justifies the use of violence against this category of people once the Endtimes would arrive.

The cataclysmic event predicted by Aum’s theology is characterized by the general belief that the world was sinful and that life, as lived by most people and especially Westerners, was primarily a path of human suffering. This basic concept underlined the importance of breaking free from such way of living through practices that could elevate one spiritually, such as yoga and meditation, among other things. In general, Aum followers were overwhelmed by the lifestyle that spread across the globe after World War II. The cosmopolitan, modern, often stressful life often did not represent the true will of many Japanese, hence some of them decided to join the group because it offered ways to cope with such anxieties. Aum leaders were very critic and rejected completely the materialist and wealthy lifestyle of the majority of the population. They believed that the world had literally plunged into a vicious cycle of materialism, wrecked by natural disasters and global warfare as a consequence

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<sup>172</sup> Richard Danzig, Marc Sageman, Terrance Leighton, Lloyd Hough, Hidemi Yuki, Rui Kotani, Zachary M. Hosford, *Aum Shinrikyo. Insights Into How Terrorists Develop Biological and Chemical Weapons*, Center for a New American Security, 2012, p. 17;



of the disappearance of a high moral authority. The millenarianism belief of the group's theology moreover inspired many young people to join the cult as it promised spiritual progress and the destruction of the morally corrupt world in which they were living in favor of a more idealistic and conscious universe<sup>173</sup>.

Until the 1980s, the group's theology asserted that the global accumulation of negative energy would lead to the upcoming apocalypse and that the world could be saved only if 30,000 enlightened *shukkesha* (individuals who renounce to their ordinary lives) would use their positive influence and generate a new universe. These individuals could be produced only through the teaching and the activities imposed by Aum and its leaders.

The group's vision for the post-apocalyptic moment was clear and consisted in the arrival of a new messiah, namely, Shoko Asahara, who even declared himself to the new Christ, and the creation of a new society. Similarly, to both jihadis and Christian Identity militants, also Aum members believed that the necessary condition for the perfection of the utopian state involved the fusion of the state and religion. In this context, Shoko Asahara referred to *Shambala*, the ideal Buddhist kingdom ruled and disciplined by religious jurisprudence<sup>174</sup>. It is for this very reason that he used all of the finances of the sect to build the famous Lotus Villages all around Japan, communities where the Aum members could live their life self-sufficiently in isolation from the sinful outside modern world.

#### Aum's rejection in Japanese society: enemies and warfare

A decisive moment in the development of Aum was when the group attempted to register itself under the Religious Corporations Law, a Japanese legislation that guaranteed numerous benefits to religious movements, such as tax privileges, rights to own property and, most importantly, protection from any form of state or external intervention. As there are more than 180,000 groups registered under this statute, Aum thought that the approval process was simple. However, this turned out to be false and the group's application was rejected by the Tokyo prefectural government offices. This refusal marked an important moment as the group, and especially the leader, turned to an offensive tactic and started protesting and filing lawsuits<sup>175</sup>. Shoko Asahara especially interpreted this event as the confirmation that not only the outside mainstream and materialist world was heading towards a moral collapse, but also that it was antagonistic to the movement. This feeling grew the leader's belief that Japanese society was Aum's enemy and also led him to have paranoid behaviors as he argued that

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<sup>173</sup> Ian Reader, *A Poisonous Cocktail? Aum Shinrikyo's Path to Violence*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, Copenhagen, 1996, p. 23-24;

<sup>174</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24;

<sup>175</sup> *Ivi*, p. 35-36;

he and his followers were being persecuted. In fact, from 1993, Shoko Asahara filed numerous allegations of conspiracies against his sect<sup>176</sup>.

At this point, the humiliation caused by Japanese society led the group to a doubt, as they were uncertain if it was necessary to save humanity in its entirety or only the enlightened elite of Aum. The fact that the sect was socially rejected meant that the rest of the world was not conscious of its own moral degradation and was not aware of the upcoming Armageddon. Accordingly, in April 1990, Shoko Asahara organized a gathering on the island of Ishigaki. During the event, he announced a turning point in the group's theological development, and, from that moment, the group would no longer aspire for the salvation of humanity as a whole, but only of the few who were morally elevated<sup>177</sup>.

Ever since the beginning of the cult, Asahara's predictions were marked by a pessimistic vision about the quantity of people who could survive Armageddon. However, the violent connotation of this belief grew stronger during the 1990s. In 1992, he stated that 90% of the world would die during the apocalypse<sup>178</sup>.

Through its own publishing firm, Aum made public many writings that involved sacrificial and paranoid ideas, especially focused on the belief that the members of the sect were being persecuted by the state. In this context, Asahara saw himself as the most important sacrificial victim, reason why he evoked images of Christ's martyrdom. In a two-volume publication, the leader in fact declared himself to be the new Christ, also linking himself to the Lamb of God which was immolated for the salvation of humanity<sup>179</sup>.

The leader's initial predictions asserted that the final war between the two opposing forces, the enlightened and the non-enlightened, would occur successfully in 1999. However, he later stated that it would instead happen 2 years earlier, in 1997, without giving any explanation. This final cosmic conflict would engage primarily Japan and the United States in a context characterized by economic disruption and social agitation, through the use of weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear bombs. By pronouncing this prophecy, Shoko Asahara encouraged vividly all Japanese to turn to militarism as the war seemed imminent<sup>180</sup>.

For many members of the movement, the fulfillment of Aum's apocalyptic prophecy culminated in the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway on March 20, 1995. At about 7:45 A.M., five followers of

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<sup>176</sup> *Ivi*, p. 37;

<sup>177</sup> *Ivi*, p. 45;

<sup>178</sup> *Ivi*, p. 55;

<sup>179</sup> *Ivi*, p. 55;

<sup>180</sup> *Ivi*, p. 60-61;

Aum, all scientists, entered the metro at different locations. After an hour, their trains were expected to converge in the center of the city's government district. When the moment arrived, each scientist released a rolled-up newspaper that wrapped plastic sacks full of the toxic chemical. After only a couple minutes, people were coughing, choking and rolling on the ground in agony. In the end, 12 people died and over 5,500 people were affected by the attack. As argued *a posteriori* by several Aum followers, the aim was not to kill as many people as possible, but to give the idea of what humanity was supposed to expect from the upcoming Armageddon<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2003, p. 103;

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Verifying the existence of a terrorist mindset*

This final chapter serves to verify the existence of a terrorist mindset by discussing the findings of the study and analysis of the three religious ideologies chosen. For this purpose, I have constructed three tables, one for each case, in the following manner:

- The first column contains the independent variables, namely the characteristics conceived by the various scholars/security organizations and questions that are useful for the purpose of the verification;
- The second column presents the dependent variables and therefore proposes to identify the fixed variables in the ideological discourses analyzed in the third chapter.

