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**Islamic Radicalism and Exponential Technology: Roots and Prospects of
Jihadist Extremism in an Interdisciplinary Perspective.**

Islamic Radicalization in Italy

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Introduction

The present research aims at analyzing extremism phenomena attributable to Islamic radicalization processes, with particular attention to the European and, specifically, the Italian context. Since the 9/11th intelligence failure and since 2004 and 2005 train bombings which occurred, respectively, in Madrid and in London, Islamic radicalization phenomena has been to the highest attention of Western scholars, practitioners and policymakers determined to prevent such a destructive event from occurring again. Compared with central and northern-Europe countries, Italy has been touched very few times by Islamic terrorist attacks. In the Italian context, awareness on the threat of jihadist extremism was raised with the cases of Domenico Quaranta, a Sicilian who converted to Islam and carried out four attacks in Italy in 2002, and Muḥammad Game, a radicalized Libyan immigrant responsible for the attack against the Santa Barbara barracks in Milan in 2011. However, this country has never witnessed massacres of the magnitude of those seen in France, Germany, Belgium or Spain (but also elsewhere in Europe) in the five-year period 2014-2020, nor has it ever been affected by phenomena of serious social hardship with a religious-cultural background, as happens in other European suburbs. Molenbeek and Schaerbeek in Brussels, Lavapiés in Madrid and Saint-Denis in Paris are just some of the European neighborhoods where the high concentration of Muslim inhabitants, against the backdrop of socio-economic hardship and lack of security, gives rise to potential hubs for local and global Islamic radicalism networks. In the mid-2010s, the disproportioned growth of Muslim population in some specific urban areas sparked a lively debate about the existence, even in Europe, of alleged “no-go zones”, that is, Muslim-majority neighborhoods shunned by non-Muslims over

which institutions fail to exercise authority.¹ In Italy there is no shortage of multi-ethnic neighborhoods inhabited by a high rate of Muslims, such as Torpignattara and the Esquilino in Rome, but there seems to be a general peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups and cultures. Precisely for this reason, Italy began to move in the field of combating violent radicalism just a few years ago. The Italian strategy against home-grown jihadism is based above all on cooperation agreements and initiatives with the Italian Islamic communities, but still lacks a comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating violent jihadist extremism. In this sense, two draft laws were put forward to provide this country with a CVE strategy, respectively in the 17th and 18th legislatures, entitled «Measures for the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism of jihadist origin». Unfortunately, neither of them concluded the Italian legislative process. In June 2023, the same bill was presented again in the Senate, but it is likely that due to Russian and African migratory pressure, respectively from East and from the South, the issue will remain at the bottom of the agenda of parliamentary activities.²

Despite the diverse degree of attention reserved to this issue from a country to another, scientific literature on the subject of jihadism and Islamic radicalization is quite nourished, both in Europe and in Italy, but most theories and research seem to have hard time in giving theoretical explanation to the matching of some features in cases of radicalization or to the coexistence of

¹ Particular contributions were made to this debate by Steven Emerson, an American journalist expert in Islamic extremism, and Daniel Pipes, an American journalist and political scientist belonging to the neoconservative political current. See: Emerson's intervention on Fox News, *Full Fox News Report: Birmingham, UK. No Go Zones for Non-Muslims*, 2015, YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Em0eXxW3Gw4>; D. Pipes, *The 751 No-Go Zones of France*, danielpipes.org, 2006 (updated in 2015), available on <https://www.danielpipes.org/blog/2006/11/the-751-no-go-zones-of-france>.

² A critical reading of the Italian draft Law against jihadist radicalization is provided in G. Cesta, *Flussi migratori e dinamiche interculturali in Europa: il caso della regolamentazione giuridica delle comunità islamiche*, PhD dissertation, academic year 2020/2021.

multiple archetypes. In fact, the constant increase in number of youngsters being fascinated by the jihadist narrative can be attributed neither solely to the rise of fundamentalism, nor can it be explained as the mere consequence of a lack of integration combined with socio-economic distress. Not even the sum of these factors is enough to explain the widespread success of some extremist ideological systems. Even when a common denominator is found, allowing to the definition of “models” of reference, a general difficulty in going beyond a mere descriptive attitude can be observed.

Indeed, constant efforts are needed in order to gain a broader comprehension of a phenomenon that has undergone profound changes in the last two decades.

Since the late Nineties, the European jihadist landscape has profoundly changed, due to the combination of several factors mainly of a social and a geopolitical nature. Most of this change seem to be attributable to the massive migration of the jihadist landscape on the Internet, which resulted in the almost boundless expansion of the audience of recipients of propaganda material and calls to action. The spread of the Internet and of technological devices, in fact, has caused the structural transformation of the economic and social system at a global scale, and, most important, has changed the way in which issues of this kind have developed up to now. The advent of ICT has accelerated the process of globalization, which affected the paradigms that had always governed social relations and cultural phenomena, first characterized by verticality and linearity, and then by horizontality and reticularity. Among other things, globalization, both in terms of growing mobility of people on global soil and in terms of media interconnection, has closely confronted the West with non-Westphalian paradigms belonging to a different legal and cultural traditions. Among the latter, there is the Islamic paradigm, marked by a communitarian and non-secularized vision of the world, whose expansive *vis* can inspire hegemonic geopolitical

projects which could go at the expense of the West.

All this has posed unforeseen challenges in the field of security management. Techno-scientific development, in fact, is significantly faster than the political and institutional one. This dynamic results in an “exponential gap”, which criminal entities have learnt how to exploit to reach their purposes, which are different to each other with respect to the nature of the organization involved. Systems that operate outside the circuits of democracy – as autocracies, as well as jihadists – then, are not subject to the constraints deriving from the need to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and claim to be able to use Technoscience to its full potential. However, the will to use the benefits of the web to achieve certain objectives could lead to the adaptation of the latter to the potential of the internet. That’s what happens when the use of a means to achieve a goal involves the adaptation of the purpose to the potential of the means. At the basis of this dynamic there is a prejudice regarding techno-scientific products, which nowadays are often conceived as mere means for achieving human goals. This misunderstanding does not only involve criminal entities, but also the fields of Law and politics, even in the West. In the Western world, however, the nihilistic attitude has given considerable thrust to the consolidation of contemporary Public Law doctrine. The seed of Western nihilism, indeed, fueled the need to reach the foundation and, at the same time, overwhelms any foundation, thus leading to the consolidation of the rule of law and the primacy of the person.³

Critical-hermeneutical attitudes arising out of Western nihilism has also penetrated the Islamic world, fueling the debate on the need to reopen the gate of *iğtihād*. As it is well known, such a propensity for hermeneutic reformism is

³ See C. Sbailò, *Europe’s call to Arms, Philosophical Roots and Public Law Profiles of the Confrontation with the Monster of the 21st Century: Westernization without Democratization*, Nomos Verlag, Baden Baden, 2023, 116-117.

typical of some forms of moderate Islam and Muslim thinkers considered to be “progressive”, while connections between the rejection of traditional exegesis and Islamic extremism is often overlooked.⁴ The doctrinal positions assumed by jihadist organizations, against which the authorities of “official Islam” are in fierce controversy, denote the penetration into jihadist circles of a way of thinking, borrowed from the West, oriented towards the denial of anything eternal and immutable. This attitude, together with the massive migration of jihadist networks on the web, denotes the penetration even in the Islamic world of a technical way of acting, i.e., that type of action aimed at continuous improvement of the ability to achieve goals which pass through the refusal of a definitive result. Embracing Technique involves the convergence between the individual particular goal and the ultimate goal of the Technique, which consists in the continuous overcoming of the last result. This convergence, in turn, translates into the general enslavement to the technical progress, which informs human action leading to inevitable nihilistic tendencies.

As we will try to demonstrate throughout this work, the awareness of the potential of the Internet and technological devices has profoundly influenced the *modus operandi* of terrorist organizations and their followers. Their attempt to maximize the use of the Media has led to a dangerous reversal which, in the years to come, could completely annihilate the jihadist project, which is already suffering from doctrinal, ideological and organizational insubstantiality.

The picture outlined thus far constitutes the theoretical nucleus in which the relationship between contemporary jihadism and Technique lies. From this nucleus, then, numerous themes radiate, the investigation of which requires an interdisciplinary approach. It should be emphasized that interdisciplinarity goes

⁴ C. Sbailò, *Non aprite quella porta: l'alternativa islamica come sfida interna all'Europa*, La Filosofia futura, 16(1) 2021, 85-96.

far beyond the mere combination of interpretative frameworks borrowed from different subjects, which would lead to a multidisciplinary, perhaps useful for describing the raw data of sensory experience, but not for conceptualizing them. Therefore, the deep understanding of Islamic extremism requires a multi-level investigation encompassing a huge number of issues strictly interrelated to each other. The full understanding of those “interrelations”, in the end, requires the resort to the conceptual instruments of Western philosophy.

Giving an account of the intricate pattern of factors involved is quite complicated. An attempt is made here dividing such factors into the ones which can be investigated using a “vertical” approach, and the ones that need to be observed from a “horizontal” perspective. Among the former there are factors linked to Islamic radicalization by a relation of casualty or, anyway, which directly affect its roots. Under this group fall both endogenous (among which we find, essentially, socio-economic and psychological drivers) and exogenous factors (attributable to the geo-political context) which can trigger a radicalization process. Among the latter, we can observe a wide set of broader topics related to the emerging global order (e.g., the mutation of the relationship between religion and culture, or the digitalization of the social dimension), which, apparently, have a weak or, at least, indirect relation with the roots of Islamic radicalization and that, indeed, require the adoption of a comprehensive “horizontal” perspective. In order to put the whole picture together”, in the present research an interdisciplinary methodology and a multilevel perspective are adopted and combined in an integrated approach, with the hope of providing original theoretical elements for a deep comprehension of the very roots and prospects of contemporary jihadism in the framework of the digitalization process, with particular attention to the Italian scenario.

In order to expose the picture described so far in the clearest and most organic way possible, this work is divided into two main parts. The one is aimed

at framing the conceptual challenge posed by the confrontation with the Islamic experience, on one side, and to the exploration of the Western roots of jihadism, on the other. Chapter I is aimed to enlighten the limits of the Western conceptual horizon for the observation of other Public Law and politic experiences, which, in the end, negatively affect both our geopolitical cunning in the Mediterranean and our ability to manage the seed of those experience when it springs up within Western public space. Such inabilities result, respectively, in the mismanagement of geopolitical dossiers of higher importance, such as the Arab Springs or the migration emergency, and the inability to predict and prevent the security risks faced by Western societies in front of extremist interpretation of the Islamic political doctrine, which ends up threatening the very foundation of the democratic building. The second chapter, then, is aimed at describing the theoretical assumptions that regulate the relationship between jihadism and Technoscience, with particular attention to proliferation of the technique attitude within the people's Islam and jihadist circles. This relationship, as will be seen, is rooted in a horizon of thought originating in the West, but which is enveloping the whole world. From this arises a process of global Westernization which threatens, above all, the Western world.

The second part of the work moves along two guidelines oriented, respectively, to the exploration of security challenges in the digital age, and to the analysis of the Italian and European jihadist landscape. Chapter III will explore the jihadist challenge to the West within the broader context of the major global transformations that are putting pressure on traditional Western interpretative framework. This part of the work is focused on the role of techno-scientific development in determining the overcoming of the Westphalian model, which, taken alone, has proved insufficient to understand and anticipate security threats in the third millennium. Ample space is dedicated to the diachronic analysis of the evolution of the jihadist threat within the "exponential gap", and to the

influence that the use of the internet has exerted on the phenomenology of radical Islam. The fourth and last chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the Italian and European jihadist panorama. Starting from the existing scientific literature, an analysis of European jihadism is proposed, with particular attention to the mutation of organizational structures and to the connections between radicalization phenomena and demographic and social impact of migratory flows. The final part of the work focuses on the Italian scenario. Here, we will give a comprehensive overview of some key issues related to Islamic radicalization in Italy in the late 2010s and early 2020s through a qualitative analysis of some cases of radicalization observed in the period under review, trying to shed light on the future prospects of the jihadist threat in this Mediterranean country.

Methodological premise

The present research deals with a religiously marked phenomenon having social, political, and legal implications. The topic of Islamic extremism and radicalization, in fact, encompasses a huge number of subjects and issues concerning both its own roots and drivers, and its consequences. In terms of historical and ideological roots, the jihadist threat – both to the West and to Islamic countries – could be considered the result of the affirmation of a current of thought inspired to *Salafīyya* which at first emerged in Middle East and has spread all over the world through both the increasingly free movement of people and technological communication channels. As we will try to describe, the resort to the digital sphere as an organizational base and as a place for propaganda and indoctrination has led the jihadist system to major transformations, thus affecting its doctrinal and ideological foundation, as well as its organizational and operational model.

