

Department of International Relations

Course: International Public Policies

Lone wolf terrorism:
how the European Union can fight it

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Introduction

Terrorism as a field of study has been broadly explored in many of its characteristics, models and definitions by several scholars during the past decades. The concept itself, politically debated other than scientifically, is a source of controversy and political discussion; and in the complexity of this phenomenon and its various implications there is though one aspect of it that, while being a stronger and stronger trend, that has not been explored much yet, namely, lone wolves Terrorism. As terrorism is increasingly used as a mean of offense in a globalized warfare and terrorist organizations like the IS appear frequently on news and tv screens, becoming a political and not only strategic issue, the phenomenon of individuals that, apparently out of the blue, decide to carry on a terroristic attack is on the rise. The motives behind the actions of said individuals may vary to a wide range of possibility, going from right wing extremism, nationalistic parties, to communist guerrilla, to jihad. The personalities behind the perpetrators' mind might be very different one to another, as well as the socio-economic conditions. So, the questions arise on how it can be possible to identify those personalities before they attack, if it is possible, or to prevent their actions, being unable to identify a clear target or audience. The purpose of this thesis will therefore be focused on five different core arguments, correlated by case studies meant to exemplify them, that will try to identify and discuss the phenomenon.

First, the phenomenon needs to be investigated in detail in relations to the definitions provided by the main sociological studies covering the issue, in way to identify the key elements the literature has generally attributed to lone wolves. The analysis of definitional issues will also be related to an historical overview on terrorism as a social and political phenomenon, so that it will be inclusive of the largest numbers of cases possible related to the issue of lone wolf terrorism. Once we have found our definition, we can now proceed to go more in-depth into the analysis, as we identify a particular section of radical extremist, the jihadist one, to be the core focus of this thesis.

Terrorism is a political and strategic instrument, and especially the lone-wolf type is even very cheap and easy one to sustain, therefore is a tactic that the IS,

especially nowadays, in which its territorial integrity has been shattered, has decided to resolve, therefore the need to analyse and understand the phenomenon is needed now more than ever. Being terrorism also a social phenomenon, we will try to understand not only why the jihadist recruitment strategy has proven so effective in the last years in driving so many Muslims residing in Europe, maybe second-generation ones, turning from the liberal values of the West to turn to a radical ideology like Islam. They usually do not turn overnight and some signs of radicalization can be found and maybe stopped before any violent action takes place, therefore the path to radicalization will also be analysed in detail, as it is the part of the process in which we might be able to do more. This analysis will be carried out using sociological and psychological premises, as it has been widely recognized that an approach of this kind proves to be very effective in the analysis of such personalities that, as their own name suggests, prefer to act alone. Here is the category in which we have more cases to study, yet one of the most complex to analyse and especially categorize, as the differences arising from the psychological and social situations of every single case, but is the one that more than others allows us to understand lone wolves' terrorism.

An analysis of this sort, written in the era of communications, would never be completed if we did not dedicate space to Internet and the role it has been playing in the development and evolution of this phenomenon. As said above, terrorism, and lone wolves' terrorism, must be considered from a social and psychological perspective, and ignoring how Internet has radically changes the way of life of so many people the world, would make this research at least incomplete, if not completely meaningless. Internet is used as a main driver of communication in the modern society, and is used to vehicle information of any kind all across the globe with nothing but a click. News, contents, comments, all of the are present now more than ever in the life of the last majority of the population, that is anyway connected by the classic media like TV and newspapers, and this has been made possible thanks to the capillary growth of Internet and its functions. Terrorist organizations however have long ago understood the potential of such a channel like internet to spread radical propaganda on the internet, but their online capabilities are much wider than that, as Internet is used as a recruitment, educational, and operational tool. As will be discussed afterwards in detail, Internet

provides with a large array of possibilities, as it is able to connect a large community that, outside of the Muslim countries in the Middle East and surrounding area, is scattered in small groups. But thinking that Internet can be used only as a tool capable of allowing faster information's transfer, would be a misunderstanding of its potential. Internet is into the everyday life of the youth of several countries, and conditions, as all things to which someone is exposed for a long and continues time, the psychological and social attitudes of the individual. Online communities, both intended as social media, blog, or gaming communities in general, are on the rise as a mean to keep in touch with like-minded people that might not be reached otherwise, may be because of the distance or other impediments. They are of very different sorts and types, and some of them are used as a mean of propaganda by radical ideology; communities of this kind can be a very powerful instrument in the hands of a capable speaker, as they not only vehicle the message intended, but also provide for an environment in which the message, no matter how extreme, has been embraced by all those who belong to it, making such messages normality, a normality completely detached from reality. Gaming allows such interaction to go even deeper, as it not only requires written participation through a blog, it requires the almost full extent of senses and skills, allowing a higher internalization of the message.

The Internet variable, however can be rightly considered to be a global phenomenon, is even more strongly related to the life of people residing in the EU and in the US, that register the higher numbers of people connected by internet, with numbers grow even higher when it comes to the younger part of the population. Almost all of these people had some kind of resentment, being for political or religious reasons, towards authorities or the state government, may it be for everyday issues or for fundamental ones. The issue here becomes even more important to analyse as we deal with "*foreign fighters*", people that have left their life in the West to travel to Syria or Iraq to follow the call of the terroristic flags. The question makes it not only a problem of international concern, as terrorism has been defined as a key issue of UN countries' foreign policy for many years, especially after 9/11, but makes it problem at domestic level. The radicalization process begins long before the attack, and the issue can and must be tackled at a domestic level in the case of lone wolves' terrorists, they do not

necessarily have to fit the role of “potential foreign fighters” or potentially radicalized individual” to have started it. The issue of how the radicalization processes and develops will be analysed in detail in this work, as it is one of key variables that, according to our findings, can be influenced in way to prevent the possibility of an individual to become radicalized in the first place.

Once all the analysis above will be carried out, we will try to answer the question posed at the beginning of this introduction. We cannot define a one-fits-all category for the phenomenon of lone wolves, but we tried to define a workable profile, a tool to policy makers and police forces to use to identify targets that, more likely than others, are susceptible to the call of radicalization. This way the intent is to provide a target to which the State can aim when proceeding with the policies proposals written at the end of the thesis. Solutions may vary in type, costs and effectiveness, but are all propositions that have been done taking care of how the phenomenon of lone wolves’ terrorism has evolved during the years, and these policies might provide a useful guideline for the creation of policies aimed not exclusively to tracking down and blocking radicalizing propaganda and those who transmit it. What will the key focus of said policies will be a preventive approach to lone wolves terrorism, as radicalizing messages will always find an audience on the huge plethora of internet, in way to make those voices, if not silent, at least ignored.

CHAPTER ONE

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PHENOMENON

To begin with the analysis of such a complex and challenging issue as the one of lone wolf terrorism, it seems due to the reader to underline how the case studies considered for the scope of this research, can not be considered totally comprehensive of the whole activities of lone wolf terrorists in Europe since the 2000s, as such a presumption would mean to underestimate a number of methodological challenges characterizing the issue. First of all, not all plots are in the public domain, especially when they have been not successful thanks to authorities or abandoned by potential terrorists. Secondly, there are a number of key variations in the way lone wolf terrorist attacks are perceived and reported by authorities across Europe. For instance, the boundary between lone wolf terrorist attacks and hate crime is really variable among different authorities reports thus making some discrepancies, at least at some levels, inevitable. Furthermore, limitations may arise from the use of open-source reporting. In particular, the most relevant of these limitations seem to arise from the the inevitable reporting bias characterizing most of these sources: namely, the fact that often whether an information is publicly available depends on whether such an issue is of interest for journalists investigating the story. Moreover, complete information is not always available and finding open-source information in relation to mental health issues is particularly challenging. Compensating substantial gaps with references to sociological works conducted on the issue, has further displayed methodological challenges since discrepancies among the studies realized make a comparative approach often ineffective in addressing the issue. Furthermore, quantitative analysis covering lone wolf terrorism and which represent the largest amount of studies realized on the issue, do not provide a deep understanding of the psychological, ideological and social dynamics behind violent radicalization processes.

1.1 The issue of definition

First and foremost, before moving on into a scientific discussion regarding the theme of this research, we need to address the issue of definition of the different issues that we are going to tackle. The issue of lone wolves' terrorism is a subject of study in the field of security and terrorism that has not been explored much during the last decades, and we hope the following research to give some insight on the phenomenon and provide explanations on who this people are, or are likely to become, why they act and what can be done to prevent terrorist attacks of this kind. To proceed with this kind of analysis, we need to provide the definition of what the previous literature gives us regarding the main variables and phenomena that we are going to analyse in this research, and obviously the first definition we need to provide is the one of lone wolves' terrorism.

Sometimes also defined as freelance terrorism, leaderless resistance, solo-actor terrorism, or even, in the case of violent *takfiri* Islamism, personal jihad, lone wolf attacks conceptualization is not a new issue for the aetiology of terrorism. Nevertheless, the literature still suffers from a lack of agreement over its interpretation, that, in turn, leads to a defect of consistency among the studies covering this issue, notwithstanding a substantial laxity in the quantity itself of the academic work produced. The definition of the concept of terrorism is widely debated in social sciences, and a universally and widely accepted definition of the phenomenon is yet to be found, up to being defined as impossible as the quest for the Holy Grail by Levitt in 1986. The causes of such uncertainty are several, starting not only by the definition of lone wolf terrorism, but coming directly from the definition of terrorism we are suggesting. The concept of terrorism is instrumental in the political arena, and the definition can be changed accordingly to the political need of the day, as Schmidt puts it “*one man's terrorist is the other man's freedom fighter*”¹. This holds both in the national and in the international discussion on the phenomenon. The political use of the term, usually in a

¹ Schmidt, Alex P. and Jongman, Albert I. (Eds.), *Political Terrorism*, SWIDOC Amsterdam and Transaction Books, 1998

subjective and pejorative way, has made the possibility of finding a universal definition at best, remote.

Terrorism, as any social science concepts, is a social construction, not made of brute scientific facts like physics or mathematics, but is a continuously changing phenomenon that evolves together with its social meaning. Creating a universal definition that can unite the anarchist terrorism of the late 19th century and the modern Islamic terrorism can indeed be a daunting task. It is commonly viewed as essentially a collective, organized activity and, therefore, scholars focus predominantly on group dynamics and collective socialization to explain individual pathways into terrorism. This has been already acknowledged by the Dutch Crisis Management Team, or COT, in 2007: *“The imbalance between the perceived threat of lone-wolf terrorism on the one hand and the almost exclusive scholarly focus on group-based terrorism on the other hand indicates the need for more conceptual and empirical analysis to enable a better understanding of lone-wolf terrorism”*². Yet, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, defining lone wolf terrorism has become an increasingly challenging and important task for scholars as well as for law enforcement officials, considering the series of high-profile attacks occurred in the USA and Europe by seemingly unaffiliated terrorists and the increasing role played by the internet in fostering their radicalization processes. According to several scholars, including the specialist in organized crime and terrorism Jerome Bjelopera, threats coming from lone wolf terrorism represent one of the greatest challenges to democratic intelligence and law enforcement officials³. A sense of urgency has encouraged the creation of a wide spectrum of definitions of lone wolf “typologies” that vary on some key points, contributing, on one hand, to better understand new aspects of the issue while, on the other, hindering definitional operationalization and comparison of analysis. However, definitional conundrum reflects the multifaceted nature itself of lone wolf terrorism, entailing that even in a narrow definition, a wide spectrum of lone actors exists.

² Dutch Instituut voor Veiligheids- en Crisismanagement, *Lone Wolf Terrorism*, COT Study, 2007

³ Bjelopera J., *The Domestic Terrorist Threat: Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, 2013

Nevertheless, even among those scholars who fundamentally disagree over how to define lone wolf terrorism, some insights have catalysed scholar's agreement. In particular, from a concise history of the phenomenon, it seems clear that lone actors do not move in a vacuum. In other words, their actions, are not the irrational fruits of some form of insanity, analysing them must not be seen only as a psychological phenomenon, but also as a sociological one. On the contrary, attacks are perpetrated with rational efficiency by radicalised actors who behave in accordance with a radical interpretation of reality that, in turn, is framed by the ideological tale they decide to join. Precisely, even if it is commonly assumed that lone-actor terrorists suffer from greater degrees of mental illness than both the general population and the broader community of terrorists, as highlighted by several studies, including Emily Corner and Gill last work⁴ and Europol 2016 report⁵, according to which about 35% of the lone wolves who carried out attacks between 2000 and 2015 suffered from some form of mental disorder; nevertheless, it would be wrongful and hasty to consider the existence of mental illness as an indicator of limited rationality or incapability of conducting an effective attack, as demonstrated by several studies⁶.

Namely, according to an increasing large segment of the literature, lone wolf attacks seem to be the result of calculated plans of action the terrorists individually prepare and perpetrate going through what Stratfor defines as "*terrorist attack cycle*"⁷, considered to include different phases of action rationally persecuted by the lone wolf: operational planning, target selection, deployment and attack. As illustrating example of the rational effectiveness behind lone wolf terrorist attacks, we can mention the destructiveness of Anders Breivik case. Breivik, who is generally ascribed by the literature as one of the most lethal lone wolf active in the European history, on July 22, 2011 killed 77 people and injured other 242 in his double terrorist attack against

⁴Corner E., Gill P., Mason O., "*Mental Health Disorders and the Terrorist: A Research Note Probing Selection Effects and Disorder Prevalence*", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 39:6, 560-568, 2016

⁵ European Police Office, available at: www.europol.europa.eu

⁶Borum R., '*Informing Lone-Offender Investigations*', *Criminology and Public Policy* (Vol. 12, No.1, February 2013); Gill, Horgan and Deckert, '*Bombing Alone*', pp. 425-35; Corner and Gill, '*A False Dichotomy?*'.

⁷Stratfor's "*Defining the Terrorist Attack Cycle*," 2012, available at: www.stratfor.com/image/defining-terrorist-attack-cycle.

Norway Government and the Labor Party's youth holiday camp on the island of Utøya. Looking in depth at his case, we can find out that, similarly to many other lone wolf terrorists, Breivik was diagnosed with a narcissistic personality disorder and, at the same time, presented an ideologically radicalized profile drew on extremist messages generally ascribed to currents of populist racism against Muslims that have broken out like a rash in Europe and the US over the last two decades. His terrorist action, similarly to those perpetrated by several following lone wolf terrorists, seemed to be the result of two main determinants: on one side, a social-psychological condition strongly characterized by social ineptitude and a certain degree of mental disorder, while on the other, his rational adherence to a precise ideological tale in whose plot he gains a new victorious identity.

His action reflects his total adherence to an ideological framework that shaped and crippled his interpretation of reality. This becomes clearer looking at what Breivik stated in his closing trial statement on June 22, 2012: *"The attacks of July 22nd were preventive attacks, serving the defense of the Norwegian indigenous people, ethnic Norwegians, our culture, and I cannot declare myself guilty before the law for conducting them. I was acting in defense of my people, my culture, my religion, my city, and my country. Therefore, I demand to be acquitted of all charges⁸".* According to the Norwegian journalist Aage Borchgrevink, who investigated Breivik path of violent radicalization, in *"A Norwegian Tragedy: Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utoya"*, Breivik *"seemed quite normal. However, he seemed not to feel empathy for other people and, even if he is intelligent in certain contexts, from a social point of view he is clumsy, often conflictual. He is tormented by feelings of inferiority and, at the same time, driven by a desire for grandeur⁹".*

According to an increasing bunch of scholars that is focusing on the role played by ideological extremist narratives in driving individuals living a condition of existential crisis towards violent radicalization: for individuals who finds themselves in a socio-psychological condition, similar to what presented by Breivik, ideology can

⁸ Richman A., Sharan Y., *"Lone Actors – An Emerging Security Threat"*, 2015

⁹ Borchgrevink A., *"Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utoya"*, 2013

work as an effective palliative¹⁰. Ideological and religious extremist belief help individuals diagnosing what is the problem of their condition, who is the responsible, and prescribing them the “cure” to remove it. Breivik ideologically “fictional” new role provided him with essential tasks that involved eradication of the Evil from the world and the preservation of the “*Norwegian purity*”¹¹. In his “manifesto” 2083¹², – 2083 if both the 400th anniversary of the Battle of Vienna as well as the 200th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx, founder of the genocidal worldview and multi-ethnic praxis of “cultural Marxism” – he figures himself as a “*justice knight*”¹³, who is part of a fantomatic organization of Templar knights. His “*merciless war*,” as he defines his struggle, was a “*preventative*” one against the multicultural “*treason*” of the Norwegian—and more broadly, European—postwar establishment of “*cultural Marxists*”¹⁴. Also his choice of symbolic targets – the prime minister’s office in Oslo and innocent labor Party youths – and the date of the attack itself – as the scholar Feldman highlights – reveal his complete adherence to a totalitarian system of belief¹⁵. Namely, on July 22, 1095, Jerusalem was sacked by the Ottoman Empire, which prompted the Crusades and, for Breivik, represented the first of the three so-called Muslim invasions of Europe.

His radicalization occurred on the internet: his world view seems to have been shaped by online fantasy games and the anti-Islamist blogosphere. As Borchgrevink reports, in a period of isolation occurred before the terrorist action, Breivik plunged into a cyberscene characterised by unmitigated hatred of the new Europe, aggressive denunciations of the “*corrupted, multiculturalist power elites*”¹⁶ and pejorative generalisations about immigrants, targeting Muslims in particular. The Norwegian terrorist himself has claimed to have found in such a virtual dimension of socialization, a group of affiliates sharing his belief as well as practical instructions on how to

¹⁰ Ivi.

¹¹ Ivi.

¹² Breivik A., “*2083: A European Declaration of Independence*”, De Laude Novae Militiae, London, 2011

¹³ Ivi.

¹⁴ Ivi.

¹⁵ Feldman M., “*Comparative Lone Wolf Terrorism: Toward a Heuristic Definition, Democracy and Security*”, 2013

¹⁶ Borchgrevink A., “*Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utoya*”, 2013

manufacture explosives. Interestingly, also recent video messages left by Jihadi lone wolf terrorists showed their complete adherence towards an apocalyptical ideological tale, claiming the need of restoring trust to the Muslim nation to respond to what is perceived as a foreign intervention in Islamic affairs. In other words, contrary to the notion of the “Other” that vary with the changing of the radical belief of adherence – for Breivik it was the Muslim invasion, while for Islamic lone wolves they are the miscreants; nevertheless, the narrative plot of extremist beliefs brought by terrorists seems not to have changed switching from one extremist belief to another.

Recently, Europol 2017 report has affirmed the relevance of radical ideological messages in fostering lone wolves’ radicalization towards violent acts: “*even if the ideology can be used by terrorists to cast shadows on the deeper causes of their acts, which are always of a personal and psychological nature, we should not underestimate the power of the jihadist discourse to a certain audience*¹⁷”. As highlighted by several studies, including Bakker and de Graaf’s analysis of 2011¹⁸, almost all lone wolves display a degree of commitment to, and in some instances identification with, the extremist movements providing their ideologies of validation. Not by chance, Breivik describes himself as a “*political terrorist*”. Larger radical melieus have been recently argued to play a crucial role in lone wolves’ processes of radicalization exercising their influence on the terrorist psychological mechanisms of externalization, by channelling personal frustrations towards the destruction of the Other, who, through the elaboration of an extremist totalist belief, becomes responsible of all the lone wolf’s suffering. However, according to a number of scholars, lone wolves’ affiliation towards larger political or religious terrorist groups, even if merely ideological, raises a crucial definitional conundrum, that can not be considered compatible with the concept of “*loneness*” as a distinctive characteristic of the lone wolf; as well as being generally ascribed as the main trait distinguishing them from “ordinary” group-based terrorists. For instance, Gable and Jackson’s report *Lone Wolves: Myth or Reality?* argues, that far-right terrorists should not be considered lone wolves because they are connected

¹⁷Europol, “*JihadiWolf*” *Threat: The Evolution Of Terror Narratives Between The (Cyber-)Social Ecosystem And Self-Radicalization “Ego-System”*, The Hague, 2017

¹⁸ Bakker E., and De Graaf B., “*Preventing Lone Wolf Terrorism: some CT Approaches Addressed*” in *Prospectives on Terrorism* Vol. 5, 2011

with, influenced by and often helped by organizations whose beliefs they share¹⁹. In particular, so far, a large part of the literary debate has gravitated over the dilemmas posed by the different degrees of liveness found in research dataset covering lone wolf attacks in Western countries. It seems, in other words, that principal definitional conundrums regard the properly “autonomous” nature itself of lone wolf terrorist. In particular, diverging definitions reflect different interpretations of two main aspects of lone wolf terrorism that will be analysed in the following paragraph: composition and control.

1.2 A definitional conundrum: composition and control

The literature offers us a wide spectrum of definitions nuanced around these two issues as wisely portrayed by Spaaij and Mark S. Hamm 2015 study²⁰. Regarding the first issue, doubts among scholars arise around whether under the lone wolf terrorist umbrella definition there is space only for actions perpetrated by a single actor or also by small groups such as dyads or triads of individuals forming “wolf packs²¹” - essentially like leaderless “groupuscules”. These two cases can be clearly illustrated, on the one hand, by Nidal Hassan and the Fort Hood shooting (a single actor) and, on the other hand, by the Kouachi brothers in the Charlie Hebdo massacre, who acted together with Coulibaly and Boumeddiene (forming a small cell). Then, the issue of control rises from some inconsistency among different definitions on whether lone actor actions have to be considered the result of a fully individual initiative or, on the contrary, may also incur in some form of external influence. Thus, a number of studies has provided diverging distinctions between the different types of logistical and material support the

¹⁹ G. Gable, and P. Jackson, “*Lone Wolves: Myth or Reality?*”, Searchlight Magazine, 2011

²⁰ Ramón Spaaij & Mark S. Hamm, “*Key Issues and Research Agendas in Lone Wolf Terrorism*”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38:3, 167-178

²¹ Pantucci, “*A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists*”, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence, 2011

The lone wolf “types” he identifies range from loner (wholly self radicalizing), lone wolf, lone wolf pack to lone attackers (“with clear command and control links with actual Al Qaeda core or affiliated groups”), 29–30.

lone wolf may obtain – in order to be defined as such. Differentiations here range on a continuum that has at one of its extremity directed attacks perpetrated by a lone actor operating under a hierarchical command – that is typical of explicit members of existing terrorist organizations, who operate alone for operational reasons; and, at the other, those perpetrated by individuals in total isolation from any social ties to larger radical milieu²².

More in detail, disagreement over the inclusion of dyads or triads - small cells of two or three individuals that act as isolated and independent terrorist units - split scholars' opinion between, on the one side, those who focus their definitions around the individual action, therefore, excluding attacks committed by couples or small cells, such as Becker's consideration of the crime as "*ideologically driven violence, or attempted violence, perpetrated by an individual who plans and executes an attack in the absence of collaboration with other individuals or groups*"²³, or the Danish Security and Intelligence Service, according to which in order to be considered a lone wolf terrorist, an actor must have "*no contact to terror groups (not even historically)*"²⁴, and, on the other side, comparatively broader characterisation, like the one promoted by Jessica Stern, that holds also "*small groups who commit terrorist crimes, inspired by a terrorist ideology, but [do] not belong to established groups*"²⁵. Furthermore, among those focusing specifically on the isolation of the person from a larger terrorist network, we can find authors including Randy Borum, Robert Fein and Bryan Vossekuil²⁶; Joshua Freilich, Steven Chermak and Jeff Gruenewald²⁷, and, of course, Ramón Spaaij, who suggests that lone wolves are persons who:

- a. *“operate individually;*
- b. *do not belong to an organized group or network;*

²²Schuurman B, "*Lone Actor Terrorist Attack Planning and Preparation: A Data-Driven Analysis*", Journal of Forensic Science, Paper: Psychiatric and Behavioral Science, 2017

²³Becker M., "*Explaining Lone Wolf Target Selection in the United States*", Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 37:11, 959-978, 2014

²⁴PET, "*The Threat from Solo Terrorism and Lone Wolf Terrorism*", Center for Terror analyse, 2011

²⁵Stern J., "*Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*", New York, 2003

²⁶Borum R., Fein R. and Vossekuil B. "*A dimensional approach to analyzing lone offender terrorism*" Aggression and Violent Behavior Vol. 17, 2012

²⁷Adamczyk, A., Gruenewald, J., Chermak, S. M., & Freilich, J. D. "*The Relationship Between Hate Groups and Far-Right Ideological Violence*", Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 30(3), 310-332, 2014

c. *whose modi operandi are conceived and directed by the individual without any direct outside command or hierarchy*²⁸.

Similarly, the aforementioned COT study points out: *“In the case of lone-wolf terrorism, such intentional acts are committed by persons:*

- a. *who operate individually*
- b. *who do not belong to an organized terrorist group or network*
- c. *who act without the direct influence of a leader or hierarchy*
- d. *whose tactics and methods are conceived and directed by the individual without any direct outside command or direction;*

*[. . .] Their terrorist attack or campaign, however, results from their solitary action during which the direct influence, advice or support of others, even those sympathetic to the cause, is absent*²⁹.

However, on closer inspection, it seems that stricter definitions in terms of composition, run a risk of inconsistency when confronted with the multifaceted variety of cases this phenomenon is bringing in Western countries. Moving our attention away from few high-profile cases of solitary individuals executing terrorist attacks on their own, such as Breivik and the “Unabomber” Ted Kaczynski – who attacked in the USA through mail bombs between 1978 and 1995 killing 3 and wounding 23 others,³⁰ we can observe they do not embody the archetype of lone wolf terrorist in terms of isolation. On the contrary, such narrow definitions cut out of their scope some exemplary cases of self-radicalised individuals committing terrorist attacks alone but making and instrumental use of the assistance of others, as the aforementioned Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, which was masterminded by Timothy McVeigh but logistically assisted by Terry Nichols, as well as Mohammed Merah's 2012 attacks on French soldiers, children and teachers from a Jewish school in Marseille, who made use of

²⁸ Spaaij R., *“Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention”*, London, Springer, 2012

²⁹ Report by the Dutch Instituut voor Veiligheids- en Crisis management, *“Lone Wolf Terrorism”*, COT Study, 2007

³⁰ Ibidem

external assistance for transportations³¹, like several other lone wolf terrorists.

According to probably the most comprehensive research study of the phenomenon to date realized by Schuurman³², most of lone actor extremists operating in North America and Western Europe between 1978 and 2015 maintained plot-relevant social ties during their radicalization that typically occurred in both online and offline radical milieus. Also, Malthaner and O'Connor dataset shows that lone-actor terrorists are more often than not in contact with radicalized individuals or groups, but for various reasons they do not fully integrate into these or they detach their terrorist acts from group participation³³. Breivik himself, who is generally considered by the literature as the emblem of “solitary” lone wolves, in 2012 began to design the constitution of an organization known as the Revolutionary Conservative Movement, which would be made up of about fifty right-wing activists across Europe. He also attempted to establish correspondence with the Swedish jailed terrorist Peter Mangs (author of the Malmö terrorist attacks) and the German extremist Beate Zschäpe. Referring to his solitary terrorist action, Breivik stated: “*The old saying: “if you want something done, then do it yourself” is as relevant now as it was then. More than one “chef” does not mean that you will do tasks twice as fast. In many cases; you could do it all yourself, it will just take a little more time. AND, without taking unacceptable risks. The conclusion is undeniable*³⁴”. Accordingly, in the last few years, an increasing bunch of scholars, have tried to capture in their definitional structure of lone wolf terrorism the nuances of its multifaceted nature, abandoning a strict adherence to the terminological framework of “*lone actions*”. Among them, there is Gill, Horgan and Deckert³⁵ study, according to which also dyads should be calculated in the formulation of a comprehensive definition.

³¹Spaaij R., “*Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention*”, London, 2012

³² Schuurman B., L. Lindekilde, Malthaner S., O'Connor F., Gill P., Bouhana N.: “*End of the Lone Wolf: The Typology that Should Not Have Been*”, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 2017

³³ Lindekilde, L., Malthaner S., and O'Connor F., “*Embedded and Peripheral: Relational Patterns of Lone Actor Radicalization*”, 2017

³⁴ Turettini U., “*The Mystery of the Lone Wolf Killer: Anders Behring Breivik and the Threat of Terror in Plain Sight*”, Pegasus, 2015

³⁵Gill P., Horgan J., Deckert P., “*Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivations and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists*” Journal of Forensic Sciences 59(2) (2014), pp. 425–435.