# JIHADISM

RADICAL  
CATASTROPHISM

The world is morally corrupt because of “secular liberism”

IDENTIFICATION OF  
EVIL

The symbols that represent “secular liberism” (U.S., United Nations, the West, etc.) are considered as enemies  
al-Haqq (true Islam) VS kufr (unbelief)

OBSSESSION WITH  
PURIFICATION

Through jihad the militants can bring al-Haqq to the decadent world

WAITING FOR THE END

As Islamic eschatology did not exist, ISIS marketed its own End of Times narrative

OBSSESSION WITH  
PURITY

Those who are not “true Muslims” are considered as infidels and therefore can be killed

EXALTATION OF  
MARTYRDOM OR DESIRE  
TO BE PERSECUTED

Martyrdom regarded as the most noble and honorable act ( Hamas’s suicide bombers) / Jihadis believe that Western culture’s objective is to eradicate Islam

PURIFICATION OF THE  
MEANS THROUGH THE  
END

Killing is justified by the interpretation of the Qur’an as it is the only means through which it is possible to purify the world from infidels

COSMIC WAR

The concept can be found in the notion of jihad

A TIME TO KILL

Not specified in the Islam eschatology created by ISIS

MARTYRS AND  
DEMONS

Jihadis consider themselves as martyrs while they regard all others as “evil forces”

DUALISM

al-Haqq (true Islam) VS kufr (unbelief)

IMMINENCE

Not specified

THE PERSECUTED  
CHOSEN

Jihadis believe that Western culture's objective is to eradicate Islam and that they are God's chosen soldiers to save humanity

DETERMINISM

Not specified

SALVATION THROUGH  
CONFLICT/ ENEMY  
ERADICATION

The only way to ensure salvation of humanity is to impose shar'ia law through conflict and through the elimination of the unbelievers

DOES THE IDEOLOGY ARGUE THAT  
STATE AND RELIGION MUST  
COINCIDE IN ORDER TO FORM THE  
UTOPIAN SOCIETY?

Yes

DOES THE CONFLICT BETWEEN  
FORCES OF GOOD AND FORCES OF  
EVIL HAVE A DEFENSIVE  
CONNOTATION?

Yes

# CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

## RADICAL CATASTROPHISM

The world is morally corrupt because of “secular liberism”. The United States is controlled by Jews and Liberals who do not respect Christian principles

## IDENTIFICATION OF EVIL

The symbols that represent the U.S. government and its allies are considered as enemies

## OBSESSION WITH PURIFICATION

Militants argue that they are protecting their own militia from the “pollution of impure outsiders” and that joining the cult purifies one from the immoral outside world

## WAITING FOR THE END

The coming of the year 2000 symbolized Armageddon

## OBSESSION WITH PURITY

Force is occasionally necessary “to extirpate injustice and subdue evil within a sinful world”

## EXALTATION OF MARTYRDOM OR DESIRE TO BE PERSECUTED

Christian Identity adherents shared the belief that they were trapped in satanic conspiracies involving spiritual and personal control

## PURIFICATION OF THE MEANS THROUGH THE END

Killing abortion clinic staff was necessary in order to save “unborn babies”

## COSMIC WAR

Biblical references to Michael the Archangel’s destruction of evil, which pointed out to a cosmic struggle of the forces of darkness against the ones of light

## A TIME TO KILL

The coming of the year 2000 symbolized Armageddon

## MARTYRS AND DEMONS

Juxtaposition between members of the religious movements who are the “saviors” and the demonic forces of the government

DUALISM

See “Identification of Evil” and “Martyrs and Demons”

IMMINENCE

In March 1998, Kerry Noble reported that the group (CSA) was preparing for an incoming war because of the approach of Armageddon

THE PERSECUTED CHOSEN

Christian Identity militants give great importance to the Endtimes and believe that they will take part in the upcoming apocalypse. Following this logic, the militants are expected to engage in a fight against the forces of the Antichrist

DETERMINISM

According to Noble, the original timetable was up to God, but militants could fasten the process if they believed that the signs of Endtimes were coming

SALVATION THROUGH CONFLICT/ ENEMY ERADICATION

See “the persecuted chosen” and “Cosmic War”

DOES THE IDEOLOGY ARGUE THAT STATE AND RELIGION MUST COINCIDE IN ORDER TO FORM THE UTOPIAN SOCIETY?

Yes

DOES THE CONFLICT BETWEEN FORCES OF GOOD AND FORCES OF EVIL HAVE A DEFENSIVE CONNOTATION?

Yes



# AUM SHINRIKYO

## RADICAL CATASTROPHISM

The sect believed that Western culture was oppressing Japanese culture which was originally based on Buddhist principles

## IDENTIFICATION OF EVIL

Initially, the sect had peaceful intentions. Towards the end, it believed that society was after it and therefore regarded it as its enemy, together with the United States who were the ones who imposed Western values linked to materialism

## OBSESSION WITH PURIFICATION

The movement started as pacific, however it descended in the belief that it had to purify Japanese society from Western and especially American values

## WAITING FOR THE END

The sect firmly believed in the predictions of Shoko Asahara which stated that Armageddon was coming approximately in 2000

## OBSESSION WITH PURITY

Only the “enlightened” could survive the apocalypse

## EXALTATION OF MARTYRDOM OR DESIRE TO BE PERSECUTED

The leader saw himself as the greatest sacrificial victim and argued that the state was after him and his sect

## PURIFICATION OF THE MEANS THROUGH THE END

The concept of poa

## COSMIC WAR

Armageddon would trigger the cosmic struggle between the enlightened and the non-enlightened

## A TIME TO KILL

See “Cosmic War”

## MARTYRS AND DEMONS

The enlightened VS the un-enlightened

DUALISM

See "Martyrs and Demons"

IMMINENCE

Represented by the fact that the leader anticipated the date of the Endtimes

THE PERSECUTED  
CHOSEN

See "Exaltation of Martyrdom or Desire to be Persecuted"

DETERMINISM

See "Imminence"

SALVATION THROUGH  
CONFLICT/ ENEMY  
ERADICATION

Only the enlightened could survive the conflict triggered by Armageddon while the rest of society would die

DOES THE IDEOLOGY ARGUE THAT  
STATE AND RELIGION MUST  
COINCIDE IN ORDER TO FORM THE  
UTOPIAN SOCIETY?

Yes

DOES THE CONFLICT BETWEEN  
FORCES OF GOOD AND FORCES OF  
EVIL HAVE A DEFENSIVE  
CONNOTATION?

Yes

## CONCLUSION

Before arriving to a conclusion, it is of the most utter importance to discuss the tables presented in the last chapter in order to verify if a terrorist mindset exists or not. Clearly, all three cases analyzed – jihadism, Christian Identity and Aum Shinrikyo – present striking similarities despite their apparent differences. However, it is necessary to precise that the analogies concern the structure of the ideologies' theology, and not their content.

As the tables show, all three ideologies share the belief that, how Orsini would argue, the world is witnessing absolute moral corruption, and therefore support the notion of “radical catastrophism”: followers of these ideologies indeed share the perception that Western values, imposed primarily by the United States and the Jews, are oppressing their core values and generally leading the world to a catastrophe. Nonetheless, the fact that the content of the argument coincides is only a mere coincidence.