The exponential spread technological devices within jihadist circles, along with the growing ethnic and cultural diversification in Europe, is the main reason why attention on this threat should be kept high. The use of the Internet has allowed Islamic radicalism to transcend geographical borders undisturbed and threaten the security of countries, including Italy, which are not the traditional target of jihadist-inspired terrorist actions. The diffusion of radical contents and their rapid replication on the web must be read in the general political and social frame in which this phenomenon is inserted. In fact, a clear separation between the digital sphere and the real sphere, which would lead to an incorrect understanding of the so-called “online radicalization”, does not find legitimacy. Nowadays, the sphere of human action, in fact, encompasses both dimensions. Considering them as separated is a mistake that would hinder the overall

understanding of the problems related to inter-cultural relations in the public space and of the connections of those problems with geopolitical dynamics.

In recent years, the Italian scenario has shown signs of change that bring it closer to other European countries. The first evidence of this change concerns the high number of arrests for crimes related to jihadism, apparently in contrast with the absence of attacks on Italian soil and the general decrease of terrorist plots all over Europe. These data, as we will see, raise the alarm, also in Italy, about the threat of jihadist extremism. This threat is strictly linked – but not to be simplistically attributed – to uncontrolled migratory flows expose Italy to the risk of infiltration by jihadist elements capable of plotting terrorist actions or proselytizing in the country. These risks also persist in the prison environment, making the exclusive repressive approach seriously insufficient against both jihadism and illegal immigration. Concerning the latter, Russian-Ukrainian war has exacerbated the elements of instability in the North African region, where basic food supplies are lacking and life is increasingly difficult, thus leading young Arabs to dream about a prosperous future in Europe. Meanwhile, it was witnessed the collapse of the Tunisian democratic laboratory, which, together with the persistence of the long-time on-going Libyan crisis, is among the causes why these flows may not decrease unless there is real European political coordination on the issue.⁵

If poorly managed, immigration can seriously threaten national security. In the short term, illegal foreigners on Italian soil can fuel terrorism, organized crime and prostitution. In the long term, both legal and illegal immigration brings

⁵ In the years following the Arab Spring, Tunisia was considered a pioneer of the democratic transition in the Islamic world, as well as a true laboratory in which, for the first time, the possibility of an Islamic path to constitutional democracy was concretely explored. This experiment was abruptly interrupted by the measures adopted by Tunisian President Kais Saïed in 2022, when he dismissed the Prime Minister and dissolved Parliament, and adopted a constitutional reform which has made Tunisia a «hyper-presidential» system. See: F. Biagi, *Tunisia: la Costituzione di Kais Saïed*, *Diritti Comparati*, 2022, available on <https://www.diritticomparati.it/tunisia-la-costituzione-di-kais-saied/>.

about changes capable of modifying the Italian demographic and social fabric, not without the risk of social and cultural polarization heralding phenomena of extremism. Radical narratives, in fact, always circulate on the web, where they acquire infinite forms and meanings and can hardly be eradicated. However, they wouldn't pose security threats if they don't find fertile ground in which to take root. That ground is often made "fertile" by the feeling of cultural non-belonging, also called "double absence", felt by Muslims who are children or grandchildren of immigrants. In other cases, extremist ideologies put down roots thanks to situations of socio-economic hardship, along with social marginalization and widespread delinquency, such as, as already mentioned, the outskirts of European metropolises. These conclusions are not conjectures, but the result of the observation of previous failed experiences in the field of integration of immigrants and management of multi-ethnic societies. If we explore the problem of Islamic radicalism in the West in reverse along what we would call a "conceptual pyramid", at the top of the latter that problem seems to regard the comparison between legal experiences and cultures and, in particular, the legal and cultural context in which this comparison takes place. Social and anthropological disciplines, in fact, provide the conceptual tools to describe phenomena, but not those to analyze the meaning of the relationship between problems and the cultural and legal framework in which they are posed. The latter can be explored only drawing on the fruits of the dialogue between philosophy and comparative Public Law.

Indeed, to correctly analyze the theme of the present dissertation, a holistic approach is needed, which takes into account all the terms of the problem, including its *position* in our horizon of thought. The Western scholar, as an observer, is involved in a hermeneutic circle together with the object of study. In that circle, the two interact with each other. The scholar's point of view, in fact, can never be totally neutral and objective, since he is plunged into a specific

historical-cultural framework. That framework influences how the object of study will appear to him. This dynamic is inevitable and cannot be managed but through the adoption of a hermeneutically oriented approach, which takes into account the intrinsic nature of study and research activities.⁶

The adoption, instead, of a monolithic one-dimensional perspective places the Western scholar in front of several methodological problems.

The first one is of a cultural nature and regards the lack of knowledge of the Western public opinion towards Islam – especially in Italy, where multi-ethnicity is a relatively recent matter – that frequently cause the misunderstanding of events, concepts and, in the end, terms closely linked to the topic of this work. The meaning of the word *Ĝihād*, as well as the difference between the adjectives “Islamic”, “Islamist” and “Muslim”, are, at the best of cases, subjects of confusion and, at worst, deliberately misused for political purposes. It is the case of the so-called “holy war”, commonly considered the translation of the Arabic word *Ĝihād*. Nonetheless, at the opposite than one can think the unscrupulous war against “infidels” is not part of the legitim Islamic doctrine or, at list, not as it is laid down by jihadist narratives.

The distorted knowledge of Islam, however, does not only concern public opinion understood as the set of beliefs of the people, but also a part of the community of scholars. Only in recent times, in fact, has a part of Public Law doctrine focused on the Public Law of Mediterranean Islam, underlining its “recognizability” compared to Western political and legal experiences. The importance of this experience has emerged not in terms of individual national

⁶ The topic of the «hermeneutic circle» that involves the Western scholar who dedicates himself to the study of Islamic legal experience is extensively explored in C. Sbailò, *Per un approccio concreto ed ermeneuticamente orientato al costituzionalismo islamico contemporaneo*, in S. Bagni, G. A. Figueroa Mejía, G. Pavani (cur.) “La ciencia del derecho constitucional comparado. Estudios en homenaje a Lucio Pegoraro”, Tomo I, Ciudad de México, Tirant Lo Blanch, 2017, 673-712.

Public Law experiences but in a trans-national Islamic key, thus allowing the identification of some elements that transversally characterize all the legal experiences the Islamic world.

The delayed acknowledgement the Islamic legal experience is closely linked to Eurocentrism, on the one hand, and Orientalism, on the other. The tendency of European legal scholars to observe Islamic legal experience using the European conceptual toolkit risks leading to ideological abstractions, thus hindering the achievement of valid scientific results. This is what happens when, for example, the secular-clerical conceptual dichotomy is applied to the observation of the Islamic experience, where that dichotomy has never existed. The conceptual tools of European Law, in fact, are inadequate to “read” the Islamic legal experience, which risks ending up being narrowed as a series of religious and linguistic-cultural traits.

Europe at the crossroad of Orientalism and Eurocentrism

Most of the intellectual challenges faced by legal scholars and security analysts have to do when approaching to Islam and to the Islamic world fall under the umbrella of Orientalism. In its first meaning, this term is meant as the general interest in what is “Eastern”, or more generally, referring to academic studies of cultures and civilizations of Far and Middle East. The concept of “Orientalism” assumes the ontological distinction between the West, on one side, and the East, on the other. Historically this word, starting from the XVIII century, started to mean the whole of the institutions created by the West to manage its relationships with the East. Those relationships, at the time, were based on the Western economic and political supremacy on the East and on the Western idea of the Eastern civilization and culture, which, most of the times, did not have any

correspondence with what actually was the East.⁷ Without delving into the Western attitude towards its colonies in the imperialist era, which is not at the core of this study, it is worth noting that such tendency to consider Eastern civilizations as a mere set of static cultural attributes and of religious traditions is still deeply ingrained in the Western way of thinking the East.

For reasons of geographical proximity, of recent history, and of geopolitical interests, this kind of problems mainly affects the way in which European people look at the Islamic world and civilization. Islam is often considered a religion among others and, as such, it is seen as an affair circumscribed to the private sphere, thus reflecting a strictly orientalist attitude. Muslims are supposed to have their own private religious belief as well as a set of cultural traditions related to Islam and to Arabic – or “Eastern” – culture. Indeed, European people seem not to be aware that Islam is not just a religion. Islam is a civilization, a culture, and a geopolitical phenomenon, but most of all, it is a way of rationalizing the public space which is – or wants to be – *alternative* to the Eastern one.

This orientalist way of looking at Islam, quite spread in the West, has negative consequences that can be detected both inside and outside the European Union borders, that is, under the legal and geopolitical perspective.

In major European countries, the Western attitude towards Muslim “minorities” (which, as already mentioned, in some neighborhood of European capitals represent the majority of the population, sometimes in a condition of “ghettoization”) seems to be quite objectionable. In Europe, there is scarce awareness of the geopolitical value of Islam, and this emerges in particular at the level of the respective national public opinions, strongly concerned with the respect of cultural differences as a form of presumed protection of freedom of

⁷ E. W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1979, 1-5

expression and of worship. All this move from the assumption of the neutrality of public space, thus neglecting the actual nature of Islam. This way of thinking is exemplified in the controversy, which re-emerge periodically in Italy, about the organization of initiatives attributable to the cultural and religious traditions of Christians at school (such as Christmas pageant played by children or the stage of the nativity scene) or the display of religious symbols of Christianity (i.e., the crucifix) in school classrooms, hospital rooms, but also during radio and television broadcasts.⁸ Criticism and complaints in this regard, but from Christians – or at list people considering themselves non-believers or atheists – worried about the offense against other religions and cultures and ignoring the position of the latter towards Christian symbols. This behavior is the source of multiple paradoxes.

First of all, we should ask ourselves whether Christian religious symbols are really an offense to other religions, especially monotheistic ones such as Judaism and Islam, with which Christianity shares the same Abrahamic roots. It is worth underlying the continuity, stated in the Quran, between Islam and the two previous monotheistic religions, reported in Surah *al-ʾImrān* through the words attributed to *ʾIsā* (“Jesus Christ” in Arabic), who expressed his aim of confirming, and not abolishing, what was told previously in the Jewish Torah.⁹ By virtue of this continuity, Islamic doctrine attributes a privileged status to the major monotheistic religions, i.e., Christianity and Judaism, and to their believers, which are mentioned in the Islamic Law as “People of the Book”, which in Arabic are called *Ahl al-Kitāb*. Indeed, their presence is tolerated even within an Islamic

⁸ There are numerous examples in Italy of schools deciding to neutralize any religious sign as a form of respect of religious diversity. Two examples of this kind of approach can be made with the decision of the dean of a primary school in Northern Italy of not making the Christmas crib not to offend non-Christian children attending that institute, or with the remotion of the crucifix in the classrooms of a primary school in central Italy, respectively in 2018 and 2019. See: *Presepe "vietato" dalla preside in una scuola elementare del veneziano: bufera social. Salvini: «Difendiamo il Natale»*, Il Messaggero, 2018, <https://t.ly/KrTjX>; *Crocifisso tolto dall'aula a Fiumicino, scoppia il caso politico. La preside: «Non ci sono i soldi per comprarli»*, Corriere della Sera, 2019, <https://t.ly/CLjV->.

⁹ Quran, 3:50

country, where they are englobed in a communitarian key. Furthermore, the common Abrahamic origin of the three monotheistic religions implicates the sharing of common values and beliefs. Concerning Christianity and Islam is worth mentioning the shared devotion for figure of Jesus Christ. The latter, of course, has a profoundly different status for Christians, on one side, and for Muslims, on the other. While for the former, he is considered the Messiah, the “incarnation of God” that came on the earth for the salvation of humanity, for the latter he is a highly respected prophet comparable to Muhammed, who had the merit of closing the “prophetic circle”. However, both the Bible and the Quran talk about Jesus’s virgin birth, his miracles (remarkably, he is the unique prophet which made miracles according to the Quran), and his ascension into heaven. Another point in common regards the status of his mother, the Virgin Mary, who was chosen by God to become the mother of Jesus Christ.