Both Christopher Hewitt³⁶ and Sarah Teich³⁷ incorporate triads, while Pantucci – whose typological approach offers the most extensive discussion of lone wolf Jihadist terrorism to date - has gone further including “lone wolf packs”³⁸. According to Pantucci, even if formal connections with precise command and control features is alien to lone wolf terrorist action, this does not preclude some forms of “*contact with operational extremists*” or the attacks realized by “*small group of similarly minded individuals who choose to engage together in an act of terrorism*”³⁹. Moreover, also the most recent and detailed definition provided by Simon recognizes these small cells giving fundamental importance, however, to a lack of hierarchical organizational structure: “*Lone wolf terrorism is the use or threat of violence or nonviolent sabotage, including cyber attacks, against government, society, business, the military (when the military is not an occupying force or involved in a war, insurgency, or state of hostilities), or any other target, by an individual acting alone or with minimal support from one or two other people (but not including actions during popular uprisings, riots, or violent protests), to further a political, social, religious, financial, or other related goals, or, when not having such an object, nevertheless has the same effect, or potential effect, upon government, society, business, or the military in terms of creating fear and/or disrupting daily life and/or causing government, society, business, or the military to react with heightened security and/or other responses*”⁴⁰. This definition, however, by shifting away its focus from perpetrator motivation, seems to be too slanted toward ex post facto perception of the crime. Moreover, these approaches expose their taxonomy to some objections that focus on the *prima facie* obvious consideration that individuals and groups are not the same. Nevertheless, definitional stalemates over the issues posed by lone wolves’ real or presumed loneliness represent only an apparent hurdle for the individuation of a general definition of the phenomenon and its, consequent,

³⁶ Hewitt C., “*Understanding Terrorism in America: From the Klan to al Qaeda*”, Routledge, New York, 2003

³⁷ Teich S., “*Trends and Developments in Lone Wolf Terrorism in the Western World: An Analysis of Terrorist Attacks and Attempted Attacks by Islamic Extremists*”, Herzliya, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2013

³⁸ Pantucci R., “*A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists*”, 2011

the lone wolf “types” he identifies range from loner (wholly self-radicalizing), lone wolf, lone wolf pack to lone attackers (“with clear command and control links with actual Al Qaeda core or affiliated groups”)

³⁹ Ivi.

⁴⁰ Simon J., Jenkins B., “*Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat*”, 2016.

operationalization. In particular, in the light of the heuristic definitional contribution provided by Feldman⁴¹ it should be noted that questions of leadership and direction are not necessarily incompatible with the notion of a lone wolf group. On the contrary, it seems that, rather than focusing on the difference between “lone” and “group” terrorism, distinction should be made between, on one hand, “solo terrorists” acting alone for operational strategies but whose attack is perpetrated under the direct control and instructions of a larger terrorist group and, on the other, self-activating lone wolf - or wolf packs- terrorists, whose attacks are not the result of a networked terrorist plot, but of a terrorist cycle fully individually undertaken and controlled by a lone wolf or by a small cell of similarly minded person who incur in a process of radicalization. In these terms, a degree of outside influence during the lone wolf terrorist cycle – especially in the initial phase of radicalisation and, later, as an instrumental source of knowledge – should be considered quite normal since it is generally agreed that the lone actor is usually inspired by the ideology of a terrorist group.

Nevertheless, the logistic control of the self-activated attack, with respect to timing, targeting and the terrorist cycle should be expected to remain under the command of the lone actor. Accordingly, individuals who have trained or radicalized within a structured group or movement, but whose attack is self-activated in terms of terrorist cycle should be considered lone wolf terrorists; for instance, Mohammed Bouyeri assassination of Theo Van Gogh on 2 November 2004 in Amsterdam should be considered the result of a lone wolf terrorist action, despite his participation in the Hofstad Network, as the terrorist-cycle was undertaken and realized by Bouyeri independently from the group. On the contrary, cases such as the would-be airline bombers Richard Reid (the “shoe bomber”) and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab (the “underwear bomber”) who – despite operating alone - acted under the direct command and instructions of Al-Qaeda networks, should be considered simply solo terrorists. Thus, in order to get a better analytical framework of analysis of the phenomenon, attention should be paid on the distinction between directed solo-actor terrorists and self-activated lone wolf terrorists. It is the absence of direction rather than the absence

⁴¹Feldman M., “*Comparative Lone Wolf Terrorism: Toward a Heuristic Definition, Democracy and Security*”, 2013

of links that should be considered a distinctive feature of lone wolf terrorism. It is with this distinction in mind that Feldman formulates his remarkable heuristic definition of lone wolf terrorism. According to him, *“lone wolf terrorism as self-directed political or religious violence undertaken through the “terrorist attack cycle” by individuals—typically perceived by its adherents to be an act of asymmetrical, propagandistic warfare—which derives from a variable amount of external influence and context (notably now online), rather than external command and control⁴²”*. This definition, despite having the merit of excluding impromptu acts of violence, reminds also us of the tangled nexus between the political or religiously driven violence of the lone wolf and the external influence exerted by his social environment in fostering his propensity to consider terrorism as a viable path⁴³. Moreover, the concept of terrorist attack cycle seems helpful in reminding that violent actions perpetrated as a result of mental illness impetus or reactive spree killings should be distinguished from self-activating terrorism, which—despite being undertaken by an individual rather than by a terrorist movement or cells—nevertheless must plot, prepare, and prime in a manner familiar to counterterrorism experts. On this point, Fred Burton and Scott Stewart have separated an alleged prevalence of some form of severe psychological disorder—such as depression or lack of social skills—found in loner terrorists by usefully distinguishing between lone wolves and *“lone nuts⁴⁴”*.

Furthermore, another fundamental terminological distinction that should be brought to light is that between the notion of lone wolf terrorists and lone assassins. Distinction between terrorism and criminal intent or personal motivation has been highlighted by Spaaij study, according to who: *“violent acts by stand-alone individuals that were carried out for reasons of personal motivation or simply with criminal intent should not be considered lone wolf terrorism”*.⁴⁵ Violence motivated exclusively by financial gain or personal vengeance arguably should not be defined as terrorism

⁴² Ivi.

⁴³ Wikström H., Bouhana N., *“Analizing Radicalization and Terror: A situational Action Theory”*, The Handbook of the Criminology of Terrorism, 2017

⁴⁴ Burton F., and Stewart S., *“The ‘Lone Wolf’ Disconnect”*, Stratfor, 2008

⁴⁵ Spaaij R., *“Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention”*, London, 2012

because the latter is generally directed in pursuit of larger political, ideological, or religious aims. Terrorist acts have a political rather than a merely personal or criminal orientation. Accordingly, the immediate, direct target of the attack is usually of secondary importance to its secondary target or its broader message or effect. In other words, what separates the actions of the lone wolf terrorist from those of the “lone assassin” is the fact that they are properly terrorists and, accordingly, their violence displays broader political, ideological, or religious cause than the lone assassin’s action.

Thus, so far from an analysis of the main definitional issues posed by lone wolf terrorism to the literature we can gain a preliminary impression of the complexity of this phenomenon. Control and composition are two of the main issues that makes defining lone wolf terrorism challenging and thus, the analytical operationalization of a possible definition even harder. However, some fundamental insights have been gained so far that may help future research to focus on particular characteristic of the phenomenon, differentiating it from group-based terrorism and other kinds of crime. In particular, the absence of control on the lone wolf terrorist cycle from other terrorists – that does not mean that the lone actor can not recur to technical assistance for the realization of his terrorist cycle. On the contrary, at a certain level, an external form of influence, at least at an ideological level should be considered possible in the formulation of a workable definition. Otherwise, especially on the rise of the current wave of Jihadist lone wolf terrorism, theorizations will run a risk of inconsistency. Not by chance, the crucial relation between lone wolf terrorists and their social environments and groups of reference, has catalysed scholar’s attention especially on the wave of nowadays rise in terrorist attacks of Islamic mould, perpetrated by single actors targeting their own Western countries. Thus, in order to get a better historical overview of such a nexus, it seems opportune to look at its evolution throughout the history of lone wolf terrorism. So, in the following paragraph attention will be focused on the ideological or religious framework in which lone wolves have ended up finding a new “role” and that has varied across the centuries.

1.3 An historical overview

Even if lone wolf terrorism most enthusiastic supporters in the last few years have been extremist Muslims and extreme-right activists, as well exposed by Feldman, they are not the only ones— across history, there have also been individual acts of “eco-terrorism” against symbolic targets, animal rights or abortion activists, and even, with sad irony, anti-war campaigners⁴⁶.

Scholars have usually identified different “waves” of lone wolf terrorism. According to David Rapoport, we are experiencing the fourth wave of religious self-activating terrorism, while other overlapping waves have been anarchist, anti-colonial, new left and religious terrorism⁴⁷. Instead, Jeffrey Kaplan has argued we are now in a fifth wave marked by radical localism and rabid xenophobia⁴⁸. However, the literature generally agrees in tracing lone wolf terrorism roots in nineteenth-century anarchism⁴⁹ and, more precisely, in 1870, when Mikhail Bakunin in its *Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis*⁵⁰ illustrated the concept of “propaganda of the deed,” maintaining: “we must spread our principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda.” The following 60 years were ignited by the anarchist bombings violence targeting royal and bourgeois symbols. Among their remarkable attacks, anarchist lone wolves were responsible of King Umberto I of Italy assassination in 1900, the destructive bombing on Wall Street in New York in 1920 and the bombing of Cafè Terminus in France on 1894, realized by the 21-years-old Émile Henry. Interestingly, similarly to what will state Anders Breivik more than one century after, during his trial, the 21-year-old terrorist provided a kind of apologia for his self-declared war: “*In the merciless war that we have declared on the*

⁴⁶Feldman M., “Comparative Lone Wolf Terrorism: Toward a Heuristic Definition, Democracy and Security”, 2013

⁴⁷ Rapoport D., “The Four Waves of Modern Terrorism” in *Attacking Terrorism: Elements of a Grand Strategy*, eds. Audrey Kurth Cronin and James M. Ludes (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 46–73

⁴⁸ Kaplan J., Löw H., Malkki L., “Lone Wolf and Autonomous Cell Terrorism”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2014

⁴⁹ Bakker E., de Graaf B., “Lone Wolves: How to Prevent this Phenomenon?”, ICCT Expert Meeting Paper, 2010

⁵⁰ Bakunin, M., “*Letters to a French Man on the Present Crisis*”, 1870

*bourgeoisie, we ask no mercy. We mete out death and we must face it. For that reason I await your verdict with indifference*⁵¹”.

Since this first wave – considered by Feldman as “*proto-lone wolf terrorism*” – lone wolf terrorist actions have shown to be the result of a process personally constructed and undertaken in terms of motivation, targets, and justification. Moreover, two features already present among anarchist bombers will continue to characterize the following waves. The first one is represented by the already fundamental role played by new media – at that time, telegraphs and penny press - in spreading radicalizing material throughout space and time and, thus, fostering lone wolves’ radicalization. Secondly, lone wolves considered – and still consider as we will see in next paragraphs – their attacks as acts of asymmetrical warfare against their own society, more than as justified crimes⁵². That’s why their actions have been usually directed against symbolic rather than strategic targets.

In the 1960s and 1970s, waves of right-wing and left-wing terrorism struck the US and Western Europe fostered by the ideological tension produced by the Cold War. In particular, despite both lines advocated, through their propaganda channels, the radicalization of lone actors – including left wing extremist groups, such as the Earth Liberation Front and the Animal Liberation Front, however, the modern concept of lone-wolf terrorism was developed by right-wing extremists in the USA. A fundamental theoretical impetus for political violence arose stimulated by the publication in 1978 of “The Turner Diaries” by William Luther Pierce⁵³. The National Alliance ideologue fictionalized a number of episodes based on the deeds of Joseph Paul Franklin, a neo-Nazi serial killer who spread terror across the United States promoting a race war between 1977 and 1980. On April 19, 1995 Timothy McVeigh, former army sergeant US, veteran of the Gulf War, killed 168 people at the FBI’s Alfred P. Murrah building, in the centre of Oklahoma City. For the attack, he used a Ryder truck rented in Kansas containing homemade explosives realized with a fertilizer. His radicalization occurred

⁵¹ Merriman J., “*Is This the First Terrorist of the Modern Age?*,” BBC Magazine

⁵² M. Feldman, “*Comparative Lone Wolf Terrorism: Toward a Heuristic Definition, Democracy and Security*”, 2013

⁵³ Pierce, W.L., “*The Turner Diaries*”, National Vanguard Books, 1978

after some bloody operations occurred in the 1990s in the United States, directly involving the FBI and / or the police. McVeigh remained deeply disturbed by these violent events – in particular, the Waco operation - feeding a hatred of the federal government, he was already incubating since his return from war. He started believing the Government was engaging in a war against its own citizens and, as many other right-wing lone wolf terrorists found his theoretical framework reading Pierce's novel, *The Turner Diaries*.

Furthermore, lone wolf terrorism rise was fostered by the development of the concept of Leaderless Resistance, proposed by Col. Ulius Louis Amoss in 1962, tireless opponent of Communism, who was the founder of International Service of Information Incorporated, located in Baltimore: his theories on extremist groups organizational structure were primarily directed against the threat of eventual Communist take-over in the United States. His concept of *Leaderless Resistance: through a phantom cell structure*, is meant as a social resistance strategy in which small, independent groups (cells), including individuals (lone wolf), challenge an established institution such as a law, economic system, social order or government. This conceptualization inspired the imagination of US populist right who feared conspiracies by the government to round up “patriots” after the Cold War. In 1983, Louis Beam, a Klux Klan activist, inspired by Amoss work, published the essay “*Leaderless Resistance*”⁵⁴, affirming the necessity of this method to overcome the pervasive power exercised by national states in individuating, penetrating and disrupting the traditionally structured, pyramidal terrorist movements. He wrote: “*As honest men who have banded together into groups or associations of a political or religious nature are falsely labeled "domestic terrorists" or "cultists" and suppressed, it will become necessary to consider other methods of organization - or as the case may very well call for: non-organization*”, and again: “*Utilizing the Leaderless Resistance concept, all individuals and groups operate independently of each other, and never report to a central headquarters or single leader for direction or instruction, as would those who belong to a typical pyramid*

⁵⁴Michael G., “*Leaderless Resistance and the Extreme Right*” in *Lone Wolf Terror and the Rise of Leaderless Resistance*, Nashville: University of Vanderbilt Press, ch. 2, 2012

organization⁵⁵”. As Kaplan underlined: *With Beam’s formulation, the theory of leaderless resistance was essentially complete. All that remained was to adapt and disseminate it to ever wider constituencies of the far right wing*⁵⁶”. No sooner said than done, in the early 1990s, the concept of leaderless resistance, encouraged by the growth of the internet, which has promoted its increasing circulation among extremist right groups in United States and Europe as well⁵⁷, in Kaplan’s words “*was on everyone lips*⁵⁸”. Its European adaptation began soon to be referenced by far-right milieus in Germany and Scandinavia⁵⁹. Among the most devoted to this approach there were Tom Metzger and Alex Curtis, two American-based neo-Nazis leading supporters of lone actor attacks as a terrorist tactic. In May 2000, Metzger, leader of White Aryan Resistance, realized a call to arms on the WAR website, entitled “*Laws for the Lone Wolf*”, thus contributing to the popularization of this concept. He wrote: “*I am preparing for the coming War. I am ready when the line is crossed ... I am the underground Insurgent fighter and independent. I am in your neighborhoods, schools, police departments, bars, coffee shops, malls, etc. I am, The Lone Wolf!*⁶⁰”

Soon, through the rise of new digital channels extremist groups have started disseminating radicalizing material across the web, amplifying their audience. Illiberal far right, through often-anonymized websites and postings, has been an early enthusiastic adopter of this technology, stretching back to Don Black’s Stormfront website, founded in 1995 and now home to hundreds of thousands of far-right members⁶¹. Thus, not surprisingly, so far, US and EU lone wolf terrorism has been mainly driven by an extremist right-wing matrix, such as that inspiring Breivik radicalization. As Ramòn Spaaij tersely portrayed in 2012, over the last 20 years,

⁵⁵Beam L., “*Leaderless Resistance*” *The Seditonist* 12 (Feb. 1992 [first published 1983]), www.louisbeam.com/leaderless.htm.

⁵⁶Kaplan J., “*Leaderless Resistance*”, *Terrorism & Political Violence* 9, no. 3, 1997

⁵⁷R. Spaaij “*Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention*”, London, 2012

⁵⁸Ibidem.

⁵⁹Gardell, M. “*Crusader Dreams: Oslo 22/7, Islamophobia, and the Quest for a Monocultural Europe*”. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2014

⁶⁰Morris T., “*Dark Ideas: How Neo-Nazi and Violent Jihadi Ideologues Shaped Modern Terrorism*”, in *Political Science*, 2017

⁶¹Feldman M., “*Comparative Lone Wolf Terrorism: Toward a Heuristic Definition, Democracy and Security*”, 2013

American far-right is still the more faithful adherent to the concept of *leaderless resistance*⁶². Looking at data, the CLAT research project, “*Lone Wolf Terrorism*⁶³” published by Pantucci and based on Global Terrorism Database, refers to a working definition of lone wolf terrorism that entails the terrorist acts perpetrated by a single actor as well as small cells, capturing instances of lone-actor terrorism – both plots and attacks – across thirty European countries (EU member states, in addition to Norway and Switzerland) between 2000 and 2015. According to this study, around 80% of deaths occurred in this period from lone-wolf terrorism resulted from right-wing extremists, nationalists and other forms of political extremism, rather than from Jihadist inspired. A third of all perpetrators were right-wing extremists, almost as high as the 38% who were religious fanatics. However, right-wing extremists have not remained for a long time the main supporter of lone wolf terrorism. The compilation “*The Hate Directory*” of 2010, realized by the American instructional technologist Raymond Franklin, individuated 165 pages of listed Web sites considered to “*advocate violence against, separation from, defamation of, deception about, or hostility toward others based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation*⁶⁴.” Since the early 2000s, the most enthusiastic supporters of the leaderless resistance logic have become Al-Qaida-inspired jihadist groups, who instigated a sharp rise of radicalization on the American and European soil. The first lone wolf terrorist attack of Jihadist mould occurred in Europe has been Bouyeri assassination of Theo Van Gogh in 2004; since then, the number of the attacks perpetrated by a single individual has increased steadily. In particular, as we will see in the following chapter, Abu Musab al-Suri’s book, *A Global Islamic Resistance Call*, published on the internet in December 2004 encouraged Islamist militants to engage in acts of violence individually or in small cells⁶⁵.

⁶²Spaaij R. “*Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention*”, London, 2012

⁶³Pantucci R., “*A Typology of Lone Wolves: Preliminary Analysis of Lone Islamist Terrorists*”, 2011

⁶⁴ Franklin R., “*The Hate Directory*”, 2010, www.hatedirectory.com/hatedir.pdf.

⁶⁵See Fredholm M., “*Understanding Lone Actor Terrorism: Past Experiences, Future Outlook, Responses Strategies*”, London, Routledge, 2016; Michael G., “*Leaderless Resistance: the new face of terrorism*”. 2012

Most recently, during and after the territorial defeat, IS has also embraced a Jihadist form of leaderless resistance. through the dissemination across the web of radicalizing material that will be analysed in the following chapters. However, it seems important to note some further insights suggested by data. From Europol 2017 report⁶⁶, we can observe an overall increasing stream of, not only Jihadist, but also ethno-nationalist and left-wing extremist attacks. A particular increase has been registered over the past two years, in the rate of extremist individuals and groups targeting asylum seekers and ethnic minorities in general. This leads to the consideration that as fast as the Jihadist terrorist front is working for fostering lone wolf violent radicalization on the European soil, extremist political groups, in particular ethno-nationalists, may be working for the same scope.

1.4 Towards a comprehensive definition?

From the history of lone wolf terrorism, we can get some fundamental insight over this issue contributing to a better understanding of its evolution and main traits. In particular, in the light of an analysis of the evolution of the phenomenon, it seems that earlier literature approaches fail to understand both the particular context from which *“lone wolf” ideology comes, and the community of support that backs up such solo actor terrorism⁶⁷.”* That this is true, however, should not disqualify the merits of heuristic researches covering the issue, and that, instead, should properly add nuance to constructions of this phenomenon.

First of all, lone wolf terrorism is not a new phenomenon and it is not exclusively related to a specific ideological extremist threat. On the contrary, the phenomenon seems to reflect more a pan-ideological tactic that as Feldman clearly portray *“was forged in the fires of nineteenth-century anarchism before being taken up again in post-war Europe and the United States by, in particular, far-right extremists and, more*

⁶⁶ European Police Office, available at: www.europol.europa.eu

⁶⁷Feldman M., *“Comparative Lone Wolf Terrorism: Toward a Heuristic Definition, Democracy and Security”*, 2013

recently, *jihadi Islamist solo-actor terrorists*⁶⁸”. That is to say, lone actor terrorism is a terrorist method of action and, more precisely, an homegrown terrorist method of action, personally constructed by individuals who, through a process of self – directed radicalization, end up undertaking violent actions against parts of their own society. Through the history, they have tended to see their attacks as symbolic acts of asymmetric war against different targets of their own society: the bourgeoisie, colonial powers, post-war capitalism, or multiculturalism in Europe and the United States⁶⁹.

Secondly, across the centuries, radical ideological narratives, especially when fictionalized as in *The Turner Diaries* novel, have exerted a fundamental prompt for the rise of lone wolf terrorism waves. The increasingly pervasive evolution of communication channels has, thus, amplified the potential appeal of such narratives. Furthermore, social relations in both the real and the new virtual dimensions have demonstrated to exert a considerable influence on the violent radicalization lived by lone wolves, especially those channelling individual’s personal frustration toward radical totalitarian belief⁷⁰. Thus, rather than being an exclusively individual process, lone wolves’ pathway of radicalization seems to involve, to some extent, an almost regular external form of indoctrination, exerted by the radical ideologies elaborated by larger extremist milieus and terrorist organizations. Nevertheless, as it has been previously noted, lone wolves tend to maintain the full control on their terrorist cycle. Thus, their – at least ideological – affiliation to larger groups or cells should not overshadow the self-activating nature of their radicalization.

Thirdly, on the other side of the barricades, structured terrorist organizations and radical movements have started using lone wolf terrorists as a strategic asset of low-level targeting. This scenario has been also recently suggested by a number of scholars, including Hoffman who points out that al-Qaeda also in the past purposely incorporated the use of lone wolf attacks as operational cover in order to facilitate larger and more

⁶⁸ Ivi.

⁶⁹ Ivi.

⁷⁰ Schuurman B., Lindekilde L., Malthaner S., O’Connor F., P. Gill & N. Bouhana: “*End of the Lone Wolf: The Typology that Should Not Have Been*”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2017

coordinated attacks⁷¹. This is to say that, if on the one side, lone wolf terrorist actions should be seen as resulting from the independent terrorist cycle undertaken by individuals against their own society, on the other side, from terrorist organizations point of view, lone wolves can be considered as operational units with loosely tied affiliation to them – to be used in place of cells – that have the potential of realizing effective violent attacks with less risk for the organization’s high ranks of being tracked down because, in most of the cases, the bond between the lone wolf and the terror group is more based on an ideological affiliation rather than on concrete direct contacts, much easier to track down.

To sum up, three key features has been identified so far as main characteristics of lone wolf terrorism across the centuries:

- Terrorist organizations and groups of ideological reference are interested in promoting lone wolf terrorism as a strategic method of low-level targeting. Thus, they exert a considerable influence on fostering this kind of homegrown terrorism.
- Radical ideological narratives and communication channels – specifically, nowadays the internet - exert a determinant influence on the emergence of this phenomenon, thus, fostering a process of identification, even if merely ideological, of the lone wolf with the radical or terrorist milieus promoting such narratives.
- Lone wolf terrorism is a form of homegrown terrorism, that refers to a pan-ideological tactic, in which, individuals through a process of self – directed radicalization, end up undertaking violent actions against parts of their own society.

Accordingly, in order to give a deep understanding of the lone wolf threat posed by Jihadist terrorism and how European Union institutions should deal with it, the next

⁷¹Hoffman B., Reinares F., “*Al-Qaeda’s continued core strategy and disquieting leader-led trajectory*”, 2013

chapters will be dedicated to deepening our understanding of the phenomenon through the analysis of these three main aspects characterizing lone wolf terrorism. Thus, this study of the Jihadist wave of lone wolf terrorism will begin investigating the structural ties between the lone wolf terrorist and current Jihadist groups fostering their radicalization. Such an issue will be analysed starting with an overview of the current operational strategy adopted by IS and Al-Qaeda.

CHAPTER TWO

THE JIHADI-INSPIRED WAVE OF “LONE WOLF” TERRORISM

2.1 The Jihadist recruiting strategy

Looking at the current Islamic wave of lone wolf terrorism that has started spreading throughout Europe since early 2000s, it seems that a progressive operationalization of the concept of *Leaderless Resistance* has reflected a change of tactic in the jihadist front, shifting from complex, mass casualty attacks - to an increase in small-scale attacks perpetrated by individuals with loosely tied affiliation to networked cells⁷². In particular, an increasingly decentralized organizational structure behind incidents on the European soil reveals the complexity and plurality of the jihadist front that continues to evolve changing its face. According to Jordan analysis of Jihadi terrorism in Western Europe, since 2005, if complex organizations have continued to be associated to a number of terrorist attacks⁷³, nonetheless the tendency noted indicates an increase in the number of groups acting on their own initiative, either as independent cells or as lone wolves⁷⁴.

To assess new threats, the European intelligence has been forced to change the way it works. For example, it has had to develop new skills to stop online extremist propaganda, and, in turn, international terrorism has changed its face adopting new

⁷² Michael G., “*Leaderless Resistance and the Extreme Right*” in *Lone Wolf Terror and the Rise of Leaderless Resistance*, Nashville: University of Vanderbilt Press, ch. 2, 2012

⁷³ Jordan J., “*Analysis of Jihadi Terrorism Incidents in Western Europe, 2001–2010*”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 35:5, 382-404, 2012

⁷⁴ Hoffman B., “*The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism*”, *Foreign Affairs* 87, pp. 133–138, 2008; Sageman M. and Hoffman B., “*Does Osama Still Call the Shots? Debating the Containment of al Qaeda’s Leadership*”, *Foreign Affairs* 87, pp. 163–166, 2002

strategic kind of attacks and diversified methods of recruitment⁷⁵. As highlighted by several terrorism studies, the contemporary operating environment has displaced the highly selective Salafi-Jihadism as a matter of strategic necessity⁷⁶. In other words, the movement has been forced to adopt a strategy that casts a wide net across the globe⁷⁷ searching for already self-radicalized individuals or potential terrorists fitting a precise socio-psychological profile, who can be – through a process of indoctrination – converted to their cause and attacks their own Western home countries from within, or, use their Western citizenship to move easily across borders reaching the Caliphate.

Looking at the current set of geopolitical equilibria governing the Middle East – with a particular focus on the Syrian conflict and the Jihadist galaxy - it becomes clearer how the lone-wolf strategy benefits IS and al-Qaeda in several ways. In first instance, with its territorial defeats in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, IS is desperate for payback, and attacks by inspired supporters not only serve that purpose but are also an important force multiplier that works as a swarming tactic⁷⁸. As the Italian political sociologist Orsini portray in his *“IS: I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli”*, IS main goal so far has been to build a safe territorial state: a Caliphate in Syria and Iraq, and attack other Middle Eastern countries, like Arabia Saudita and Kuwait contrarily to Al Qaeda, who, across the decades has demonstrated to be more interested in promoting terrorist attacks against Western countries – whether these in the form of lone wolf or guerrilla style attacks⁷⁹. Moreover, differently from al-Qaeda, who has affirmed the intention to build the Caliphate through the use of force, IS has maintained the necessity to build the Islamic State by *“winning Muslims’ hearts and minds”*, thus attributing in his struggle for affirmation, a much more weighted role to its propaganda strategies⁸⁰.

⁷⁵ Rasheed A., *“Countering the Threat of Radicalisation: Theories, Programmes and Challenges, Journal of Defence Studies”*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 39-76, 2016

⁷⁶ Carson J., *“The Global Jihadist Movement: The Most Lethal Ideology?”*, 2016

⁷⁷ Lewis J.A., *“Assessing the Risks of Cyber Terrorism, Cyber War and Other Cyber Threats”*, 2012

⁷⁸ Mendelsohn B., *“IS Lone-Wolf Strategy”*, Foreign Affairs, 2016

⁷⁹ Orsini A., *“IS: I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli”*, 2016

⁸⁰ Ivi.

However, when the Western coalition led by USA has threatened IS territorial capacity its offensive terrorist reaction has not taken long to come. This happens because, as highlighted by some of the greatest scholars of the terrorist world – including, Bruce Hoffman, Marc Sageman, Ariel Merari and Martha Crenshaw – terrorists are not crazy. On the contrary, they behave rationally, following the same logic patterns of other people. Accordingly, they attack those who they think are threatening their lives. Thus, IS strategic considerations have increasingly shown correlation with the principle according to which, “*when they recede at home, they push forward abroad*”⁸¹. In other words, being IS principal goal the consolidation of a *safe heaven*: a living space where to build the prosperous Caliphate, its violence is driven towards Western countries when these are an obstacle this project. To take an example, the terrible mass-casualty attack occurred in Paris on November 13th 2015, was realized only after the formation of the US-led coalition in August, and after the intensification of bombardments against IS controlled territories, led by the entrance in the battlefield of the Russian air forces by the end of September⁸².

Accordingly, now that IS has been progressively militarily defeated on its territories and its operational capabilities strongly reduced, also his propagandistic strategy has been changing its core appealing message: from national consolidating propaganda attracting new western affiliates in becoming *foreign fighters* on the Syrian battlefield, to war stimulating messages aimed at fostering home-grown forms of terrorism targeting the Western coalition in their own homes⁸³. The benefits of this “recruiting” strategy for Jihadists groups are several. First of all, promoting homegrown terrorism in Western countries is cheap and relatively easy. On the part of Jihadist groups, it requires no planning or knowledge of the perpetrators. Secondly, lone wolves frustrate Western authorities’ preventive measures since they cannot be identified ahead of time and shelters the group’s Western networks from possible exposure. Third, such attacks are damaging to both Western nation’s psychology and political leadership, raising fear and inciting alarmism among civilians while making governments appear

⁸¹ Ivi.