The second important common characteristic is the construction of an arch enemy, and it always represents the group of people which are regarded as responsible for the moral degradation of the world by the terrorists. Therefore, after having “identified evil”, the group commits, at all costs, to purify the world from these enemies. Again, all three ideologies share the “obsession with purification”, which is unmistakably achieved through the use of violence.

The third relevant result to discuss is the shared “obsession with martyrdom”. Not only to the followers of these groups share the use of violence towards their enemies, but they also accept it towards themselves. In fact, the three ideologies have common cultures of martyrdom that turn killing others and risking one's life for the greater cause as the most considerable act of honor. Moreover, the three groups analyzed have the commonality of believing, in an obsessive manner, that their evil enemies are out to get them with the objective to eradicate their respective movements.

Interestingly, the three ideologies share the belief that, in their utopian plans for society, state and religion must coincide, and they also all regard their conflicts to be defensive, as, in their minds, it is the enemies that are attacking them in the first place.

Does a terrorist mindset exist? After having underlined and discussed the results found in the tables, it is now feasible to respond affirmatively to the question. After having carried out this research, it is possible to conclude that, in general, certain types of radical ideologies share a dichotomic view of the world divided into good and evil forces, which is in turn witnessing moral decadence because of the actions of the alleged evil individuals, hence, it is necessary to use violence in order to eliminate them, even at the cost of the lives of the militants. Religious terrorist ideologies specifically share the belief that their followers are taking part in some sort of “cosmic war”, to quote Juergensmeyer, that they will win in order to survive the end of times.

This inquiry could not have been carried out without using a sociological perspective. Aside from verifying whether a terrorist mindset exists, this paper also aims at proving how important sociology is to the study of such phenomenon, precisely because of the human and social nature of it. Understanding the perspective of the terrorist undoubtedly provides leaders and decision makers one of the fundamental factors that lead to radical behavior, namely the reasons that lie behind it. Being aware of the motivations is, in the candidate's opinion, part of the key knowledge necessary to address the problem.

To complete the concluding remarks, it is worth to mention the process through which this topic has been chosen. The idea for this paper came to me originally while attending Alessandro Orsini's course in Sociology of Terrorism at LUISS University. While reading his contributions to the field, I have come to notice how Orsini used the same sociological scheme, namely the "radical mental universe", to describe the ideological narratives of the Red Brigades and jihadist organizations. Indeed, it seemed that both entities shared the conviction that they had the moral, or divine, duty to annihilate their respective arch enemy at all costs, because the latter was responsible for the moral corruption plaguing the world, and that a "cleansing" from these evil forces was necessary in order to be victorious in the battle of the "end of times". Hence, through this instrument, the similarities between the two apparently very different groups seemed so evident that it led to ask myself the following question, which has turned into the hypothesis of the thesis: does a terrorist mindset exist?

The conviction to delve in this research became stronger when I came to understand that the common belief is that terrorism is strongly linked to Islam and that other religions do not resort to violence. Without any doubt, this assertion is false, as Islam, exactly like all other religions, preaches peace over violence and strongly condemns the actions of jihadist terrorism. Also, many Muslim academics, lawmakers, leaders and theologians have made this assertion clear in 2014 in the "*Letter to Baghdadi*", an open letter, available also online for consultation, to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), in which the signatories theologially rejected the practices and the ideology of the terrorist group. Ever since the development of the Clash of Civilizations theory by Samuel Huntington, according to which post-Cold War politics would have inevitably dealt with the clash of cultures around the entire globe, people have been exposed to one of the most complex issues of modern times, namely the battle between the West and the world of Islam, or better, the secular discourse against the religious one. It is in this context that the common misbelief that terrorism is strictly linked to Islam and the Arab world, and that religion is considered as an inconceivable worldview by Western citizens. This thesis aims precisely at disassembling this common belief by presenting evidence that even the West has had numerous religious-based terrorist groups, not linked to Islam, which share the same amount of hatred and degree of acceptance of violence with jihadist organizations. To conclude, as my professor would say, this research is an attempt to "challenge common belief through culture".

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## SINTESI

Questo elaborato si propone di verificare, tramite una lente sociologica, se esista o meno una mentalità tipica dei terroristi. In particolare, questa analisi si focalizza su delle ideologie radicali di matrice religiosa. Per studiare il modo in cui ragionano i terroristi, è importante tenere presente il contributo di Max Weber alla sociologia interpretativa. Questa base teorica preliminare è cruciale, poiché ci fornisce gli strumenti necessari per comprendere il principio metodologico impiegato da quegli studiosi che hanno cercato di spiegare la mentalità dei terroristi. Tra questi vi sono Jessica Stern, Alessandro Orsini e Mark Juergensmeyer. Questo principio, ispirato principalmente dallo studio di Weber, afferma che le azioni sociali dipendono da come gli individui interpretano la realtà. Di conseguenza, questo assunto può essere applicato alle azioni violente dei terroristi.

Weber si riferisce al compito di interpretare con il termine tedesco *Verstehen*, che è approssimativamente tradotto in italiano come "comprensione", nel senso di comprendere l'azione sociale dal punto di vista dell'attore. L'obiettivo del *Verstehen* di Weber è quello di dare un senso a qualsiasi azione data guardando la situazione come la intende l'attore.

Come definito in "*Contemporary Social Theory & Its Classical Roots: The Basics*", il *Verstehen* è una tecnica metodologica che comporta uno sforzo per comprendere i processi di pensiero dell'attore, i suoi significati e le sue motivazioni, e come questi fattori hanno portato all'azione (o all'interazione) sotto studio.

Per Weber, l'azione sociale può essere spiegata solo analizzandola dal punto di vista dell'attore stesso. Ciò significa che egli cerca di scoprire i significati sociali che guidano l'azione sociale. Ai fini della mia domanda di ricerca, questa metodologia è cruciale, poiché ci permette di capire il terrorismo dal punto di vista dei militanti.

L'applicazione di Weber del *Verstehen* può essere osservata nella sua analisi dell'etica protestante in relazione al capitalismo. Nel suo libro "*L'etica protestante e lo spirito del capitalismo*", Weber cercò di capire la mentalità dei calvinisti, che sono protestanti, per spiegare i motivi che portano allo sviluppo del modello economico capitalista. Egli infatti sosteneva, in opposizione a Karl Marx, che era effettivamente la mentalità culturale di certe persone a porre le basi per l'ascesa del capitalismo, e non viceversa. In pratica, usando il *Verstehen*, si metteva nella mente dei calvinisti per capire il contesto culturale a cui appartenevano e cosa li portava a comportarsi secondo quello che noi percepiamo come mentalità capitalista, come, ad esempio, la ricerca energica di profitti.

Dunque, in "*L'etica protestante e lo spirito del capitalismo*", Weber ha sostenuto che è la mentalità culturale che modella e influenza il sistema economico. Di conseguenza, è stata l'etica protestante che ha portato al capitalismo, attraverso la dottrina della predestinazione (tipica dei calvinisti).