As regards Islam, then, we must keep in the absence in Sunni Islam of globally recognized religious authorities that express unobjectionably the Islamic position towards specific issues (that is, instead, the case of Christianity with the Clergy and the Pope – for Catholicism – and, also, of Shiite Islam with its multilevel clerical hierarchy). For this reason, the positions of leaders of local religious communities, such as the custodians of Islamic cultural centers that serve as prayer halls, known as *Imām*, are of greater importance. These figures, responsible for managing Islamic gathering places in the West, have their finger on the pulse of Muslims’ mood on certain issues (such as that of religious symbols in public space). At the same time, they provide a valuable point of view that institutions should grasp to fully understand the context in which they operate. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the statements of the *Imām* of the Mosque of the Italian city of Reggio-Emilia regarding the exposure of the crucifix in school classrooms. During an interview with a Muslim female student who asked for an authoritative opinion on this issue, he defended without hesitation the right of

Christians of worshipping symbols of Christianity. He claimed that the latter is part of Italy, which, in its turn, is the «root of Christianity».¹⁰ Likewise, it is worth reporting what expressed by the president of the Islamic League of the Venetian region in Italy regarding the tradition of making the nativity scene at school. At the beginning of December 2018, few weeks before Christmas, acting as a spokesperson for his fellow believers, he stated that Muslims «aren't against the Christmas crib at school», also remarking the importance of preserving religious traditions as instruments to enhance interreligious dialogue. Furthermore, he argued that the press should stop to implicate Muslims in such polemic dispute on the Christmas symbols.¹¹ Even though Imams are not comparable to Christian priests, they are a point of reference for the local Muslim community. Indeed, they can be the engine of a virtuous circle of respect and interreligious dialogue.

Assuming that the opinion expressed by the two Imams of Northern Italy reflects that of Muslims in general would mean adopting a simplistic approach to be totally rejected. There are of course Muslims which are not such tolerant regarding the exposure of Christian symbols, also in a country predominantly Christian. To make an example which had some echo in Italy, it is the case of the former president of the Union of Muslims of Italy (*Unione musulmani d' Italia*, a small association marked by integralist views) Adel Smith. The latter in front of the refuse of removing the crucifix that was exposed in the room where his mother was hospitalized decided to throw it out the window.¹²

The investigation into the reasons of the scarce tolerance of some Muslims is also complex and multifaceted and must go beyond the accusations of

¹⁰ See *L' Islam dice sì al crocifisso in classe*, il Resto del Carlino, 2010, available on <https://www.ilrestodelcarlino.it>.

¹¹ See *L'Imam del Veneto: «Non siamo contro il Presepe a scuola, smettete di coinvolgerci in queste polemiche»*, Il Messaggero, 2018, available on https://www.ilmessaggero.it/italia/imam_veneto_presepe_scuola-4148656.html?refresh_ce.

¹² See *Adel Smith getta crocifisso da finestra ospedale*, La Repubblica, 2003, available on <https://tinyurl.com/28zx6nyv>.

fundamentalism and closed-mindedness. Conceiving Islam as the combination of moderate intellectual currents opposed to fundamentalist and radical currents totally neglect the common hermeneutic posture that these two currents often assume. Furthermore, Similarly, dividing Muslims into diversity-tolerant moderates and intolerant extremists is a sign of unfamiliarity with the way Islam interact with other religions and, above all, with other civilizations. Both positions – the tolerance of Christian symbols in a country with a Christian majority as well as their refuse – reflect a typically Islamic way of thinking the public space as “non neutral”, but “religiously determined”. Indeed, according to the Islamic view, as it will be analyzed afterwards, the foundation of public space is determined by the spread of Islam and the expansion of the Islamic *Ummah*. Indeed, tolerance and benevolence of those Muslims who welcome, or at list accept, the exposure of religious symbols results as well profoundly Islamically marked, reflecting the rooted conception of public space as “not neutral”. Likewise, the rejection of the crucifix by Muslims reflects the Islamic tendency of necessarily considering the public space as something “Islamic”. This way of thinking pushed to its extreme consequences could lead to the delegitimization of the existing political order and the foundation of an Islamic jurisdiction (it is the case of the so-called “Londonistan” or the other Islamic “ghettos” existing in Europe). Islam, in fact, adopts an eschatological perspective aimed at freeing man from the pre-Islamic condition of ignorance. This vision can translate into different ideologies, from progressive and moderate to conservative and extremist ones. All are equally Islamic, and the prevalence of one over the other depends on the political and geopolitical context. It is for this reason that in Europe we must take great care of inter-cultural dynamics, rejecting, however, the instances of cultural relativism.

This Western tendency of constantly censoring symbols of religious identity produces several side effects. First of all, this approach is not positive for

interreligious dialogue, which can be considered a common social interest under multiple perspectives, involving of course security management. The exaggerated attention of the West towards the presumed susceptibility of Muslims leads to the emergence of controversies that otherwise would not exist, thus exacerbating cultural and religious differences which would not engender any “clash of civilizations”. But most important, this approach has deep political implications. The aforementioned idea of religious neutrality as a form of respect towards religious minorities and, at the same time, of expression of the secularism of the state raises several problems of a political nature with serious geopolitical implications. At the base of this way of thinking, there is the idea that the neutralization of the religious aspects in the social and political sphere is a necessary condition for the affirmation and the defense of Constitutionalism and democracy. This assumption leads to the adoption of orientalist views, thus banalizing religious affiliation – in general, but especially to Islam given the relatively high number of Muslims in Europe and in Italy – as something “secondary” in the identity building of individuals, while, on the contrary, this aspect often ends up being among the most important in home-grown Muslims of foreign origins. Although neutralization policies, such as the French ban on wearing the Islamic headscarf in public, are correct under the legal profile, they have sparked discontent from Muslim women in France.

Moreover, the idea of religious neutrality as a precondition for constitutional democracy entails an interpretative framework that, in turn, results to be Eurocentric, and which has proven to be inadequate for looking at the political, constitutional, and geopolitical developments occurring in Islamic countries. The most suitable example in this regard is related to the relationship between Islam and the State, which a recent doctrine defined as of “political and

religious polarity”.¹³ This relationship of polarity is often misunderstood by Western legal scholars, who look at the historical experience of the emergence and the consolidation of the Westphalian secularist model and to the progressive transformation of the liberal state into pluralist democracy as the path that every state entity has to follow. This conceptual framework has long hindered the deep understanding of the phenomenon known as the “Arab Spring”. On that occasion, the demand for democracy and pluralism put forward by the North African populations was translated into the re-expansion of the Islamic ordering principle, resulting in the promulgation of an Islamic constitution in Egypt (2012), and with the rise of a people’s Islamic party in Tunisia. One of the most evident consequences of the misunderstanding of the Arab Spring can be observed in the outbreak of the Libyan civil war, with the consequent emergency of migration to Europe – or to be precise, to Spain, Italy, Malta, and Greece. The sudden decision made by France and UK, supported by Italy, of eliminating the Libyan President Mu’ammar al-Qaddāfi was attributable to a vision of the world which dates back to the Cold War, and that is rooted in the idea that the respect of human rights and democratic principles was needed to ensure the stability of the West and defend its strategical interests. This idea, in turn, was at the base of the Doctrine of the Great Middle East, emerged after the 11/09 Intelligence failure, on the assumption that the security and the stability of the West demand the affirmation of constitutional democracy in a wide area of the world which, summarizing, corresponds with the Islamic world. Of course, the intervention of the West in Libya was due as well to direct strategic interests, especially regarding the project of al-Qaddāfi of replacing the Franco-African with a local currency, thus strongly dimensioning the French influence in Africa. The absence of a unique European policy in Libya does not allow the West to support Libyan State building, which is

¹³ C. Sbailò, *Diritto Pubblico dell’Islam Mediterraneo. Linee evolutive degli ordinamenti nordafricani contemporanei: Algeria, Tunisia, Libia, Egitto*, Wolters Kluwer, CEDAM, Padova, 2022, 16-20

strictly connected to the security and the stability of Europe. In fact, the Libyan civil war has become the “powder keg” of the Middle eastern geopolitical turmoil. Indeed, the European weakness in managing the Libyan crisis risks exacerbating the consequences the ongoing fight between the two main fronts of the Islamic Sunni world, whose impact is going to overcome the borders in the Islamic world.

Likewise, the exclusive resort to the categories of European Public Law would not allow to understand the Egyptian constitutional experience. It is what happened with the two constitutional reforms carried out in Egypt, respectively in 1969 and 1980, by the then President Anwar al-Sādāt, which wanted the introduction of *Sharī'ah* principles in the Constitution as primary source of legislation. In the same reform, a Constitutional Court in charge of monitoring the respect of legislation towards Islamic Law was created. A significant part of the Western scholarly community interpreted this decision as the premise for the adoption of Islamic integralist views on the model of the Afghani *Tālibān*. On the contrary, the circumscription of the *Sharī'ah* principles in a constitutional framework was used by the Egyptian Constitutional Court to mitigate the application of *Sharī'ah* principles and, indeed, give liberal innovating judgements.¹⁴

What happened in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion of Kabul is among the greatest examples of the destructive potential of Eurocentrism applied to geopolitics. In that occasion, the American administration gave great priority to the geopolitical interests of the country and to military aspects, regardless of the religious implications leading, in the years that followed, to the emergence of *al-Qā'idah*. This group, which is responsible for the most destructive ever terrorist attack “at the heart of the West”, determined the emergence of a criminal ideological framework which demand innovative security approaches.

¹⁴ Ivi, 113-119.

This ideological framework results a misleading conception of socio-cultural and geopolitical scenarios also in Europe, where it is at the base of the French and the British integration strategies. France has adopted a paradigm of neutralization of public space based on the assimilation theory, which resulted in the mere marginalization of the religious identity in the private sphere. The British strategy, instead, does not aim at repressing the symbols of cultural and religious belonging, but is aimed at feeding multiculturalism by guaranteeing generous spaces of autonomy for the religious communities. Both strategies have shown counterproductive effects resulting, respectively, in the spread of forms of Islamic eversion and in the emergence of self-referential cultural ghettos, not without ambitions of legal independence.¹⁵ Furthermore, these two approaches share the idea of public space as an empty and neutral space in which different cultural identities coexist according to modalities defined by national politics. This poses an epistemological problem for Public Law doctrine, which seem to neglect that integration strategies are implemented *within* a Western and European horizon of thought.¹⁶

¹⁵ On the topic of Islamic legal independence in Britain and in Europe, see: A. Rinella, M. F. Cavalcanti, *I Tribunali islamici in Occidente: Gran Bretagna e Grecia, profili di diritto comparato*, in *Diritto pubblico comparato ed europeo*, 19(1), 2017, 69-118; A. Rinella, *La Shari'a in Europa: questioni di diritto comparato*, *Diritto pubblico comparato ed europeo*, 21(Special), 2019, 633-656. On the French policy on religious symbols in the public space, see: M. Adrian, *France, the veil and religious freedom*, in *Religion, State & Society* 37(4), 2009, 345-374; C. Sbailò, *Dopo la strage di Parigi. Appunti per un dialogo tra giuristi*, *Federalismi.it*, 2/2015, available on <https://shorturl.at/pKOX8>.

¹⁶ A critical reflection on the paradigm of multiculturalism is carried out in C. Sbailò, *Who Integrates Whom, in What and After All Why? Beyond the Paradigm of Multiculturalism*, in "Europe's call to Arms", cit., 81-102.

Terminological clarifications

Although the present dissertation does not encompass disciplines traditionally considered among exact “sciences” – under which fall, for instance, biology, chemistry or medicine – the adoption of an unambiguous and rigorous language is an essential requirement for the inner coherence of the work and for the achievement of a remarkable scientific standard.

Every field of study has its own specialized language and its own terminology. So, choosing a term or another directly impacts the results of any research, regardless of the disciplines involved. But given the markedly interdisciplinary approach adopted here, one could claim that linguistic unambiguity is not only difficult, but even impracticable. On the contrary, the discussion of topics falling under more than a single subject does demand the adoption of respective specialized languages, since neglecting the importance of linguistic aspects would be source of confusion and would have an even more negative impact on the scientific value of the work. Moreover, some of the issues that will be addressed within this work have a strong political value, thus making linguistic strictness an essential requirement. In this sense, since the semantical meaning of a specific term is a matter of content, it would be wrong to consider linguistic choices as mere matters of grammar. For some of the issues which will be discussed below scientific literature does not provide unique definitions. Indeed, the choice of words, terms and expressions is a matter of methodological approach. Nonetheless, the following lines are not aimed at formulating static definitions of terms occurring within this text or to choose the most suitable among the existing ones. Complying with the aims of this work and without neglecting – when present – authoritative sources in this regard, an attempt will be made to define scientifically valid criteria for the linguistic choices of the author, aiming at textual cohesion and scientific accuracy.