⁸² Muir J., “*Islamic State: Raqqa's loss seals rapid rise and fall*”, BBC News, 2017

⁸³ Connable B., Lander N., Jackson K., “*Beating the Islamic State*”, RAND, National Defense Research Institute, 2017

helpless and even incompetent in the eyes of their electorate. And fourth, the worldwide proliferation of lone-wolf terrorism boosts IS' image, demonstrating its reach and appeal to both enemies and sympathizers⁸⁴.

To understand the incidence of this tactical shift for the rise of jihadist lone wolf terrorism, it is important to go back to the words of IS spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani who was killed on August 2016 in Aleppo. On 21 May 2016, al-Adnani released a speech that sounded like a call of activation for volunteers that wanted to join IS mission without travelling to the Caliphate, but, instead, in their places of residence: *“Get prepared, be ready ... to make it a month [Ramadan] of calamity everywhere for the non-believers ... especially for the fighters and supporters of the caliphate in Europe and America. The smallest action you do in their heartland is better and more enduring to us than what you would if you were with us. If one of you hoped to reach the Islamic State, we wish we were in your place to punish the Crusaders day and night⁸⁵.”* In particular, it is important to underline how al-Adnani call for lone actor terrorism marked a fundamental prompt in IS propaganda strategy: namely, if since June 2014 - when it announced the re-establishment of the caliphate – IS has firmly encouraged its Western adherents in travelling to join the Islamic States, re-enacting the historical migration (Hijrah) of Prophet Muhammad to Medina in 622 AD to escape from Mecca, stating that all Muslims were under the religious obligation to do it, al-Adnani speech of May 2016 pushed for the perpetration of terrorist attacks on the Western soil, stating that this was even preferable than travelling to join the Islamic State⁸⁶.

Practical guidance for lone actors have also been issued by IS on its multi-language magazine *Rumiyah*, with a profusion of articles under the title “Just Terror Tactics⁸⁷”, suggesting IS' sympathizers how to perpetrate terrorist attacks using everyday life tools: knives, vehicles or arson and how to maximize the number of victims. Less than a month after al-Adnani call, in the night of June 13, Larossi Abballa,

⁸⁴ Mendelsohn B., *“IS Lone-Wolf Strategy”*, Foreign Affairs, 2016

⁸⁵ Withnall A., *“IS official calls for 'lone wolf' attacks in US and Europe during Ramadan”*, The Independent, 2016

⁸⁶ Hoffman B., *“The Coming IS–al Qaeda Merger. It's Time to Take the Threat Seriously”*, The Global Terror Threat and Counterterrorism Challenges Facing the Next Administration, CTC, 2016

⁸⁷ *Rumiyah*, issue 9, *“The Ruling of the Beligerant Christians”*, al-Hayāt Media Center

a French 25-year-old of Moroccan origin, killed in Magnanville, near Paris, the deputy commander of the Judicial Police in Les Mureaux, Jean-Baptiste Salvint, and his wife Jessica Schneider. He stabbed the man shouting Allah Akbar and later beheaded his partner⁸⁸. Before being shot down by French special forces, he claimed he acted in response to al-Adnani call “*to kill the non-believers in their homes and with their families*”⁸⁹. Son of Moroccans immigrants, Larossi Abballa, was born in the suburbs of Paris, in Mantes-la-Jolie. Like other young boys at risk of that neighborhood, Abballa had a history of small crimes, including thefts and stolen goods. Before the attack he was already known to French authorities and in 2013 he was sentenced to three years in prison by the Paris Correctional Court for participation in a Jihadist branch operating between France and Pakistan. The group's goal, according to reports from the AFP agency at the time, was to prepare the men who wanted to affiliate with the Islamic holy war, with the aim of sending them later to Pakistan as volunteer fighters. In the words of his defender Hervé Denis, “*He was a psychologically lost man, who have had the impression to serve a mission*”. “*The brunch – Denis continues - it was not well structured, something remedied, certainly not comparable to the Belgian branches. There were no weapons or explosives*”⁹⁰. According to Marc Trevidic, the judge who sentenced him, Abballa did not play a central role in the group, but was only a minor figure. Quoted by *Le Monde*, Abballa himself during the trial had referred to his process of radicalization occurred on the internet, saying “*I needed recognition, I did not work and I had just rejected the Cap (professional diploma). They began to talk with me about religion and they comforted me*”⁹¹.

After Abballa lone wolf attack, several others have occurred in Europe in a steep growing trend, followed by alleged claims of allegiance to the Black Flag call, thus revealing how the lone wolves Islamist universe, which now takes much more advantage of the Telegram channel of Twitter or Facebook, reacts to underground terrorists driven inputs. Thus, it is not surprising that the most targeted European

⁸⁸ BBC News, “Who was French police killer Larossi Abballa?”, 2016

⁸⁹ BFM, “Magnanville: qui était Larossi Abballa, le meurtrier des deux policiers?”, 2016

⁹⁰ Huffpost, “Ce que l'on sait de Larossi Abballa, meurtrier des policiers de Magnanville”, 2016

⁹¹ Vincent E, “Magnanville: Larossi Abballa, histoire d'une haine « anti-police »”, 2016

countries from 2014 to 2017 have been United Kingdom and France, namely the two leading European nations in conducting air bombing attacks in Syria and Iraq over the same time framework.

Proofs of the potential destructiveness of this tactic have been provided – among the others - by the Bastille Day killings occurred in Nice in the evening of 14 July 2016, when Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlej, a 31-year-old Tunisian, living in France, drove a truck for two kilometres through the crowds on the Promenade des Anglais, killing 85 people and causing serious injuries to 201; and, of course, the most recent Manchester Arena bombing of May 2017, perpetrated by Salman Ramadan Abed, a 22 years old British Muslim of Libyan ancestry, who detonated an home-made bomb after Ariana Grande concert, killing twenty-three people, including himself, and injuring over 500. Commenting the suicide-bombing attack, Richard Fenning, global CEO at political consultancy Control Risks, said: *“Recent attacks on European soil reveal the development of self-radicalized individuals. These people have chosen to duck below society's radar, got personal issues that lead them to self-alienation as well as a willingness to inflict serious violence⁹²”*.

Furthermore, another source of concern brought by the rise of lone wolf terrorism in Western Europe seems to arise from the increasingly fragmentation of the Jihadist galaxy. Recent trends show that terrorist attacks against Western countries since IS progressive affirmation within the Jihadi groups coalition – have resulted not only from the hatred relations these organizations have with the West, but also from a rising competition among themselves⁹³. It has been observed, as Orsini defines it, a *“damned regularity”* beyond recent Islamic attacks, according to which, when IS catalyse the international attention on itself – through some territorial consolidation or through attacks – al Qaeda try to regain visibility with the realization of more sensational massacres⁹⁴. An example of this dreadfully trend can be gained from Charlie Hebdo attack on January 7, 2015, revendicated by Al-Qaeda, occurred when international

⁹²CNBC, Nyshka Chandran, “Manchester attack likely the work of lone wolf than terror network, analyst says” (2017)

⁹³ Lewis B., *“The Revolt of Islam”*, 2001

⁹⁴Orsini A., *“IS: I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli”*, 2016

media were principally focused on the IS siege of Kobane, the city defended by Kurds on the Syrian border⁹⁵. This is due to the rising rivalry in the Jihadi galaxy between the two leading forces, namely al-Qaeda and IS, who compete to get the loyalties of other groups. In particular, fragmentation and competing dynamics among Jihadist formation seems to rise the amount of total violence against their enemies. Not surprisingly, looking at the statistical data provided by the “*Global Terrorism Database*” (GTD), in last four years, the total number of terrorist attacks occurred in the world has showed an overall increasing trend. Since 2013, when 10.000 attacks occurred causing 18.000 deaths, the trend has always risen arriving to 13.488 of 2016, killing 34.676 people⁹⁶. According to Europol 2017 report⁹⁷, Al-Qaeda nominal head Ayman al-Zawahiri - who has succeeded Osama Bin Laden in leading the organization - since 2016, has claimed in several video messages al-Qaeda increasing efforts to reject IS’ claims of legitimacy as leading group of all Muslims and declaration of the Caliphate. For instance, he exhorted opposition groups fighting in Syria not to let the country become controlled by IS, but, instead, trust its local affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra⁹⁸. At the same time, Al-Qaeda has taken inspiration by IS communication formats targeting audiences in the West, calling for a rise of homegrown terrorist attacks in Western countries.

In particular, the most effective communicative tool used by IS to spread its jihadist educational messages in the West has been generally considered to be the publication of *Dabiq*, a magazine in the English language that, since its first publication in July 2014, works as a source of ideological and operational knowledge for aspiring terrorists⁹⁹. *Dabiq* refers properly to the name of a city appearing in a *hadith*, namely, a tale on an episode of Mohammed life. Such a tale describes a series of events resembling the Cristian Apocalypse, and thus the eternal fight between Good and Bad.

Similarly, Al- Qaeda brand-building tool *Inspire*, appeared on the virtual scene

⁹⁵ Ibidem.

⁹⁶ GTD, 2017

⁹⁷ European Police Office, TE-SAT, “*European Union Terrorism Trend Report*”, 2017 available at: www.europol.europa.eu

⁹⁸ Ivi.

⁹⁹ Maggioni M., Magri P., “*Twitter e Jihad, la comunicazione dell’IS*”, 2015

for the first time in 2010 and, has progressively adopted publication formats resembling IS propagandistic strategies. For instance, on the mold of IS deep web dissemination of practical guidances, al-Qaeda has introduced in June 2016 the *Inspire Guides*, a new format providing comments and recommendations on completed and foiled attacks perpetrated by homegrown terrorists and, in particular, giving practical instructions on how to maximise the impact of lone actor attacks in the West¹⁰⁰. Therefore, beyond last years' sharp rise in radicalization numbers in Western Europe, Jihadist groups are competing to capture widest audiences to convert - through a totalitarian ideological education - into "jihadi soldiers", under their own brand.

2.2 Lone wolf-cell connections: The Bouyeri Case

Lone wolves' ideological affiliation to larger radical melieus works as a fundamental pushing element for their violent radicalization as it has been acknowledged by several studies in the literature. Such an ideological bond has been recently "formalized" by IS, who claims lone actor attacks in Western countries through it's A'maq News Agency. Perpetrators have been requested to leave some kind of evidence stating the motivation of the attack and allegiance of the lone wolf to IS, such as a note attached to the victim's body or a last will. In change, IS pay a public tribute to lone wolves issuing short messages labelling them as "*soldiers of the Islamic State*¹⁰¹", thus, fostering a process of self-identification of the lone wolf with the group of reference while placing the entire responsibility of the success of the attack on perpetrator and at the same time incentivizing other potential terrorists to act.

Accordingly, and as also previously underlined, it would be unfeasible to consider total isolation as a main driver of creation of the lone wolf typology, since that social ties,

¹⁰⁰ European Police Office, TE-SAT, "*European Union Terrorism Trend Report*", 2017 available at: www.europol.europa.eu

¹⁰¹ Bloom M., "Constructing Expertise: Terrorist Recruitment and "Talent Spotting" in the PIRA, Al Qaeda, and IS", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 40:7, 603-623, 2017

even if discontinuous in time and weak in nature, will undeniably play a fundamental role in the radicalization phase of the to-be lone wolf. Shuurman study, based on a three-year empirical research project, demonstrates that, among 125 cases of lone wolves taken under scrutiny, around 86% of the actors communicated their intentions to others, either fellow terrorists, close relations or family members, and 58% of them also provided clear and undeniable indications of actual violent intent¹⁰². Furthermore, if we agree on this assumption under a law enforcer or intelligence operator perspective, we would renounce to any possibility of actually detect and contain the lone wolves' actions, as the main avenues for detection and eventually convictions are indeed the social context, the groups of reference and political and ideological affiliations which, per se, constitute a social construction. While the assumption of total isolation could provide some answers, it seems to hold only on a limited set of cases, thus not helping us in the formulation of a workable theory nor in coherent and effective policies proposals.

These social ties, although being difficult to detect especially when they occur on the internet, exist at a certain level and are worth of analysis in a theoretical and practical perspective alike. Such ties are not undetectable as the media would want to portrait, on the contrary, plot-relevant ones exist and usually are continuous in time, thus allowing law enforcement to exploit them in the context of prevention. Data show how, while secrecy in theory remains a well-established necessity, in practice the lone wolves are not trained as “normal” terrorists would be, therefore they do not have the operational capacity to maintain complete silence and not leaking their intentions to others, months or even years before the attack is eventually put in practice¹⁰³. As many deviant personalities, they appear to need a certain level of acceptance and recognisance from what they perceive to be their equals, or sub-culture, thus exposing them to possible leaks and preventive actions from police enforcement, if said groups are taken under account and kept under close control.

¹⁰²Schuurman B., Lindekilde L., Malthaner S., Francis O'Connor, Paul Gill & Noémie Bouhana, “*End of the Lone Wolf: The Typology that Should Not Have Been*”, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 2017

¹⁰³ Pantucci R., Ellis C., Roy van Zuijdewijn J., Bakker E., Gomis B., Palombi S., Smith M., “*Lone-Actor Terrorism*”, Final Report, RUSI, Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 11, 2016

Thus, what it should be stressed here is that lone actors' radicalization process must be understood under a relational perspective. Recent studies have demonstrated how loneliness is not an inherent quality of these individuals¹⁰⁴, on the contrary we should consider the radicalization path as a social process triggered and shaped by the individuals' personality, expectations of recognitions from their equals and often poor social skills, that disallow such individuals to fit in the society they are currently living in. accordingly, it should not be surprising that many potential lone wolves, including among the others, Brunon Kwiecien, the Polish man arrested on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack on the Polish parliament in 2012, appears to have gone through the terrorist cycle alone only after attempts at recruiting others to a terrorist cell failed.

Not only the society in which potential lone wolves' live influences their choices, but constitutes one of the main drivers for initial radicalization, and radicalization, of course, can begin as a refusal of societal values. This is particularly true when we focus the attention on "our" latest terrorists: namely, all those, especially young people, European citizens who have choose to abandon their Western social values of reference to embrace the totalitarian and radical belief proposed by Jihadist groups and, thus, becoming soldiers of the Islamic State fighting in Syria or in their own European home countries. Let's not forget that most of the latest lone wolf terrorist attacks occurred in Europe were perpetrated by European citizens against their own society and the values that regulate it. The reasons behind a refusal of an individual's societal values can be several, but according to the latest wave of Jihadist lone wolves, one of the main driver toward violent radicalization relies on a desperate need for justice and purpose in life. Discomfort with modern society is a common problem that has been found to be present in the psychological profile of many lone wolves and that will be analysed more in detail later. Anyway, al-Baghdadi creates in his messages and storytelling a chance for catharsis and accomplishment similar to the one that can be

¹⁰⁴ Schuurman B., Lindekilde L., Malthaner S., Francis O'Connor, Paul Gill & Noémie Bouhana, "*End of the Lone Wolf: The Typology that Should Not Have Been*", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2017
E. Bakker and B. De Graaf, "*Preventing Lone Wolf Terrorism: some CT Approaches Addressed*" in *Prospectives on Terrorism* Vol. 5, 2011

achieved after having beaten a complex videogame¹⁰⁵. The images of Muslim kids wounded by American bombing makes the hate grow, and later provides the photo of the American journalist Steven Sotloff beheaded provide a sense of catharsis, becoming almost “addictive”.

Such a need can lead individuals to a situation of existential disorientation, thus triggering a sense of alienation from the social institutions values they raised in and in which they do not identify anymore. The search for a new group of reference and, thus, the adoption of a new radical frame as an alternative framework of values then can mark the following step. Namely, when facing a phase of existential disorientations, some individuals may take a passive attitude. Others, on the other hand, may become available to embrace new values in contrast with the previous ones. This mental predisposition, which sociologists call "*cognitive opening*"¹⁰⁶, represents the willingness to embrace a new system of ideas with which to start a new existential adventure together with those adhering too to this system. So, radicalization processes, even in the case of lone wolves, cannot be studied if not in a sociological prospective that takes into account said relationships and social processes, at least in an early phase of indoctrination. Most of the homegrown Western terrorists who live an ideological conversion and radicalization have stumbled in some wrong meeting, whether with a fundamentalist Imam in a Mosque or in an online extremist community, providing them a new violent ideological framework of reference.

The example of Mohammed Bouyeri, the first recorded lone wolf operating in Europe since 2003, could provide valuable practical insights on the research and, accordingly, needs to be analysed more in detail. Similar to most of other Jihadist lone wolf terrorists, before his ideological radicalization, Bouyeri was a Muslim leading a life far from strict Kuran precepts. He was a second-generation Berber-Moroccan-Dutchman and, from several articles and witnesses, like most of his ideological heirs, he

¹⁰⁵ Phillips V., "The Islamic State's Strategy: Bureaucratizing the Apocalypse through Strategic Communications", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:9, 731-757, 2017

¹⁰⁶ Wiktorowicz Q., "Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam", Department of International Studies, Rhodes College, 2003

seemed to be born into a cultural divide and to have lived a troubled existence. The family context in this particular case does not provide any explanations for his radicalization: although the family did not speak Dutch fluently, Bouyeri's father has been described as a "typical first-generation Moroccan who worked himself to a standstill"¹⁰⁷. By all means, he was not born in a family of fundamentalists, on the contrary, his family was well integrated in the community, and "Mo", as he was nicknamed by friends, was considered smart, positive and promising, just a little shy and introvert at times. Born in a working-class district of Amsterdam, he followed through the standard educational process and started working as a journalist for a local newspaper after dropping out of college; all things considered, nothing unusual or of particular concern. He also praised in his articles the multiculturalism in the Netherlands. He liked Dutch girls and worked to promote stronger and healthier relations between the Moroccan youth and the local police after the riots of 1998. He also begun social and political activities for integration, leaving us to wonder what happened to this individual's personality to have him change this much. The turning point of his radicalization seems to have occurred around 2002-2003, years in which his mother died of cancer and his father decided to remarry, causing a deep existential crisis in Bouyeri, who started to abandon his adherence to a liberal system of belief to live in accordance with a strict interpretation of Sunni Islamic Sharia laws. According to the Dutch writer Ian Buruma¹⁰⁸, who investigated the process of Islamic radicalization and commitment to Jihad pursued by Bouyeri, his drift towards radicalization and fundamentalism appeared to have started already in 1999 before 11 September attacks in America¹⁰⁹, but only after these two personal events it was triggered towards violent action. In this particular emotional situation, Bouyeri met Abou Khaled, a fundamentalist Imam who indoctrinated him on the Islamic current *Takfir*, according to which a true and faithful Muslim must punish mercilessly all those who abandon the true path and live in blasphemy. Bouyeri changed completely his lifestyle¹¹⁰. The training and doctrine he was taught provided him not only with a new way of interpreting history, religion and society, but a new way of understanding life with a

¹⁰⁷ Anthony A., "Amsterdamned", The Guardian, 2004

¹⁰⁸ Buruma I, "Extremism: the loser's revenge", The Guardian, 2006

¹⁰⁹ Ivi.

¹¹⁰ Kaplan J., Loow H., Mallki, L., "Lone Wolf and Autonomous Cell Terrorism", Routledge, 2013

system of thought and meanings that strictly disciplines every aspect of his life. While he might have had, before the indoctrination, doubts and concerns about to handle life's difficulties, the *Takfir* ideology provided with a clear and undeniable system of values dividing good from evil, a "black or white" distinction that disallowed for any possible shade of grey or doubt. In Abou Khaled, Bouyeri seemed to have found someone who, not only provided him a new community of potential friends, but made also his life easier providing him simplified cadres of interpretation of the reality.

Of course, this needed to be linked to a completely changed lifestyle: no more Western clothing, long beard, no more alcohol or narcotics and, obviously, severe ties with his old friends. The isolation process became more and more evident as he began to refuse serving alcohol and to attend activities in which also women were allowed to participate and making Islam the centre of his world, as well as, repeat to his colleagues "*Islam is my everything*"¹¹¹. And of course, the Islamic community in which he lived in up to that moment, was not a faithful Muslim community according to *Takfir*: by the end of summer 2003 he broke ties also with his local mosque after the imam asked him why he didn't work and how was able to pray five times a day. Also, his political activism, before moved and committed to multicultural values, turned to harsh criticism of such values and the Western society that promoted them. On the internet, where he wrote and shared his articles and thought, he adopted the new name of Abu Zubair, to honour the al-Qaeda commander Abu Zubair al-Haili. This online name, that could be considered a side effect of all the process described above of identity reconstruction, is actually of great importance: the adoption of the new name, and a name so linked with radical Islam, can be rightfully considered to be the end of the road, as all ties with his previous life were severed to lead to a new one. Changing ones' own name is the typical culminating step of a religious or ideological conversion, with the new name, different from the one given by the family and recognized by people from the previous life, being the central final path of separation and the beginning of a new life, a sort of ideological rebirth¹¹². The Jihadist education received by Bouyeri, as that received by the following

¹¹¹ Anthony A., "Amsterdamned", The Guardian, 2004

¹¹² Teich S., "*Trends and Developments in Lone Wolf Terrorism in the Western World: An Analysis of Terrorist Attacks and Attempted Attacks by Islamic Extremists*", ICT, 2013

lone wolf jihadists active in Europe, involved a complete renovation of his identity within the Jihadist ideological narrative.

The new name, together with the new life, will eventually provide a feeling of new belonging, where weakness and uncertainty have been cleared away by a simple system of rule that gives meaning to life. The Islamic rule, that covers and dictates over so many aspects, of society, provides clarity but in order to be catapulted in a new life with a new radical value set of reference, the lone wolf needs some kind of external input, and in some instances, a minimal degree of socialization, with a group of equals, whether this real or imagined. For a personality that tends to introversion similar to that presented by several lone wolves, this will eventually provoke two results: at first it will provide a set of rules and a meaning to life, on the other will require a level of social interactions that, being unbearable for the introvert, will eventually push him away also from the deviant group. This leads to the conclusion that only the set of rules provided by the doctrine would remain a certain point in everyday life.

2.3 Lone wolves' path to radicalization

Relational and group dynamics can exert a fundamental influence on the radicalization of a potential terrorist in several ways; many sociological studies of terrorism points out the presence and influence of charismatic group leaders, different recruitment styles (both top-down and bottom-up), ideological training and power notions, solidarity between members of the same social group (that appears out of reach in the non-deviant society), the need for conformity and leadership and depersonalization of the enemy¹¹³. All those concepts and series of events cannot be understood if not under a relational perspective. In his exploration of the psychological dynamics behind terrorist radicalization, the scholar Moghaddam argues that:

¹¹³ Luis de la Corte, *Explaining Terrorism: A Psychosocial Approach*; S. Moskalenko and C. McCauley, *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*, 2012

*“commitment to the terrorist cause strengthens as the new recruit is socialized into the traditions, methods, and goals of an organization [...] Conformity and obedience will be very high in the cells of the terrorist organization, where the cell leader represents a strong authority figure and where nonconformity, disobedience, and disloyalty receive the harshest punishments”*¹¹⁴. However, lone wolves are not “ordinary terrorists”. In their terrorist cycle they lack the direct influence of the hierarchical structure typical of an organization. In most of the cases of Jihadist lone wolves studied, they are referred to by their relatives and friends as normal individuals who after a process of radicalization become ready to sacrifice everything in a violent action that has neither organizational nor small group support. Moreover, and above all, lone wolf terrorists become ready to sacrifice their own life for a cause they decide to join, without all the “emotional benefits” of being a fully integrated member of a group.

Namely, similarly to what happens for a group-based terrorist the lone wolf fills a condition of existential disorientation by embracing an absolute faith that gives him a new identity, a life full of meaning and a mission to be realized, but contrary to the former, he does not find a physical community full of love and solidarity supporting him in his action. It is important to underline, in the words of several scholars as well as in the witnesses of a number of former terrorists, how it is properly the search for love and more in depth, a community of love one of the main driver of individuals’ affiliation to radical groups¹¹⁵. This becomes clearer if we consider that people, in general, when find something new persuading them – for instance, a new sport, a game or a hobby – have the natural instinct pushing them to find someone sharing their new passion. Now, if we consider that radical ideologies provide their adepts a revolutionary gnostic¹¹⁶: namely, the secret knowledge on how to redeem humankind, we will expect them to search for others sharing their view, thus creating an elitist group who is tragically disconnected by the rest of the society because of their radical belief. Such a disconnection frustrates the radical group aspirations, since the rest of their society is reluctant and refuses to bend to their will. Consequently, they use violence to show to

¹¹⁴ Fathali M. Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism”, 2005

¹¹⁵ Simone Cottee, *What Motivates Terrorists?* 2015

¹¹⁶ Fathali M. Moghaddam, “*The Staircase to Terrorism*”, 2005

the world, the path that should be undertaken to redeem those who can be redeemed and to punish those who cannot. Accordingly, deviant groups' disconnection with the rest of their society should be expected to be stronger as more the ideology is radical and far from the society value set. At the same time, the rate of socialization within a radical group among its members is expected to be higher as more the group detach itself from the society values. This is well inferable from Orsini analysis of intra-groups dynamics within different deviant groups: not only Jihadists, but left-wing as well as right-wing terrorist groups. According to the author, the total "immersion" of the potential terrorist in a community of pure love, presenting the characteristics of a closed society¹¹⁷ and, thus, built on institutional pillars, among which hyper-socialization dynamics and a holistic vision of communitarian interests – play a fundamental role in the process of identity reconstruction of the terrorist to be¹¹⁸.

Not by chance, Orsini refers to the concept of revolutionary sept to explain terrorist intra-groups dynamics. Revolutionary sept' adepts, similarly to terrorist groups, are educated through a process of indoctrination to accomplish a precise mission: the eradication of the Evil from the world. Such a mission can be pursued only after the "world purifiers", as Orsini label this kind of sociological typology, have been "socially educated" on the basis of eight cardinal institutional pillars that Orsini takes back from the Italian political sociologist Luciano Pellicani and that refers the notion of *closed society*. Such pillars, interestingly, are common of all the totalitarian systems of belief: thus, not only those promoted by Jihadist groups, but also Communism or Nazism for instance. It has been aforementioned the importance of two of these pillars: hyper-socialization and holism. Now we will explore them and the others on closer inspection:

- Hyper- socialization: in a totalitarian society – such as that proposed by the Jihadist education – group's members are totally deprived of any sort of autonomy of thought and action. Any attempt to deviate from the mere conformism has to be eradicated with the force.

¹¹⁷ Pellicani L., "Dalla Società Chiusa alla Società Aperta", Rubettino, 2002

¹¹⁸ Orsini A., "IS: I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli", 2016

- Holism: the whole must always prevail on the singular parts of it: Community interests are above personal interests as the individual existence of a member has not reasons to be out of those provided by the group.
- Sacralisation of Tradition: those values, principles, and ideals belonging to the tradition are sacralised and, thus, any attempt to modify them or to put them under discussion should be considered a sacrilege and, thus, it needs to be punished.
- Isolation: a totalitarian society has to be isolated from the others, foremost, in cultural terms. The Jihadist system of belief has to be protected from the “contagion” of other cultures that may contaminate the purity of the adepts, who have to close their contacts with the rest of the society that may contaminate them.
- Orthodoxy: believes and actions must be conformed to the prevalent and pervasive dogma of the faith. Tradition work for the community as a perfect mental framework, from which, group’s members can not move away. Every new ideas would represent an open attack to the Truth proposed by the group and thus, an attempt to compromise the perfection of the close mentality provided by the Jihadist education.
- Autarchy: in order to be kept pure the Jihadist society has to be self-sufficient and, thus, incompatible with the logic of the market: commerce, money and private economic activity compromise the intrinsic immutability of the Community and its values. Not by chance, al-Baghdadi propaganda opposes the figure of the soldier considered as a “guardian” to the merchant, who is seen as a “messenger” who, by travelling in the external world, can introduce new cultural models.
- Political centralization of the power: in order to preserve the Tradition and the pervasive structure of the institutions, the society has to be autocratic and militarized. Through the centralization of the power at its vertex, the changeless nature of the society can be preserved, and potential sources of social mutations can be avoided.

- Misoneism: a deep hatred for every kind of change and innovation in any field mark a fundamental institutional characterization of the political model proposed by terrorist groups. The individual creativity must be inhibited as it cannot be controlled and may lead to some unpredictable behaviours, thus, threatening the value set of the Tradition¹¹⁹.

Thus, through a deep analysis of Jihadist messages, it can be easily deduced how, similarly to other source of totalitarian belief, this works in order to provide a pervasive education to the potential Western terrorist they address through their campaign, based on these eight pillars, that represent the main institutional traits of the Jihadist society. Not surprisingly, it has been argued by a number of scholars, the reason why Middle Eastern countries give birth to such a huge number of ideologically radicalized individuals is inextricably linked to the promotion in that area and, in particular, by Saudi Arabia Government, of the Islamic current *Wahabism*¹²⁰, that promote an extremely strict interpretation of the Koran potentially leading to processes of radicalization among young Muslims, thus spreading the obsession with purity and purification of the world typical of revolutionary sects. As a remark of it, it should be stressed that among the nineteen hijackers that on September 11, 2001, attacked the USA, fifteen were citizens of Saudi Arabia.