Proprio come Weber ha cercato di osservare il mondo circostante attraverso la lente dei protestanti, allo stesso modo Orsini si propone di osservare il mondo attraverso la mentalità dei terroristi. Ciò è



stato realizzato attraverso lo studio del contributo di Max Weber alla sociologia interpretativa, il *Verstehen*.

Uno degli assunti chiave della *verstehende Soziologie* - sociologia interpretativa - è che si presume che le motivazioni soggettive degli attori siano importanti perché sono i fattori che guidano il comportamento umano.

L'argomento principale di Weber in questa prospettiva è che il metodo naturalistico da solo non può rendere la condotta umana interamente intelligibile per noi, poiché si occupa solo di relazioni esterne e oggettive. D'altra parte, la comprensione interpretativa mira a superare le ambiguità dell'approccio soggettivo per fonderlo nelle normali procedure della ricerca scientifica.

Detto questo, la questione che Weber solleva è la seguente: "Fino a che punto la comprensione interpretativa, come metodo sociologico, è in grado di stabilire verità valide per tutti coloro che vogliono la verità?". Se la sociologia interpretativa mira sempre a cogliere il significato di un comportamento, in altri termini, a comprenderlo, allora bisogna cogliere il contesto di significato di tale comportamento. Per riassumere, Weber sostiene che gli accademici non sono generalmente in grado di comprendere l'auto-evidenza dei valori e dei fini ultimi di una data azione, ai quali, nella loro esperienza, l'azione umana può essere orientata. Mentre possono essere in grado di farlo intellettualmente, non saranno mai in grado di capirli immaginando empaticamente tale azione se essa diverge radicalmente dai loro principi e morali personali. Di conseguenza, gli studiosi dovranno accontentarsi di interpretarle intellettualmente o di accettarle come dati.

Weber approfondisce ulteriormente questo meccanismo sostenendo che quanto più queste azioni sono legate a reazioni emotive come la rabbia, l'ansia, l'ambizione, la vendetta, l'orgoglio o l'amore, e le loro conseguenze irrazionali - di cui gli esseri umani sono generalmente preda - tanto maggiore è la misura in cui gli studiosi sono in grado di re-sperimentarle emotivamente come auto-evidenti. Pertanto, anche se queste azioni superano di gran lunga le loro capacità, essi sono comunque in grado di prendere in considerazione l'orientamento e i mezzi dell'azione empaticamente e intellettualmente. Weber sottolinea che l'interpretazione è un metodo logico che può permetterci di cogliere il significato dell'azione sociale. Anche se non siamo in grado di capire qualcosa con certezza razionale a causa della nostra incapacità di rivivere empaticamente, come ad esempio il suprematismo bianco o l'estremismo jihadista, queste sono comunque azioni sociali orientate in modo significativo. Quindi, dobbiamo cercare di capirle.

Richiamando la definizione di Weber, la sociologia è lo studio interessato alla comprensione del comportamento sociale. Fino ad ora, abbiamo ampiamente discusso su cosa sia la sociologia interpretativa e quale sia il ruolo della comprensione nella ricerca sociale. Ora, discuteremo l'altro elemento fondamentale che è presentato nella definizione: il comportamento sociale. Secondo Weber, l'azione è intesa come "un comportamento umano legato al significato soggettivo voluto da parte dell'attore o degli attori interessati". Tale azione può essere palese, o verificarsi interiormente, sia con

un'azione positiva, o tollerando una situazione, o astenendosi dall'azione. Tale condotta è considerata sociale quando il significato inteso dall'attore o dagli attori è legato al comportamento degli altri, e l'azione è orientata nella loro direzione. Pertanto, si distingue dalla semplice nozione di comportamento. Come afferma Weber, l'azione sociale può essere determinata da a) razionalità propositiva; b) razionalità valoriale; c) affetto; d) tradizione. Questi quattro casi rappresentano i tipi ideali di azione sociale di Weber. Di fatto, in sociologia, come in tutte le scienze sociali, i concetti devono essere definiti con precisione. Weber introduce l'uso dei tipi ideali per questa precisa ragione. Secondo lui, i tipi ideali sono concetti che vengono creati e classificati per scopi di ricerca.

Come sostiene Orsini, i leader dell'ISIS sono uomini come gli altri, e quindi anche il loro modo di ragionare dipende da come percepiscono il mondo circostante, e dunque, nello spiegare le motivazioni dietro la preferenza dell'ISIS di attaccare la Francia e la Germania rispetto ad altri Paesi europei, Orsini ci fornisce quella che lui chiama la "spiegazione weberiana", ovvero che loro attaccano a loro volta chi attacca loro in primis. Egli discute inoltre che ciò che i terroristi pensano non è così complicato da capire, poiché il loro pensiero segue normali linee di ragionamento, comuni a tutte le persone. La necessità di ricorrere alla teoria sociologica della comprensione deriva da uno specifico punto di vista accademico, enunciato da Orsini nel suo libro *Anatomia delle Brigate Rosse*. Egli afferma che per capire - nel caso particolare del libro - le Brigate Rosse e le Brigate Nere, bisogna ascoltarne i militanti. L'idea di base della sua ricerca si fonda sul fatto che i militanti estremisti non sono "pazzi". Di conseguenza, Orsini scrive che la categoria della follia serve a condannare e ad allontanare dalla comprensione. Al contrario, bisogna avvicinarsi alla loro mentalità e immergersi nel fenomeno sociale del terrorismo per capirlo a fondo. Tuttavia, non bisogna condividere le idee e le opinioni dei militanti per comprenderli. Di fatto, come sottolinea Jessica Stern, è importante distinguere l'empatia dalla simpatia. Mentre l'empatia è "capire e condividere i sentimenti di qualcun altro immaginando come sarebbe essere nella situazione di quella persona", la simpatia può essere definita come provare pietà o dolore per le disgrazie di qualcuno o anche essere d'accordo con la sua opinione. L'empatia è un elemento cruciale per capire come gli individui possono radicalizzarsi fino al punto che sono disposti a uccidere, e a essere uccisi, per una causa più grande.

Ai fini della discussione, merita di essere introdotto anche il contributo di Arie Kruglanski. È importante ricordare che Kruglanski, come Orsini, sostiene fortemente nei suoi studi che i terroristi non sono irrazionali e che agiscono seguendo un ragionamento logico.