1. Radicalization. The word “radicalization” has been part of the language of European citizens for a long time because of its direct – but not predictable – linkage with terrorism, of which radicalization process is commonly considered the incubation phase. Terrorism, in turn, is part of the historical memory of Europe – the First World War itself started with a terrorist attack perpetrated by the Serbian-Bosnian nationalistic movement.

In the last century Major European countries, such as the United Kingdom, Spain, France and, of course, Italy, have been facing, at different degrees and in different periods, waves of terrorist violence originating and manifesting within their borders, most of the times for political purposes.

United Kingdom faced for decades Irish irredentism and the acts of violence attributable to the *Irish Republican Army* (IRA), a paramilitary organization created in 1919 with the aim of unifying Ireland under a government independent from London. IRA’s neWest branches (“Real IRA” and “Continuity IRA”) operated in Norther Ireland until 2009.¹⁷

Spain, in turn, has been witnessing the phenomenon of Basque irredentism since the early Sixties through the *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA - Basque Homeland and Liberty) originating from a split of the Nationalist Basque Party in 1959. ETA was originally devoted to the fight against Francisco Franco’s regime in the shape of guerrilla warfare, but then moved to the terroristic activity which culminated in the murder of the

¹⁷ Social, political and philosophical insights about the IRA are provided in J. C. Dingley, *The IRA: The Irish Republican Army*, Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2012. About the guerrilla warfare of the IRA, see C. Townshend, *The Irish Republican Army and the development of guerrilla warfare, 1916-1921*, in “Warfare in Europe 1919–1938”, Routledge, 2017, 393-420.

Prime Minister Blanco in 1973 and claimed victims until its formal renunciation to armed struggle in 2017.¹⁸

France has been the most targeted country from international terrorism since the second post-war. In the Fifties and Sixties, the country was disfigured by both the Algerian *Front de Libération National*, expression of the anti-colonialist resistance, and the *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* (Organization of the Secret Army), which did not accept Charles de Gaulle's decision of leaving Algeria. In the two decades that followed, France was prey to Palestinian terrorism – whose activity reached the peak in 1983 with the double train bombing in the train station Saint-Charles in Marseille and on the high-speed train Marseille-Paris – and to terrorist organizations linked to the Shiite Lebanese party *Hezbollah*. In the Nineties, the country witnessed a period of intense terrorist activity which was the geopolitical effect of the Algerian Civil war (1991-1999), consequently to the French support to the Algerian government of *Benghedid*. It is after the Arab spring that France starts experiencing a new typology of terrorism made of unpredictable attacks perpetrated mostly by Muslim citizens with weak linkage with jihadist organizations settled abroad.¹⁹ This new terrorist pattern, which does not seem to be over, is known under different names – e.g., *Ġihād partout* (“*Ġihād* everywhere”), as well as “Global *Ġihād*” – and has been claiming victims, mainly in countries in Central (Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands) and Northern Europe (United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden and Norway), without sparing southern Europe (Spain).

¹⁸ An updated analysis of the historical development and activities of Basque irredentism is carried out in M. Kubiak, W. Iwanowska, *ETA's terrorist activities—historical background and contemporary times*, Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces, 2019, 51.

¹⁹ A comprehensive overview about terrorism in France is provided in G. Ferragu, *La France et ses «siècles de plomb»*, *Confluences Méditerranée*, 102(3), 2017, 13-28.

Last, but not least, Italy experienced the terrorist threat starting from the Fifties, with the *Südtirol Befreiungsausschuss* (South Tyrolean Liberation Committee – BAS), a Northern Italy terrorist organization aiming at the political independence of the South Tyrol region from the Italian state and to its annexation to Austria. BAS was responsible for several bombings in two decades until the Italian government adopted a set of measures for the protection of the German minority in the area in 1969. But the most remarkable wave of political violence in Italy was witnessed in a period between the early Seventies and the early Eighties, remembered as *Anni di Piombo* (in English “Years of Lead”), when the polarization of the political discussion led to armed struggle and terrorism. In that period several terrorist attacks were perpetrated by the Red Brigades (RB), a subversive organization from the extra-parliamentary extreme left the first targets of which were magistrates, law enforcement officers and representatives of Italian national institutions. Furthermore, those decades were marked as well by terrorism of extra-parliamentary extreme right. The latter, through the so called *Strategia della tensione* (in English “Strategy of tension”) carried out a campaign of violence made bombing on trains, in squares and public buildings as tool for smashing the democratic institutional system.²⁰ Such a painful historical precedent has at list a relatively positive side: Italian public authorities and law enforcement agencies gained great experience in countering domestic terrorism. Nowadays this explains, in little part, the absence in the Country of a terrorist threat comparable to that of other European countries. However, the Italian scenario is experiencing some changes which will

²⁰ Among the most relevant terrorism actions of the Years of Lead are the Piazza Fontana massacre in Milan, carried out on 12th December 1969, simultaneously with three bombings in the capital in Piazza Venezia, Altare della Patria and San Basilio, and the kidnapping and subsequent killing of Aldo Moro, president of the Christian Democracy party (*Democrazia Cristiana*).

make it necessary to diversify the Italian strategy for fighting extremism and terrorism, mainly focused on a repressive approach.

However, for most of the XX century, in Italy and in the other countries examined thus far, ideological radicalization leading to terrorism was of a strictly political nature. The claim for political independence of Ireland, Basque Country and South Tyrol was the main root of the wave of violence witnessed, respectively, in UK, Spain and Italy. Concerning the Italian Red Brigades, although undermining the unity of the nation was not among their aims, their main objective – the “strike at the heart of the State” – was inherently political. Algerian terrorism in France is not an exception since it was the result of a feeling of political revanchism the roots of which date back to the decolonization process.

The political nature of the latest wave of jihadist terrorism is controversial, or, at list, divisive. Part of the public debate and the scientific literature on the subject considers that Islamic violent radicalization is attributable to the rise of political Islam and its doctrinal elaboration – leading to the so called “Islamic alternative” – and to the mistakes of the West in the MENA region, thus preferring the resort to a “vertical” approach of investigation, which focuses on direct cause-effect relationships. Another part of the scholarly community, though not neglecting political drivers, considers that radicalization leading to Jihadism is the result of the combination of a huge number of factors attributable not only to political purposes, but to several endogenous and exogenous factors which should be investigated in the light geo-political

and socio-economical mutations which have been occurring at global level.²¹

In the light of what considered thus far, the most complete definition of “radicalization” was conceived by Charles E. Allen,²² who describes it as «the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change».²³ One could claim that Allen’s definition does not answer several important questions; for instance, it does not explain what an “extremist belief system” is and it does not include the purpose of effecting a political change. The generic character of this definition is due to the potentially infinite range of ideological systems that underlie radicalization and violent extremism. Indeed, the terms “radicalization” and “extremism” refer to a diverse range of phenomenological typologies, attributable to several ideological systems, such as far-right, far-left, ethno-nationalism, separatism, jihadism, those of animal rights or ecological extremist organizations. Furthermore, Allen’s definition is deliberately broad in order to include every existing kind of radicalization regardless to its drivers – which can be, as already said, endogenous or exogenous – and to its outcomes – the difference between behavioral and just cognitive radicalization should not be neglected.²⁴ However, public

²¹ These two positions on the origin of Islamic radicalism are summarized in the debate between François Burgat and Olivier Roy which took place in 2016 on the initiative of the French *École Normale Supérieure*, available on <http://savoirs.ens.fr/expose.php?id=2602>.

²² Charles E. Allen is an American public servant, former Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis Chief Intelligence Officer Department of Homeland Security.

²³ See C. E. Allen, *Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland U.S. Senate*, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, March 14, 2007, 4.

²⁴ The fault-line between cognitive and behavioral radicalization can be identified in the translation of radical beliefs into violent action. However, the political implication of this distinction is animatedly discussed in public debate. See P. R. Neumann, *The trouble with radicalization*, *International affairs*, 89, 2013, 873-893.

authorities and policymakers seem to be aware of the general inability in identifying univocal interpretations and clear boundaries to the meaning of the phenomena that this work tries to analyze. Moreover, these expressions take on different values depending on the time and space in which they are used. In the European context, since the London and Madrid bombings in 2005 and 2004, EU has invested remarkable resources in policies to combat terrorism and dismantle terrorist networks operating on European ground. Thereafter, the term “radicalization” has been predominantly associated with jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks. In Italy, until recently, words such as “terrorism” or “extremism” mainly evoked episodes of violence and armed fight conducted by far-right and far-left groups among the late Sixties and the Eighties. Although Italy was only marginally hit by jihadist terrorism, evidence suggest an increase in the likelihood of jihadist offenders to target the country. Therefore, the words “terrorism”, “extremism”, and “radicalization”, but also “salafism” and “jihadism”, have entered – sometime improperly – the daily lexicon of Italian institutions and citizens, directly referring to the spiral of violence triggered by *Dāesh* and *al-Qā'idah*.

The fight against “radicalization” and “extremism” is an inherent component of European and respective national security policies. Indeed, especially in the counter terrorism field and in C/PVE strategies, national and international institutions make an extensive use of the aforementioned terms, but no definition has ever obtained general consensus. The Report of the UN Secretary-General with respect to the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism clearly expresses the difficulty in finding complete and exhaustive definitions stating that violent extremism «is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition». Moreover, it is specified that the adoption of specific definitions

of “violent extremism” «is the exclusive prerogative of member states, compatibly with their obligations under international law».²⁵

This approach has also positive sides. On the one hand, considering the linguistic policy in this field a national prerogative reflects the diverse nature of violent extremism, the phenomenology of which is deeply different from one State to another, depending on historical, social and geopolitical factors. Moreover, in this way there is no forcing to define a linguistic standard for something the meaning of which is extremely broad and controversial. But on the other hand, from an international and supranational point of view, the shared definition of linguistic criteria could be considered a first small step towards political integration in a period in which, as it will be deeply explored, socio-political and economical phenomena do not move within the “Westphalian paradigm” anymore.

As already mentioned, language is not a mere matter of grammar, but of content: naming something, especially criminal and subversive events, not only reflects the general awareness about it, but is a concrete step towards its acknowledgement and the definition of targeted security policies. For this reason, the general tendency not to differentiate radicalization and extremism according to their ideological background and to attribute them the sole feature of “violent”, which is typical of politics especially in the EU, would seem not to be constructive to face the phenomenon. This is the same logic that stands behind the resort to the adjective of “Islamist”, instead of “Islamic”, when referring to concepts linked to jihadism with the aim not to offend Muslim citizens. But such an attitude has the effect of circumscribing jihadism to political Islam, while now the scholarly community seems to agree on the fact that jihadist radicalization

²⁵ *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, Report of the Secretary-General, New York: UN, 24 Dec. 2015.

can affect individuals – who, for a diverse set of reasons, result to be vulnerable – regardless to their affiliation to organizations or networks attributable to political Islam. In addition, this excessive attention to politically correct forms is inherently incoherent when, for instance, the press resorts unscrupulously to the term *Ġihād* meant as “Holy war” – that is non the translation nor the meaning of this term in Islamic traditional doctrine – thus potentially offending the Muslim minority.

In this context, aiming at both linguistical unambiguity and scientific rigor, it would seem necessary to explicitly specify how some recurring terms, around the meaning of which there is not general awareness or that are likely to be misinterpreted in a political sense, are meant in the present work.

2. *Jihadist* radicalization. The present research addresses radicalization as the process of progressively adopting an extremist believe system that, in this case, results from the deliberate misinterpretation of a religious thought. Without delving into the meaning of the word *Ġihād*, the doctrinal value of which will be deepened later, we would consider that the most suitable definition of this phenomenon is given by the Italian Parliament, which in its double attempt – two Draft Law on the subject were signed but none was ultimately approved – to give a legal response to the security threats in this regard gave an explicit definition of jihadist radicalization as «the phenomenon of people which, even without continuative relationships with terroristic groups, welcome ideologies of *jihadist* inspiration»²⁶. This definition is more specific than Allen’s one, since here the ideological background of reference is clearly pointed out.

²⁶ Draft Law *Misure per la prevenzione della radicalizzazione e dell'estremismo violento di matrice jihadista* (243), art. 2. Texts available on the official website of the Italian Parliament on <https://tinyurl.com/bdfvmx8h>.

Nonetheless, it is broad enough to encompass both cognitive and violent radicalization, thus expressing the will of the Italian Legislator to define a comprehensive CVE strategy.