So, potential terrorists, whether group-based or lone wolf, are educated through the propaganda to become effective members of the Jihadist society and to sacrifice everything in their hand – even their own life and identity – on the altar of an ideologically radicalized community of pure who have the mandatory mission to save humanity. Nevertheless, as previously asserted, lone wolves' adherence to the Jihadist community do not entail a physical participation in it and, in most of the cases, it is merely a virtual affiliation. Moreover, contrarily to *foreign fighters* who abandoned their Western home countries to reach the Caliphate and fight for its defence, lone wolves complete their terrorist path never reaching the idealized community for which

¹¹⁹ Ivi.

¹²⁰ Yousaf Butt, “*How Saudi Wahhabism Is the Fountainhead of Islamist Terrorism*”, Center For Islamic State, 2017

they fight, thus making suppose their ideological affiliation with the Black Flag to be maybe stronger than that of *foreign fighters*. This particular aspect of lone wolves' ideological commitment, suggesting a higher degree of self-sacrifice spirit, animating the lone wolf for a communitarian goal that he knows to be out of his, at least physical, reach, should be analysed more in detail, as it may constitute a distinctive trait, differentiating lone wolves from group based path towards violent radicalization. In their psychological analysis of lone wolf terrorism of 2011, Moskalkenko and McCauley centres a crucial point regarding the issue¹²¹. They frame the problem of lone wolf self-sacrifice in terms of the “free rider problem”¹²² that is usually understood by political sociologists as one of the principal concept to define the terrorist psychology. In other words, scholars attempt to determine why should a person sacrifice anything for a public ideological good: freedom, justice, equality – that will benefit others. A rational individual will let the others sacrifice at his place and get the benefits of their efforts. On the contrary, terrorists do not free ride, even if the maximization of their utility would rationally let them behave in this way- they let the others free ride and prefer to sacrifice for a general good. Traditional explanations for this kind of behaviour in the case of group-based terrorists often rely on the rational-choice interpretation of self-sacrifice that points to the power of group dynamics, organizational rewards and punishments to move the individual towards violence¹²³. The lone-wolf terrorist operates without these externally imposed contingencies and pushing factors, and has, accordingly, a much wider spectrum of choices than those allowed to a traditional member of a terrorist cell. Namely, the definition and perpetration of his terrorist activity remains fully within his hands and do not represent a shared experience within a radical milieu, where the terrorist self-interest is totally overwhelmed by the group-interest, and thus to a number of people considered as real, at least by the lone wolf. On the contrary, the lone wolf self-interest is totally captured by the ideological tale proposed by such groups. It is to the idea itself of an idealized Jihadist society more than to the real community of reference proposing such idea that the lone wolf terrorist pays his violent tribute. Accordingly, it should be argued a much stronger incidence in

¹²¹ Moskalkenko S., McCauley C., “*Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*”, 2012

¹²² Mancur Olson, “*Logic of Collective Action*”, 1965

¹²³ McCauley C., “*Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism*”, 2008

the radicalization path pursued by these solo political terrorists of the ideological narrative appeal than for terrorists embedded in radical groups or terrorist organizations, where group-dynamics exert a stronger influence on the integration of the terrorist in a radical milieu.

How can be this possible? Group psychology theories offer some key considerations over the issue: the more proximate explanation seems to rely on the human capacity itself for group identification. If the lone wolf terrorist experiences his path toward violence, mainly alone, the ideological construction built by his Jihadist group of reference should be expected to be strong and appealing enough to compensate an eventual lack of human empathy facilitating the radicalization. Moskalenko and McCauley in order to explain this psychological mechanism make reference to the notions of positive and negative identification, which are one of the main “ideological tool used by IS through its propaganda: *“Given positive identification with a group perceived as victimized, an individual feels anger and outrage toward those responsible for the victimization”*¹²⁴. In other words, adopting the radical narrative construction provided by his ideology of reference, the lone wolf terrorist ends up perceiving a group as victimized and thus developing a strong sense of negative identification with the perpetrators of victimization and positive identification with the victims. This becomes clearer if we consider the psychological impact on an already destabilized mind of an extended exposure to multimedia radicalizing material such as that proposed by Jihadist groups. Identification with the victims can lead to a steady source of motivation in which help for the victims or damage to the victimizers become a rewarding, while the opposite is experienced as a punishing.

Accordingly, several authors, including Orsini points out how the community of reference of a political terrorist may be physical, but also an *“imagined community”*¹²⁵. This concept was firstly elaborated by the political philosopher Benedict Anderson at the beginning of 1980s and provided a fundamental contribution to the political debate on the notion of modern nationalism. Anderson argued that any political community

¹²⁴ Moskalenko S., McCauley C., *“Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us”*, 2012

¹²⁵ Orsini A., *“IS: I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli”*, 2016

large enough (that it would exceed a minimum threshold, corresponding roughly to a neighbourhood or small town) cannot rely on the perception of belonging to a same group that is based on face-to-face interaction between its members. In such cases, the sense of belonging to a common identity, and the internal cohesion of the community, must necessarily be based on the imagination of the people that allows to perceive themselves as members of that group.

Similarly, in order to become a member of a terrorist community it is not necessary to have an actual social engagement in it: we can become part of a group since we dress in a determined way or behave in another. It can work as a sort of role play, not unlike the ones found online among video game players around the world. A person can become part of a community that does not actually exist, but if he wants to believe in it, then it is real enough. Individuals that feel unfit in the society they live in will eventually try to escape from it in any way possible, and the ways in which to do so are plenty, especially in the era of internet. Role playing communities online create a determined set of values and norms that will probably differ from the ones in the real world. If a very introvert personality manages to be successful in a different reality rather than in the one he is actually leaving, he will eventually focus all his attention toward the first. This phenomenon, in particular, has been made possible with new technologies, but is not new when it comes to meet social needs. By making a comparison between the case of roleplaying and the one of the lone wolf, it seems that when both are taken to an extreme level, there is a point in which there is a clear cut with what was considered reality before and the acceptance of a new one.

There is more to it, agreeing to a new community, even if merely virtual, based on a complete new set of rules may lead an individual to surround himself only with ideas that he accepts; this process will eventually lead to a situation in which there is no negative feedback of any kind that differs from the accepted norms of the community. Namely, in his new imagined community of reference the lone wolf lacks the influence of a different point of view dissuading him from the violent drift he has undertaken. Totalitarian ideologies, like regimes, cannot accept any contradiction inside them as the binary differentiation black or white will be questioned. Let's look at *Dabiq* division of

humanity in two precise categories: “*The world is divided into two camps and two trenches - the field of Islam and faith and the field of unbelievers and hypocrites, the camp of Muslims and mujahidin and the camp of Jews, crusaders, their allies and all nations and religions of unbelief that are all led by the United States and Russia, and which are mobilized by the Jews*”¹²⁶. This division appears in *Dabiq* first publication, and according to the Jihadist education, any deviation from this essential truth would mark an outrageous attack to the Kuran. As happened throughout history with closed societies, religions or parties, social identification encourages the individual to create a dualistic categorization of society as a whole into us vs them. This process is not a new one, on the contrary it has been one of the main drivers for unification of societies and cultures around the same ideals, or banner, for centuries. Stereotyping social groups and making them just an enemy and not individual human beings allows for the higher imaginable levels of violence. Examples can be seen throughout history: Crusaders and Mujahidin, although “thou shall not kill” being a fundamental value both in Christian and Muslim religion, have been slaughtering each other without hesitation, since they were not anymore humans (like the ones of each owns’ societies), but just unbelievers. Without looking so far back, Nazism during WWII provides us with a valuable example on how dehumanization of the enemy allows for unlimited violence.

Lone wolves will not only deeply interiorize the dualistic views imposed by strong ideologies, but also withdrawn themselves from most societal values. As pointed out by Weiss and Hassan research, the religious creed on which IS is based largely relies on the concept of *wala* and *baraa*, that is loyalty to Islam and disloyalty to all that is not considered true Islam¹²⁷. In order to understand how in depth adherence to a totalizing system of meanings can shape individual actions and beliefs, even without a real participation within a radical community, we can borrow a philosophical concept inaugurated by Immanuel Kant in his “*Critique of Pure Reason*” of 1781. Contrary to his predecessors, Kant based his epistemological study on the assumption that it is not the reality and its experiences that shapes the individual mind, but are the a priori

¹²⁶ Ioffe J., “*If Islam Is a Religion of Violence, So Is Christianity*”, 2016

¹²⁷ Weiss M., and Hassan H., “*IS: Inside the Army of Terror*”, 2015

mental cadres¹²⁸, that are common to every individual, to modulate individual's reception of data coming from experience. A totalitarian system of belief works on the individual mind similarly to Kant mental cadres. In other words, it is the subject himself who, through his thoughts, goes to construct the world of experience. *A priori* mental cadres work as glasses whose lens filter what we see. If we wear glasses with green lens, we will see a green world; if we change the lens we change our perception, even if the reality itself has not changed. to what postulated by Kant, indoctrinated individuals, like Bouyeri, adhering to a new pervasive system of values change their a priori mental cadres, adopting a mentality framed around a binary code¹²⁹ that filter their interpretation of reality around the simplified and impassable division of Good and Bad. According to Orsini, binary code mentality is typical of the already mentioned anthropological types he defines as “*world purifiers*¹³⁰”.

These are those individuals, who, after a conversion towards a pervasive ideology or religion providing a new system of meanings¹³¹, starts interpreting world experiences in coherence with a precise narrative path that is common to all the totalitarian belief, and whose plot is continuously revoked in *Dabiq* pages. In the words of Orsini: “*the tale sounds like follows: the world has plunged into an abyss of suffering and unhappiness (radical catastrophism) and by the time it is heading towards an immense catastrophe (waiting for the end) whose responsibilities fall on a category of men (identification of the evil) that must be exterminated (obsession with purification) by a handful of uncontaminated men (obsession with purity). Only then, the moral regeneration of humanity and its liberation from the universal Evil will begin*¹³²”. It is based on these five pillars - radical catastrophism, waiting for the end, identification of the evil, obsession with purification and obsession with purity – the process of social identity reconstruction¹³³ pursued by world purifiers. Within this apocalyptic ideological frame, individuals – especially young people - like Bouyeri who live

¹²⁸ Kant I., “*Critique of Pure Reason*”, 1781

¹²⁹ Ivi.

¹³⁰ Orsini A., “*IS: I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*”, 2016

¹³¹ Ivi.

¹³² Ivi.

¹³³ Ivi.

existential crisis and do not recognize anymore themselves in their society values, can embody a new role with a new meaning according to a new system of values.

Let's look at the letter Bouyeri pinned to the body of Theo Van Gogh using a knife, after shooting him eight times and nearly decapitating him. This document seems of particular relevance because it represents a primary source of knowledge to understand lone wolf ideological universe and their deep adherence to the apocalyptic tale they decide to live in. The letter address Miss Hirshi Ali, a Dutch naturalized Somali politics and writer, known for her particular commitment to women's rights within the Islamic tradition. In his words, we can find the apocalyptic frames woven around Bouyeri's mind by Jihadist ideology.

“There is one certainty in the whole of existence; and that is that everything comes to an end. A child born unto this world and fills this universe with its presence in the form of its first life's cries, shall ultimately leave this world with its death cry. A blade of grass sticking up its head from the dark earth and being caressed by the sunlight and fed by the descending rain, shall ultimately wither and turn to dust. Death, Miss Hirshi Ali, is the common theme of all that exists. You, me and the rest of creation can not disconnect from this truth. There shall be a Day where one soul can not help another soul. A Day with terrible tortures and torments. a Day where the unjust shall force from their longues horrible screams. Screams, Miss Hirshi Ali, that will cause shivers to roll down one's spine; that will make hairs stand up from heads. People will be seen drunk with fear while they are not drunk. FEAR shall fill the atmosphere on that Great Day:

When the sun is overthrown,

And when the stars fall,

And when the hills are moved,

And when the camels big with young are abandoned,

And when the wild beasts are herded together,

And when the seas rise,

And when souls are reunited,

And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked for what sin she was slain,

And when the pages are laid open,

And when the sky is torn away,

And when hell is lighted,

And when the Garden is brought nigh,

Then every soul will know what it hath made ready. (81:1-14)

On that day a man flee from his brother

And from his mother and his father

And from his wife and his children,

Every man that day will have concern enough to make him heedless (of others).

On that day faces will be bright as dawn,

Laughing, rejoicing at good news;

And other faces, on that day, with dust upon them,

Veiled in darkness,

Those are the disbelievers, the wicked. (80:34-42)

You as unbelieving extremist of course won't believe in the above described scene. For you the above is merely a made-up drama piece from a Book like many. And yet, Miss Hirshi Ali, I'd bet my life to claim that you are sweating with FEAR when you read this¹³⁴”.

Bouyeri's total adherence to the radical catastrophic narrative proposed result from a deep indoctrination which in the most relevant sociological studies covering the issue represent a fundamental point in an individual radicalization path. To cite one of them, the model proposed by Silber and Bhatt in their analysis of Western homegrown terrorism identify four main phases of radicalization in the path pursued by individuals to commit terrorism against their own societies under the indoctrination of Jihadist-Salafism propaganda:

- Pre-Radicalization: the life situation before the exposure and adoption of a radical cognitive systems of meanings.
- Self-Identification: the individual, after being exposed to Jihadist Salafist propaganda, detach himself from his previous identity and values of reference and begin to associate himself with the radical narrative framework provided by Jihadists and with like-minded individuals sharing those ideas.

¹³⁴ Bouyeri M., “Open letter to Hirsi Ali”

- Indoctrination: radical beliefs intensifies and the individual accept the idea of his full-involvement, even violent, in the ideological cause as a necessity for the catastrophic situation in which humankind is capitulating.
- Jihadization: is the phase in which members of the cluster accept their individual duty to participate in jihad and self-designate themselves as holy warriors or mujahedeen. Ultimately, the group will begin operational planning for the jihad or a terrorist attack¹³⁵.

According to the authors, it is properly in the crucial phase of indoctrination that the process of group-identification and association with like-minded persons start exerting a fundamental role in reinforcing radical beliefs. With no doubts, also in Bouyeri case, the process of self-radicalization has been highly influenced by his membership in the Hofstad group, but Bouyeri did not act as a member of a terrorist group. On the contrary, he pursued his personal path without external direction in the terrorist cycle. This has been further supported by the Hague sentence of 23 January 2008 which overthrew previous suspects on the Hofstad network eventual hand behind Bouyeri attack, since no evidence was found of a conspiracy of which Bouyeri was part. As stated above, it is to the radical ideological narrative that the lone wolf pays his violent tribute more than to his real Jihadist group of reference. As demonstrated by Bouyeri case, some societal ties, whether these virtual or physical, may remain and are determinant in the initial radicalization process, but the need to act alone and not become an active part of the terroristic cell is a psychological choice that is utterly personal and distinctive of this kind of terrorists. Moreover, the progressive substitution of the Mosque as main locus devoted to recruitment with Internet platforms, increase further the role played by the radical narrative in the indoctrination process of the lone wolf, since direct contacts with jihadist cells operatives can be increasingly reduced. Thus, if on the radicalization process of a group-based terrorists we might expect a higher role played by group-dynamics in fostering radicalization, in the lone wolf cases, it seems that a stronger appeal may be exerted by the narrative itself proposed. Accordingly, when formulating EU counterterrorism policies, EU stakeholders should

¹³⁵ Silber M., Bhatt A., “*Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*”, Senior Intelligence Analysts NYPD Intelligence Division, 2007

take into consideration the realization of effective counter – narratives to gain grounds on the ideological battlefield against IS. There is here a complex psychological issue that needs to be analysed: while, on one hand, the loner to-be terrorist, that sees himself as unfit to the society in which he lives, seeks a new life within the ideological framework provided by a deviant group, on the other lacks fundamental social skills and has strong feelings of discomfort regarding full membership of said groups, as he would have for many social interactions whatsoever. This explains how, while the beginning of the radicalization process must be a social construction, its eventual development, in the case of said individuals, continues on a personal basis due to feelings of discomfort, thus proving an explanation to why lone wolves stay lone wolves, and will persecute individually the different phases of the terroristic cycle. In sum, from a relational perspective, the lone wolf can be considered on one hand, more difficult to detect, as in most of the cases he lacks structural ties to a cell or a group, a clear operational pattern of action and a commanding figure that could control and direct his actions; on the other, in most of the cases he also lacks training of sort, and could be easily halted once the radicalization process is understood by law enforcers at an early stage.

Moving forwards, the analysis would not be complete if we disregard one of the main instrument through which radicalizing Jihadist narrative foster lone wolf terrorism. Namely, the role played by the cyber-world and how it is exploited by terrorists. Internet and online communities offer a dual advantage to this peculiar type of individuals; while provides them with the information and a sense of belonging they need, it also allows them to remain in their comfort zone. This has two main consequences: first of all, there is no direct confrontations with equals on values, ethics, ways of life, and when there is, most of the time is hidden behind virtual nicknames, thus allowing the loner to construct his own set of values around the main ones that he has acquired at the very first steps of radicalization; second, it makes other individuals, both friends and enemies alike, more and more distant to the terrorist to-be, as digital presence cannot be compared to real and shared human connection.

The lone wolf will overexpose himself to extremist ideology, propaganda, and

the internet provides the perfect means of transportation of such information and their ideological messages should be taken into primary consideration when we analyse lone wolf radicalization path, besides considering – as formulated by several studies of sociology of terrorism - that in order to push potential terrorists toward radicalization the Jihadist ideologues have created an effective propagandistic tool with precise characteristics aimed at helping individuals in overcoming those internal moral barriers¹³⁶ human beings have in hurting or killing others. Many studies discuss the facilitating role of the Internet in the spread of lone wolf terrorism and it will be now analysed in detail. Thus, it seems appropriate to move our line of reasoning towards said aspects, constituting the second main feature we need to analyse: the main channel of communication fostering Western lone wolves' radicalization.

¹³⁶ Bandura A., “*Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in Terrorism,*” in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*”, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 161-191.

CHAPTER THREE

JIHADIST NARRATIVES THROUGH THE INTERNET

3.1 Jihadist online campaign

Defining the issue of Jihadist lone wolf terrorism without the analysis of internet and its use by terrorist groups would be incomplete, as it has been fruitfully used by terrorist networks all around the globe to achieve different goals and in particular, to spread their competitive system of meaning to the widest audiences. Moreover, as previously underlined, during the lone wolf radicalization path a much The main channel of communication used by terrorists to spread radical ideologies constitute one of the main determinant of lone wolf terrorism, as it has been described by different scholars. Pantucci and several other authors discusses how it enables individuals with personal grievances to congregate in online chat rooms and become exposed to the justifying and externalizing narrative offered by radical Islam¹³⁷. First and foremost, when dealing with this issue, it should be stressed that from a law enforcement perspective, the internet is very difficult to control, regardless of you being the government of a small nation or of a superpower as it has been acknowledged by a number of recent security studies, therefore it can be exploited to expand the reach and influence of jihadi messages, provide useful training skills and keeping untraceable connections among the members of a terroristic group or cell. Tracking the terrorist a communication system in a world that is constantly hyper-connected is still a valuable asset for security forces to identify and stop terroristic cells or lone wolves from action,

¹³⁷ RUSI, “Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 4, Lone-Actor Terrorism: Analysis Paper” Clare Ellis, Raffaello Pantucci, Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, Edwin Bakker, Benoît Gomis, Simon Palombi and Melanie Smith. 2016

but internet propaganda must be taken into consideration as it can provide a powerful driver for radicalization that is very difficult to find and even more difficult to contain.

Recent studies have discovered thousands of jihadi websites live and operational on the internet today, and this is a clear sign that terroristic groups and IS and Al-Qaeda mostly, have been exploiting this new mean of communication in a very effective way. Not unlikely the “*war of narratives*¹³⁸” that staged during the years of the cold war, the new terroristic propaganda aims to strike the mind and imagination of the largest amount of people and gaining support from it. Al Qaeda was the first organization to broaden its messages to a wider public, the whole Muslim community around the globe, rather than only its affiliates and supporters, and IS has taken from there, leading internet propaganda to a whole new level. This has also a religious base: while the focus of Al Qaeda was a fight against the Western world as a response to the overwhelming influence of it on the Muslim world, IS points towards the physical elimination of all enemies of the doctrine, may they be Christians, Jews or other Muslims that do not follow the rule. Having a larger base of potential listeners, the IS had to broaden its scope of action and to do this, it needed to influence the hearts and minds of the Muslims around the world, and internet has surely been one of the main drivers for such messages to be carried around.

A peculiar feature is the presence of a strong and charismatic leadership that, in a religion that mixes religious and political power, must be a central figure, if not indispensable as a propagator of the jihadi message. This figure, that is a powerful one on its own, becomes so more and more with the exposure to classic and new media. Internet provides this charismatic leaders and individuals a unique way of connecting with others around the world without having to leave a safe area. The main challenge previous terroristic groups had was to reunite and join together the different Muslim communities scattered around the world and connect them in one, and internet helped a great deal in solving such a challenge. This lack of communication with the charismatic leader was one of the main reasons why Muslim resurgence has always been, in the last

¹³⁸ Callahan K., “*War Narratives: Framing Our Understanding of the War on Terror*”, 2004

decade, a short-lived movement, but since this problem has been averted, it is possible to cooperate and create a “leaderless jihad”¹³⁹ with self-activated and self-radicalized individuals and group able to operate together without having direct contact with the leadership. This allows for a much higher degree of penetration into the less advantaged social classes, mostly constituted by the young, poor and uneducated that can be more easily radicalized. In particular, IS has demonstrated through its pervasive propagandistic mobilization, the centrality of the concept of the Caliphate for al-Baghdadi project. The idea of the Caliphate restoration has been living a reviving period since the 1950s, when Hizb ut-Tahir - an Egyptian sect, later became a political movement - present today mainly in the United Kingdom and in Uzbekistan and that has its base among second generation immigrants of Islamic religion – have revived the dream of a Caliphate “*resurrection*”. In the mid-90s, the Taliban leader Mullah Omar went as far as claiming for himself the traditional title *Amir al-Mu'minin*, the “*Commander of Believers*”, one of the titles usually attributed to the Caliph. The restoration of the Caliphate has been then mentioned by Osama bin Laden as his ultimate goal. However, no Islamic leader since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1924 and the consequent abolition of the Caliphate, has pretended for himself the title of Caliph, until al-Baghdadi, whose propaganda distils deep millennial dreams of a great, just, pure multinational empire of faith. An idealized heaven on Earth where the Muslims of all over the world can find a home and see their social troubles compensated by a just society. Al-Baghdadi has structured a pervasive propaganda machine aimed at spreading its effects throughout space and time, thus reflecting the international everlasting nature itself of the Caliphate.

On one hand, in order to foster an enduring threat in time, during 2016, in correspondence with its territorial recession, IS propaganda has provided an increasing value to the role of children as a guarantee of continuity of the Caliphate project and of the continuation of the jihad for the conquest of “*Damascus, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Mecca, Rome and Andalusia*”, thus showing, how children Jihadist education has

¹³⁹ Sageman M., “*Leaderless Jihad: Terror Network in the Twenty- First Century*”, 2008

become an increasing issue for IS¹⁴⁰. On the other, for its expansion through space, IS propaganda could not find a better weapon of the internet. Moreover, in the age of social network, apps like Twitter since few years have started becoming an effective tool to spread the width of the terroristic messages to a rate that had never been reached before all around the globe. Social media and social networking also allows and facilitates the creation of subcultures; Stern's 2003 study clearly portray how the Internet works for terrorists as a fundamental enabling factor, explaining that the Internet facilitated the spread of virtual subcultures, and increased the capacity for more loosely-based terrorist networks¹⁴¹. To give a clearer explanation, here follows two tweets from July 2014, translated in English:

"#The_Concept_of_Lone_Wolf_Attacks The time has arrived to respond to Twitter's management by directly attacking their employees and physically assassinating them!! Those who will carry this out are the sleepers cells of death.

*#The_Concept_of_Lone_Wolf_Attacks Twitter management should know that if they do not stop their campaign in the virtual world, we will then bring the war to them in the real world on the ground"*¹⁴².

As we can clearly see, the social media is used as a mean to alert lone wolves spread all around the world that time for action has come, and when the Twitter management rightfully bans such tweets, the response is immediate and fierce, thus giving a clear target to hit. The ones called to action might very well be lone wolves, sleeping cells or foreign fighters and the message would have reached them all regardless of their physical location. This loosely controlled network of terrorists, as we claimed above, is much more difficult than a normal terroristic cell to control and keep in check, marking a clear-cut difference between them and the terrorists of the past century. The IS understood the potential of internet and social media and is on its way to

¹⁴⁰ National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) *"The Children of ISIS: The indoctrination of minors in ISIS-held territory"*, 2017

¹⁴¹ Stern J., *"Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill"*, New York, 2003

¹⁴² Dearden L., *"Islamic State: IS fanatics threaten terrorist attacks on Twitter employees for shutting accounts down"*, The Independent, 2014

exploit its full potential as more and more young Muslims from the west, well accustomed to the system, get radicalized. Not only they are aware of that, but are also aware of the fact that they are constantly kept under surveillance by intelligence forces all around the world, therefore by 2015 the IS planned to create a secret and private messaging platform to guarantee secrecy to its users¹⁴³. Private messaging platforms do exist already, but having one of their own would mean provide a communication system similar to the one of countries' secret services, thus improving their capacity to hit even more. Not that existing networks have not been exploited before; the Play Station Network, or PSN, has been used as a mean of communication between cells and lone wolves, as is protected by high levels of privacy.

As we stated before, the psychological profile of the lone wolf would want him to be part of the subculture on one hand, but on the other he lacks the social skills to become part of said community, and the internet provides a very good medium to keep in touch with the subculture without being a part of it. Further, Stern asserts that recruiting via the internet attracts better educated young people, compared to older, more traditional recruitment methods such as radio programs¹⁴⁴. The new IS communication tends to aim strongly on those individual rather than others, as they are much more useful to the cause compared to others: they are more educated, usually digital native, and mostly know English, thus making them much more valuable in a “marketing strategy”¹⁴⁵ as the one they are actually carrying on. The marketing strategy adopted by IS manages to exploit the faults of the social media systems at their advantage, and in addition, is able to create interesting contents for those willing to listen and watch it: one for all, the video launched on November 2014 showing three main IS fighters calling, in perfect French, others to battle; symbols like the Kalashnikov and the Muslim scimitar are linked together, with perfect timing and direction that equals social messages from many influencing Twitter or Instagram account. The video provided not only with ideological figures and values, but practical advices on how to carry on the attacks on heartens “run them down with your cars”.

¹⁴³ Grayson C., “The Flaw in IS's Favourite Messaging App”, The Atlantic, 2016

¹⁴⁴ Jessica Stern, “IS: The State of Terror”, 2015

¹⁴⁵ Ivi.

Jihadist groups strategy has been innovative, opportunistic and effective, as they understood, unlike many other violent groups, the need to create a new community out of the one they planned to destroy, in way not to alienate support but to create a stronger one based on both violence and utopia. A utopia of a Muslim world is not only a religious concept, it also transmits a clear political message to those Muslims living in slums, *banlieue* or in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, that if they want to live a better and more satisfying life, radical Islam and fight for the Caliphate is an option, and a good option as well.

As explained in an enlightening report by The Henry Jackson Society¹⁴⁶, one of IS most effective and recently used strategy for foreign terrorism relies on those inspired individuals having received encouragement via contact with an *Amn al-Kharji* officer online or via encrypted messaging services. *Amn al-Kharji* is the external operations branch of the Islamic State and it manages the lone wolf virtual contacts with members of the organization and in particular, with IS digital planners, those “recruiters” who keep contacts with potential terrorists, providing them tactical and emotional supports during their path of radicalization. One of the most dangerous of these educators has been recently portrayed by Bridget Moreng writing for *Foreign Affairs*¹⁴⁷: Rachid Kassim, who has been tied to a web of terror plots, including, among the others, the two young jihadists who murdered a priest in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, Normandy in July. Among the increasing number of lone wolf terrorist actions perpetrated with the technical assistance of IS digital recruiters, several can be mentioned. Among the others: the 17-year-old Afghan refugee Riaz Khan (also known as “Muhammad Riyad”) who on 18 July 2016 assaulted passengers on a train in Würzburg, Germany with an axe and a knife¹⁴⁸; Nearly one week later, on July 24, the 27-year-old Syrian refugee Mohammad Daleel who blew himself up outside of a music festival in the German city of Ansbach; as well as the 16-year-old German-Maroccan girl Safia S., who in February 2017 stabbed a police officer at the train station in

¹⁴⁶ Wilson T., “*Foreign Funded Islamist Extremism in the UK*”, The Henry Jackson Society, 2017

¹⁴⁷ Moreng B., “*IS' Virtual Puppeteers*”, *Foreign Affairs*, 2016

¹⁴⁸ Joscelin T., “*Terror Plots In Germany, France Were 'Remote-Controlled' By Islamic State Operatives*”, FDD's Long War Journal, 2016

Hannover. As *The Long War Journal* reported at the time, the fact that Amaq was able to release the videos so soon after the attacks suggested that both were in touch with the Islamic State's media operatives.