Secondo lui, ogni tipo di comportamento, comprese le versioni estreme, dipende dalla motivazione e dalla capacità di un individuo. La ricerca di Kruglanski mostra che il grado di necessità secondo cui un bisogno specifico deve sottomettere gli altri è il fattore fondamentale che porta al comportamento estremista. Questo meccanismo è quello che lui definisce "squilibrio motivazionale". Gli esseri umani sono guidati da bisogni biologici e psicogeni di base che si equilibrano reciprocamente, il che significa che soddisfare un bisogno mentre se ne ostacola un altro è un comportamento generalmente

evitato. Secondo Kruglanski, nessuna persona nasce rivoluzionaria, terrorista o amante delle diete estreme. Lo squilibrio motivazionale deve essere innescato durante la vita a seguito di un evento traumatico. Come sarà discusso più avanti, questo processo di attivazione è presente anche nel lavoro di Orsini. L'episodio che porta alla devianza comportamentale può avvenire quando ci si rende conto che un bisogno specifico e importante è stato trascurato. Mentre si cerca la soluzione per soddisfarlo, si può non prestare attenzione ad altre considerazioni, optando per il comportamento estremo. Come sostiene Kruglanski, il bisogno trascurato è spesso di natura sociale. Fondamentale nel suo contributo è la sua teoria su ciò che chiama la "ricerca di significato", ovvero il bisogno di contare, di essere una persona di successo, di essere importante e così via. Detto questo, Kruglanski conclude che è la privazione di tali bisogni che porta alla radicalizzazione e alla devianza estrema nel comportamento. Il più delle volte, la perdita di significato è innescata dalla perdita di identità sociale o da una crisi di identità.

Fondamentale da presentare ai fini dell'elaborato è il contributo di Orsini, e in particolare il modello DRIA. Ideato da Orsini per la prima volta nel 2007, il modello è il risultato di un'ampia ricerca e si occupa del processo di radicalizzazione di un solo tipo antropologico specifico, il "terrorista per vocazione". Il concetto è stato definito da Orsini sulla base della distinzione tra un individuo che vive "per" la politica e "fuori" dalla politica, identificata precedentemente da Max Weber. Chi vive "per" la politica, è colui che ne fa una carriera, quindi ha un compenso materiale in cambio del servizio pubblico. Chi vive "per" la politica, fa di quest'ultima il suo scopo di vita, quindi gode di essere parte di una causa più grande, più nobile, che è slegata da un reddito permanente. Di conseguenza, il termine "terrorista per vocazione" si riferisce a tutte quelle donne e uomini che hanno deciso di sacrificare la loro vita, e quella degli altri, per soddisfare un profondo e interiore bisogno spirituale. Più specificamente, il termine descrive coloro che cercano di soddisfare un bisogno interiore di redenzione, ma che sono anche ossessionati dall'idea di punire gli altri per la loro presunta corruzione morale. Orsini specifica che si può far fronte al trauma esistenziale in molti modi e l'adozione di una "mentalità da codice binario" è solo uno di questi. Con la definizione "mentalità da codice binario", Orsini intende il meccanismo di semplificazione della realtà che favorisce il dispiegamento della violenza politica. Nel suo libro, *L'anatomia delle Brigate Rosse*, Orsini utilizza questa espressione per descrivere la mentalità tipica dei membri delle Brigate Rosse. Secondo Orsini, questa mentalità è elementare, istintiva e brutale nella sua immediatezza. È proprio per queste caratteristiche che, secondo lui, la "mentalità del codice binario" ha tanto successo. Il pensiero dicotomico consiste nel ridurre anche il fenomeno più complesso a due sole categorie, cioè "bene" e "male". Questa riduzione permette al terrorista di disumanizzare le sue vittime e di creare una forte convinzione collettiva che definisce il nemico da eliminare a tutti i costi. L'assunto è, come lo definirebbe lui, tipicamente weberiano, e sostiene che le azioni degli individui dipendono dai loro stati mentali o dalle loro rappresentazioni del mondo circostante. L'ideologia serve sia come fonte di significato, motivo per il

quale Orsini sostiene che, quando si cerca di capire cosa spinge gli individui a commettere atrocità quali attacchi terroristici, è importante capire le ideologie dei militanti e non escluderle dall'analisi perché appaiono irrazionali e non convenzionali. Questa affermazione è cruciale, poiché realizza concretamente la *verstehende Soziologie* concepita da Max Weber. A questo proposito, vale la pena ricordare che i terroristi "accettano l'idea di uccidere perché uccidere è giusto e opportuno". Quindi, le origini delle azioni terroristiche non devono essere rintracciate da presunti disturbi psicologici, ma piuttosto nella loro stessa percezione, più precisamente, nella percezione della setta rivoluzionaria, del mondo circostante e di come si dovrebbe condurre l'azione al suo interno. Questa percezione è guidata dall'ideologia radicale.

Detto questo, la visione del mondo dei terroristi e il modo in cui essi percepiscono il mondo circostante si adatta perfettamente all'"universo mentale radicale" di Orsini, che verrà definito nelle righe successive. Seguendo i passi enunciati nel modello DRIA, dopo che il "terrorista per vocazione" ha sperimentato una crisi di identità o un evento traumatico, si sblocca il passo successivo, cioè la *Ricostruzione dell'Identità Sociale*. Questo corrisponde al momento in cui l'individuo abbraccia un'ideologia estremista per trovare nuovi riferimenti esistenziali per condurre la sua vita. In questo modo, il futuro terrorista acquisisce quello che Orsini chiama un "universo mentale radicale", che egli sostiene essere basato su sette categorie cognitive, descritte qui di seguito: a) Catastrofismo radicale; b) Attesa della fine; c) Ossessione della Purezza; d) Identificazione del Male; e) Ossessione della Purificazione; f) Esaltazione del martirio o desiderio di essere perseguitati; g) Purificazione del mezzo attraverso il fine. Sostanzialmente, questo schema produce una narrativa ideologica radicale di questo tipo: "il mondo è sprofondata in un abisso di dolore e miseria (Catastrofismo Radicale) a causa delle azioni di certe categorie di persone (Identificazione del Male) che meritano di essere sterminate (Ossessione della Purificazione). Prima che il mondo finisca (Attesa della fine) bisogna isolarsi per proteggersi dalla corruzione morale dilagante (Ossessione della Purezza) e gioire di essere perseguitati, perché il sacrificio della vita è prova di purezza spirituale (Desiderio di essere perseguitati). Il fine è tale da giustificare l'uso dell'omicidio (Purificazione del mezzo attraverso il fine)".

Il 18 dicembre 1999, il Canadian Security Intelligence Service pubblicò un rapporto che trattava la crescente minaccia del "millenarismo", definito nel documento come "la credenza che la sofferenza umana sarà presto eliminata in un imminente scenario apocalittico, assicurando che la salvezza collettiva dell'umanità si compia". La necessità di discutere questo tema era urgente nel periodo che precedeva l'anno 2000, poiché molti gruppi religiosi, o culti, si avvicinarono al millenarismo, trasformandolo nella loro dottrina centrale. Infatti, l'anno 2000 d.C. come svolta del millennio è una data cardine nelle narrazioni di molti culti moderni. Ai fini dell'elaborato, dal rapporto ho scelto di riportare le seguenti caratteristiche, utilizzate dai servizi segreti canadesi per descrivere tali movimenti: a) Dualismo: la credenza che il mondo sia fratturato in campi opposti del bene e del male,