3. Islamism. Despite the widespread resistance to define jihadism – meant here as inspiring philosophy – an “Islamic” matter, it would seem to be the expression of the darker side of the Islamic civilization. A parallelism can be made with the painful relationship between Western civilization and Nazism, that represented the darkest period of the most recent history of Europe, which, nonetheless, continues to be considered – or, at list, to consider itself – the cradle of democracy. The jihadist thought, as it will be described, emerges as the violent product of political struggle in Middle East. It has profoundly changed upon the last decades in consequence of geopolitical dynamics and global transformations and ended up being *an option* – the worst, of course – available to Muslims, especially in the West. But on the other hand, the resort to the adjective “Islamist” to define both radicalization and radicalized individuals is, in our opinion, unappropriated and reductive. Islamism is a strictly political theory which entails the aim of establishing an Islamic political order as a form of rationalization of public space comparable – and sometimes competitor – to the National State. It is a very diverse ideology which encompasses a lot of groups very different to each other. A macro-differentiation can be made between violent and non-violent Islamists in terms of political aims, theological belief, tactics, and operational strategies. One could claim that politics is a constitutive component of Islam, and it would not be wrong: Islam is a religious faith that bases its legal jurisdiction through the revelation of the prophet Mohammed, which creates the *Ummah*, the community of Muslim believers. However, as it will be described within this work, individuals

embracing radical ideas are, most of the times, youngsters exposed to several endogenous and exogenous drivers of radicalization and with no knowledge of Islamist political theory.

4. Salafism. Perfectly aware of the risk of oversimplification, and without delving in its historical origins, which would demand extensive treatment, we would define Salafism a religious and political movement which preaches the imitation of the companions of the prophet Muhammed – in Arabic *Salaf*, from which *Salafiyya* – as behavior models. Moreover, Salafism rejects every innovation which has been introduced in the Islamic doctrine since the very first Islamic age, including the interpretation of the Sources of the Law – the Quran and the Sunna. However, Salafism is a diverse ideological movement encompassing several currents and groups, some of which have a controverse relationship with violence and are, indeed, assimilated to jihadists. The roots of the success of Salafism in the West can be found in the rejection of the Western culture, that is perceived as decadent, and to which Salafism emerges as an alternative marked by simplicity and ethical superiority, thus representing a source for social redemption.

5. Integralism. This word, together with its synonym “fundamentalism” is often used in the West to define ways of thinking attributed to Islam which result to be incompatible with principles of liberal democracy, or, generally speaking, with modern society. However, this expression, which has Western origin, does not reflect the existing differences between those Islamic currents leading to violent deviations (i.e., jihadism) and movements pursuing the bottom-up “Islamization of society” (such as the Muslim Brothers and political Islam in general). It is no coincidence that terms such as integralism and fundamentalism are no longer accepted in the academic field, due to the risk that a superficial

terminological choice determines a simplistic approach to broad and complex “cultural” issues.²⁷

6. Culture. Here too, the linguistic rigor is strictly functional to the scientific one. The misrepresentation of this word, in fact, would result in the reduction of Islamic radicalism to a mere question of “integration” and “intercultural dialogue”. Although these aspects are quite relevant in Western social policies, the adoption of a relativistic approach in which the concept of “culture” is reduced to the sum of a society's food, linguistic and religious traditions should be avoided. Instead, the cultural feature is a constitutive element of human societies and forms of political aggregation. In fact, the challenges that Islam throws at the West do not concern lifestyle or religious faith in general, but above all the conception of public space and political power. For these reasons, the concept of “multi-cultural society”, which will occur several times throughout the present dissertation, refers exclusively to the physical coexistence of different ethnic groups on the same territory (the latter conceived both in physical and virtual terms), without denying the fact that European society remains founded on solid Judeo-Christian roots and on liberal democracy principles.

7. Islam. Eventually, it is worth dedicating some lines to a word which will occur several times within this work. Without delving into the etymology of this term and the respective adjective “Islamic” – which of course are of Arabic origins – at list two clarification should be made about it and its use. First, as it will be exposed afterwards, talking about Islam is not like talking about Christianity, nor about fascism or veganism and so on.

²⁷ See M. Campanini, *Il discorso politico dell'islamismo radicale. Tra modernità e post-modernità*, Teoria politica. Nuova serie Annali [Online], 6/2016, available on <http://journals.openedition.org/tp/616>.

In other terms, the word “Islam” does not entail only a religious belief, nor a political thought or an eating regime, but all these things together with many others. Islam is a way of thinking the life of human beings, the world, and its governmental institutions, with a great geopolitical echo. Second, no reference to jihadist thought or radicalization as “Islamic” is aimed at making negative judgments on Muslims. As already said, extremism of Islamic inspiration should be acknowledged as a mere negative side of the Islamic civilization.

Jihadist, islamist, and *salafī* are too often used as synonyms to each other, thus reflecting the absence of clarity on their respective meanings within the public debate on extremism and terrorism. The aim of making a non-objectionable choice of an adjective to define the phenomenon that is investigated here would be difficult, if not impossible, and would reflect a simplistic way of thinking Islamic extremism, that is the result of a process which is different from a person to another and the ideological framework of which is not static, but changeable and sometimes shaded.

Nonetheless, taking into account what considered thus far – and far from wishing to feed prejudices on Muslims, the majority of which firmly reject the jihadist thought²⁸ – it would not seem unappropriated to use the adjective “Islamic”, as well as “jihadist”, and to switch from one-another when referring to

²⁸ Establishing with certainty how many Muslims approve jihadist ideology is quite complex, both due to objective problems in collecting reliable data and due to the presence of different degrees of approval towards this cause. There are, however, reliable insights into Muslims' approval/disapproval of terrorism. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in the United States, 78% of American Muslims believe the use of violence to defend Islam is unjustifiable, and 68% disapprove of *al-Qā'idah's* views. A BBC poll of UK Muslims confirms that the vast majority of them disapprove of violence, while a minority (11%) have sympathy for those fighting against Western interests. See: *Little Support for Terrorism Among Muslim Americans*, Pew Research Centre, 2009, available on <https://tinyurl.com/2595wmmd>; *Most British Muslims 'oppose Muhammad cartoons reprisals*, *bbc.com*, available on <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31293196>.

Islamic/Jihadist radicalization. Talking about “Islamist”, “*Salafi*”, or worse “integralist” extremism, instead, would be reductive concerning the ideological framework and the profiles of individuals involved. But most important, talking about “Islamic” radicalization is a first step forward in the comprehension of the inherent nature of this phenomenon and of the paradigm on which it is based.

CHAPTER I

Beyond the Westphalian paradigm: interpretative models and emerging challenges

1 - The Westphalian model and the Islamic paradigm: the need for a hermeneutical approach

In the first two decades of the III Millennium, against the backdrop of the presumed decline of the so-called “Westphalian model”, terrorism, extremism and radicalization of Islamic inspiration have been undergoing a deep transformation concerning the way they interact with the surrounding environment, which, nowadays, encompasses both the physical and the digital dimension. The entities which move in the circuits of this hybrid environment end up modifying and modeling their behaviors on it. Among the effects of the spread of technology, as it will be described, there is a great interconnection joined with the increase in the rate of production and replication of inputs – including those of a violent or extremist nature. Furthermore, the spread of technology seems to facilitate the creation of *communities* which would substitute the individuals as the subject holding rights and freedoms, thus endangering Westphalian individualistic model. As it will be showed, the consequences of the shift linked to the Internet and to the spread of social networks impacted organizational models, affiliation patterns and ideological attitudes of contemporary jihadism, which was affected at both collective and individual level. But before delving into the “rules” that regulates this lately emerged paradigm, it is worth examining the Westphalian paradigm and its position in the Western conceptual horizon. This starting analysis demands the adoption of a strictly hermeneutical approach

which, as already said, acknowledges our resort to a Western logical conceptual system, without excluding *a priori* the possibility of other models as alternative options to the Western one and which, at the same time recognizes the evidence of the partial overcoming of the latter.

1.1-The Western conception of public space: territory, individualism and secularism

An indispensable premise for the observation of Islam, in its various ideological nuances, including the violent minority tendencies, is the awareness about the interpretative categories and the conceptual framework of the observer. In this regard, it is essential to make a great hermeneutical effort in order to strengthen the awareness of *how* pre-existing conceptual categories influence the way of interpreting events and phenomena, leading to erroneous conclusions. A quite simple – but suitable for our purposes – example of this dynamic is given by the Western idea of religious authorities. The tendency to equate the figure of the *Imām* to that of a Christian priest or of a clerical figure is typical of European and Western people. This happens because of the assumption about the secularized character of public space, in which there is a purely religious sphere, separated from the statal one. In this framework, that is the Western one, prerogatives of religious authorities are limited in the religious sphere – albeit the clergy remains subject to positive law as the secular population. In the Islamic world a similar reasoning would be unapplicable since its conceptual premises are wrong. An *Imām* cannot be compared to a priest, nor to a religious authority, because a strictly religious sphere does not exist. In Islam,

“religion” and “state” are linked by a polar relationship whereby religion is the ordering principle of public life.

The first step to make a concrete hermeneutical effort in this regard is the acknowledgement of the existence of a properly European way of conceiving the public space. This awareness has emerged throughout the first two decades of the III millennium, when the West realized that the failure of the policies of exportation of democracy and of Western economic models throughout the world was due to the incompatibility of the Westphalian paradigm with other ways of conceiving public space. Only acknowledging the possibility of *other* ways of thinking, the West has become aware on the existence of a typically Western way of conceiving public space and interpreting the political and legal changes that take place within it.

The conceptual struggle of Western scholars to understand non-Western paradigms and their respective public law experiences seem to be caused by the ethnocentric roots of the Westphalian model. Since Europe realized that “it is Europe”, European people acquired the tendency to observe the history and the socio-cultural structure of the other civilizations according to their own values, considered a reference point for legal analysis. Despite the methodological progress of Public Law doctrine in approaching the study of “Eastern” experiences, ethnocentrism is still a constitutive element of the Western National State, and, as such, it is unlikely to be questioned. In fact, it stands as a shield to safeguard the system of values, rights and freedoms built over the last few centuries. However, to concretely manage multi-culturalism, this ethnocentric instance should at least be brought to light so as to cease to be source of methodological flaw and unscientific conceptual prejudices and become a key ingredient for the management of multi-cultural relationships and foreign legal

and geopolitical dossiers.²⁹ To make our horizon of thought no longer a prison, but a resource, a preliminary analysis is needed to frame and define the “Westphalian model”.

1.1.1 - Defining the Westphalian model

The so-called “Westphalian model” identifies the archetype of the modern National State, which, in turn, could be considered the result of a historical, legal and philosophical process culminated in the absorption of the *Nation* by the *State*.

The term “nation”, from the Latin *natus* (which means “to be born”), indicates a homogeneous and cohesive community from a linguistic and cultural point of view. Therefore, belonging or not belonging to a nation depended, at least originally, on the ethnic element. In turn, the word “state”, from the Greek *statós* (“which stands upright”) describes a political and legal entity featured by territorial unity and hierarchical structure. The National State, therefore, is a form of political aggregation, on a territorial basis, which has absorbed the national element and progressively neutralized the ethnic one. Ethnicity and nationalism have historically given the driving force behind the formation of modern National States, but have subsequently been “neutralized”, i.e., deprived of the ability to produce legal effects.

The Westphalian model takes its name from the Peace of Westphalia

²⁹ See C. Sbaillò, *The State as an “Option” in a Multi-Ethnic Society: Ways to Address The Problem of Western Legal Ethnocentrism without adopting Cultural Relativism*, *Mediterranean Journal of Human Rights*, 7/2003, 105-130. On the issue of the national state in the global era see: D. Held, *Models of Democracy*, Stanford University Press, 2006; G. Cassese, *Dallo Stato monoclasse alla globalizzazione*, Milano, 2000; S. Hobe, *Global Challenge to Statehood: The Increasing Important Role of Nongovernmental Organization*, Indiana Univeristy, www.globalpolicy.org.

(1648). The latter was signed after the Thirty Years' War, one of the longest and most destructive armed conflict which had never occurred in Europe. Given its apparently religious roots, the peace of Westphalia gave as outcome the adoption of a sort of protocol for the management of the European public space, thus defining the separation of the political and the religious sphere. In other terms, with the Peace of Westphalia the territory becomes the sole ground on which wars and conflicts can be fought, neutralizing the religious factor. In this way, the territorial sphere, governed by the Sovereign, becomes autonomous with respect to the religious one. This principle had already been introduced at the time of the Peace of Augsburg (1555), that established the right of Princes and Kings to choose their religious creed according to their conscience, with the obligation for their subjects to adopt the same religion. This obligation is summarized in the principle *Cuius regio eius religio* (literally, "whose realm, their religion"), meaning that each country has its own religion, which should be the same of the Sovereign. In this way, between the Peace of Augsburg and that of Westphalia, one of the pillars of the Western conception of public space was defined: the focus of the attention passes from the religious to the territorial dimension. Hence the separation between the "Church", meant as religion in general, and the State.