3.2 Jihadist online capabilities

To understand the content of Jihadist messages, and commercial messages specifically, first we have to analyse the main target. In our case, IS so far has tried to appeal to the Muslim community that live in the West, by exiting them towards a new and different way of life on one hand - many young ones, born in difficult life conditions, are easily convinced that the jihad in Syria or Iraq might be a nice change compared to the disappointments of everyday life - and on the other act like a multinational company that wants to attract investors: IS publishes reports, infographics, attack metrics, all to prove and demonstrate, in a Western fashion, efficacy and strength. The true novelty brought about by IS is properly that they appear to be proficient in the use of social media as a mean to reach an end, and in this case, is a strong and capillary communication over a geographic area. They managed to use social media both as a radicalization proxy and as a recruiting one, and are very proficient at that, with the inner nature of the internet making them impossible to track down and stop completely - some level of control exists and is carried on intelligence and security forces, but as previously said, due to the vastity of internet, this could be considered at times as a fruitless effort. The audience appealed through the internet by Jihadist groups is surprisingly wide. Several cases have been analysed demonstrating the capillarity of terrorist's propaganda in reaching audiences presenting not only geographical, but also social, economic and age differences.

The case of Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel - the lone wolf author of the Nice attack of 14 July 2016, where 89 people lost their lives - is particularly disturbing as it shows how if the recipient of the message is an unstable or mentally weak, it becomes very likely that radicalization process would begin and also have consequences in the

short term. Bouhlel, radicalized just a couple of months before the attacks, following IS propaganda online, and all clues by investigators point to a self-radicalized individual¹⁴⁹. He did not attack randomly but with a very specific plan, tested and prepared days before the attack, as he tried the route with the van and took several rounds around the area to check the place of the attack. He was a man living in a difficult moment of his life, as he was divorcing from his wife and had economic problems. After the divorce from his wife (and mother of his three children), he “*appeared repressed and unstable*”¹⁵⁰. Looking for an ideology, a solution that could provide him with certainty in a moment of instability, he found radical Islam and give all of himself to it. He looked for video of IS attacks online, propaganda, beheadings, and begun his process of radicalization¹⁵¹. As all the other Western Jihadist homegrown terrorists, he changed completely his lifestyle. Those who knew him before the conversion describe a complete different man from the long-bearded observant of the Quran: drugs, alcohol, ate pig and a complex sexual life.

Another interesting case suggesting the vastity of the IS propaganda potential reach is that of the Algerian lone wolf Farid Ikked. Namely, if the main target of messages is usually considered to be the young and the uneducated Western Muslims, a number of cases, including that of Farid Ikken show a different tendency. He was a 40-year-old journalist, studying in France for a doctorate in communication described by his relatives as an intellectual, professionally successful man¹⁵². On 6th June 2017, in front of Notre-Dame, Ikken attacked a policeman guarding the area with a hammer, and while he was shot and by those who knew him, reserved, totally unaggressive or with any recognizable sign of radicalization, for what we said so far, a novice jihadist with an atypical profile; yet this example is useful to understand how the power of radical communication systems through internet and social media can appeal to a wide audience.

¹⁴⁹ Nossiter, A., Rubin A.J. and Blaise L., “*Years before Truck Rampage in Nice, Attacker Wasn’t “Living in the Real World”*”, The New York Times, 2016

¹⁵⁰ Samuel H., Morgan T., “Who is the Nice terror attack suspect? Everything we know so far about Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel”, 2016

¹⁵¹ Orton K., “*Lone wolf attacks in Europe are nothing of the sort*”, The Telegraph, 2017

¹⁵² BBC News, “*Notre-Dame attack: Farid Ikken appears in Paris court*”, 2017

Originary of Béjaia, in Cabilia, he graduated there as a translator and interpreter in 2000 and then moved to Sweden, where he lived for ten years and graduated in journalism, obtaining a master's degree from the prestigious Uppsala University. He worked on the public radio station of that country and he had also married a Swedish woman, from whom he divorced. In 2011 he returned to his hometown, founding an advertising agency and an information site. Two years later, however, given the failure of those initiatives, he started working as a correspondent from Bejaia for "*El Watan*", a newspaper notoriously against radical Islam. In 2014 he had managed to obtain a doctorate in France and had started writing his thesis on the new Maghreb media and their way of dealing with national elections. His nephew, Sofiane Ikken, a lawyer in Algeria, said he had last seen him last summer. His uncle had spoken ill of him and called the leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi "stupid". According to Sofiane, Farid was "*religious and made prayer, but he was absolutely not an extremist*¹⁵³". This was confirmed by his thesis director, Professor Arnaud Mercier. But he specified that Farid was "*very lonely*". His radicalization is considered to have occurred over a period of 10 months, being previously unknown to public security or police, and showing any sign of radicalization before the attack. All the propaganda material and attack guidebooks he needed to carry on the attack were found online, as there is no proof of contact with anyone connected to Iraq or Syria. In his computer and USB key where found an IS manual for lone wolves, images of the London attack three days prior to the events, video praising the Brussels and Paris attacks and a video-message in which he was supporting IS, that he planned (but failed), to share online the night before his attack. His prosecutor François Molins regarding the case highlighted how: "*He therefore appears to have the profile of a neophyte that the services fighting terrorism fear as much as hardened cases. It shows the diversity of profiles and that anything is possible*¹⁵⁴".

¹⁵³ L'Express, "*Assaillant de Notre-Dame: Farid Ikken, un doctorant "fragile" et "très pratiquant"*", 2017

¹⁵⁴ Molins F., "*Notre-Dame attack: Farid Ikken appears in Paris court*", BBC News, 2017

3.3 *Inspire* and *Dabiq*

This interconnectedness of the Jihadist groups' propaganda campaign, of which both *Dabiq* and *Inspire* are basilar components is a major factor in the apparent efficacy of its appeal. In particular, online radicalizing strategies should be understood into the context of not just its propaganda strategy but broader politico-military campaign. With this well kept in mind, we can explore more in depth the communicative strategies of the two leader-groups IS and Al-Qaeda. A recent enlightening analysis of such issues is that provided by the researcher Haroro J. Ingram for the Australian National University of Canberra, which provides a clear overview of the themes, narratives and messaging developed by terrorists in *Dabiq* and *Inspire* through a comparative lens¹⁵⁵.

According to this study, the central purpose of IS messaging is to shape the perceptions and polarise the support of contested populations. This particular motive enables IS to evoke an extraordinary variety of images and themes while retaining at the same time an overall coherence in its campaign. The variety of themes presented suggests IS capacity to shape its propagandistic tool as a hook, that can catch the attention of someone on one particular issue, for instance the despair of *hummah*'s treatment, and then, through an intimate tie between themes, create cognitive openings for other aspects such as the dreariness of Western costumes. Moreover, as highlighted by the scholar Tom Pyszczynski, constant exposure to discourses about martyrdom and death, combined with videos of suicide operations and beheadings, can produce “*mortality salience*¹⁵⁶”, and excessive feeling of mortality that leads a spontaneous support to operations like suicide bombing. In order to achieve its propagandistic goals IS mainly lie on two kind of messages: pragmatics and perceptual bounded together through self-reinforcing domino effect arguments. The former is those dealing with the group's politico and military efforts, concerning thus security, stability and livelihood themes. This kind of messaging is designed to convince IS audience of the group's credibility and legitimacy as opposed to those of their enemies. By drawing on pragmatic considerations, IS try to push the public to make rational-choice decisions

¹⁵⁵ Haroro J. Ingram, “*Learning from ISIS's virtual propaganda war for Western Muslims: A comparison of Inspire and Dabiq*”, The International Centre for Counter-terrorism (The Hague) 2017

¹⁵⁶ Tom Pyszczynski, “*Mortality Salience, Martyrdom, and Military Might*”, 2006

based on cost-benefit considerations. Not by chance, Jihadist groups and IS mostly, make an increasing use in its magazine of a formal language, compared with the past when a much more colloquial language was used. For a reader unaware of the multiple nuances of the Islamic jurisprudence, *Dabiq* discourses and messages may sound anything but crazy. On the contrary, several arguments may represent a source of inherently credibility. To take an example, let's look at a small excerpt from IS's video *Flames of War* that strongly relies on a pragmatic appeal: "*The Islamic State was now on show for the world to see. The courts were established; prayer was being enforced; the hudood were being implemented; the people were being invited to good; and the zakat was being collected and distributed. Light glowed from the mujahedeen, who were soft towards the believers and harsh against the kuffar. This harshness never wavered and was a constant trait of the brothers. So the war on the kuffar raged on*¹⁵⁷".

Perceptual messages, instead, leverage on identity, IS and solutions narrative constructs, inducing the audience to modulate their perception of the external world in coherence with the terrorist ideological value-frame. The central narrative of this type of messaging follow the one presented by Orsini, and is thus characterized by a radical catastrophist theme, in which two main concepts are introduced to the public's mind: the in-group identity and out-group identity. The tale sounds again in apocalyptic terms: "*IS are champions and protectors of Sunnis, while IS's enemies are evil Others, that are responsible for Sunni crises to which IS are the only hope for solutions*¹⁵⁸". The main intent, here, is to convince the audience in engaging in decisions involving consideration on their own identity. Here is an example from *Dabiq* magazine: "*As the world progresses towards al-Malhamah al-Kubra [the battle preceding Armageddon], the option to stand on the side lines as a mere observer is being lost. As those with hearts diseased by hypocrisy and bid'ah are driven towards the camp of kufr, those with a mustard seed of sincerity and Sunnah are driven towards the camp of iman*¹⁵⁹". Not surprisingly, IS propaganda tends to emphasise perceptual messages to transnational audiences, and in particular, Western Muslims as these are those who are more needed

¹⁵⁷Conway M., Jarvis L., Lehane O., "*Terrorists' Use of the Internet: Assessment and Response*", (2017)

¹⁵⁸Ingram H.J., "*An Analysis of Inspire and Dabiq: Lessons from AQAP and Islamic State's Propaganda War*", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:5, 357-375, 2017

¹⁵⁹Ivi.

to choose on which side of the barricade stay: namely, if on the side of God or on Evil's side. Of course, behavioural levers play a fundamental part in both *Dabiq* and *Inspire* working as both a source of inspiration for terrorists as well as a catalyst of social norming. For example, *Dabiq* presents profiles of fellow westerners fighting for the so-called caliphate in its regular "*Among the Believers Are Men*" section. According to another study published by *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, in *Dabiq* thirteen main issues are identifiable, while fourteen in *Inspire*¹⁶⁰. Three types of items were identified as recurring in both *Dabiq* and *Inspire* magazines: articles, statements and advertisements. The study assesses how the architects of these magazines through a wise dissemination of references to in-group and out-group identity, inducing to IS and solution constructs strategically designed. Moreover, the public attention is catalysed by recurring to reinforcing messaging of three kinds.

The first ones are the *value-reinforcing* messages, aimed at tying the in-group identity to solution constructs and out-groups to perceptions of crisis. Then, the *dichotomy-reinforcing* messaging: namely, those highlighting the insuperable gap between Good and Bad, and foremost between the Believer and the Unfaithful Unbeliever. Such messages are primarily aimed at instilling psychological, existential and socio-political anxieties in the audience *and* provide readers with clear choices between the in-group or Others and solution or IS. For instance, let's look also at *Inspire* arguments against Americans: "*We Muslims have no animosity against racial or ethnic group. We are not against Americans simply because they are Americans, we are against evil, and America as a whole has turned into a nation of evil*"¹⁶¹.

Finally, terrorists make use of *IS-reinforcing* messages which are particularly relevant since they show the group's *takfirist* proclivities, tying treacherous *in-group* members to *in-group* crises. An example can be taken from *Dabiq* criticism toward the so-called "moderate" Muslims, who "*had their religion diluted and, not surprisingly, are always amongst the first to speak out in any case where the mujahidin display their*

¹⁶⁰ Ingram H.J., "*An Analysis of Inspire and Dabiq: Lessons from AQAP and Islamic State's Propaganda War*", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:5, 357-375, 2017

¹⁶¹ *Inspire Magazine*, Fall 1431/2010

*harshness towards crusaders, attempting to disguise their criticism towards the mujahidin as concern for the image of Islam*¹⁶².” Moreover, the “*pedagogy of the hate*” is inculcated in potential terrorists’ minds through an insistent dissemination of justification arguments that are cyclically presented by the architects in a cognitive-reinforcing dynamic. Terrorists groups needs to appear on the right side of the barricade in the eyes of their fellow Muslims. Accordingly, they deploy messaging that are designed to proactively prepare their supporters for their rival’s critiques. It is a strategy that means that when IS deploys defensive counter-messaging it can start with an often unspoken “we told you so”. Thus, a well-orchestrated structuration of identity-choice inputs balanced by rational-choice induced arguments seems to be at the basis of the propagandistic internet campaign.

3.4 Online communities and gaming

The role of online communities and also gaming communities that we have noted above, needs a more accurate analysis. Some people might enter in a radicalizing forum out of curiosity and then, after constant exposure to such contents - the use of mobile phones has radically changed the approach to social media, as it can be used at every moment and at every hour of the day -, get to into the matter that makes them ready to declare themselves terrorists. Of course, this is, at least at an early phase, is limited to the internet reality and not the real world, since it seems to provide a sense of anonymity and deniability to avoid being held accountable for their actions. Lacking any type of moderation and moral limit in the use of such contents, violent and extremists’ voices are amplified and more moderate ones remain silent, thus convincing them that extremism can become a new normality, even more, it should become everyone’s reality. On this account, the study conducted by Katherine Bessi re on cyberspace can provide a useful example¹⁶³; role playing is a fundamental part of many online games community, in which inevitable the player projects his idealized self.

¹⁶² M. Conway, L. Jarvis, O. Lehane, “*Terrorists’ Use of the Internet: Assessment and Response*”, 2017

¹⁶³ Bessi re K., “*The Ideal Elf: Identity Exploration in World of Warcraft*”, 2007

Some of the most susceptible ones could want to project this idealized form of self, that has been overexposed by violent and extremist values and morals, into the psychical world and out of the digital one.

Gaming and gaming culture is as old as computers themselves, but in the recent years it has taken a massive leap forward, due to advancement in technology and hardware in general. This allowed more immersive realities that are not anymore just for a single player, but allow and also encourage online and cooperative game with other players. This inevitably creates communities, that can eventually be exploited for several reasons. First, as stated above, communication and messaging inside specific gaming network is protected by strict privacy rules and are kept under less control than their social media counterparts by authorities. Second, it provides a way to create a community around a completely new set of values; we stated above that the lone wolf needs to be initially socialized into the new set of values, but then, in most of the time, when facing a physically real community he stumbles in his poor social skills, and the games and online communities provide an easy satisfaction to such needs.

Moreover, they can help in changing the pre-existing value set that the just radicalized possesses; being very immersive and vast, such games could become a parallel world for the person to live in, in which create and live by a new set of values and norms, thus making a further process of radicalization much easier. In conclusion, most games, especially online games that are of our interest in this analysis, are set in a war-like environment, providing, even if only digitally, a set of skills and experience that could be useful to a new terrorist. Ritterfeld and Weber stress that *“video games can be specifically tailored to enhance cognitive, metacognitive, socioemotional, or behavioural skills, even addressing various user needs. With the development of more sophisticated intelligent systems, the potential for education in formal and informal contexts will rise dramatically¹⁶⁴”*, thus making it possible to be exploited as online training platforms. Of course, this is limited by the only approximate level of learning, as a lone wolf that “trained” on a game will never be as proficient in attacking and

¹⁶⁴ Lakomy M., *“Let's Play a Video Game: Jihadi Propaganda in the World of Electronic Entertainment”*, 2017

planning than a returned foreign fighter from Syria, but still this is an aspect that should be kept under consideration. Creating a digital environment where jihad is the accepted norm and not a subculture of some kind is indeed helpful in creating a softer terrain of culture for radicalization, as some values or ideas have been already internalized.

Rules on video games and online communities are usually clearly set on a classic Good Vs Evil dichotomy, similar to the ones of old fairy tales. The impact the message that can be transmitted through this kind of media sets up the mind towards the definition of an easier way of understanding the much more complex world in which we live in. The lone wolf profile could very well be enriched, as a variable to be considered during the analysis, the exposition to this kind of online reality. It is a driver through which the “*binary code mentality*” can be easily be imposed and then can be translated into the radical Islam of IS’s rules. There are no shades of grey in this mentality, it’s either black or white. This powerful message of security into the moral certainties of a radical ideology or religion can be very well be transmitted, slowly and in time, through a videogame or online community. Thus, internet appears to be the ultimate mean of information, much more than other secondary sources like books, pamphlets and manifestos, so much central in the work of violent and extremist propaganda in the last centuries. To acquire radicalizing information before the advent of internet, the person interested in such activities had to go out and become an active member of the community to actual do something or learn something about it. With the advance and new pervasiveness of the internet, terrorists, especially lone wolf terrorists can be self-radicalized from a distance.

IS communication technique has two possible victorious outcomes, both very helpful to the cause: on one side, it is possible to gather and recruit members coming from the far corners of the world and from different social as well as cultural layers, and make them join the fight in Muslim lands; on the other, it creates a strong and stable network of single or small groups of operatives around the world, contacted and radicalized only through the use of internet able to carry on effective attacks in their own home countries. Moreover, this network provides for useful guides on how to actually perpetrate a terrorist attack like, for example, there are sites on how to build

explosive devices out of everyday houseware. Anwar Al Awlaki, a Yemen based and US born cleric who used the internet to convince as many Americans as possible to attack their own country in every way possible, also provided his readers instruction on “*how to build a bomb in the kitchen of your mom*”¹⁶⁵. And obviously articles of this kind were followed by comments meant to incite others joining the fight. This allowed also those that were unable to find a radical cleric nearby to connect with others with the same ideas and eventually join the terroristic cell; moreover, the risk of approaching someone online is incredibly lower rather than an approach in the real world, thus making such a strategy very convenient. The fundamental role the internet has in forging and sustaining violent narratives has been recognized in 2011 by the White House’s counter radicalization strategy, and that new programs had to “*be mindful of the online nature of the threat*”¹⁶⁶. The problem is that the actions that can be taken in the internet realm by a country are very limited. Filtering the contents is an option, but very time-consuming and eventually useless, since new sites can be created every day, no matter how many are closed or obscured. Constitutional law all across the West protects free speech with very strict rules, making that most of content, no matter how clearly radicalizing in nature, should be allowed since protected by constitutional laws. Apart from Constitutions, the public opinion would immediately react to such provisions, thus creating, for such an effort, a very high political cost. The US and the EU have made themselves champions of freedom of information and freedom of speech all across the globe and all across the web, and using methods that, according to both, are dictatorial measures, is not politically feasible. This is not to claim that states are powerless in the fight against cyberterrorism: anonymity on these sites is possible but is also possible to find the persons beyond a nickname, and eventually create an occasion of security forces to individuate a terroristic cell. Moreover, the Governments could sometimes rely on cyber-attacks on specific sites, through denial of service and other more sophisticated means. Such takedowns are legal, but as much of the legislation on the issues of the internet, is very limited, and matters of constitutional or international law appear, raising the question on who should be allowed to such a strong limitation of the freedom of speech and expression. The cooperation of the private sector in this area

¹⁶⁵ Inspire, Summer 1431/2010

¹⁶⁶ The White House Counter Radicalization strategy, 2011

proves to be of fundamental importance, as corporations as Facebook, Google, Twitter can be helpful to limit, even if not to stop, the spreading of such contents in their platforms, making them at least more difficult to find. Of course, this action can be nothing but limited, as every minute 72 hours of videos are uploaded on Youtube, making Google unable to answer to politicians call for action. The willingness of both Google and Facebook to take action must however be taken into serious consideration, as they could become more aware of potential threats and sites online, finding individuals, organization and propaganda and therefore help the effort of national security forces.

Now that the two principal “external” determinants of European lone wolf terrorism – namely, the role exerted by Jihadist groups and the internet in fostering homegrown radicalization – has been investigated, we can move to the domestic dimension. In other words, we can now investigate the reasons behind EU lone wolves terrorism against their own home countries.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DOMESTIC DIMENSION OF LONE WOLF TERRORISM

As anticipated in Chapter one, lone wolf terrorism attacks, despite substantially responding to Jihadist groups recruiting strategies and being highly influenced by the ideologies of validation proposed by such groups through Internet, nevertheless represent a form of homegrown terrorism that needs to be addressed in its main social domestic determinants, in order to understand why individuals through a process of self – directed radicalization, end up undertaking violent actions against parts of their own society. As highlighted by the New York Police Department model developed by Silber and Bhatt¹⁶⁷, homegrown terrorism radicalization in the West is largely a function of the people and the environment they live in. Thus, accordingly, next part will be dedicated at investigating the reasons beyond this “rebellion” against European democracies and their social values.

First of all, in order to get a better understanding of the issue, it should be highlighted how both pushing as well as pulling factors exert their role in the radical derive in which an increasing number of EU Muslim migrants of second and third generation have been falling during last years. IS progressive territorial defeat has been well compensated by the ground gained in the battle of the “hearts” played in the ideological field. And this, of course as we have seen, represent a fundamental pull factor for Jihadist groups audience, to embrace the Black Flag call. Not by chance, already in 2005, Ayman al Zawahiri, the strategic leader of Al Qaeda, wrote a letter to Al Zarqawi, the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, in which he wrote:

¹⁶⁷ Silber M., Bhatt A., “*Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*”, Senior Intelligence Analysts NYPD Intelligence Division, 2007

“[...] however, despite all of this, I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media and that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our umma. [...]”¹⁶⁸

However, also the role played by pushing factor should not be underestimated. Lone wolf terrorist actions result from a fatal mixture of personal and political grievances which push the individuals toward radicalization. The study underlines personal difficulties of various kind in the personal life of many of the cases under scrutiny. For a significant number of them, drugs, petty crime and street violence have been part of their former life, as a part of a feeling of exclusion, absence of a sense of belonging both to the social community they live in and to the State in general. Moreover, such sense of social disfunction is not uncommon in European youth in general¹⁶⁹, but in the case of the lone wolves is taken to its extreme consequences; we could affirm that it's more demanding to be young today than it was for previous generations. Society has become harsher and more complex to understand as a result of many different trends including globalization, hyper individualism, weakening of social, traditional and cultural frameworks. Quite understandably, such issues are nothing but worsened by the economic crisis and its consequences for the European population in general. This makes younger generations much more exposed than in the past to moral crisis regarding their value sets. Considering the fact that youth is facing a much wider array of existential questions, which ranges to mere material issues (work, housing, life expectations) to moral ones, more and more young people feel side-lined from mainstream society and its values and loses its connection to them, thus making them much more sensible to extremist propaganda that, as we stated above, provides answers to all of those questions. This allows us to understand why not only those coming from severe economic deprivation are prone to turn to radical ideology, a condition of social disengagement can appear in individuals coming from the most different socio-economic conditions.

¹⁶⁸ Europol, *“The “Jihadi Wolf” Threat The Evolution Of Terror Narratives Between The (Cyber-)Social Ecosystem And Self-Radicalization “Ego-System”*, 2017

¹⁶⁹ Egmont Paper 74, *“What Drives Europeans To Syria, And To Is? Insights From The Belgian Case”*, 2015

Belgium, which has been widely considered to be the greatest terroristic hub in Europe represent a case worth exploring. Youth representatives in the country have warned several times the authorities that most young people feel depressed, hopeless and unable to cope with the challenges posed by the current socio-economic conditions¹⁷⁰. The situation of stagnation both of the economy and the labour market created a general sense of insecurity towards the future, thus providing at least a partial explanation on why the young generations feel unable to cope with life. Not surprisingly the youth suicide rate in Belgium is much higher than the EU average, as well as schools' dropouts, which appear to be a stronger trend in Belgium compared to the neighbouring countries. The Franco-Iranian sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar, in his study of 2017 on the radicalization path pursued by homegrown terrorists¹⁷¹, points to the increasing appeal displayed by the classical narration of the Islamic extremist threat and to the increasing role played in fostering radicalization processes by a diffused sense of disaffection among local communities towards the "mainstream" in general, but also to EU countries' social institutions failure, rise of joblessness and European' prisons expansions.

The radical drift that is taking place among an increasing number of EU Muslim migrants of the second and third generation can not be, of course, fully understood if not making reference to the higher degree of disaffection and a growing hatred toward their own social environment mark a fundamental prompt for the radicalization of such individuals that needs to be addressed. In particular, Jihadist lone wolves show variety in motivation, form and capacity¹⁷². Accordingly, as already stated above, and also highlighted in an increasing number of case studies realized in the last decade, it is properly a combination of individual, social and external factors that affect individual's radicalization. Thus, becoming a lone wolf terrorist involves a social process that depends on the specific situation and personal characteristics of the individual involved and his/her interaction with others, despite remaining inherently individual in nature.

¹⁷⁰ Ivi.

¹⁷¹ Khosrokhavar F., *“Radicalization: Why Some People Choose the Path of Violence”*, 2017

¹⁷² Center for Middle Eastern Studies, *“Europe’s Other Youth: Mapping the phenomenon of young Muslim radicalization”*, Lund University, 2018

Namely, the fatal mixture of causal factors that lead individuals to become “agents of terror” is diverse and unique for each individual. There are numerous references, sometimes expressed in lone wolves attempt to justify their intentions related to political issues, such as Western Europe’s foreign policy in the Middle East or retribution for Western derision of traditional elements of the Muslim religion. Taking from previous literature, Christopher Paul tries to define the reasons that lead an individual into a social context like the extremist one, highlighting three main points:

- Humiliation, particularly the one of Muslim communities that are declining in comparison to the Western culture. This, linked to the fact that currently many Muslims live in Western countries, can prove very dangerous. Humiliation can later turn into frustration towards the government and mainstream society, giving the potential terrorists all the basic pre-conditions to join.
- A lack of faith in the institutionalized political system, seen as unable or unwilling to do anything to ameliorate the issues and grievances brought upon by the community
- When two of the above are strong, it is easier for an extreme ideology filter through the social texture, thus validating the terrorist groups, allowing them to generate and maintain support¹⁷³.

Moreover, it is mainly among those psychologically fragile European young Muslims of second, third and fourth generation that terrorists find fertile ground for recruiting because as Khosrokhavar highlights “*the problem is not DAESH, which is objectively losing ground, but the ideological vacuum that characterizes today the Europe. There are no more utopias, as communism had been, ideals are lacking. Extremists fill these gaps because young people need to believe in something*¹⁷⁴”. In other words, there seems to be a substantial problem of values, a sort of request for spirituality: the lone wolf kills and in some cases sacrifice his own life as a gesture of faith, after a radical

¹⁷³Paul C., “As a Fish Swims in the Sea: Relationships Between Factors Contributing to Support for Terrorist or Insurgent Groups”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33:6, 488-510, 2010; Mark Juergensmeyer, “*Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*”, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

¹⁷⁴ Internazionale, “*I Nuovi Jihadisti Europei*”, 2016

conversion that has restructured the actor' identity. Before moving into the ideological trap posed by Jihadists lone wolves are reported to have conducted a life characterized by several behaviours – drinking alcohol, smoking, making use of drugs, have a dissolute sexual life, which after the conversion and the assimilation of the Jihadist pedagogy – are simply considered by the same actors as blasphemous because they contradict the new dogmas.

In order to understand such behavioural change it is necessary to remind how the new “social education” and the relative values assimilated by Western lone wolves, reflect the ideological negation of those liberal values and thus, social institutions, on which modern liberal democracies are built. The Jihadist society-to be dreamed by Al-Baghdadi, namely, in its totalitarian institutional asset and value set, reflect the negation of those principles on which Western European democracies are built. Namely, those values we can find in the pages of a number of mile stone works dedicated to Western political liberalism. Just to mention some of the key authors involved: Locke, Montesquieu, Kant, Humboldt, Bentham, Tocqueville and Popper¹⁷⁵. If on the one side, the “liberal man” mental framework – which should be expected to be the natural outcome of a modern liberal society – is shaped by his adherence to values such as tolerance, respect and dialogue, on the contrary, the Jihadist mental cadres are framed around the binary code mentality that impose the purification of an Evil from the world in order to save humankind. But why should an individual move from one value system of reference to another? Several sociological studies point to the high complexity of modern societies. Namely, dilemmas, tensions, antinomies, terms that recur in the works of several social scientists and political thinkers, are used to define a society crossed by deep disorientation. The social individual rooted in a liberal society is increasingly challenged with a number of issues that wants him/her to take clear positions on what is good and what is bad. Western liberal societies do not provide clear cognitive guidance to the man living a moment of value crisis, since we are dealing with an open system of belief. In this particular moment of value crisis, the radical ideology – whether Jihadist or other – provide a clear roadmap of moral conduct in which the

¹⁷⁵ Orsini A., “*IS: I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*”, 2016

boundaries between Good and Bad are clearly defined in every aspect of life. Individual converted to a radical ideology end up being freed by all moral dilemmas of everyday life since the ideology is capable of providing clear answers to all of them.