che conferisce un profondo significato ai piccoli conflitti sociali e politici come prova di questa grande lotta cosmica, e che potrebbe precipitare una risposta violenta; b) I Perseguitati Scelti: i movimenti si vedono come avanguardie profetiche appartenenti a un élite scelta, ma si sentono perseguitati da forze malvagie e tiranniche, che spingono il gruppo a fare preparativi concreti per difendere il loro status sacro; c) Imminenza: poiché i movimenti credono che l'apocalisse si stia svolgendo davanti ai loro occhi, gli "ultimi giorni" sono vissuti come psicologicamente imminenti e li spingono a intraprendere azioni immediate per assicurare la loro salvezza; d) Determinismo: poiché un gruppo crede devotamente che sarà il vincitore finale della battaglia finale, se crede che uno scenario catastrofico si stia attuando, il gruppo può sentire di non avere altra scelta che scatenare l'apocalisse attraverso la violenza; e) Salvezza attraverso il conflitto/eliminazione del nemico: poiché la salvezza dipende interamente dalla partecipazione diretta alla lotta apocalittica, un gruppo è sempre sul punto di anticipare il confronto, il che giustifica l'azione per eliminare il male e sradicare i nemici. Cruciale per questo elaborato è il contributo di Mark Juergensmeyer, il quale offre un'analisi approfondita della logica della violenza religiosa nel suo libro *Terror in the Mind of God*. Tra i molti elementi che discute, quelli che presentano somiglianze con le categorie cognitive dell'"universo mentale radicale" e della "mentalità da codice binario" di Orsini, e le credenze apocalittiche elencate nel rapporto sui movimenti religiosi del Canadian Security Intelligence Service, sono quelli che lui chiama "Guerra Cosmica", "Un Tempo per Uccidere" e "Martiri and Demoni". In breve, Juergensmeyer sostiene che le battaglie dei terroristi religiosi sono motivate dalla morte, che è l'aspetto più incerto della realtà. Molti studiosi, tra cui lui stesso, riconoscono il fatto che molte narrazioni religiose violente sono state costruite intorno all'attesa dell'aldilà per "purificare" la caotica vita terrena dalle presunte forze del male, che, a loro volta, sono responsabili della fragilità umana e della corruzione morale che affligge il mondo. Per quanto riguarda il concetto di "guerra cosmica", lo studioso si riferisce al fatto che numerosi leader di movimenti religiosi radicali, quali bin Laden, Kerry Noble e Shoko Asahara, rispettivamente i capi di al-Qaeda, the Covenant, the Sword, and the Arm of the Lord (CSA) e Aum Shinrikyo, hanno riconosciuto l'esistenza di una lotta armata globale della quale i loro gruppi facevano parte. Eric Robert Rudolph, il presunto attentatore della clinica dell'aborto che operava nella Carolina del Sud, si considerava un "soldato in guerra". Noble invece era solito ricordare ai suoi seguaci nel complesso dell'Arkansas che "il Signore Dio è un uomo di guerra", mentre un attivista dello stesso gruppo ha notato che la Bibbia è un "libro di guerra, un libro di odio". Non solo il concetto di guerra è un'immagine necessaria per creare nemici da combattere, ma è anche un motivo per usare fisicamente la violenza come mezzo per ottenere un obiettivo, e, soprattutto, deve essere legittimato attraverso testi religiosi.

Per quanto riguarda il concetto di "Un Tempo per Uccidere", vale la pena introdurre il concetto di Armageddon, che, in varie forme e interpretazioni, è presente in tutte le principali narrazioni religiose violente. Secondo la definizione data dal Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), il termine deriva da

Megiddo, una collina nel Nord di Israele, che per oltre mille anni è stata il luogo di molti combattimenti. "Armageddon" è la parola ebraica che significa "collina di Megiddo", e in inglese il termine è arrivato a tradurre il concetto stesso di guerra. Il termine si trova anche nei testi cristiani, poiché l'ultimo libro del Nuovo Testamento della Bibbia designa Armageddon come il punto d'incontro nello scenario apocalittico della battaglia finale e conclusiva di Dio contro il male. È possibile dunque sostenere che l'Armageddon fornisce il tempo e lo scenario per le narrazioni religiose, in quanto fornisce un "tempo della fine" in cui una lotta tra le forze del bene e le forze del male avrà luogo, lasciando solo i primi, come unici vincitori. Come spiegano i rapporti del Canadian Security Intelligence Service e dell'FBI, l'arrivo del nuovo millennio ha scatenato una nuova ondata di gruppi radicali che hanno concepito l'anno 2000 come l'Armageddon a cui prepararsi, suscitando molte preoccupazioni tra le agenzie di sicurezza. In particolare, il rapporto dell'FBI chiamato "Progetto MEGIDDO" mirava proprio ad analizzare tutte le potenziali minacce negli Stati Uniti con l'avvicinarsi dell'anno fatale.

Come spiegato nelle sezioni precedenti, lo scenario di guerra permette la creazione di nemici, che sono la componente essenziale delle narrazioni violente. Di conseguenza, dal punto di vista di un terrorista, chi muore mentre commette attentati è considerato un martire. Il senso di eroismo conferito a tali militanti si discerne dalla combinazione delle intuizioni bibliche da cui queste ideologie prendono ispirazione e il linguaggio bellicoso associato allo scenario della battaglia cosmica.

Come nota Juergensmeyer, "i nemici devono essere inventati se non esistono già". Questa affermazione si riferisce al fatto che lo scopo di avere uno scenario bellicoso è quello di dare una sensazione di potere a coloro che credono nella lotta attraverso la creazione di un opposto malvagio e negativo, sul quale possono sperare di trionfare. Nel contesto delle ideologie terroristiche, un elemento ricorrente nel processo di definizione degli antagonisti è la demonizzazione e la disumanizzazione del nemico, poiché il tipico schema religioso violento costringe la realtà in due sole categorie, cioè ciò che è bene e ciò che è male. La nozione di "guerra cosmica" dà analogamente il messaggio che se un individuo muore per una causa nobile, diventerà un martire del conflitto divino. Questo atteggiamento è perfettamente incarnato dai membri di Hamas che, durante i funerali dei giovani musulmani che sacrificano la loro vita per gli obiettivi dell'organizzazione, ricorrono ripetutamente all'idea di "automartirio".

Il terzo capitolo mira ad analizzare tre ideologie, ovvero il jihadismo, una corrente del Cristianesimo estremista, nota in inglese come Christian Identity, e la teologia di Aum Shinrikyo, il gruppo giapponese responsabile dell'attacco con gas sarin del 1995 a Tokyo. Ai fini dell'elaborato, le ideologie sono state analizzate seguendo le caratteristiche e categorie presentate nel secondo capitolo, in modo tale da poter successivamente compararle e verificare se esista o meno una tipica mentalità da terrorista.