In this historical framework and in the wake of this transformation, the main – and sole – character of the Westphalian system emerged: the Nation-state in its modern sense. In the Western Nation-state, religion is not anymore included among the prerogatives of the decision-making sphere, which basically can be summarized within politics, legislation and jurisdiction. The State has now the monopoly on legislative action and the use of violence. Positive law is the product of human activity and, as such, can be modified and even abolished. But most important, it has a beginning and an end both in space and in time: the law produces its legal effects only within the borders of the State (meant as territory

controlled by the ruling sovereign) and starting from a precise moment in time. Hence the double conceptual binomial on which the Westphalian model is based: “inside/outside” and “before/after”, and hence the concept of “Nation-state” and the progressive emergence of constitutional Democracy.

In the modern Nation-state legal framework, the importance of the individual sphere emerges, first for criminal-law reasons related to the need to assign specific responsibilities. Therefore, the individual progressively becomes the legal entity which is subject of law and who is the holder of universally recognized rights. The law is now *humanized*: individuals are citizens with specific rights and obligations. In the Western vision, the progressive liberation of public space from religious ties shifts the focus from the relationship between the State and the religious community to that between the State and the individual. Legal and political obligations do not refer anymore to the community, the tribe, or the clan, but to the individual, who is freed from religious bounds. Thereby, throughout the evolution of Western Public Law, the need to safeguard the interest of the individual becomes the starting point for the definition in a negative sense of the whole of rights and freedoms of citizens and the limits to political power. Hence, the emergence of the modern Nation-state, on one side, and of the modern individual, on the other.³⁰

The customary relations between the states, then, lead to the birth of modern international Law and to a new form of rationalization of war. International Law was born as a set of rules that regulate relationships between states that are part of the so-called “international community”. The conceptual premise to this process is the relationship between political power and territory: international law is based on the assumption of mutual recognition by the states

³⁰ C. Sbaillò, *Diritto Pubblico dell'Islam Mediterraneo*, cit., p. 23. On this topic see P. J. Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State*, Routledge, London, 1987.

of their sovereignty over their respective territories. The war, in turn, is now conceived as a “matter among states”.

After the Thirty Years’ War, religious war and civil conflicts are supplanted by intra-state warfare, which is rationalized according to the Westphalian paradigm. War results from national political will, so that in war decisions are linked to specific responsibilities and aimed at specific objectives both falling within the scheme of Westphalian Nation-states. As it will be seen, the rationalization of war as intra-state warfare, which regulated the two World Wars as well as the Cold War – where relationships between the East and the West side of the World were based on traditional dynamics among states – seems to be in crisis, due to the emergence of new non-state actors claiming part of sovereignty, together with the expansion of the *space* itself beyond the physical-territorial dimension.³¹

According to the picture described above, the Western conception of public space can be summarized through the constitutive features of the State of Westphalian origins:

1. Public space’s borders are delimited by boundaries of space and time. Those boundaries allow «congruence and symmetry between decision-making agents and areas in which the decision has an effect».³² Laws are in force starting from a specific moment in time and within the physical borders of the part of territory which is under the political power, thus originating a jurisdiction with precise boundaries of space and of time.

³¹ C. Sbaìlò, *I diritti di Dio. Le cinque sfide dell’Islam all’Occidente*, Libreria Universitaria, Padova, 2016, 97-105. See also: J. Rawls, *Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason*, in “Journal of Philosophy”, 92(3), 1995, 132-180; A. A. An-Na’im, *Islamic Politics and the Neutral State: a friendly Amendment to Rawls?* in T. Bailey and V. Gentile (cur.), *Rawls and Religion*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015, 242 and ff.

³² C. Sbaìlò, *Who Integrates Whom, in What and, above all, Why? A Critical Reflection on The Paradigm of Multiculturalism and on The Epistemologic Foundations of Legal Comparison*, in *Comparative Law Review*, Vol.11/1, 2022, 38.

2. Public space is marked by religious neutrality. The separation of the religious and the political field, resulting from the process of secularization mentioned above, has culminated both to the liberation of the individual from religious ties and to the circumscription of the religious belief in the private sphere.

3. Public space is regulated by the individualistic paradigm. In the modern Western Law, a constitutive relationship does exist between the centrality of the individual, the separation of public and private sphere and the limitation (and therefore legitimation) of the political power,³³ that in Western law is based on the safeguard of the individual.

Secularization and individualism, together with the private character of religious affiliation, seem to have been considered for a long time thus far not only constitutive features of Western way of thinking, but as the only way of conceiving the public space that is compatible with constitutionalism and democracy. According to this vision, non-Western paradigms which do not share those principles would be considered inadequate for the establishment of modern Nation-states on the Westphalian model and thus incompatible at all with democratic principles. That's the position supported by the Greek-American scholar Panayotis Vatikiotis, who in his volume *Islam and the State* (1987) argues the incompatibility between *Shari'ah* principles and Constitutionalism, understood as direct expression of the Westphalian model. As it will be investigated afterwards, according to the Islamic view, jurisdiction has not a so binding relationship with the territorial dimension: the Nation includes the Islamic *Ummah* regardless the geographical position of the believer (that's why, simplifying, a Moroccan on holiday in London is not exempted from *Ramadān* fasting, while a Dutch on holiday in Rome must observe Italian Legislation

³³ C. Sbailò, *Diritto pubblico dell'Islam Mediterraneo*, cit., 23.

regulating the use of cannabis).

Since Islamic legal culture is far away to the Westphalian model, according to Vatikiotis there can be no compatibility between *Shari'ah* principles and Constitutionalism.

This hermeneutical prejudice led and continues to lead to dangerous mistakes both inside and outside the borders of the West.

The idea of the incompatibility between the religious character of the State and the principles of constitutional democracy, combined with the emergence of relevant geopolitical interests in the area of the world dominated by Islam, especially after 9/11, has resulted in the adoption of interventionist policies that, as it will be described, has turned out to be totally counterproductive for the interests and the security of the West.

Secularized public space rationalized according to Western constitutional democracy principles – i.e., featured by individualism and religious neutrality – is not considered only a step of the historical development of Western Public Law and political doctrine, but is seen as a point of arrival of that transformation, which has to be defended to preserve the democratic principles consolidated in the XX Century. According to this vision, in front of the struggle in managing multi-ethnic societies, in some European experiences it can be observed the frequent resort to policies of “neutralization” of religion in the public space, seen as necessary for defending the secular character of the State. Nonetheless, those policies seem to exacerbate security threats of religious inspiration, such as jihadism and Islamic radicalization, the roots and the ramifications of which has proven to be branched both *inside* and *outside* the borders of Europe.

According to the picture described thus far, the Western hermeneutical prejudice supporting the thesis on the “absence of alternatives” to the Westphalian model seems to result in a “clash of paradigms” that have a negative

impact under a double perspective. Of course, this isn't to say that the West should cede to the pressure of geopolitical strategies, such as the Islamic Alternative, Russian Pan Slavism or Chinese expansionism. The latter, in fact, claims to replace the West in order to become "Europe", meant as the subject responsible for a civilizing mission. The question is the need of the West to acknowledge that other ways to conceive public life are currently in force in some areas of the globe, which are not necessarily the expression of legal experiences which are meant to undergo the same historical and legal path of constitutional democracies – nor they want to.

The strict adoption of Westphalian conceptual categories has led both to the underestimation of emerging security challenges, towards which the Nation-state borders seem to be highly permeable, and to crucial geopolitical mistakes of Western states at the level of external and internal policy. Indeed, it is required to the Western legal scholar (and then to the political decision-maker) to make a methodological and conceptual effort in order to acknowledge the existence of alternative paradigms to the Westphalian one, and to understand their "rules".

1.2 - The Islamic paradigm between universality and communitarianism

As previously mentioned, in front of the observation of the decline, or supposed decline, of the Westphalian paradigm, it should be acknowledged the impossibility of maintaining the traditional conceptual framework used thus far to look at phenomena impacting the security of the West. Beside the overcoming of the Westphalian categories as a consequence of globalization and technological development, European people should start realizing, willing or not, the existence of alternative paradigms that have been regulating the

historical and geopolitical course in other areas of the globe and that do not necessarily have a lesser dignity compared to the Western tradition. For reasons not only of geographical proximity, but also of methodological relevance, particular attention should be reserved to the “Islamic paradigm”, the analyses of which can be carried out through the observation of the legal experience of Mediterranean Islamic Countries.

The first brick of the “conceptual wall” it is needed to overcome regards the political nature of Islam. In the Western vision, the latter is a religion comparable with Judaism or Christianity: it is seen as a religious creed with its places of worship disseminated on the national territory and citizens can decide to embrace it or not, according to their conscience. Nonetheless, adopting an impartial perspective, we would see Islam as it actually is according to its historical development. In the MENA region the process of secularization described before has never occurred, thus allowing the Islamic thought to preserve its inherent political component. Islam emerged and spread as a political and geopolitical doctrine for the rationalization of public space from a condition of chaos and ignorance (ar. *Ġāhiliyyah*), first at the hands of the prophet Muḥammad, then by his successors “rightly guided” (ar. *Raṣīdūn*) and, in general, by the political leader. Indeed, considering Islam at the crossroad of a religious belief and a political doctrine is the logical consequence of its history. To allow the comprehension of this dynamic, it is worth mentioning the process which led to the formation of Saudi Arabia and the affirmation of Wahabism as the dominating cultural and religious doctrine in the area. The emirate of Diriyah, the first political unit of the Saudi Kingdom, was born as the result of an agreement between Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, interested in spreading the Wahabi ideology – the main pillar of which are the defense of the original Islam through the strict observation of the Quranic precepts – and the prince Muḥammad ibn Sa’ud, who aimed at the political control on the region. With the pact of Diriyah

(1744-1745) the former obtained political recognition also from non-Muslims groups, while the latter got religious legitimization as leader of the Islamic *Ummah*, thus allowing to overcome rivalries and conflicts between local tribes and consolidate the Wahabi doctrine in the Arabian Peninsula.³⁴

In the Public Law experience of Mediterranean Islam, the political-religious polarity has been declined according to two main tendencies, identifiable as “nationalization of Islam” and “Islamization of society”. The first strategy is strategically adopted by the political-military élites to place the state as guarantor – and mediator – of the Islamic character of public space. The second strategy, on the contrary, has been traditionally used by political Islam to “Islamize” public space outside the framework of the state throughout a bottom-up process. For decades, the contrast between these two trends has been at the center of political developments in North African countries. This dialectic was decisive for the political turmoil in Tunisia and Egypt after the Arab Spring, but it is also observable in the underground of Moroccan, Algerian and Libyan public life.³⁵ Furthermore, these two ways of interpreting the role of Islam have informed two rival geopolitical strategies which, as we will describe below, harbor hegemonic ambitions both inside and outside the Islamic world. Also in Europe, whose relationships with Islam are closer and more frequent than ever due to immigration and the interconnection of the globalized world, instances of “Islamization of society” can be observed at the hand of groups pertaining to people’s Islam. Political unrest and social tensions in the countries of the MENA area have caused, in recent decades, the emigration of many political dissidents

³⁴ See K. Elliot House, *On Saudi Arabia. Its people, past, religion. Fault lines and future*, New York, Vintage Books, 2013. For an overview of constitutionalism in Islamic countries see M. Oliviero, *I Paesi del mondo islamico*, in *Diritto Costituzionale Comparato*, 2010.