The socio-psychological condition of an individual detaching himself from mainstream society values as a result of an existential crisis, has been captured in the words of Alessandro Orsini, with the notion of *social marginality* – that should not be confused with *social marginalization* - referring to “*the socio-psychological condition of emotional tension of someone living in a society whose values he/she feels as extraneous [...]. It is a phase in which an individual detach himself from the dominant values and is willing to embrace new ones because no one can live without values. Otherwise, not having a criterion to orient himself in the world, he could not act*¹⁷⁶”. Contrarily to social marginalization, social marginality is not a condition of objective deprivation and it is not linked to social or economic status. As Orsini reports, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, one of the minds behind Paris attack on 13 November 2015, for instance, was not used to the hardship life of those coming from degraded social environments – such as Charlie Hebdo attackers, Chèrif and Said Kouachi. On the contrary, before converting to Jihadi ideology, he lived a life of privilege, being the son of a clothing merchant living in Molenbeek and attending one of the most prestigious catholic school of Bruxelles, the Collège Saint-Pierre d’Uccle. The same can be said for the Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, son of one of the richest banker of Africa, who after graduating in engineering in London at University College London (Ucl), lived an existential crisis that has brought him to embrace radicalization. On 25 December 2009, at the age of 23, he tried to commit a suicide bombing on an Amsterdam-Detroit flight, without, however, succeeding. What makes homegrown terrorist radicalization extremely difficult to be tackled is the fact that social marginality is not something uncommon and, as Orsini highlights, it is not a condition that necessary brings to radicalization or violence. On the contrary, it can happen to everybody to live a period of existential crisis that if prolonged, can lead to isolation, deep sufferance, depression and, in some cases, distrust in a society in which we feel

¹⁷⁶ Ivi.

foreigners and whose values we do not recognize anymore. However, if a marginal individual start attributing all his suffering to the dominant values of his social environment and this hate is duly fed through a pervasive pedagogy of ideological hatred he can ends up embracing a new extremist system of values. In most of the cases, this socio-psychological condition of reject of a system of values and cognitive opening to others usually arises from a trauma, whether it small or big, or by a condition of persistent suffering producing a constant interior tension in those affected¹⁷⁷.

These people represent the perfect audience for Jihadi radicalizing propaganda. Jihadi Salafism provide marginal individuals a new way of thinking, feeling and acting built around them through a pervasive ideological narrative. The effect of this terrorist success are well demonstrated by the surprising number of Western citizens – mainly young people – who have chosen to embrace Jihadi-Salafist mission up to the point of becoming effective and destructive soldiers of the Islamic State, fulfilling their duties fighting in Syria and Iraq as well as becoming lone wolf striking their home countries in Europe¹⁷⁸.

As stated above, the notion of social marginality, should not be necessarily related to economic deprivation factors, as demonstrated also by the number of Western young citizens who have decided to embrace Jihadist ideological project without economic grievances of any sort. However, for the sake of scientific research, we must try to underline at least the most common features of the lone wolf trend in Europe in the last decade. While the young Muslim, born into a cultural divide, uneducated and with economic grievances, seems to be the preferred target of radical propaganda, empirical finding disallow us to consider just this kind of target as all-comprehensive, therefore it is necessary to analyse also the cases in which the lone wolf, falling short into a categorization of this kind¹⁷⁹. In other words, while some individuals seem to be born into a condition of social marginality due to their socio-economic environment,

¹⁷⁷ Beutel A. J., “*Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism in Western Muslim Communities: Lessons Learned for America*”, Minaret of Freedom Institute, 2007

¹⁷⁸ Europol, “*European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*”, 2017

¹⁷⁹ Hamm M.S., Spaaij R., “*The Age of Lone Wolf Terrorism*”, Columbia University Press, 2017

others appear to have developed such condition individually at a certain point in their lifetime, mainly after a personal traumatic event.

In both cases, again, at the root of an individual's path towards radicalization there is a mixture of ideology and personal resentment towards their own social environment. This finding keep validation when compared with databases including lone wolf terrorists tied to different source of ideological affiliation, as it has been highlighted by Stern's study of 2003¹⁸⁰. As illustrating examples, we can take the cases of the American Jihadist lone wolf Mir Aimal Kansi and of "the Unabomber" Theodore Kaczynski. The former, who in 1993 shot at CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia, killing two CIA employees and wounding another three – claimed his action was "*between Jihad and tribal revenge*"¹⁸¹: Jihad against the American support of Israel and revenge against the CIA that had mistreated his father's during the Afghanistan war against the Soviets. The latter, despite being moved by totally different ideological motivations displayed the same combination of political and personal motives: he railed against technology, modernity and the fatal destruction of the individual liberty these bring. The only way to save humanity would have been to build an anarchist world. His growing hatred toward modern society appears clearly in his 1995 manifesto, where he claimed: "*organized society frustrates my very powerful urge for physical freedom and personal autonomy*"¹⁸². Thus, a perceived social dysfunction in life drive the lone wolf terrorist personal frustration, leading him/her to attribute all his sufferance to external factors.

However, it remains to be evaluated whether a particular social condition, that Hamm and Spaaji define as *relative deprivation*¹⁸³, is peculiar of the lone wolf profile, or it fit also for group-based terrorists. These authors analysis of 2015 on lone wolf terrorism in the USA claim the presence of both personal and political grievances as an exclusive and crucial signature of lone wolf terrorism. They found out that 80 per cent

¹⁸⁰ Stern J., "*Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*", New York, 2003

¹⁸¹ Ivi.

¹⁸² Ivi.

¹⁸³ Hamm M., Spaaji R., "*Lone Wolf Terrorism in America: Using Knowledge of Radicalization Pathways to Forge Prevention Strategies*", Indiana State University, 2015

of both pre and post 9/11 lone wolves' cases showed evidence of both. In their words: *"In their social exclusion, lone individuals feel deprived of what they perceive as values to which they are entitled, and form grievances against the government responsible for their unemployment, discrimination and injustices. Their violence is a deviant adaptation to this gap between means and goals¹⁸⁴"*. However, comparing group-based and lone wolf profiles, a certain degree of relative deprivation seems to be at the basis of radicalization in both cases. Namely, personal grievances and a sense of relative deprivation play a fundamental role in driving a number of individuals towards a conversion to a totalitarian belief and political violence in general, not only in the cases of lone wolf terrorism.

Thus, not surprisingly, one crucial aspect that differentiates most of the lone wolves from "ordinary" terrorists is properly their higher degree of social ineptitude¹⁸⁵. Several findings suggest how that the former are more likely to be unmoored from society as a result of their often poor social skills. Jaspardo's study of 2010 also supported the findings of psychopathology and social ineptitude as: of the 14 American lone wolves studied, nine were described as 'loners' by friends and family¹⁸⁶. Similarly, the International Centre for Counter Terrorism argues that lone wolves, differently from other terrorists *"do not work and play well with others¹⁸⁷"*. This divide emerges not only when we analyse and compare cases of group-based terrorists with totally isolated lone actors, but also when we look at those lone wolves who even having yearned to be members of a group, have faced increasing difficulties in becoming an integrated part of it and being accepted, thus ending up developing an isolationist attitude and undertaking individually their own terrorist cycle. This is consistent with the general research finding that there is not one single path to radicalization.

¹⁸⁴ Ivi.

¹⁸⁵ Jaspardo C., *"Lone wolf - The threat from independent jihadists"*, 2010

¹⁸⁶ Ivi.

¹⁸⁷ Bakker E., de Graaf B., *"Preventing Lone Wolf Terrorism: some CT Approaches Addressed"*, ICCT Expert Meeting Paper, 2011

The causal link between personal frustration and political violence has been brightly investigated by Gurr in his sociological study of 1970, “Why Men Rebel”¹⁸⁸. Gurr examines the psychological frustration-aggression theory which argues that the primary source of the human capacity for violence is the frustration-aggression mechanism. According to this theory, political violence is the result of a deep sense of discontent caused by a sense of relative deprivation: the discrepancy between an individual's expected and achieved welfare that may results in collective discontent. To understand this concept, it is necessary to date back to its first articulation, that took place in the ancient Greece. Namely, Aristotle was the first one to argue a causal link between the rise of a political revolution and a relative, rather than absolute, sense or feeling of inequality. For Aristotle, it is the discrepancies between what people have in terms of political and economic goods relative to what they think should be justly theirs, to produce political violence. At his time, political violence resulted from the tension between, on the one side, common people who aspired for economic and political equality and on the other, the oligarchs who aspired for greater inequality than what they had, thus producing a sense of relative deprivation on both sides. Nowadays, however, individual’s feeling of relative deprivation arise, of course, from different socio-psychological input than in the ancient Greece. In Western modern democracies collective violent mobilizations may arise from different needs, but the violent epilogue of the socio-psychological tension produced by relative deprivation has not changed¹⁸⁹. Looking at our European capitalist democracies, where intense social mobility processes occurs, we can observe how in a continuing changing world, it is mainly a sense of aspirational deprivation to push social groups towards political violence¹⁹⁰: dissatisfaction come out from a rise of expectations in a socio-economic situation that, instead, do not change or from the comparison with the improvements achieved by other groups.

¹⁸⁸ Gurr, “*Why Men Rebel*”, Princeton, NJ: Center of International Studies, Princeton UP, 1970.

¹⁸⁹Usoufzai, K. & Emmerling, F., “*How identity crisis, relative deprivation, personal characteristics, and empathy contribute to the engagement of Western individuals in Islamist terrorist behavior*”. Journal of Terrorism Research, 2017

¹⁹⁰Griffin D., “*Spirituality and Society: Postmodern Visions*”, SUNY Press, 1988

However, not surprisingly, terrorist groups propaganda finds fertile ground especially in those socio-economic environments which are best exemplified by the French *banlieues*¹⁹¹: the peripheral neighbourhoods of the biggest French urban conglomerates. It was exactly on the outskirts of big cities like Paris, Lyon, and Marseille – that have recently risen to the headlines for the increasing number of homegrown terrorist attacks – that immigrants have been largely housed in high-rise housing projects. The immigrants' influx from former French colonies in Africa, started in the late 1940s, when the French government needed a substantial increase in its labour force during the Second World War, became massive after colonies reached their independence in the 1950s and 1960s, when many North African moved looking for work. It has been estimated by French authorities that out of the 5 million Muslims living in France - and making of it the largest Muslim community in Europe – about 1.5 million have roots in Algeria, 1 million in Morocco, and 400,000 in Tunisia. Thus today many of these banlieues have essentially become Muslim ghettos, with, according to French data, an inmate population made of 60 percent Muslims. Here a sense of distrust towards the State, discontent and economic deprivation – that in Gurr postulation is an aspect of the relative deprivation concept – largely prevail: data on joblessness runs at 20 percent, doubling the French national average, and up to 40 percent among 15 to 24 year-olds. Moreover, according to a 2010 Stanford University study, in France a Christian job applicant of African heritage was two and a half times more likely to be asked for an interview than an equally qualified Muslim with African roots. Speaking with a journalist of the British magazine *The Week*, Soeren Kern of the think tank Gatestone Institute, described the French Muslim community affirming a central point that clarify why terrorist propaganda is so appealing to them: “*They're not integrated into French society at all. In a way, they're stateless*”. In the words of Djib, a young resident of the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois interviewed: “*people are happy the banlieues exist to cage up people they don't want to see or worry about. If we are out of sight and out of mind c'est bien*¹⁹²”.

¹⁹¹ Precht T., “*Home grown terrorism and Islamist radicalisation in Europe: From conversion to terrorism: An assessment of the factors influencing violent Islamist extremism and suggestions for counter radicalisation measures*”, Research report funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice, 2007

¹⁹² *The Week*, “*France's alienated Muslims*”, 2015

Of course, Jihadist propaganda is ready and prompt in providing an effective antidote to the perception of alienation many Muslims feel towards their own Western societies. If what they lack is the motherly hug of a State where all are equal and live in a peaceful brotherhood, that is what terrorists will give them. Let's look at the first number of *Dabiq*, published in English language on July 2014:

“Muslims of the whole world (...) turn your heads up, today, by the grace of Allah, you have a State and a Government that will restore your dignity, power, rights and command. It is a state where Arabs and non-Arabs, white men and blacks, Westerners and Orientals are all brothers. It is a state that gathers Caucasians, Indians, Chinese, Iraqis, Yemenis, Egyptians, Maghrebians, Americans, French, Germans and Australians. Allah has joined their hearts and therefore they become brothers, by His grace, loving each other and sacrificing for one another. Their blood mixes and become one, under one flag and one purpose¹⁹³”.

The French case helps us in understanding the issues: the principle of separation of powers between Church and the State is a centuries' old tenet in Western constitution and socio-political life, with no religious expression in the country's government, judiciary or schools. Muslim communities however, since their religion deeply connects state and religion, feel under attacks as secularism can be used against them to disallow them to follow their tradition in a context, the Western one, which is not theirs. This trend is even stronger in the case of second-generation Muslims, that feel the divide between their family traditions, mainstream laws, and Western society's values, since they do not feel completely a part of any of the two worlds. For one, in 2011, France became the first European country to ban women from covering their face in public with a niqab or burqa, mostly for security reasons, but causing uproars and a heated political debate in the country. Already in the autumn of 2005, the sense of social resentment has been expressed by weeks of rioting in *banlieues* throughout France, leaving behind violence and destruction: more than 10,000 cars were burnt out and hundreds of public buildings were damaged. Since then, the French government has

¹⁹³ *Dabiq*, Issue 1, 2014

spent \$55 billion trying to improve these run-down areas, but many Muslims still feel that France doesn't care about them.

In conclusion, terrorist groups continue to exploit the social and economic grievances of Muslim immigrants to the EU, in order to recruit and incite them to engage in terrorist activities. Using extreme ideology, like the IS does, has a certain appeal amongst segments of the Muslim population in the EU, sometimes expressing admiration for “martyrdom” of those able and willing to give up their life in the fight for Islam. As said above, the motivation behind the cognitive opening that leads the individual to social marginality and eventually towards terrorism, may result by both personal traumas or of a more generalized sense of distrust and hopelessness that is present now more than ever, in the European youth. The analysis done so far could allow us to trace a profile of the lone wolf terrorist and how it could be possible to identify them, or at least, try to understand where is more likely for a radicalization process to begin.

4.1 The Western lone wolf: a profile?

In order to explore the socio-psychological dynamics behind the lone wolves “rebellion” against their own Western society, it is particularly relevant to look more in depth at the personal stories of those lone wolves, who since the early 2000s have chosen to embrace the Black Flag call. Some of these stories have already been under observations in previous chapters, and looking in depth at the lives and at the path that has brought these individuals in committing terrorist attacks through a comparative lens it seems clear in first instance that a single sharable sociological profile hardly could be identified. This is an old battle the literature has engaged to address the issue of lone wolf terrorism: across time, several typologies have been proposed to characterize lone wolf terrorists, without, however, much success. It is the variety of the phenomenon itself to suggest how difficult can be to draw a unique and sharable sociological profile of this kind of terrorists. When looking at any large database of perpetrators, the conclusion drawn by all the main sociological and psychological studies conducted on

the issue – is often that they are drawn from across society, age group and gender¹⁹⁴. The Jihadist stories analysed in this study confirm further those conclusions.

The variety itself of the phenomenon suggest that no single profile can be deduced from observation. However, some key points can be highlighted. First of all, the Jihadist lone wolf terrorist tend to be relatively young. Namely, the majority of the Jihadist inspired lone wolf terrorists were younger than twenty-five years old. This seems to reflect a recent development since a number of empirical works, have in the past highlighted a higher average age. For instance, the empirical study by Gill, Horgan and Deckert of 2013¹⁹⁵ pointed out that “*the onset of lone actor engagement in terrorism has a different temporal trajectory than that of engaging in terrorism within formal groups*”. According to the authors, the average age of lone actors was higher than in comparable studies of terrorist groups. Their dataset of lone wolves displayed an average age of thirty-three years, while Al-Qaeda terrorists of twenty-six years. However, recent development of the phenomenon suggest that this pattern has probably changed. As previously underlined, through the new avenues for radicalization provided by internet and social media, the average age of lone wolves seems to have fallen. Namely, the increasing substitution of traditional Mosques with internet forum as principal *loci* for radicalization for homegrown terrorists, reveal an increasing appeal of radicalizing propaganda on youngest generations.

If we look at one already mentioned example of this trend we can find the case of Safia S, the German – Moroccan fifteen years old girl, who, on 26th February 2016, attacked a police officer at Hannover's bustling train station with a kitchen knife, inflicting her life threatening stab wounds. According to her prosecutors, the girl embraced the radical jihadi ideology by November 2015, and her chat conversations revealed her online contacts with IS affiliates. In one of these, she claimed November 2015 Paris attacks as her “*favourite day*” because “*our lions were in action in Paris*”

¹⁹⁴ Pantucci R., Ellis C., Roy van Zuijdewijn J., Bakker E., Gomis B., Palombi S., Smith M., “*Lone-Actor Terrorism*”, Final Report, RUSI, Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 11, 2016

¹⁹⁵ Gill P., Horgan J., Deckert P., “*Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivation and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists*”, Journal of Forensic Science, 425-435, 2013

and declared to be ready for a “*martyrdom operation*”¹⁹⁶. Similarly, the Turkish fifteen years old boy who – without having showed before any sign of radicalization – on 11th January 2016, attacked a teacher from a Jewish school in Marseille with a machete, attempting to decapitate him, declared to the police he had committed the act “*in the name of Allah and IS*”¹⁹⁷. Again, the guy, who had been described by his family members and schoolmates as a really “*good guy and student*” had radicalized on the internet.

Moreover, beyond an inversion of tendency in the anagraphical gap, several authors, including Fredholm, Gruenewald, Chermak and Freilich, highlights the prevalence of previous convictions among lone wolves in comparison with group-based terrorists¹⁹⁸. Although this assumption can not be ascribed as general rule, evidence of it have been found in the most comprehensive databases covering the issue: in particular, according to the work of Gill, Horgan and Deckert lone wolves display a significantly higher degree of previous criminal convictions than terrorists operating within wider networks¹⁹⁹. These authors also highlight the potential significance of the perpetrator’s relationship status. Where relationship status was available, data revealed 50 per cent of lone wolves were single and had never married, 24.4 per cent were married, and 18.9 per cent were divorced or separated. In sharp contrast, the study found out that 73 per cent of Al-Qa’ida-related terrorists were married²⁰⁰.

Eventually, as it has also been previously underlined, the literature has largely speculated on the alleged or real degree of mental illness that is usually attributed to lone wolf terrorists. On the issue, Gruenewald, Chermak and Freilich found out that 40 per cent of the lone actors in their dataset experienced mental illness, which was

¹⁹⁶ Pabst S., “*From Hanover to IS: The case of Safia S*”, DW, 2016

¹⁹⁷ Chrisafis A., “*Teenager faces terror charges over Marseille Jewish teacher attack*”, The Guardian, 2016

¹⁹⁸ Gruenewald J., Chermak S., Freilich J., “*Distinguishing “Loner” Attacks from Other Domestic Extremist Violence: A Comparison of Far-Right Homicide Incident and Offender Characteristics*”, Criminology and Public Policy Vol. 12, No. 1, 2013

¹⁹⁹ Gill P., Horgan J., Deckert P., “*Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivation and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists*”, Journal of Forensic Science, 425-435, 2013

²⁰⁰ Ivi.

significantly higher than the 7.6 per cent among the group-based actors. However, this study suffers the limit to be focused only on right-wing extremists²⁰¹; nevertheless, Corner and Gill concluded that this finding is consistent across terrorist ideologies. In their dataset, a lone actor is 13.49 times more likely to have a mental illness than an actor within a terrorist group²⁰². Moreover, as also previously underlined, lone wolf terrorists do not need to be disadvantaged to turn to terrorism. Cases observation prove that social disadvantage are not as a determinant factor. On the contrary, as also revealed by Eby study of the phenomenon, European lone wolf terrorists are not necessarily lower-class residents with no prospect of social upward mobility²⁰³.

Following through the variable constituted by mental illnesses, personal frustration appears to be among the main drivers of radicalization, as well as major events in a person's life that lead the process of becoming an active supporter and eventually a perpetrator starting from a merely supporting stance. Most of them are reported to have suffered from some kind of depression in at least one stage of their lifetime, especially after a traumatic event and before the radicalization. A higher degree of social ineptitude mark a strong behavioural characterization recurring in different cases. This suggests us potential elements to consider when coming to a categorization of the variables composing the profile of the lone wolf who, due to its very own characteristics, seems to be difficult to operationalize. Spaaij similarly concludes that individuals who become lone-actor terrorists tend to exhibit social problems to varying degrees and in variable combinations:

- personal aversion or depression
- negatively perceived developments in personal life or career

²⁰¹Gruenewald J., Chermak S., Freilich J., “Distinguishing “Loner” Attacks from Other Domestic Extremist Violence: A Comparison of Far-Right Homicide Incident and Offender Characteristics”, *Criminology and Public Policy* Vol. 12, No. 1, 2013

²⁰²Gill P., Horgan J., Deckert P., “Bombing Alone: Tracing the Motivation and Antecedent Behaviors of Lone-Actor Terrorists”, *Journal of Forensic Science*, 425-435, 2013

²⁰³ Eby., Charles A., “The Nation That Cried Lone Wolf: A Data-Driven Analysis of Individual Terrorists in the United States Since 9/11”, Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School, 2012

- direct or indirect interaction with extremist movements
- broader processes of social and political polarization in society
- militant literature and Internet publications, and admired terrorism occurring elsewhere²⁰⁴.

At last it is important to add the reason why lone wolves stay lone wolves, namely the fact that they feel a certain degree of discomfort regarding full membership of organized extremist groups, driven by social ineptitude. This sets of characteristics make the lone wolf category very broad, thus making a coherent action against the phenomenon at least complex. Being unable to trace a direct connection to a cell, a group or a criminal organization makes it very difficult for police and security forces to act directly to stop them before the attack actually takes place. In addition, the differences in profiles eventually prone to adhere to radical ideology appear very broad, and if we exclude, as we do, to consider the whole Muslim population as sensitive targets, the work of police forces becomes a daunting one. What would be our suggestion in the next chapter will try to focus more on a preventive approach rather than a responsive one.

²⁰⁴ Spaaij R., “*The Enigma of Lone Wolf Terrorism: An Assessment*”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33:9, 854-870, 2010

CHAPTER FIVE

LONE WOLVES AND HOW TO COUNTER THE PHENOMENON

5.1. EU actual issues on Counterterrorism policies

Now that the phenomenon has been analysed in detail, we can move forward and try to understand what law enforcement forces can do to prevent the attacks of Jihadist lone wolves. However, before moving into the definition of the directions in which EU counterterrorism policies should move, we have to underline some key issues EU counterterrorism policies present and that needs to be addressed in order to develop effective policies responses to the terrorist threat in all its forms. Terrorist threat nowadays is one of the major security problem the old continent is faced with, given the recent attacks that continue to occur on a daily basis, spreading terror among the lives of the world population. Of course, the wave of attacks of Islamic matrix supported by IS does not represent the first time European countries are hit by terrorist threats or attacks. On the contrary, it should be noted that first manifestations of this sociological phenomenon are traceable properly at the beginning of European contemporary history and in the same heart of its territorial extension that in the last 10 years has been hit repeatedly by the self-declaring Islamic State disciples. As a matter of fact, it was precisely during the French Revolution, between 1789-1799, that the first Terror Regime saw the light, showing to the world how a small group of men, enlightened by a pervasive ideology, could use fear as a weapon for keeping the control of a society. Later on, several waves of terrorist threats hit Europe throughout the centuries and the countries. Remarkable are those occurring between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when anarchists – especially Italian - became the protagonists of bomb attacks, as well as between 1945 and 1989, when the world was

characterized by the bipolar order of the Cold War, by which even terrorism was ideologically divided into left and right terrorism and supported, not always officially, by one or the other of the two Great Powers.

Thus, European countries Union provide an example of modern counterterrorism in those countries that not only have witnessed terrorism before the current events, but also, are the ones that have been under attack more recently. Today, European governments, policy-makers, and politicians not differently from the past, feels the renewed pressure of populations calling for adequate responses to a new kind of terrorist threat. Nevertheless, if in the past these issues were tackled by national security forces basically within State's boundaries and through a national approach, the progresses reached until now by the process of integration and the current European Union's institutional framework provide an increasing communitarian and integrated policy-making framework within which national authorities can and should better cooperate against the transnational capacity of the Islamic terrorist threat. In particular, today's EU policy-makers are not simply called for action by EU populations for the sake of it, but, counterterrorism action "*should be in line with the objectives and principles of the EU Treaty and the values EU represents, to actually assess the security situation, and implement policies that are adequate, legitimate, coherent and effective in the long run*"²⁰⁵. Therefore, some of the main issues EU Counter-terrorism policies are facing are due to the nature itself of this threat - in particular, its cross-border nature, its increasingly unpredictability and the challenging rapidity of its evolution – but others are due to the internal structural problems EU institutional policy architecture is facing in its counter-terrorism policy field. In particular, the most relevant limit posed by the EU's counter –terrorism policy formulation so far, has been the fact that it is shaped as a reversed policy circle²⁰⁶, according to which only after the occurrence of an attack there is an incentive to adopt measures at the EU level and create EU platforms to deal with the problem. New measures are not checked through the previous conduct of needs

²⁰⁵ EU Directorate General for Internal Policies, "*The European Union's Policies on Counter-Terrorism*", 2017

²⁰⁶ EU Directorate General for Internal Policies, "*The EU's Policies on Counter-Terrorism. Relevance, Coherence and Effectiveness*", 2017

assessment or impact assessment. On the contrary, the general formulation of these policy scope, action plans and a framework general strategy, take place only later.

The fight against modern terrorism was officially declared an EU priority only 10 days after the attacks to the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. Before, counterterrorism cooperation among Member States was defined within the informal limits of the so-called Trevi-framework (1975-1993) which promoted exchanges of information and best practices outside the European Community institutions, representing, however, the first communitarian initiative in the field of internal security. Police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters was then formalized in February 1992 in Title IV of the Maastricht Treaty, referring to terrorism as simply a source of concern. The attack represented a turning point pushing the European Council to recognize the relevance of the terrorist threat in the Action Plan of 2001 and to adopt a Framework Decision entailing measures against crimes related to terrorist activities and in particular, the financing of terrorist organizations. However, it was only after the Madrid and London bombings of 2004 and 2005 that a more coherent and in-depth analysis of the root causes of this phenomenon took place and a EU counter-terrorism policy started taking shape. Namely, after these attacks it was clear that the terrorist threat had both an external and internal origin as well as an internal and external impact as the attackers were mainly operating without the consent or financial assistance of Al-Qaeda or of other global Salafi networks. On the contrary, London jihadi terrorists were home-grown, thus producing a shift of attention from the external Al-Qaeda threat to *home-grown terrorism as a product of intra-EU radicalisation processes and terrorist recruitment*²⁰⁷. Radicalisation processes became one of the main focal point in the fight against terrorism as the necessity to understand why people become involved in terrorism was for the first time asserted at the EU governance level.

After Madrid bombings the Council called for the implementation of already existing measures and for the development of new ones issuing a Declaration on combating terrorism accompanied by an EU Plan of Action on Combating Terrorism,

²⁰⁷ Bures, O., *EU Counterterrorism Policy: a Paper Tiger?*, Routledge, London, 2011

which provided a roadmap for the creation and implementation of monitoring measures, competent bodies and deadlines for the realization of seven strategic objectives dealing with: international cooperation, terrorist financing, detection, investigation, prosecution, prevention of terrorist attacks, transport security and border control, response capacity after a terrorist attack, support for and recruitment into terrorism, and a focus on priority Third countries in terms of external action. Following London attack, a more centred focus on preventive actions was defined in the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy and related Strategy for Combatting Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism. In 2011 further steps were taken with the adoption of the EU Internal Security Strategy in Action and the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network. Then, until the rise of the Syrian war in 2013 the counter-terrorism agenda remained substantially unchanged.

Namely, it was again only after the rise of a new source of danger, IS, and after Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan attacks that the EU was prompted to reconsider and reinforce its counterterrorism policies. In particular, the civil war in Syria has attracted an increasing number of foreign fighters from several European countries, reaching the 5000 units in November 2015 according to Europol. If we consider that about 30% of them have returned to Europe after a period in which, probably, most of them has been exposed to violence and radicalisation, it appears to be all but inappropriate the increasing concern of EU policy-makers regarding not only the developments of the situation in Syria, but also new security issues arising in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, thanks to which IS may gain a better position at the borders of EU countries. After the destructive potential of the foreign fighters was clearly exemplified in the Charlie Hebdo, in January 2015, and in the Bataclan attacks, the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council defined terrorism, radicalisation, recruitment and terrorist financing as some of the main threats to EU internal security, and the Commission after a month from the Bataclan attack issued a proposal for the adoption of new Directive on combating terrorism in order to strengthen the Framework Decision to better address the transnational capacity of the terrorist cells and their international networks of support.

Moreover, the need for a deeper cooperation in data exchanges and mutual legal assistance pushed the EU in adopting a series of measures related, in particular, to the prevention of radicalisation, detection of travel for suspicious purposes, cooperation with third countries and the criminal justice sector²⁰⁸. After the attacks in Brussels in March 2016, the President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker launched the idea of a Security Union as a way to “*move beyond the concept of cooperating to protect national internal security to the idea of protecting the Union as a whole*”²⁰⁹. In this scenario, the role of the media, especially social networks, started to appear as crucial. Both for IS that uses them for recruitment and propaganda, both for EU governments trying to identify and stop potential threats. Accordingly, the EU Internet Referral Unit was established, as well as the EU Internet Forum and the Strategic Communication Network.