Le idee sostenute dai jihadisti sono ispirate da dogmi che affermano che l'Islam è l'unica religione destinata a governare il mondo; che i governanti arabi, se musulmani, devono governare seguendo esclusivamente la *shari'a*, la legge islamica; che non ci deve essere separazione tra la religione e tutte le altre sfere della vita; che il Corano e gli *hadith* racchiudono la verità per vivere una vita giusta; che i musulmani sono in perenne stato di conflitto con i miscredenti. Questi dogmi sono profondamente radicati sia nella discussione sulla legge e la teologia islamica che venne dopo la morte del Profeta Maometto, sia nella loro interpretazione da parte di ideologi come Ibn Taymiyya, al-Wahhab, Rida. Tuttavia, i jihadisti sono stati anche influenzati dai contesti politici e sociali contemporanei e dall'interazione tra paesi arabi e occidentali durante il XX secolo. Tra questi ci sono al-Banna, Mawdudi e Qutb. Dopo la Prima guerra mondiale, quando gli inglesi e i francesi si divisero i territori dell'impero ottomano attraverso il trattato Sykes-Picot, tutte le terre islamiche furono sotto il dominio europeo, tranne la Turchia, portando a una sostanziale divisione tra i leader e gli studiosi arabi. Mentre alcuni abbracciarono la secolarizzazione, le libertà delle donne e il liberalismo come la cura dei loro mali, altri affermarono che l'unico modo per dare potere alla comunità era quello di far rivivere l'Islam e porre fine alla dominazione europea. Seguendo le categorie cognitive di Orsini dell'"universo mentale radicale", è possibile analizzare l'ideologia jihadista. Gli aderenti ai movimenti jihadisti credono fermamente che il mondo sia moralmente corrotto a causa di quello che chiamano "liberismo secolare" e associano le forze del male ai simboli che identificano tale presunto comportamento corrotto, come gli Stati Uniti, le Nazioni Unite e il mondo occidentale in generale. La loro visione dicotomica del mondo può essere riassunta nel vedere *al-Haqq* (vero Islam) contro *kufir* (miscredenza, i miscredenti). Secondo i jihadisti, solo loro possono portare il vero Islam al mondo attraverso il *jihad*, considerato come l'unico modo per purificarlo. Mentre al-Qaeda non aveva una visione apocalittica, come la maggior parte dei movimenti terroristici religiosi, l'ISIS ha invece commercializzato la propria narrazione della "fine dei tempi" per avere un bacino di seguaci più ampio. Il concetto di martirio è considerato come l'atto più nobile e onorevole da compiere in nome della più grande causa di purificazione del mondo, soprattutto nella cultura dei kamikaze di Hamas. I jihadisti credono anche, in generale, che l'obiettivo della cultura occidentale sia quello di sradicare l'Islam, motivo per cui questi ultimi si rivolgono alla violenza per difendersi. In particolare, l'uccisione è giustificata dalla loro interpretazione del Corano ed è considerata come l'unico strumento disponibile per eliminare gli infedeli. È anche possibile identificare le caratteristiche di Juergensmeyer dei movimenti terroristici religiosi nell'ideologia jihadista. Per esempio, il concetto di "Guerra Cosmica" può essere trovato nella nozione estrapolata di *jihad*, che afferma che i musulmani hanno il dovere di combattere per portare l'Islam all'umanità. Simile alla visione dicotomica descritta da Orsini, Juergensmeyer mostra che i jihadisti vedono il mondo diviso in due sole categorie: i martiri, che sono i militanti, e i demoni, che sono tutte le altre persone che non sono veri musulmani. Seguendo le caratteristiche descritte dal Canadian Security Intelligence Service, è possibile identificare: "Dualismo", in quanto i jihadisti

credono nel continuo confronto tra quello che chiamano vero Islam e i miscredenti; "I perseguitati eletti", in quanto i jihadisti credono che l'obiettivo della cultura occidentale sia quello di sradicare l'Islam e che loro siano i soldati scelti da Dio per salvare l'umanità; "Salvezza attraverso il conflitto/sradicamento del nemico", in quanto credono che l'unico modo per garantire la salvezza dell'umanità sia imporre la legge della *shar'ia* attraverso il conflitto e attraverso l'eliminazione dei miscredenti. Per concludere, secondo l'ideologia jihadista, stato e religione devono coincidere per formare la loro versione di una società utopica e, inoltre, che il conflitto tra le "forze del bene" e le "forze del male" ha una connotazione difensiva, nel senso che i militanti si sentono attaccati.

Per quanto riguarda il Cristianesimo estremista, molti gruppi vi aderirono a partire dalla seconda metà del secolo scorso, e l'America divenne improvvisamente un terreno fertile per attentati di matrice cristiana, come l'attentato di Oklahoma City nel 1995 e gli attacchi alle cliniche abortive che ebbero luogo nei primi anni '80. Inoltre, il Paese conobbe la proliferazione di molte milizie organizzate che condividevano convinzioni riguardanti l'avvento della "fine dei tempi", definita anche come "Armageddon", il dovere imminente di proteggere l'America da un governo malvagio controllato dagli ebrei, la corruzione morale che caratterizzava il Paese e la convinzione che solo attraverso la violenza e l'attuazione di principi cristiani l'umanità poteva essere salvata. L'arrivo del nuovo millennio ha spaventato questi gruppi poiché il processo di modernizzazione e industrializzazione sembrava distruggere le loro credenze religiose e tentare di sostituirle con le idee del nemico, che per alcuni è il cosiddetto Governo di Occupazione Sionista (ZOG), definizione usata per riferirsi al Governo americano, mentre per altri sono gli ebrei o il personale delle cliniche per aborti. L'estremismo cristiano in America è particolarmente connotato dalla credenza in una guerra cosmica e in una lotta continua con le suddette fazioni opposte. Questa caratteristica non è nuova, poiché il Cristianesimo ha sempre avuto un lato violento, che è stato dimostrato in diverse occasioni, come le crociate, l'inquisizione e le guerre sante. La teologia del Cristianesimo estremista ha in definitiva le sue radici nella Bibbia. Tuttavia, alcune posizioni derivano dalla teologia della riforma Protestante. Seguendo le categorie di Orsini, è possibile identificare: "Catastrofismo Radicale", in quanto, secondo i militanti di Christian Identity, il mondo appare moralmente corrotto a causa del "liberismo laico" e che gli Stati Uniti sono controllati da ebrei e liberali, i quali, a loro avviso, non rispettano i loro principi cristiani; "Identificazione del Male", dato che i simboli che rappresentano il Governo degli Stati Uniti e i suoi alleati sono considerati come acerrimi nemici; "Osessione di Purificazione", poiché i militanti sostengono di proteggere la propria milizia dagli "inquinamenti degli esterni impuri" e che unirsi al culto purifica le persone dal presunto mondo esterno immorale; "Attesa della fine", in quanto i movimenti credono che l'anno 2000 avrebbe coinciso con l'Armageddon, cioè l'apocalisse; "Osessione per la Purezza", dato che, secondo i militanti di Christian Identity, la forza e la violenza sono considerate necessarie per estirpare l'ingiustizia e sottomettere il male all'interno del presunto mondo peccatore; "Esaltazione del martirio o desiderio di essere perseguitati", poiché il movimento