³⁵ On this topic, see: C. Sbailò, *Principi sciaraitici e organizzazione dello spazio pubblico nel mondo islamico. Il caso egiziano*, Padova, Cedam, CISR – Centro italiano per lo sviluppo della ricerca, 32, 2012; C. Sbailò, *Islamismo e Costituzionalismo: La problematica della compatibilità, percorsi costituzionali*, 2/3, 2013.

persecuted as members of the Muslim Brotherhood or of one of its numerous branches. The freedom of thought, expression and association guaranteed in Europe and the United States have allowed these immigrants, which sometimes are political refugees, to organize themselves in informal but structured groups to spread Islam within Western societies. Sometimes, these groups, despite rejecting the use of violence, aim to carry out precise political projects with patience and endurance. Indeed, people's Islam activists, which most of the times are part of Western branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, adopt views that cannot be considered "radical" *tour court*, but end up being challenging for Western jurisdictions.³⁶

Focusing the attention on North Africa, among the main examples of the already mentioned relation of "polarity" between religion and politics (which in Arabic can be translated as *dīn wa dawlah*, that means "Religion and State") are Egypt and Morocco. In the first case, the political value of Islam has been cleverly exploited by the political-military élite to exercise political pressure on the Muslim Brotherhood and demand for the cooperation with the religious legal scholars of al-Azhar, the main religious authority in the Islamic Sunni world. In the second example, Moroccan Kingdom managed to preserve national political stability throughout the last decades and in the years of the Arab Spring thanks to the Islamic legitimization of the King and, in general, of the Royal Family. Muḥammad VI is the 23rd Sovereign of the dynasty of Alawites, traditionally considered direct descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad and thus benefiting from a high degree of legitimation among Moroccan people. From the moment of his ascent to the throne in 1999, King Muḥammad VI aimed at – and succeeded in – finding a balance among the preservation of the historical heritage of his

³⁶ On the topic of the controversial role of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West, see: L. Vidino, *The closed circle. Joining and leaving the Muslim Brotherhood in the West*, Columbia University Press, 2020; M. Roel and B. Edwin, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

ancestors and turning the Kingdom to the future, thus reaching a discrete degree of compliance to democratic principles in an Islamic statal key.³⁷ But most important, in Morocco religious minorities are active subjects of the public life together with Muslims. The Sovereign plays the role of guarantor of Islam and guardian of the interests of the people, including religious minorities among the “People of the Book”. For this reason, the King is called *'Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (“Prince of believers”). The diverse Moroccan people is brought together in a communitarian key and this framework has been successfully exploited by the political authorities to manage the multi-faith society perfectly adhering to the Islamic communitarian paradigm.

In the Islamic history, the lack of a secularization process made it possible the preservation of the religious interest as a mean of limitation and legitimization of the political power. This prevented the affirmation of individualism in its Western sense, thus leading to the establishment of political orders based on a communitarian paradigm. The latter is shaped on the already mentioned concept of *Ummah*, the community of believers with no-boundaries by space, nor by time.

Since the earliest days of the foundation of Islam, the “interest of the *Ummah*” (in Arabic *Istislāḥ*) has been the main aim of the political leader, starting with the Prophet Muḥammad himself, who used precepts contained in the Revelation of God to resolve disputes, thus assuring the unity and the social cohesion of the community and increasing in political consensus. Historically, this approach led to the affirmation of a doctrine of limitation of power in a strictly communitarian key, where freedom ends were the interest of the community, and not the one of the individuals, starts.

³⁷ See O. Bahija, *Biographie du roi du Maroc*, Les Cahiers de l'Orient, 2011/2 N° 102, 9 -13. On the topic of Moroccan constitutionalism see G. Arena, *L'organizzazione sciaraitica dello spazio pubblico, lineamenti costituzionali del Marocco e dell'Algeria*, Euno Edizioni, Palermo, 2023.

Furthermore, the communitarian aggregation model is at the core of the unifying role of Islam. A first example of that is the already mentioned case of Saudi Arabia, whose political unification was possible – or at list simplified – thanks to the spread of Wahabism. A more recent example regards Libya, the political borders of which were established by Italian colonists at the beginning of the XX Century putting together three geographical areas – Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan – very different to each other in terms of culture and economic patterns but linked by religion. The cohesive force that allowed to hold together the components of the diverse Libyan society was found in the Islamic movement of the *Sanūssiyya*, an Islamic model with mystical inclinations and organized in religious brotherhoods. The communitarian membership let the first Libyan statal entity to preserve political unity and develop a strong feeling of national identity, thus allowing the consolidation of a National State in a communitarian key.

In the Islamic view, the concept of “community” itself is deeply different from its Western sense: it is not the mere sum of adhesions to Islam in terms of converts or of demographical expansion of the *Ummah*, but the measure of the spread of Islam through the Revelation «considered under the profile of the legal obligation».³⁸ The Revelation an event whose legal effect consist in the formation of the Islamic public space. Since the expansion of the *Ummah* in space and time has no limits, the legal bond that is created by it is equally unlimited.³⁹ In other terms, in the Islamic view the boundaries of the public space are not reported in political maps but are defined throughout the legal obligation mentioned above.

The acknowledgement of the communitarian paradigm is imperative for a

³⁸ See: C. Sbailò, *Diritto pubblico dell'Islam Mediterraneo*, cit., 36; E. G. Fuller, and I. O. Lesser, *Geopolitica dell'Islam. I paesi musulmani, il fondamentalismo, l'Occidente*, Donzelli Editore, 1996.

³⁹ In this regard, it is worth noting that the ritual formula used to convert to Islam consists in the admission of one's proper “testimony” (indeed, the Arabic word to call that formula is *Šahādah*, meaning precusely “testimony”) of the oneness of God (*tawhīd*), as it was affirmed through the Revelation.

deep comprehension of the *Weltanschauung*, “vision of the world”, that is at the core of Islamic Public Law and its historical evolution. Furthermore, the communitarian paradigm seems to be regaining strength also in the West, where communitarian identity strategies and forms of tribal affiliation have emerged, thus challenging the traditional logic articulated solely around the legal bound between the citizen and the state.

The legal nature of the concept of *community* shapes the relationship that Islam have with territory, on one side, and with the time, on the other. The historical transition leading to the primacy of the territorial dimension over the religious one has never occurred in the Islamic world, thus, to preventing the affirmation of physical geographical boundaries to the validity of Law, on one side, and allowing to preserve the overlap between the concepts of “sin” and “crime”, on the other. Indeed, the boundaries of public space and jurisdiction are defined under the religious profile, with no territorial landmarks: Islamic Law is in force on Muslims, wherever they are on the globe.

The universalism of the Ummah also explains how the political and social developments that take place in an Islamic country have consequences on the entire “community of believers”. Historically, one of the most important examples of this phenomenon is the Iranian revolution of 1979, which not only led to the emergence of the Lebanese *Ḥezbollāh* party (an Islamic terrorist movement directly inspired by the figure of Khomeini but ended up fueling a religious interpretation of political revanchism in various areas of the Islamic world). The same is true for the siege of the great mosque in Mecca implemented in November of the same year, which represented the starting point of the evolution of the deadly ideology of *al-Qā'idah*.

According to what described thus far, the Islamic way of thinking the public space is based on a paradigm strictly different from the Westphalian one, mainly

featured by:

I. The relationship of polarity between the religion and the State. The *dīn wa dawlah* doesn't consist in a dynamic of conflict neither of fusion, but of "functional coexistence" that (at list, in Sunni Islam) has nothing to do with theocracy. The political and religious spheres have been linked to each other since the first times of Islam, which emerged and spread not only as a religion, but as a civilization with its own political vision.

II. The space-temporal universality of the *Ummah*. The community of believers created by God with no boundaries by space nor by time is the source of a bond between the Caliph and believers by means of the Revelation. That bond does not acknowledge territorial boundaries (the law follows the Muslim regardless of political maps) nor temporal ones. Revelation has opened the last phase of human time, that assimilates all historical experiences, which therefore remain unhistoricized.

III. The communitarian paradigm. The latter is taken as point of reference for the limitation of political power and criterium for the affirmation of freedoms and rights. Moreover, communitarianism inspires identity strategies in a post-national key: Muslim people increasingly identify themselves as members of the global community of believers and not in national terms.⁴⁰

In the framework described above, the Western individualistic model and the Islamic communitarian one seem to share a common feature: the inability of

⁴⁰ This dynamic particularly involves Muslims born and raised in Europe, far from their parents' homeland, who often identify themselves with Islamic civilization rather than with their national origin. See: O. Roy, *Global Muslim. Le radici occidentali del nuovo Islam*, Feltrinelli Editore, 2003; G. Kepel, and M. Susan, *Allah in the West: Islamic movements in America and Europe*, Polity Press, 1997.

considering other paradigms as possible alternatives to conceive public space or as theoretical bases on which develop a public legal experience. Nevertheless, a fundamental difference should be underlined: if on one side, the West does not admit anything but the Westphalian model of constitutional democracy, on the other, in the Islamic vision the Westphalian state-national model is acknowledged, but considered failing or, however, in decline. This assumption has nourished the theory about the possibility of an “Islamic alternative” to the Western global hegemony, The latter is mainly embodied by Erdoğan’s neo-Ottoman Turkey project, which, as it will be deepened, is included among the geopolitical strategies which are threatening the security of Europe.

1.3 - The “Islamic alternative” and the intra-Sunni conflict

Talking about an “Islamic alternative” has a multiple meaning, even more in the West than in the Islamic world. In Europe, Islamic alternatives do exist not only concerning food (*ḥalāl* meat butchers are now widespread in all European cities) and clothes (e.g., the very opaque women’s swimwear, commonly called “burkinis” which has recently entered the market) but even justice (i.e., *Šarī’ah* Courts regulating Muslims’ civil justice) and finance (actually Islamic finance is still not very consolidated in Europe, but there are signs for its future growth in the West)⁴¹. But beside the relatively recent appearance of these Islamic “options” linked to the private preferences and sensibility (thus progressively making religion a “commercial” product), theories about an “Islamic alternative” to the globalized system of power led by the West, and in particular by Washington,

⁴¹See F. di Mauro, P. Caristi, S. Couderc, A. Di Maria, L. Ho, B. K. Grewal, S. Masciantonio, S. Ongena and S. Zaher, *Islamic Finance in Europe*, Occasional paper series 146/2013, European Central Bank Eurosystem.

have been developing since the late XIX Century. In this sense, the Islamic alternative postulates the existence of the conditions for the affirmation of an Islamic constituent power, meant as the absolute and unconditional power to give life to an independent constitutional order.

The premise of this theory is twofold, linked to both economics, Public Law and geopolitics.

Frist of all, the search for an “Islamic alternative” reflects the desire of redemption from the state of marginalization of the Arab-Islamic world with respect to the “global governance” established by the West. In the political and economic framework of the globalized world – that according to part of Western political doctrine would be ruled by definitive and immutable principles – Islamic countries have always been subordinated to Western and non-Western super-powers.⁴² This sense of marginalization dates back to the Cold War, when global balances were hinged on a bipolar system. Even after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Islamic impatience with Western world leadership was due to the failure of the enforcement of European political and economic categories to the MENA area in the post-Cold War decade. In the Nineties the West, led by the United States, exploited its geopolitical power to push North African regimes to achieve structural political reforms. Simultaneously, the ongoing globalization process, together with exhortations from Bretton Woods institutions, led to the spread of economic models inspired to Western capitalism. Nonetheless, the transition towards the free economy, achieved in North African countries through privatization campaigns, has resulted in the increase in the rate of corruption and social inequalities, with neglectable progress in terms of economic growth and employment rate.⁴³

⁴² See M. Campanini, *L'alternativa islamica*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2012, 6-10.

⁴³ See C. Sbailò, *Diritto Pubblico dell'Islam Mediterraneo*, cit., 41-47.

The negative results of Western policies in the MENA area were the consequence of the – misleading – unconscious overlap between “Westernization”, generally meant as the technic improvements in solving problems, and “democratization”, that is, the affirmation of an ordering principle of a liberal and democratic kind.⁴⁴ It was a widespread belief that the adoption of Western political-economic categories should have allowed not only the entry into the market economy, but also the transition towards liberal-democratic models. This idea shares its theoretical basis with the theory of the “End of history”, elaborated by the American political scholar Francis Fukuyama and published in the book of the same title in 1992. According to Fukuyama, after the end of the Cold War, human history was projected towards a process of democratization, which would have allowed the definitive overcoming of the era of armed conflicts and inequalities. This vision, in turn, inspired the geopolitical doctrine of the Greater Middle East, according to which Western interests should have been defended through the export of the democratic constitutional model on a global scale, starting with the region of the “Greater Middle East”, a large area between North Africa and Western Asia inhabited by Muslim majority.⁴⁵ At the same time, Fukuyama views led to the misunderstanding – or to the intentional manipulation – of the theory of “the clash of civilizations”, formulated by Samuel Huntington in the mid Nineties. The latter was interpreted, especially by the American neoconservatives close to the administration of J. W. Bush, as the exhortation to the armed conflict against the *other* civilizations, in particular against Islam, thus nourishing one of the most destructive geopolitical strategies of the contemporary era.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See C. Sbaìlò, *Armed Europe. Constitutionalism cannot be exported, but it can (and should) be defended. Westernization without democratization: this is the ‘Mazinga Z’ we have to face*, *Federalismi.it*, 14/2022, 5, available on <https://www.federalismi.it>.