Nevertheless, another shift in the threat assessments within Europe occurred after the attack in Nice in July 2016 and the rise of the lone wolf threat and the *weaponization of ordinary life*²¹⁰. Fostered by the increasing dissemination of extremist material provided by the internet, this phenomenon has emerged in the last years as the main source of terrorist threat because of the particular sociological profile this kind of terrorists have: *lone wolves* are usually difficult to identify and free from decision-making processes that might limit their creativity. Their attacks are basically unpredictable and, as we have seen, they are taken out of direct control by a terrorist organization. Through the internet dissemination of radicalizing material and practical guides to the realization of attacks, the new tactic of IS is directed towards the realization of a real psychological war, creating new isolated adepts on the European territory, ready to carry out small - scale attacks. Those individuals who appears to be open and ready for the process of radicalisation then, may embrace the Jihadi ideological mission – simply looking into their kitchen drawer or turning to car rental services renting a truck, thereby weaponizing ordinary life, not needing the support of a

²⁰⁸ European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), “*Foreign fighters – Member State responses and EU action*”, 2016.

²⁰⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council, 2014

²¹⁰ European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), “*Foreign fighters – Member State responses and EU action*”, 2016.

criminal ring to provide weaponry. The rise of concern among various national agencies regarding the tactical change of IS in fostering this phenomenon has been motivated not only by the fundamental unpredictability of these attacks but also by their steady increase. As showed by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) lone wolf attacks have become on average deadlier than attacks committed by multiple perpetrators. Accordingly, in January 2016 the EU launched the *European Counter-Terrorism Centre* and in June 2016 a new Commissioner for the Security Union, Sir Julian King.

However, this incident driven approach, of course, give rises to a series of gaps and ineffectiveness in the formulation of the preventive measure that are needed to address effectively today terrorist challenges as well as tomorrow challenges. For instance, in the area of weapons and explosives, some shortcomings are evident in the lack of a systematic and far –reaching approach towards the realization of effective policies. Actual policy-makers, on this field, are concentrating in tracking the weapons traffic originated within the Balkan, as a result of the end of the Yugoslav war because they are aware that most of the explosives used in the last EU terrorist attacks came from that area without, nevertheless searching also for future or present war scenario that may represent alternative weapons markets for the terrorists. Rather than producing a comprehensive approach towards the issue, EU counter-terrorism policy architecture seems to lack of an efficient policy design built on the basis of in depth analysis of trend developments, needs assessment, evidence gathering on the specifics of the terrorist issue, and the expected results of certain policies²¹¹. In particular, the highly dynamic and diversified nature of the Islamic terrorist attacks, combined with an ad hoc and crisis-driven approach followed by EU policymakers has produced a counterterrorism composite policy area presenting serious challenges for EU policymakers related to coordination, coherence and consistency.

Moreover, according to EU experts and national security services these developments, in particular the tactical shift of IS towards an increasing use of foreign fighters and lone wolves' terrorism is intended to continue for the coming five years

²¹¹ Ivi.

with an expected increase of attacks²¹². Europol in December 2016 has signalled the possibility of emergence of new terrorist *modus operandi*, changes in the target selection and changes in the perpetrators profiles²¹³. In particular, according to Europol reports, targets such as private sector, civil society and locations will be increasingly interchangeable with the choice of “traditional” targets such as vital infrastructures. In addition, the risk of the use by IS of chemical or biological weapons in next five years will rise. Finally, the IS defeat in Syria, Iraq and the MENA region may produce radical implications for the 4000-5000 EU foreign fighters that may decide to come back to European home countries.

In other words, what should be required to the EU in the extremely challenging battle against IS is a combination of broad prevention (long-term effectiveness) and targeted repression (short – term effectiveness which is known as *ambidexterity*²¹⁴. Only leaving the crisis-driven and ad hoc approach brought forward until now, *the EU will be able to respond swiftly and effectively to new developments in society, while also pre-emptively investing in the insights that will allow continued effective responses in the future*²¹⁵. Based on both quantitative data and qualitative expert assessments, an inventory of the main influencing factors on the insecurities of the future can also be made, which provides input for future scenario planning, and can inform the policy planners on the specific issues that need to be addressed in order to contain the future threats. This kind of analysis can be done for the overall threat, but can also be informed by analysis on more specific themes, such as lone wolf terrorism. In particular, the EU capacity of formulating effective long – term counter-terrorism policies will depend on EU policy-makers capabilities to conduct strategic research on which measures are most effective, field in which this research seeks to provide its contribution.

²¹² Bart Schuurman, Lone Actor Terrorist Attack Planning and Preparation, 2017

²¹³ Europol, “*European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*”, 2016

²¹⁴ O’Reilly III, C. and Tushman, M., “*Organizational Ambidexterity: Past, Present and Future, Academy of Management Perspectives*”, 2013

²¹⁵ EP, “*The European Union’s Policies on Counter-Terrorism. Relevance, Coherence and Effectiveness*”, 2017

5.2 A policy proposal

From previous chapters, we can understand how relevant will be in next years for EU policy-makers winning the ideological battle Jihadist groups are engaging. The fight against lone wolves' terrorism, but of terrorism in general, must be understood not unlikely the "Battle of Narratives" that East and West have fought during the Cold War, a battle of minds rather than armies. There is here a conflict that we are witnessing: a form of Huntington's clashes of civilization²¹⁶, and we could argue that the one between Islam and Christendom is an old one but also with a very modern echo. We can understand how this has also been taken as a symbol, the words *crusader* and *mujahidin* are used far and wide by IS to identify the struggle we are dealing with. And the individuals that we have tried to identify in the previous chapters might live a similar psychological struggle inside their minds. The attempt of the Caliphate to gain a territory and its failure proved that Jihadist terrorism has been much more vital than the limited life spawn of IS as a country, as it kept living in the battle of narratives, and in time, prove dreadful as well.

Modern warfare has changed radically the way in which a military confrontation can actually take place: big open field battles among large armies are a thing of the past, and, however, it is something that is incredibly expensive to put into place for small groups. Terrorism has been sometimes defined as the last resort for the small, otherwise defenceless, group, against a much stronger military power. And terrorism, as much as guerrilla, relies more on the support of the population and rhetoric's rather than sheer armed force. As we have seen, a fundamental part of IS's power relies on the powerful narratives they use: when a terrorist recruiter or extremist tries to gain the trust of the people, they voice the resentment of Muslim population all around the world by exciting their mind regarding the West fighting a war against Islam and, to a certain extent, they do not lack arguments in favour of their thesis, especially when it comes to US policies, conditioned by years by the so called "war on terror" declared by Bush's administration. Drone strikes in Muslim countries, imprisonment (often lacking even the most basic human rights) in Guantánamo, the Afghani and Iraqi war, US support to

²¹⁶Huntington S.P., "*The Clash of Civilization*", Simon & Schuster, 1996

Israeli foreign and internal policy. Of course, the political and strategic reasons of the abovementioned policies exist but is not here the place to discuss them in the detail, what interests us to note is that when said policies are likely to cause resentment among the public opinion, especially coming from certain communities, European Union countries should at least take this side-effects into account when dealing with a cost/benefit calculus. The battle against lone wolves must be seen in this key if we want to propose a concrete and effective counterterrorism policies. What should be our main concern, regarding the main scientific support of this thesis, and to make it as a viable policy proposal, is to tackle the root causes of lone wolves' terrorism, and the battle that needs to be fought will be as much on the streets but also in the battle of narratives, as we need to find a solution to a problem as old as constitutions themselves: what can the State do to stop an ideology, however dangerous, without, of course, curtailing human rights?

First and foremost, to answer the question, we need to identify the extent of the phenomenon, in way to have number and figures for it. We need to underline that lone actor terrorism in Europe is rare: if we consider European countries, we can see how Between 2000 and 2015 only two countries (UK and France) have more than 4 plots planned, attempted or carried out by individuals, while all other European countries have had 4 or less plot by individuals. The data change slightly, even if not substantially, when it comes to plots by dyads or triads, therefore we can leave our reasoning unvaried when we deal with the extent of the phenomenon in the last years. However, we need to underline the fact that the phenomenon has seen a substantial increase in numbers during the last years, and we need to ask ourselves why this happened. The first conclusion we can drawn is that leaderless terrorism is going to be the new trend of security studies and issues for the years to come, as while the IS is defeated in Raqqa, it still has a fundamental role in radicalizing and eventually make use, either directly or indirectly, of certain personalities that are more keen to latch onto a radical vision of Islam. If we take into account terrorism coming from all sides, both left wing, right wing, religion-driven or inspired by a specific single issue, we need to understand what are the numbers for each of the attacks.

Ideology	Plots	Attacks	Injured	Fatalities
Ethno-National and Separatist	2	2	1	0
Left Wing and Anarchist	3	3	29	8
Religiously Inspired	36	27	65	16
Right Wing	31	17	260	94
Single Issue	5	5	18	19
Other	21	18	76	58
Total	98	72	449	195

Table 2: Casualties from Lone-Actor Terrorism Plots; in Lone Actors Terrorism, by C.Ellis, R.Pantucci and Others.

The table above shows how what, among the categories taken under consideration, are the ones that are more frequent, deadly and effective among the type attacks taken under consideration so far, namely the Religiously Inspired ones and Right-Wing ones. We could rightfully say that the two categories are inherently correlated: as much as Right wing terrorism used to respond to the attacks perpetrated by the Red terrorism in the last decades, now extreme Right-Wing ideologies, taking up arms against a decades old conflict between European and Islamic civilizations, have decided to resolve to terrorism to answer to the “Islamic Threat” coming from radicalized Muslims. Sadly, this kind of attacks usually target those who have nothing do to with radicalized Islam. The two phenomena era therefore likely to keep growing at the same pace, as they reflect two opposite considerations and definition of the world and civilization itself that will inherently resolve into a fight. Whatever the motives underlying the attacks, we need to understand the fact that the phenomenon is going to rise in the next decades, as while the single terroristic group becomes smaller and weaker in numbers, they become almost impossible to defeat either. Rather than a rigid dichotomy between lone wolves and large, established group, the trend should be conceptualized as a continuum with more and more terroristic activities committed by lone wolves²¹⁷. The proposition that

²¹⁷ Smith B.L. and Dampousse K. R., “*American Terrorism Study: Patterns of Behaviour, Investigation, and Prosecution of American Terrorists*”, 2002.

lone wolves are calculating and spend much time planning their operation appears to be rather the exception than the rule, therefore aiming for the limitation of the capacity of finding weapons and explosives, however useful in general, will not provide with any help in countering the phenomenon. All things considered, we can anyway classify lone wolves' terrorism and compare it to more mainstream forms of terrorism, as while their motives might be different, but the means in which said attacks are carried out are similar: use of mainly firearms or explosive, and a civilian target.

While these two variables are fairly common and the policy proposals meant to stop them have been analysed and sometimes put into practice, therefore we will not focus our analysis on them, on the contrary, since we are dealing with a specific form of terrorism, we believe it would be much more helpful to analyse and find a solution for the issue at its origin since, as we have analysed above, it is very difficult to find and stop a lone wolf perpetrator before the attack. The possibility to create a bomb using chemicals that can be easily acquired in a supermarket or to just rent or steal a car or a truck and drive it through a crowd, could exclude the previous contact with a criminal group as a main variable to tackle, since finding a gun or a rifle or a professional explosive is not fundamental to perpetrate the attack. Therefore, since we tried to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the phenomenon developed throughout the years, and to find the typology of personality more likely to latch to radical ideologies, we believe it is much more important to address the root causes of the phenomenon rather than an approach on the means in which the attack is perpetrated. This could help to tackle both radical Islamic terrorism and right-wing one, as we have seen with the Brevik case, they all drawn from a similar standard type of ideology, to which the to-be-terrorist is more likely to focus his attention. This, of course, poses strong issues regarding the use of the internet and its inherent ability to be very difficult to control, no matter how strongly the state tries to counter it. It is a very comfortable and safe environment for radical ideologies to spread and a strong instrument to put similar minds into a conversation in which there is no negative feedback of any kind.

The necessity to address the battle of information in the discussion is supported by data. Between 2000 and 2015 in Europe:

- Religiously driven and right-wing perpetrators constitute the 71% of lone wolves' terroristic attacks, evenly shared between the two, with a slight advantage for the first.
- The majority posts their motivations online, or even share their plans, at a certain point, others reveal them orally, while a small minority has a coherent manifesto.
- The majority of lone actors did not show signs of political activities before the events.
- When lone actors are active online, social media constitutes a normal mean of communication, and mainstream ones as well. Also, the internet was used as a way to download training, find information, radicalize²¹⁸.

The Internet nowadays is the main source of information for many, and is considered one of the main achievement of freedom of speech ever made, holding not only an empirical value, but also a symbolical one; in general, and now more than ever, policies targeting freedom of speech would do more harm than good, not only being politically unfeasible. The limits the Constitutions of most Western countries pose the ability of the state to limit the spread of information are set very high. The First Amendment of the US Constitutions sets limitation to the US government, on the base of freedom of association and freedom of speech, for what regards crimes such membership or incitement to terrorism, which cannot be punished. In Europe, having dealt with terrorism on a large scale much earlier in time, those crimes have been already introduced or will be anytime soon, but still the issue of shutting down websites poses questions regarding the assumed freedom of the Internet. And even if in Europe the legislation, however still limited mostly in national legislation, has much more powers regarding protection against extremism, still has not been able to tackle the issue effectively²¹⁹.

²¹⁸Pantucci R., Ellis C., Roy van Zuijdewijn J., Bakker E., Gomis B., Palombi S., Smith M., "*Lone-Actor Terrorism*", Final Report, RUSI, Countering Lone-Actor Terrorism Series No. 11, 2016

²¹⁹Europol, "*EU Internet Referral Unit, one year report, highlights*," 2015

Social media and in general, the mediatisation of life caused by the social network platforms, the extensive video sharing, made it much more difficult not only to remove all the sites belonging to a certain ideology, but mostly to even find them, amongst all the contents that can be found online²²⁰. Countries like China, which could not be defined as a champion for human rights in this respect, have tried to apply a national filtering of all the information coming to Chinese users, the so called “Great Wall of China”, is barely able to keep up with the contents, and has proven to be not invincible²²¹. In the West, taking for example the US, something like that would be considered politically unfeasible, in a country that has made freedom of speech one of the most upheld values. Most countries inside the EU had plans for the institution of a nationwide filter, but the political cost of such a controversial and debated discourse, made it impossible to even promote such a policy²²². Takedowns however, have been taking place around Europe, but, being able to target only sites hosted domestically, being a censorship of this kind useful up to a certain point, and even taking it at a European level would be ineffective²²³.

What is then left to the state, now that hard powers appear to be out of the question? Continuing the comparison, we did before with the battle of narratives between East and West during the Cold War, where nuclear power is nothing but an extreme option, we need to resolve to soft power, that in this specific case would be do a wise use of the internet in way to enhance security. Police and security enforcement have mostly decided to engage in a cyberwar against those who want to spread propaganda, but those takedowns happen in a legislative grey-area, with a question still of freedom of speech, regarding who should decide what kind of content can be shared and what cannot. The effectiveness is limited, has is possible to disable websites, but is very difficult to penetrate and stop services instant messaging and social networking, and they can possibly bloc a content limited to a certain amount, as the times a content

²²⁰ EP, “*Countering Terrorist Narratives, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs Directorate General for Internal Policies of the Union*”, 2017

²²¹ Today Online. “*KL counter-terrorism centre to be expanded with China's help.*” 2017

²²² Ivi.

²²³ Tucker P., “*Analysts are quitting the State Department's Anti-Propaganda Team.*” Defense One. 2017

is shared from so many different positions that an attack, even if centred to a whole region, would be eventually ineffective in the long run²²⁴.

So far, what we understood that all those policies that try to target the supply of such contents or information find so many obstacles on the way to full effectiveness, both of practical and political nature²²⁵. What is left to deal with for the issue is trying to limit the demand of such content rather than its supply. As ideas are better when there are better ones that can confute them, internet seems to be the fairest place to share them. Bad ideas will eventually be confuted and truth and reasoning may return, and ideally those following those bad ideas could be taken back. The ideal market of ideas suffers from terrible market failures. As we described above, not only the aspiring terrorist is able to find a “safe heaven” in which his ideas are understood, but, since those minorities are particularly active online, they could also appear as the majority in a conversation, thus giving to a personality seeking for help and guidance at least an alternative²²⁶.

First, it is important to keep in mind that, even if the battle this time is on the field of cyberspace, this does not mean that the answer can't be non-cyber. We must remember that this people, apart from extreme cases of isolation, have families, friends and a group to which they belong. If the community is sensitive about the issue it can be easier that either the members of family or inner circle manages to dissuade the potential terrorist way before the process of radicalization begins, or others in the community come up spontaneously to report extremist activities. Thus, considered that some degree of social ineptitude has emerged as one of the most recurring trait among lone wolf terrorists, it seems that such an element should be taken under consideration in the definition of counter-radicalization policies.

²²⁴ ICCT, *“IS Propaganda: Should We Counter the Narrative?”* International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, 2017

²²⁵ Tucker P., *“Analysts are quitting the State Department’s Anti-Propaganda Team.”* Defense One, 2017

²²⁶ Reed, A., *“Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communications: Back to the Future: Lessons from Past and Present.”* In *Terrorists’ Use of the Internet*, edited by Maura Conway, Lee Jarvis, Orla Lehane, Stuart Macdonald, and Lella Nouri, 269-278. 2017

In the last years, projects of this kind have taken foot both at a national and local level: communities either provide education to prevent radicalization at the bottom with workshops and courses on internet security and awareness. For one, the US government has created community-awareness briefings, meant to educate the younger ones to security online and radicalization²²⁷. The issue with the youngest generations, the so called digital native, takes the issue at another different level: they are fully able to research on any content online, but they lack the instruments to understand them. Therefore, acting on the community most susceptible of being targeted by radicalizing propaganda is one of the best first steps to take towards finding a solution to the problem of lone wolves²²⁸. We stated above the importance of the imagined community that the extreme ideology can provide to a personality looking for easy solutions to complex problems, so another policy that needs to be taken into account, even if it tackles the issue very broadly, is to create a real sense of community not only in the online reality, but also in the real world. Changes on behavioural patterns have been observed in several cases of lone wolves' terrorism, and a strong community objecting terrorism and radicalization can easily identify and eventually stop said behaviours, rather than encouraging them. Eventually, inside a small community, not only is possible to spot and report quick changes of behaviour that could be a sign of incoming radicalization, but also could be possible to find "leaks" regarding the terrorist plan, either shared willingly or unwittingly, but still, having a community supporting more the established regime rather than terrorism could provide security forces with useful intel to stop the attack long before it actually takes place. Of course, this comes with a limit, as it is not unlikely that a family member or a close person, even knowing the plan, or even parts of it, would want to report the terrorist-to-be to police and security forces. Still, this does not need to discourage EU authorities and member states in supporting this kind of programs, as they could prove effective in the long run, creating a sense of belonging and trust in the state that would only be beneficial for the citizenry.

²²⁷ Neumann P.R., "*Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in the United States*", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 36:6, 431-459, 2013

²²⁸ Silverman T., "*U.K. Foreign Fighters to Syria and Iraq: The Need for a Real Community Engagement Approach*", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:12, 1091-1107, 2017

Furthermore, in a religion like Islam, where state and religion are deeply connected, we must consider this fact as being of great importance. Obviously, this is not to intend that also in the West, where God and Caesar were separated long ago, the system should change; on the contrary, the role of imams should be understood in this light: as it has been proved that charismatic preachers of radical Islam, there should be a political and strategic focus in promoting, both with community meetings and online, the work of imams more prone to moderate interpretations of the religion. Even more, this will empower the local communities in shaping common issues and not feel marginalized or targeted: the choice of supporting one or another personality or local institution must be considered carefully, for example even nonviolent, but yet extremist voices can and must be excluded, as extreme voices, no matter if violent or not, will never be useful in the creation and sustainment of an open discourse.

As it is true that radical preachers have been allowed by internet to have a global reach, so it should be allowed to moderate ones to spread their ideas and opinions regarding Islam to a wider public, so that a figure that naturally invokes respect in the mind of a faithful Muslim could prove as effective, and maybe more, than the ones taken by the state authorities. Counterterrorism strategy should focus on undermining the credibility and appeal of the extremist message and the messenger so as to break the charismatic bond²²⁹. The US State department already moved towards this direction, by hosting “webinars”, online seminars in which online activist supporting moderate views were given help in gain more visibility online and exchange ideas and thoughts, therefore targeting a larger audience, in way that “*Rather than telling people what to do, the aim—in the words of American officials—is to connect “good people,” build capacity, and make it possible for good things to result*”²³⁰. Addressing the right voices inside the community can prove effective and also save a lot of time and expenses, as targeting and helping single personalities is much easier than a whole community. We must however recognize the limits of this kind of approach, as this could cause the resentment of other non-Muslim communities: by appealing only to their values and

²²⁹ Gendron A., “*The Call to Jihad: Charismatic Preachers and the Internet*”, 2017

²³⁰ Neumann P.R., “*Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in the United States*”, 2013

without trying to push the values of democracy, freedom, individual liberty and tolerance for other faiths, the risk is to polarize the political discourse where the clash of values and civilization is not averted but worsened. Additionally, working with the right institutions should remain inclusive of working right with them and prioritizing not only statutory needs, but community needs, as accurately iterated by Spalek and Baker²³¹. Clear guidelines and lines of conduct for both parties could help in this case, so that all parts are tackling the current issue correctly and in a coherent way.

Clearly, what we need is a healthy community and spirit of belonging, otherwise we achieve nothing but the opposite, as we would create a situation in which not only the aspiring terrorist can find the material to radicalize himself, but will also receive support from the community, thus moving among the people “as a fish swims in the sea”²³², as Mao Tse-Tung suggested. By creating a healthy community in which radical values are considered to be too extreme, we take away to terrorism the popular support they might find, thus hindering not only their possibility to radicalize, up to a certain extent (we have already analysed the role internet can have in this respect), but mostly we take away much of their offensive potential and chances to hide and disappear²³³. The Lebanese-American expert on the Middle-East, Fawaz Gerges, professor at the London School of Economics notes that “*The critical question is not whether Muslims sympathize with bin Laden’s rhetoric of victimhood but if they are ready to shed blood to support it*”²³⁴, thus first we need to create a community in which Muslim do not feel regret of victimization towards the West, and if this become impossible, it is imperative to monitor the level of endorsement such ideologies have inside a community, in way to keep them under control, as the step from endorsement to support is very short, and then a pure process of radicalization can begin with ease. In a “sick” community the aspiring terrorists can find intelligence, information, a safe heaven and tolerance for their activities, thus pushing him closer towards the limit and eventually perpetrate a terroristic attack. The failures during the integration processes of many Muslim

²³¹ Spalek B., “*Terror Crime Prevention with Communities*”, 201; Baker A.H., “*Extremists in Our Midst*”, 2011.

²³² Mao Tse-tung, “*On Guerrilla Warfare*”, trans. Samuel B. Griffith II, 2000

²³³ Paul C., “*As a Fish Swims in the Sea: Relationships Between Factors Contributing to Support for Terrorist or Insurgent Groups*”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33:6, 488-510, 2010

²³⁴ Fawaz A. Gerges, “*The Far Enemy: Why JIHAD Went GLOBAL*”, 2005

communities is a fact, the reasons of which will not be investigated here, since it would mean going away from the key targets of this research, however, this is an important factor be underlined. A former Muslim extremist, Ed Husain, writes in his book, “The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, what I Saw Inside and why I Left”:

“The result of 25 years of multiculturalism has not been multicultural communities. It has been mono-cultural communities.... Islamic communities are segregated. Many Muslims want to live apart from mainstream British society; official government policy has helped them do so. I grew up without any white friends. My school was almost entirely Muslim. I had almost no direct experience of 'British life' or 'British institutions'. So it was easy for the extremists to say to me: 'You see? You're not part of British society. You never will be. You can only be part of an Islamic society.' The first part of what they said was true. I wasn't part of British society: nothing in my life overlapped with it²³⁵”.

And Husain’s community is not the only closed Muslim community in Europe, on the contrary, we are often dealing with situations in which the mainstream society enters in the social discourse very rarely. Engaging into open discourse and confrontation with said communities, more likely than others to be targeted by extremist propaganda, with a long term and transparent engagement will make people more willing to open dialogue, rather than an engagement that is clearly reactive and relational to a single event²³⁶. This process is long and will require even longer periods of time to be fully effective, but is a step in the right direction, as trust is built and relations are tightened. By encouraging an open dialogue also between communities and police forces, both parties can understand more about each other’s role and motives, this helping in the creation of a safe environment in which prevention against radicalization is in everyday discourse and not engaged only when tragedies happen. Of course, dialogue with police forces is the one that results more problematic, although being the most effective, as, especially in close communities that live on difficult context tend

²³⁵ Husain E., writes in his book, “*The Islamist: Why I Joined Radical Islam in Britain, what I Saw Inside and why I Left*”, 2007

²³⁶ Silverman T., “*U.K. Foreign Fighters to Syria and Iraq: The Need for a Real Community Engagement Approach*”, 2017

naturally to distrust policeman and policewomen, and more than an open dialogue, could appear that security forces are just trying to put them under surveillance.

In addition, there is the need to rethink the approach to which national governments view counterterrorism policies: it is imperative to move from a top-down approach, that would be eventually criticized and prove ineffective, to a more levelled approach that looks more closely at the needs and issue present inside a community. This is helpful not only where Muslims are not the majority, as it would help in the process of mutual recognition between the different parts by putting community issues and shared problems and values at the base of recognisance, but also in Muslim only communities, where the authorities do not appear to be only security focused, but more as a helping hand to solve everyday problems. This will create a sense of trust and belonging that could prove helpful in fighting the phenomenon of self-radicalization, and maybe prevent it at a very early stage. This community engagement must, in addition, be all-inclusive, not only focusing on central areas that already have visibility on the media, but also, and especially, of the more peripheral ones, that more easily, due to harsher life conditions, are prone to produce psychological situations in which radicalization can begin more easily²³⁷. By actively creating and supporting a healthy real community we can also try to limit the factors that cause individuals already prone to extremism, to accept and support said terroristic group. The more the terroristic group is inherently connected to the society it lives in, the more it gains legitimacy among the civil population, thus making the lone wolf not only more easily born, but also much more effective and deadly in his action²³⁸.

Strategic communication and counter communication can prove incredibly useful in taking away most of the discursive strength to extremist reasoning; of course, a system of incentives and public communication, even if community and population cantered, can be limited to a certain degree of effectiveness, mostly on two factors: grievances towards the state, the creation of shared goals. Most terroristic groups rely

²³⁷ Silverman T., “U.K. Foreign Fighters to Syria and Iraq: The Need for a Real Community Engagement Approach”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:12, 1091-1107, 2017

²³⁸ Paul C., “As a Fish Swims in the Sea: Relationships Between Factors Contributing to Support for Terrorist or Insurgent Groups”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33:6, 488-510

on population support, and lone wolves' terrorism, even if in a more indirect nuance, still need it to validate their beliefs, therefore, attacking the support to the terrorist organization can be as useful as attacking its financial or technical abilities²³⁹. Producing counter narratives could be a very useful tool in the hand of the state to deal with the issue of lone wolves, as it could act directly on the field in which terrorists are stronger, providing an alternative source of information and counterarguments to the persuasive ones of radical propaganda. We have stressed already enough how the internet has proved instrumental, if not fundamental, for terroristic activities in the past years, and how it is particularly essential for lone wolves, as it is used to create and maintain relations, gain inspiration and support towards a terroristic action, or to acquire technical knowledge, with the discourse on social media and their role in the development of terrorism has been prominent also in the scientific discourse of the past years. The study of narratives has been a prolific field of study in both security studies and sociological ones, and it is important to underline its efficacy, especially in the long run. The narrative is simple to experimentally manipulate while investigating, for example, how it increases the legitimacy of terrorism. Research can be conducted to identify what elements in the narrative are persuasive, what audiences are more receptive to its message, and if identity management issues play a role in people's agreement with the narrative. Furthermore, research on the narrative promoted by the jihadi groups can directly inform counterterrorism and counter-radicalization strategists.

Counter-narratives could be constructed based on research findings. For counter-terrorism strategists, factors such as this narrative should be at the top of research agendas, as it is more manageable to contend with a narrative than many other factors, such as relative deprivation, discrimination, and foreign policy, which are diffuse and require long-term solutions. In this context, counter-messaging can prove useful, when targeting people that more than others are more susceptible of radicalization. These messages aim to challenge extremist ideas and their claims, by either mocking, ridicule or undermine their credibility. The issue of fake news is not new in the political arena, and should be a key issue also in counterterrorism studies, as a narrative based on

²³⁹ Phillips V., "The Islamic State's Strategy: Bureaucratizing the Apocalypse through Strategic Communications", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:9, 731-757, 2017

integration, focused on shared values and life objectives, can prove a valuable tool to counter the terrorism narrative and avoid radicalization when it is at its very first steps. However, the role a EU national government might have in this kind of activities must be limited, as it would appear as instrumental in the eyes of an individual that already feels distrust against state authorities. On the other hand, the government can have a supportive role, with a strong support to specific moderate groups, personalities or more in general nongovernmental actors, that can with the help of the national government, reach much more people. Proposing civil participation into community activities and events, financing philanthropic foundations, and seeking the help of private companies should be the main weapons to use in this information war. Of course, the place in which this exchange of ideas takes place nowadays is mainly the internet, and is there that moderate voices need to engage radicals and extremist in way to disrupt their arguments and provide a negative feedback that is mainly absent in radical communities online; by encouraging this kind of dialogue, is possible to avoiding a potential terrorist being transformed into a proper one. Ignoring forums and communication platforms in which this kind of discussion is held would be detrimental to any other operation and policy put into place, while presiding said forums with moderate voices could turn some mind back into the mainstream culture.