sostiene l'idea che i suoi militanti sono intrappolati in un Paese, gli Stati Uniti, coinvolto in cospirazioni sataniche che hanno a che fare con il controllo spirituale e personale; "Purificazione del mezzo attraverso il fine", in quanto, nel caso specifico degli attentatori delle cliniche abortive, l'uccisione del personale di queste ultime era necessaria per salvare i bambini non nati. Proseguendo nell'analisi, è possibile identificare le caratteristiche di Juergensmeyer: "Guerra Cosmica", come riferimenti biblici alla distruzione del male da parte dall'Arcangelo Michele, che indicava una lotta cosmica delle "forze delle tenebre" contro le "forze della luce"; "Un Tempo per Uccidere", in quanto i militanti di Christian Identity si preparavano all'arrivo dell'Armageddon; "Martiri and Demoni", dato che il movimento sosteneva la contrapposizione tra i militanti, che sono i "salvatori" e le "forze demoniache" alleate con il Governo statunitense. Proseguendo con le caratteristiche dei servizi segreti canadesi, è possibile identificare: "Dualismo", poiché il movimento sosteneva la visione dicotomica del mondo tra "bene" e "male"; "Imminenza", dato che Kerry Noble, il leader del CSA, nel marzo 1998, riferì che il suo gruppo si stava preparando per una guerra in arrivo a causa dell'avvicinarsi dell'Armageddon; "Gli eletti perseguitati", poiché i militanti dell'identità cristiana danno grande importanza alla fine dei tempi e credono che prenderanno parte alla prossima apocalisse e si impegneranno nel conflitto contro le "forze dell'anticristo"; "Determinismo", in quanto, nel caso particolare di Noble e del CSA, il calendario originale, riferito all'apocalisse, era solo sotto il controllo di Dio, ma i militanti potevano accelerare il processo se credevano che i segni della fine dei tempi stavano arrivando; "Salvezza attraverso il conflitto/sradicamento del nemico" segue la stessa logica di "Gli eletti perseguitati" e "Guerra cosmica". Per concludere, anche l'ideologia di Christian Identity sostiene l'idea che stato e religione devono coincidere per formare la perfetta società utopica e che i suoi militanti sono impegnati in un conflitto a scopo di difesa.

Infine, il capitolo tratta l'ideologia del gruppo Aum Shinrikyo, il quale ha preso ispirazione da concetti della cosmologia indù e buddista esoterica, e, in particolare, sulla nozione di un percorso di elevazione della coscienza attraverso diverse pratiche, come lo yoga, la meditazione e l'alienazione dalla società contemporanea. Analogamente alle precedenti, è possibile analizzarla quest'ultima ideologia. Utilizzando le categorie di Orsini, possiamo identificare: "Catastrofismo Radicale", in quanto la setta credeva che la cultura occidentale stesse opprimendo quella giapponese, originariamente basata su principi buddisti; "Identificazione del Male", in dato che, anche se inizialmente la setta aveva intenzioni pacifiche, verso la fine, credeva che la società le fosse contro e quindi la considerava come sua nemica, insieme agli Stati Uniti perché responsabili dei valori occidentali; "Obsessione della Purificazione", poiché il movimento credeva di avere il dovere di purificare la società giapponese dai valori occidentali e soprattutto americani; "Attesa della Fine", in quanto la setta credeva fermamente che le previsioni del leader, Shoko Asahara, che sosteneva che l'Armageddon sarebbe arrivato nell'anno 2000; "Obsessione della Purezza", dato che solo i membri "illuminati" del movimento avrebbero potuto sopravvivere all'apocalisse; "Esaltazione del Martirio o desiderio di essere

perseguitati", poiché il martirio era considerato l'atto più nobile che un militante potesse compiere per perseguire l'obiettivo del movimento; "Purificazione del mezzo attraverso il fine", che si trova nel concetto di poa, che significava che se un individuo stava accumulando un karma cattivo che lo avrebbe portato all'inferno, era obbligatorio "trasformare", cioè uccidere, la persona per assicurarsi la rinascita e la salvezza. Proseguendo, è possibile identificare le caratteristiche di Juergensmeyer: "Guerra Cosmica", in quanto il prossimo Armageddon avrebbe scatenato la lotta cosmica tra gli "illuminati" e i "non illuminati"; "Un Tempo per Uccidere", seguendo la logica della guerra cosmica; "Martiri e Demoni", dato che la setta credeva fermamente che il mondo fosse costituito da due sole categorie di persone, cioè gli "illuminati" e i "non illuminati". Infine, è possibile identificare le categorie dei servizi segreti canadesi: "Dualismo", seguendo la logica della loro visione dicotomica del mondo; "Imminenza", rappresentata dal fatto che il leader anticipava la data in cui sarebbe avvenuta la fine dei tempi; "I perseguitati scelti", secondo la logica del martirio; "Salvezza attraverso il conflitto/sradicamento del nemico", in quanto, secondo la setta, solo gli "illuminati" potevano sopravvivere al conflitto scatenato dall'apocalisse mentre il resto della società sarebbe morto. Per concludere, come le ideologie precedenti, anche quella di Aum Shinrikyo credeva che stato e religione dovessero coincidere per formare la società perfetta e che il conflitto in corso avesse una connotazione difensiva.

Con l'ausilio delle tabelle situate nel quarto capitolo, le quali mettono a confronto in maniera schematica tutte le similitudini descritte nelle sezioni precedenti, è dunque possibile riflettere sulla domanda di ricerca di questa tesi, ovvero: esiste una mentalità tipica da terrorista? In base agli strumenti e alla metodologia impiegata per l'indagine scientifica, la risposta risulta affermativa. Dopo aver condotto questa ricerca, è possibile concludere che, in generale, alcuni tipi di ideologie radicali, soprattutto quelle di matrice religiosa, condividono una visione dicotomica del mondo diviso in forze buone e cattive, e che i proprio militanti stiano assistendo alla decadenza morale del mondo a causa delle azioni dei presunti individui malvagi, per cui è necessario usare la violenza per eliminarli, anche a costo della vita dei militanti stessi. Le ideologie terroristiche religiose condividono specificamente la convinzione che i loro seguaci stiano prendendo parte a una sorta di "Guerra Cosmica", per citare Juergensmeyer, che essi vinceranno per sopravvivere alla fine dei tempi.

Per concludere, vale la pena menzionare il motivo per i quali è stato scelto questo tema per l'elaborato finale. Nel pensiero comune esiste la convinzione che il terrorismo sia fortemente legato all'Islam e che le altre religioni non ricorrano alla violenza. Senza alcun dubbio, questa affermazione è falsa, poiché l'Islam, esattamente come tutte le altre religioni, predica la pace sulla violenza e condanna fortemente le azioni del terrorismo jihadista. Questa tesi mira precisamente a smontare questa credenza comune presentando le prove che anche l'Occidente e l'Oriente hanno avuto gruppi terroristici di matrice religiosa, non legati all'Islam, che condividono la stessa quantità di odio e grado

di accettazione della violenza con le organizzazioni jihadiste. Per concludere, come direbbe il mio professore, questa ricerca è un tentativo di "sfidare i luoghi comuni attraverso la cultura".