In this analysis it has been essential the understanding of the motives and reasons that push the lone wolf to become a terrorist, and the answers we have been trying to provide have been considered to be targeting the reasons beyond rather than the actions undertaken after. This has been done with a specific rationale: as we stated above, the issue of terrorism and how to fight it can constitute serious issues when it comes to the respect of human rights. Western countries found themselves in a very particular situation when it comes to fighting terrorism; being advocates of human rights home and abroad, breaches of human rights, even if done with good intentions, could prove not only ineffective practically, but also inconvenient politically. The incident-driven approach followed by the EU so far proved to be ineffective and a shift to a pre-emptive approach of the kind exposed above sounds an easier and more effective strategy to follow, also in a calculus of risk and benefits. Especially in the grounds of detention and data protection most of the EU countries and the US have

harshened their response to terrorism, going also beyond the limits imposed by human rights. This was particularly evident in the US, with the regime of extraordinary detention in Guantanamo Bay, at the first moment praised by a large majority of scared American citizens, but is the same with almost all states we took under scrutiny.

One of the main aims of terrorism, if not the first one, is to strike fear in the hearts of the population, and fear is a strong political tool: a scared public can be demanding draconian measures and the government most likely will enforce such measures to appease the sense of security required by the electorate. This way of tackling the issue however proves short-sightedness from political leaders, as while they are responding to the country's need for security, there are laying the foundation of democratic subversion and also provide propaganda material for the extremist organization. We can trace a similarity here with the scope that the RAF had in Germany: by attacking the state they wanted to push the government to use all its strength against them, thus proving the inherent fascism of the system as a whole. Their attempt failed in Germany, and arguably, also Islamic terrorism is failing in this scope in the Federal Republic; while terrorism has recently hit the country, law provisions coming from the Basic Law disallow draconian measures and limit the action of government. Arguably, Angela Merkel's government, however of right wing inspiration, has not decided to go towards harsh security policies, instead turning to a policy of inclusion and integration; how and if these would be more beneficial in the long run is yet to be seen, but following the reasoning we followed during this research, they could provide more benefits than harm.

Protecting democracy is indeed a taunting task, more difficult than defending other forms of government: unlike a dictatorship, the rulers must respect a basic set of guarantees and human rights, that can be restricted but never abolished tout court, cannot just imprison political opponents and protestors, it has to listen to them and bear the consequences being basically helpless in the process. This is particularly true when it comes to terrorism: even if data and proof sustain the chance of an individual being a terrorist, the authorities must abide to the principle of presumption of innocence if they want to be spared of public criticism. However, there is a trend towards securitization

that on the other hand will shift the blame on the politician also for non-acting, regardless of human rights protection, thus putting the politicians in a very difficult position, especially if wants to be re-elected. Such a difficult situation is fostered by extremist or anti-system parties, that, being in an open conflict with the incumbent institutions, will always have grounds for criticism, thus gaining strength along the way.

The risk here is two-folded, on one hand we have populists or extremist parties gaining strength, on the other we have institutions that provide the tools for an un-democratic government to become a dictatorship in the future, and have all the legal instruments to enforce them. If this situation appears to be at best, dark, we could turn to a definition less harsh but that could describe the possible future development. Karl Loewenstein coined the term “*militant democracy*”²⁴⁰ to define a politico-constitutional development typical of many European democracies after the victories of Fascism and Nazism in several countries. The comparison here can seem a bit extreme, but there are grounds of contact and of concern. Loewenstein focused his analysis on antiextremist legislation, essential means in the hand of democracies to respond to extremist threats. We must in fact recall that fascist and Nazi leaders where at first democratically elected, and then used the powers granted them by the laws or the constitution to destroy all those that could have formed a concrete opposition to their rule. Those laws were most often anti-extremist legislation, and we can claim with a good degree of certainty that said provisions match with those we have analysed in this research. Norms like the ones we have dealt with insofar have been put in place to protect democracy from its external enemies, but the question remains: what if they are used to protect the ruler from internal enemies? If the situation is not kept in constant check by all political actors, civil society and the media, this is a possibility that needs to be considered, especially due to the polarization of politics that we have witnessed in the last years. Insofar, it appears that policies like the ones we have proposed in this chapter could appear to be not only easier and less expansive to put in place, but would also come at a much lower political cost

²⁴⁰ Loewenstein K., *Militant Democracy and fundamental rights*, (1937)

Conclusion

In this thesis we have tried at the best to describe the phenomenon of lone wolves' terrorism, how it has developed in the last years and what are more likely to be the new challenges that security and police forces will have to do to fight the phenomenon. The panorama defined in this work could provide both scholars and institutions a framework to understand lone wolves' terrorism, starting from a sociological and psychological perspective. As acknowledged by many authors, the phenomenon of terrorism is a social one, and it appears to be so also in the case in which there is a lone individual that decides to act, alone or with very limited accomplices. Internet has allowed for a degree of connection between people all across the world that has never been seen before in the history of mankind, becoming the ultimate expression of freedom of speech rights, but terrorists have managed to exploit this space for their purposes, and in a very effective way.

Once more, it is important to stress the key role internet has played in the evolution process of information in general and of propaganda in particular, and obviously, in the results and policies exposed in this work. There is much either the State or the local community or private companies can do to allow internet to remain a safe space for freedom of speech and at the same time a place in which terrorism and radical propaganda is ignored and does not attach so strongly on some individuals' personalities. Among the policies proposed, counternarratives seems to be the best way to follow, as internet is free for terrorist the same is for counterterrorism initiatives, and fighting radicalization where it really begins could inflict a hard blow on terrorists' recruiting strategies. The literature on the matter, as well the strategies adopted to follow this new approach to counter lone wolves' terrorism, are still limited, and it is a field worth deepening as it could have positive implication not only on the social well-being of current European societies, but also very strong ones on the number of people that fill the need to identify with a radical ideology. This approach can be used not only in counterterrorism but also in the political arena, as narratives of this kind can prove helpful in fostering integration policies, both on the Christian and Muslim community that, being brought together on a common security issue, might also better understand

each other and laying the foundation for a more pacific coexistence. By being able to identify, hopefully in time, those people that more than others are prone to follow these ideologies, it would be possible to intervene in those aspect of life that distress them the most, and help them to find answers somewhere different from a radical ideology. This can be achieved in time, but could be a key variable that must be understood in putting in place any counter radicalization policies; as we said above, it is much more effective trying to find a way to cut off the demand of terrorism, rather than trying to stop the supply of it.

Terrorist groups are not a novelty in the political discussion, radicalism as well, and the point here is how we can face it in the most effective way, considering the huge differences that exist between this new form of terrorism compared to the ones we already knew. An approach that takes into account what written in this thesis could have higher chances of success, aiming at the roots of the problem rather than its latest implications.

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Abstract

Threats coming from lone wolf terrorism represent one of the greatest challenges to EU democratic intelligence and law enforcement officials. The issue is a subject of study in the field of security and terrorism that has not been explored much during the last decades, and we hope the following research to give some insight on the phenomenon and provide explanations on who this people are, or are likely to become, why they act and what can be done to prevent terrorist attacks of this kind. To proceed with this kind of analysis, the main variables influencing lone wolf terrorism throughout history have been explored through an overview of the main definitional issues characterizing the literature covering the phenomenon and an historical overview of the phenomenon itself.

In particular, definitional conundrum reflects the multifaceted nature itself of lone wolf terrorism, entailing that even in a narrow definition, a wide spectrum of lone actors exists. Moreover, from a concise history of the phenomenon, it seems clear that lone actors do not move in a vacuum. In other words, their actions, are not the irrational fruits of some form of insanity, analysing them must not be seen only as a psychological phenomenon, but also as a sociological one. On the contrary, attacks are perpetrated with rational efficiency by radicalised actors who behave in accordance with a radical interpretation of reality that, in turn, is framed by the ideological tale they decide to join. Precisely, even if it is commonly assumed that lone actor terrorists suffer from greater degrees of mental illness than both the general population and the broader community of terrorists, their attacks seem to be the result of calculated plans of action the terrorists individually prepare and perpetrate going through what Stratfor defines as “*terrorist attack cycle*²⁴¹”, considered to include different phases of action rationally persecuted by the lone wolf: operational planning, target selection, deployment and attack.

²⁴¹ Stratfor’s “*Defining the Terrorist Attack Cycle*,” 2012, available at: www.stratfor.com/image/defining-terrorist-attack-cycle.

A growing segment of scholars have recently argued how radical milieus play a crucial role in lone wolves' processes of radicalization exercising their influence on the terrorist psychological mechanisms of externalization, by channelling personal frustrations towards the destruction of the Other, who, through the elaboration of an extremist totalitarian belief, becomes responsible of all the lone wolf's suffering.

However, according to a number of scholars, lone wolves' affiliation towards larger political or religious terrorist groups, even if merely ideological, raises a crucial definitional conundrum, that can not be considered compatible with the concept of "*loneness*" as a distinctive characteristic of the lone wolf; as well as being generally ascribed as the main trait distinguishing them from "ordinary" group-based terrorists. Diverging definitions reflect different interpretations of two main aspects of lone wolf terrorism that will be analysed in the following paragraph: composition and control. disagreement over the inclusion of dyads or triads - small cells of two or three individuals that act as isolated and independent terrorist units - split scholars' opinion between, on the one side, those who focus their definitions around the individual action, therefore, excluding attacks committed by couples or small cells. Thus, on closer inspection, it seems that stricter definitions in terms of composition, run a risk of inconsistency when confronted with the multifaceted variety of cases this phenomenon is bringing in Western countries. Most of lone actor extremists operating in North America and Western Europe between 1978 and 2015 maintained plot-relevant social ties during their radicalization that typically occurred in both online and offline radical milieus.

Accordingly, in the last few years, an increasing bunch of scholars, have tried to capture in their definitional structure of lone wolf terrorism the nuances of its multifaceted nature, abandoning a strict adherence to the terminological framework of "*lone actions*". Moreover, definitional stalemates over the issues posed by lone wolves' real or presumed loneliness represent only an apparent hurdle for the individuation of a general definition of the phenomenon and its, consequent, operationalization. In particular, in the light of the heuristic definitional contribution provided by Feldman it should be noted that questions of leadership and direction are not necessarily

incompatible with the notion of a lone wolf group. On the contrary, it seems that, rather than focusing on the difference between “lone” and “group” terrorism, distinction should be made between, on one hand, “solo terrorists” acting alone for operational strategies but whose attack is perpetrated under the direct control and instructions of a larger terrorist group and, on the other, self-activating lone wolf - or wolf packs- terrorists, whose attacks are not the result of a networked terrorist plot, but of a terrorist cycle fully individually undertaken and controlled by a lone wolf or by a small group of similarly minded persons who incur in a process of radicalization. In these terms, a degree of outside influence during the lone wolf terrorist cycle – especially in the initial phase of radicalisation and, later, as an instrumental source of knowledge – should be considered quite normal since it is generally agreed that the lone actor is usually inspired by the ideology of a terrorist group. Nevertheless, the logistic control of the self-activated attack, with respect to timing, targeting and the terrorist cycle should be expected to remain under the command of the lone actor. With this distinction well kept in mind, Feldman formulates his remarkable heuristic definition of lone wolf terrorism. According to him, *“lone wolf terrorism as self-directed political or religious violence undertaken through the “terrorist attack cycle” by individuals—typically perceived by its adherents to be an act of asymmetrical, propagandistic warfare—which derives from a variable amount of external influence and context (notably now online), rather than external command and control.”*

From an historical overview of the lone wolf’s terrorism evolution, three key features have been identified as main characteristics of lone wolf terrorism across the centuries:

- Terrorist organizations and groups of ideological reference are interested in promoting lone wolf terrorism as a strategic method of low-level targeting. Thus, they exert a considerable influence on fostering this kind of homegrown terrorism.
- Radical ideological narratives and communication channels – specifically, nowadays the internet - exert a determinant influence on the emergence of this phenomenon, thus, fostering a process of identification, even if merely

ideological, of the lone wolf with the radical or terrorist milieus promoting such narratives.

- Lone wolf terrorism is a form of homegrown terrorism, that refers to a pan-ideological tactic, in which, individuals through a process of self – directed radicalization, end up undertaking violent actions against parts of their own society.

Accordingly, in order to give a deep understanding of the lone wolf threat posed by Jihadist terrorism and how European Union institutions should deal with it, the following part of this study has been devoted to deepening our understanding of the phenomenon through the analysis of these three main aspects characterizing lone wolf terrorism. Thus, attention has been focused at first on the structural ties between the lone wolf terrorist and current Jihadist groups fostering their radicalization. Such an issue has been analysed starting with an overview of the current operational strategy adopted by IS and Al-Qaeda and then, shifting the focus to the role exerted by terrorist groups in the radicalization path pursued by lone wolf terrorists.

In particular, looking at the current Islamic wave of lone wolf terrorism that has started spreading throughout Europe since early 2000s, it seems that a progressive operationalization of the concept of *Leaderless Resistance* has reflected a change of tactic in the jihadist front, shifting from complex, mass casualty attacks - to an increase in small-scale attacks perpetrated by individuals with loosely tied affiliation to networked cells. The contemporary operating environment has displaced the highly selective Salafi-Jihadism as a matter of strategic necessity. In other words, the movement has been forced to adopt a strategy that casts a wide net across the globe searching for already self-radicalized individuals or potential terrorists fitting a precise socio-psychological profile, who can be – through a process of indoctrination – converted to their cause and attacks their own Western home countries from within, or, use their Western citizenship to move easily across borders reaching the Caliphate. Moreover, beyond last years' sharp rise in radicalization numbers in Western Europe, there seems to be as a determinant factor also the rise of competition among Jihadist groups trying to capture widest audiences to convert - through a totalitarian ideological

education - into “jihadi soldiers”, under their own brand.

Lone wolves’ ideological affiliation to larger radical melieus works as a fundamental pushing element for their violent radicalization as it has been acknowledged by several studies in the literature. Thus, as it has been stressed, lone actors’ radicalization process must be understood under a relational perspective. Recent studies have demonstrated how loneliness is not an inherent quality of these individuals, on the contrary we should consider the radicalization path as a social process triggered and shaped by the individuals’ personality, expectations of recognitions from their equals and often poor social skills, that disallow such individuals to fit in the society they are currently living in. Not only the society in which potential lone wolves’ live influences their choices, but constitutes one of the main drivers for initial radicalization, and radicalization, of course, can begin as a refusal of societal values. This is particularly true when we focus the attention on “our” latest terrorists: namely, all those, especially young people, European citizens who have choose to abandon their Western social values of reference to embrace the totalitarian and radical belief proposed by Jihadist groups and, thus, becoming soldiers of the Islamic State fighting in Syria or in their own European home countries. Let’s not forget that most of the latest lone wolf terrorist attacks occurred in Europe were perpetrated by European citizens against their own society and the values that regulate it. The example of Mohammed Bouyeri, the first recorded lone wolf operating in Europe since 2003, has provided practical insights on the research. Similar to most of other Jihadist lone wolf terrorists, before his ideological radicalization, Bouyeri was a Muslim leading a life far from strict Kuran precepts. He was a second-generation Berber-Moroccan-Dutchman and, from several articles and witnesses, like most of his ideological heirs, he seemed to be born into a cultural divide and to have lived a troubled existence.

potential terrorists, whether group-based or lone wolf, are educated through the propaganda to become effective members of the Jihadist society and to sacrifice everything in their hand – even their own life and identity – on the altar of an ideologically radicalized community of pure who have the mandatory mission to save humanity. Nevertheless, lone wolves’ adherence to the Jihadist community do not entail

a physical participation in it and, in most of the cases, it is merely a virtual affiliation. Moreover, contrarily to *foreign fighters* who abandoned their Western home countries to reach the Caliphate and fight for its defence, lone wolves complete their terrorist path never reaching the idealized community for which they fight, thus making suppose their ideological affiliation with the Black Flag to be maybe stronger than that of *foreign fighters*. This particular aspect of lone wolves' ideological commitment, suggest a higher degree of self-sacrifice spirit, animating the lone wolf for a communitarian goal that he knows to be out of his, at least physical, reach. The lone-wolf terrorist operates without the externally imposed contingencies and pushing factors present in the radicalization path pursued by a group-based terrorist, and has, accordingly, a much wider spectrum of choices than those allowed to a traditional member of a terrorist cell. Namely, the definition and perpetration of his terrorist activity remains fully within his hands and do not represent a shared experience within a radical melieu, where the terrorist self-interest is totally overwhelmed by the group-interest, and thus to a number of people considered as real, at least by the lone wolf. On the contrary, the lone wolf self-interest is totally captured by the ideological tale proposed by such groups. It is to the idea itself of an idealized Jihadist society more than to the real community of reference proposing such idea that the lone wolf terrorist pays his violent tribute. Thus, it should be argued a much stronger incidence in the radicalization path pursued by these solo political terrorists of the ideological narrative appeal than for terrorists embedded in radical groups or terrorist organizations, where group-dynamics exert a stronger influence on the integration of the terrorist in a radical melieu.

Adopting the radical narrative construction provided by his ideology of reference, the lone wolf terrorist ends up perceiving a group as victimized and thus developing a strong sense of negative identification with the perpetrators of victimization and positive identification with the victims. Identification with the victims can lead to a steady source of motivation in which help for the victims or damage to the victimizers become a rewarding, while the opposite is experienced as a punishing. Accordingly, several authors, including Orsini points out how the community of reference of a

political terrorist may be physical, but also an “*imagined community*”²⁴². Lone wolves will not only deeply interiorize the dualistic views imposed by strong ideologies, but also withdrawn themselves from most societal values. As pointed out by Weiss and Hassan research, the religious creed on which IS is based largely relies on the concept of *wala* and *baraa*, that is loyalty to Islam and disloyalty to all that is not considered true Islam²⁴³.

Moving to the analysis of the main channel of transmission of the Jihadist ideology, it has been observed how the internet provides the perfect means of transportation of such information and their ideological messages should be taken into primary consideration when we analyse lone wolf radicalization path, besides considering that in order to push potential terrorists toward radicalization the Jihadist ideologues have created an effective propagandistic tool with precise characteristics aimed at helping individuals in overcoming those internal moral barriers²⁴⁴ human beings have in hurting or killing others. IS, in particular, has structured a pervasive propaganda machine aimed at spreading its effects throughout space and time, thus reflecting the international everlasting nature itself of the Caliphate project. On one hand, in order to foster an enduring threat in time, during 2016, in correspondence with its territorial recession, IS propaganda has provided an increasing value to the role of children as a guarantee of continuity of the Caliphate project. for its expansion through space, IS propaganda could not find a better weapon of the internet. Moreover, in the age of social network, apps like Twitter since few years have started becoming an effective tool to spread the width of the terroristic messages to a rate that had never been reached before all around the globe. The marketing strategy adopted by IS manages to exploit the faults of the social media systems at their advantage, and in addition, is able to create interesting contents for those willing to listen and watch it. The true novelty brought about by IS is properly that they appear to be proficient in the

²⁴² Orsini A., “*IS: I terroristi più fortunati del mondo e tutto ciò che è stato fatto per favorirli*”, 2016

²⁴³ Weiss M., and Hassan H., “*IS: Inside the Army of Terror*”, 2015

²⁴⁴ Bandura A., “*Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement in Terrorism*,” in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*”, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 161-191.

use of social media as a mean to reach an end, and in this case, is a strong and capillary communication over a geographic area. The audience appealed through the internet by Jihadist groups is surprisingly wide. Several cases have been analysed demonstrating the capillarity of terrorist's propaganda in reaching audiences presenting not only geographical, but also social, economic age and cultural differences. The case of Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel - the lone wolf author of the Nice attack of 14 July 2016, where 89 people lost their lives - is particularly disturbing as it shows how if the recipient of the message is an unstable or mentally weak, it becomes very likely that radicalization process would begin and also have consequences in the short term. Bouhlel, radicalized just a couple of months before the attacks, following IS propaganda online. Another interesting case suggesting the variety of targets of IS propaganda potential reach is that of the Algerian lone wolf Farid Ikked. Namely, if the main target of messages is usually considered to be the young and the uneducated Western Muslims, a number of cases, including that of Farid Ikken show a different tendency.

The interconnectedness of the Jihadist groups' propaganda campaign, of which both *Dabiq* and *Inspire* are basilar components, is a major factor in the apparent efficacy of its appeal. The researcher Haroro J. Ingram for the Australian National University of Canberra, provides a clear overview of the themes, narratives and messaging developed by terrorists in *Dabiq* and *Inspire* through a comparative lens²⁴⁵. Accordingly, IS mainly relies on two kind of messages: pragmatics and perceptual bounded together through self-reinforcing domino effect arguments. The former are those dealing with the group's politico and military efforts, concerning thus security, stability and livelihood themes. This kind of messaging is designed to convince IS audience of the group's credibility and legitimacy as opposed to those of their enemies. By drawing on pragmatic considerations, IS try to push the public to make rational-choice decisions based on cost-benefit considerations. Perceptual messages, instead, leverage on identity, IS and solutions narrative constructs, inducing the audience to modulate their perception of the external world in coherence with the terrorist ideological value-frame. The central narrative of this type of messaging follow the one

²⁴⁵ Haroro J. Ingram, "*Learning from ISIS's virtual propaganda war for Western Muslims: A comparison of Inspire and Dabiq*", The International Centre for Counter-terrorism (The Hague) 2017

presented by Orsini, and is thus characterized by a radical catastrophist theme, in which two main concepts are introduced to the public's mind: the in-group identity and out-group identity.

The role of online communities and also gaming communities has also been analysed more in detail. In these virtual arenas, lacking any type of moderation and moral limit in their content, violent and extremists' voices are amplified and more moderate ones remain silent, thus convincing them that extremism can become a new normality, even more, it should become everyone's reality. Rules on video games and online communities are usually clearly set on a classic Good Vs Evil dichotomy, similar to the ones of old fairy tales. The impact the message that can be transmitted through this kind of media sets up the mind towards the definition of an easier way of understanding the much more complex world in which we live in.

After, the analysis of the main traits characterizing Jihadist groups online efforts to foster Western lone wolf terrorism, the phenomenon has been analysed in its main "domestic" determinants. Thus, since lone wolf terrorism represent a form of homegrown terrorism, its main social domestic determinants have been analyzed, in order to understand why individuals through a process of self – directed radicalization, end up undertaking violent actions against parts of their own society. As highlighted by the New York Police Department model developed by Silber and Bhatt²⁴⁶, homegrown terrorism radicalization in the West is largely a function of the people and the environment they live in. Thus, attention has been focused on the reasons beyond the lone wolves' "rebellion" against European democracies and their social values. We have tried to deal with this kind of analysis looking at several different cases, trying to understand the stories and the motives of this individuals. For a significant number of them, drugs, petty crime and street violence have been part of their former life, as a part of a feeling of exclusion, absence of a sense of belonging both to the social community they live in and to the State in general. Moreover, such a sense of social dysfunction is

²⁴⁶ Silber and Bhatt, "Radicalization in the West,"

not uncommon in European youth in general, but in the case of the lone wolves is taken to its extreme consequences; we could affirm that it's more demanding to be young today than it was for previous generations. Society has become harsher and more complex to understand as a result of many different trends including globalization, hyper individualism, weakening of social, traditional and cultural frameworks. Quite understandably, such issues are nothing but worsened by the economic crisis and its consequences for the European population in general. This makes younger generations much more exposed than in the past to moral crisis regarding their value sets. Considering the fact that youth is facing a much wider array of existential questions, which ranges to mere material issues (work, housing, life expectations) to moral ones, more and more young people feel side-lined from mainstream society and its values and loses its connection to them, thus making them much more sensible to extremist propaganda that, as we stated above, provides answers to all of those questions.

The causal link between personal frustration and political violence has been brightly investigated by Gurr in his sociological study of 1970, "Why Men Rebel"²⁴⁷. Gurr examines the psychological frustration-aggression theory which argues that the primary source of the human capacity for violence is the frustration-aggression mechanism. According to this theory, political violence is the result of a deep sense of discontent caused by a sense of relative deprivation: the discrepancy between an individual's expected and achieved welfare that may results in collective discontent. Terrorist groups propaganda finds fertile ground especially in those socio-economic environments which are best exemplified by the French *banlieues*: the peripheral neighbourhoods of the biggest French urban conglomerates. It was exactly on the outskirts of big cities like Paris, Lyon, and Marseille – that have recently risen to the headlines for the increasing number of homegrown terrorist attacks – that immigrants have been largely housed in high-rise housing projects.

²⁴⁷ Gurr, Ted Robert. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton, NJ: Center of International Studies, Princeton UP, 1970.

In order to explore the socio-psychological dynamics behind the lone wolves “rebellion” against their own Western society, it has been particularly relevant to look more in depth at the personal stories of those lone wolves, who since the early 2000s have chosen to embrace the Black Flag call. We tried, following a close case-to-case analysis of some of the most renowned case of lone wolf terrorism, to trace a profile that could be workable not only in the scientific debate and to help understand such a complex phenomenon, but also a profile adaptable to security and integration policies, fighter with law enforcement operations. At last, it is important at this point to note the reason why lone wolves stay lone wolves, namely the fact that they feel a certain degree of discomfort regarding full membership of organized extremist groups, driven by social ineptitude. This sets of characteristics make the lone wolf category very broad, thus making a coherent action against the phenomenon at least complex. Being unable to trace a direct connection to a cell, a group or a criminal organization makes it very difficult for police and security forces to act directly to stop them before the attack actually takes place. In addition, the differences in profiles eventually prone to adhere to radical ideology appear very broad, and if we exclude, as we do, to consider the whole Muslim population as sensitive targets, the work of police forces becomes a daunting one. However recognizing the limit the profile provided in this chapter, that can be still refined by fellow scholars deepening more and more the issue, we believe that we have gathered enough information to try to provide some more practical solutions to the problem.

Mainly-responsive responses to terrorism proved their lack of effectiveness and sometimes legal ground, as it happens both in the US and the EU, therefore we will try to focus more on a preventive approach rather than a responsive one. The phenomenon of lone wolves terrorism is relevant today and most likely will be in next years for EU policy-makers winning the ideological battle Jihadist groups are engaging. The fight against lone wolves’ terrorism, but of terrorism in general, must be understood not unlikely the “Battle of Narratives” that East and West have fought during the Cold War, a battle of minds rather than armies. There is here a conflict that we are witnessing: a

form of Huntington's clashes of civilization²⁴⁸, and we could argue that the one between Islam and Christendom is an old one but also with a very modern echo. Clearly, the issue will have an important digression on the internet and its inherent potential of communication and fundamental, with Internet being the main source of information for many, and is considered one of the main achievement of freedom of speech ever made, holding not only an empirical value, but also a symbolical one, misinterpreting its values would make the whole research incomplete. However great the instrument, is appears to be very difficult to control when it comes to propaganda, especially extremist one, no matter how strongly the state tries to counter it. It is a very comfortable and safe environment for radical ideologies to spread and a strong instrument to put similar minds into a conversation in which there is no negative feedback of any kind, and social media only work as a loudspeaker for all small realities, that could even appear strong and dangerous. We understood that all those policies that try to target the supply of such contents or information find so many obstacles on the way to full effectiveness, both of practical and political nature. What is left to deal with for the issue is trying to limit the demand of such content rather than its supply. As ideas are better when there are better ones that can confute them, internet seems to be the fairest place to share them. Bad ideas will eventually be confuted and truth and reasoning may return, and ideally those following those bad ideas could be taken back.

The US State department already moved towards this direction, by hosting “webinars”, online seminars in which online activist supporting moderate views where given help in gain more visibility online and exchange ideas and thoughts, therefore targeting a larger audience, in way that “Rather than telling people what to do, the aim—in the words of American officials—is to connect “good people,” build capacity, and make it possible for good things to result”²⁴⁹. Addressing the right voices inside the community can prove effective and also save a lot of time and expenses, as targeting and helping single personalities is much easier than a whole community. there is the need to rethink the approach to which national governments view counterterrorism

²⁴⁸ Huntington

²⁴⁹ Peter R. Neumann, *Options and Strategies for Countering Online Radicalization in the United States*, (2013)

policies: it is imperative to move from a top-down approach, that would be eventually criticized and prove ineffective, to a more levelled approach that looks more closely at the needs and issue present inside a community. This is helpful not only where Muslims are not the majority, as it would help in the process of mutual recognition between the different parts by putting community issues and shared problems and values at the base of recognisance, but also in Muslim only communities, where the authorities do not appear to be only security focused, but more as a helping hand to solve everyday problems. This will create a sense of trust and belonging that could prove helpful in fighting the phenomenon of self-radicalization, and maybe prevent it at a very early stage. This strategic communication and counter communication can prove incredibly useful in taking away most of the discursive strength to extremist reasoning; of course, a system of incentives and public communication, even if community and population centered, can be limited to a certain degree of effectiveness, mostly on two factors: grievances towards the state, the creation of shared goals. Most terroristic groups rely on population support, and lone wolves' terrorism, even if in a more indirect nuance, still need it to validate their beliefs, therefore, attacking the support to the terrorist organization can be as useful as attacking its financial or technical abilities. Producing counter narratives could be a very useful tool in the hand of the state to deal with the issue of lone wolves, as it could act directly on the field in which terrorists are stronger, providing an alternative source of information and counterarguments to the persuasive ones of radical propaganda.