⁴⁵ See D. J. Stewart, *The greater Middle East and reform in the Bush administration's ideological imagination*. *Geographical Review*, 95(3), 2005, 400-424.

⁴⁶ See C. Sbaìlò, *I diritti di Dio*, cit., 104 and ff.

Throughout the globalization process, the attempts – especially in circles of People’s Islam linked to the Muslim Brotherhood – to propose an Islamic alternative to Western models gain strength through the idea of the decline of the Westphalian ordering principle which. Such decline, in turn, is the result of secularization, which led the West to lose its values, morality and ethics. Secularization and individualism would have made men slaves to superstition and power: the individual isolated from the community is prey to economic and financial logics, all what remains of the meagre souls of Western people. The theoretical analysis on the alternative character of the Islamic paradigm takes on a particularly antagonistic character, thus reaching a turning point, with the Egyptian thinker Sayyid Quṭb, who after a stay in America, puts the denunciation of Western materialism and individualism at the center of his literary production.⁴⁷

However, in the wake of the erosion of the Islamic constituent power, two serious errors of assessment can be attributed to Quṭb, and to part of political Islam. The first is that of not having indicated *how* to translate the emulation of the “golden age” of Islam into a concrete political and constitutional practice. The second mistake concerns the violent interpretation of the Islamic alternative with the launch of a global *Ġihād* which was not participated by most of the Islamic world. The idea of imposing the hegemony by coercion and unscrupulous violence has alienated most Muslims from the jihadist cause and from extremist circles. Historically, the choice of armed struggle and terrorism by groups such as the Algerian Islamic Armed Group (*Groupe Islamique Armé* – GIA) or the Egyptian *al-Ġihād* (considered responsible for the murder of the former Egyptian president Anwar Sādāt) has not led to the achievement of any positive result. On the

⁴⁷ Quṭb rationalizes his harsh judgment of American society and way of life in the work *Amrīkā allatī ra’aytu* (the America I have seen); translation in English available on <https://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound>. See M. Campanini, *Ġihād e società in Sayyid Qutb*, in *Oriente moderno*, XIV/LXXV, 1995, pp. 251-266;

contrary, this way of acting has led Islamic regimes to make counterterrorism a structural component of their security policies, thus providing them for a pretext for the adoption of repressive and anti-democratic measures.⁴⁸

In the second decade of the III millennium, the idea of an “Islamic alternative” in a jihadist key seems to have lost momentum.

In the late twentieth century, in fact, the latter was reinterpreted under a philosophical-political perspective and in the framework of the so called “neo-Ottoman strategy” adopted by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This vision – the main exponent of which is Ahmet Davutoğlu, former Foreign Minister and former head of the Turkish government – interprets the “otherness” of Islamic civilization with respect to the European one no longer in historical-institutional or merely cultural terms. Instead, the focus is now on the alternative character of the Islamic paradigm in terms of *Weltanschauung*, or “world visions”, thus projecting the realization of the Islamic alternative onto a wide geopolitical level, often – but not always – in terms of soft power.⁴⁹

In the geopolitical framework of the enlarged Mediterranean, Islamic anti-Western revanchism gave rise an intra-Sunni rivalry between two main tendencies not necessarily opposed to each other, but different enough to collide. The first refers to political Islam and to the Muslim Brotherhood, which pursue the bottom-up Islamization of society on a global scope and the foundation of a sort of “Islamic Commonwealth” with financial, economic and geopolitical relationships. The final aim is the institution of an Islamic society of solidarity with no boundaries, within which internal alliances of a military, economic and political nature are cultivated and that over time would come to play a role of premiership in the world. From a political point of view, this

⁴⁸ See M. Campanini, *L'alternativa islamica*, cit., 139-145.

⁴⁹ See C. Sbailò, *Sul sentiero della notte. La πόλις*, Pacini Editore, Pisa, 2020, 151-158.

geopolitical project is pursued by the Muslim Brotherhood, which is supported by Erdoğan's Turkey, the Libyan Tripolitania side, the Islamic Tunisian party Ennahḍa – albeit its influence has been strongly reducing since the election of the President Kaïs Saïed – and in part by Qatar, together with several allies among Western actors that sometimes seem to be unaware of the conflictual dynamics which are going on in the Mediterranean. This front emphasizes the Islamic *vis expansiva* and the space-temporal universality of the *Ummah*, embodied in a revolutionary and expansionist project.⁵⁰

The second geopolitical tendency observable in the Mediterranean Islamic scenario is led from Saudi Arabia and supported by the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. This front pursues a renewal of Islam aimed at the increase of its geopolitical weight with respect to the West. Although these actors acknowledge the geopolitical ambitions of Islam, they do not aspire to establish a true “Islamic alternative”. Instead, they aim to achieve a dynamic of dialogue with the West, with Saudi Arabia as the main interlocutor. Therefore, the “Saudi coalition” does not have political ambitions in the West like the Muslim Brotherhood. Its objective, instead, is of geopolitical strengthening and internal modernization, including the aim of leading Gulf Countries to successfully face the downsizing of the importance of hydrocarbons that is looming in the future.⁵¹

The web of rivalries and alliances which are at the base of this confrontation within the Sunni world can be observed in some geopolitical developments that underline the commonality or the clash over specific geopolitical interests. The alliance between the Turkish Erdoğan and the Libyan Fāyez Al-Serrāġ, for instance, is reflected in the deep cooperation in the hydrocarbon sector which was formalized in 2019, and strengthened in 2022,

⁵⁰ See C. Sbailò, *Non aprite quella porta*, cit.

⁵¹ Ibid.

with the sign of two agreement aimed, respectively, to define a maritime free trade zone between Tripoli and Ankara – a measure which is in contrast to international Law – and to undertake new forms of technical and economic cooperation in the oil sector until 2025.⁵² The Saudi-Egyptian partnership, in turn, resulted in the sale of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir – of great strategic value as they are located near the strait of Tiran, port of access to the Gulf of Aqaba – by Cairo to Riyadh (2017), in return for financial support to the Egyptian government since 2014.⁵³

The most relevant expression of this intra-Sunni confrontation is the so called “Abraham Accords” for the normalization of the political and diplomatic relationships with Tel Aviv, signed in 2020 between UAE and Bahrein, on one said, and Israel, on the other. The position of the regional actors towards this deal reflects the existing fracture within the Islamic Sunni world, that is polarized between a front in favor of the Accords – led by Saudi Arabia and the Emirates and supported by Egypt, Morocco and Sudan – and the people-Islamic axis – which brings together Turkey and Qatar, not without a dialogue window with Iran – that is hostile to the Accords. Unlike Morocco, Saudi Arabia did not formally subscribe the deal, but falls among its supporters in the framework of the long-term cooperation between the Gulf countries and Israel.⁵⁴

As already said, these are alliances adopting a variable geometry, as

⁵² See *Libya-Turkey: here is the controversial secret agreement on hydrocarbons signed in Tripoli*, Agenzia Nova, 2022, available on <https://www.agenzianova.com>.

⁵³ See G. Deiana e O. Giardini, *Evoluzione degli assetti politici e costituzionali dei Paesi nordafricani a dieci anni dalle rivolte*, Alexis. Testi per il dialogo giuridico euro-mediterraneo, Autunno-Inverno 2021/2022, 63-79, available on <https://www.unint.eu/alexis>.

⁵⁴ This pattern of rivalries and alliances reflects a mess of interests of a geopolitical and economic-energy nature, made even more complex by the interference of many state and non-state actors interested in asserting their influence in the region. See G. Kepel, *Le prophète et la pandémie. Du Moyen Orient au jihadisme d’atmosphère*, Esprit du Monde Gallimard, 2021, 59-78.

evidenced by the apparent rapprochement between Riyadh and Ankara and the resistance of Saudi Arabia, at the beginning of 2023, to finally sign the Accords. In April 2022, the journey of Erdoğan to the Saudi city of Jeddah to meet Muḥammad bin Salmān seems the sign of an attempt to rebuild bilateral ties after years of tensions and, according to some observers, could represent the beginning of a Turkish diplomatic shift.⁵⁵ Saudi Arabia, in turn, places obtaining the status of a “major non-NATO ally” and US support in developing a nuclear program as a necessary condition for formally normalizing relations with Israel.⁵⁶ Moreover Riyadh, after having resumed diplomatic relationships with Tehran under Beijing mediation,⁵⁷ seems to be drawing closer to the Palestinian authorities – in April 2023 the Saudi ruling house received the President of the Palestinian National Authority (ANP) and the political leader of Ḥamās, respectively in Jeddah and Riyadh – generating discontent in Tel-Aviv.⁵⁸

Unlike the violent interpretation of the Islamic alternative given by jihadists, the terrorist tactics nor the resort to weapons are not part of the strategy of these actors. Indeed, neither side – at list formally – is in collusion with terrorist organizations, albeit the relationships between jihadist and people-Islamic circles have always been ambivalent. A first remark is that several exponents of al-Qā'idah were formerly members of the Muslim Brotherhood, such as Abdullāh ‘Azzām and Ayman al- Ḥawārī. Moreover, such an ambiguous

⁵⁵ See V. Talbot, *Turkey's New Diplomatic Shift*, Italian Institute for Mediterranean Studies, 2022, available on <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/turkeys-new-diplomatic-shift-34903>.

⁵⁶ See M. Mazzetti, R. Bergman, E. Wong and V. Nereim, *Biden Administration Engages in Long-Shot Attempt for Saudi-Israel Deal*, The New York Times, 2023, available on <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/17/us/politics/biden-saudi-arabia-israel-palestine-nuclear.html>.

⁵⁷ On the topic of Saudi-Iranian rapprochement, see Y. Farouk, *Riyadh's Motivations Behind the Saudi-Iran Deal*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, available on <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/03/30/riyadh-s-motivations-behind-saudi-iran-deal-pub-89421>.

⁵⁸ See *Saudis said set to host top Hamas delegation, further dimming Israeli hopes for ties*, The Times of Israel, 2023, available on <https://www.timesofisrael.com/saudis-said-set-to-host-top-hamas-delegation-further-dimming-israeli-hopes-for-ties/>.

dynamic can be detected observing how the terrorist threat spreads in the MENA area. In particular, the proliferation of *Dāesh* in Libyan territory is attributable to Erdoğan's sending of Syrian mercenaries to Tripolitania to garrison the territory against the other faction, regardless of their affiliation with terrorist groups. But above all, people-Islamic circles have a vision of the world and of the West that is widely shared not only by *salafī* groups, but also by terrorist ones, albeit the latter have a clear tendency to the violent option. A point in common between the way of thinking of those currents is the so-called "retrospective utopia", that is the return to the time of the prophet as behavioral and operative model. This idea postulates the paradoxical need to look at the past in order to make steps forward in the future. The "retrospective utopia" is shared by *salafī* groups (which aim at emulating the model provided by the first companions of the Prophet – *Salaf*), the Muslim Brotherhood and contemporary jihadism, and reflects the lack of historicization of the past typical of Islam. The desire to recover the experience of the Prophet for the formulation of an "Islamic alternative" gradually emerged in the XX century, reaching a turning point with the Khomeinist revolution of 1979 and fomented by the negative perception of Western influences on the Islamic world. On the one hand, these sentiments have been interpreted in a violent key by radical Islamism, which has chosen the *modus operandi* of armed struggle. On the other hand, in some circles of political Islam a moderate vision of Islamic reformism, called *Wasatiyya* has matured, which rejects the use of violence and seeks a middle ground (from the Arabic *wasat*, that means "medium" or "middle way") between strict conservatism and top-down management of religious affairs.⁵⁹

Observing the picture described thus far, the framework of the geopolitical dynamics, ideological convergences and confrontations in the Mediterranean

⁵⁹ See M. Campanini, *Il discorso politico dell'islamismo radicale*, cit.

appear “liquid” and rich in nuances that in some points mix with each other. Therefore, the investigation on the current and future trends in Islamic radicalism cannot disregard an overview of the different tendencies underway in Mediterranean Islam. The matter is of particular importance if we consider that those tendencies will soon concern – as some of them already do – “European Islam”.

Not only different Islamic circles share several conceptual and ideological issues. In the geopolitical and cultural scenarios of the early III Millennium, “liquidity” is exacerbated by the transformations resulting from technological development and the spread of its products. Inputs are processed and reproduced at very high speed thanks to the globalized information system and interconnection, thus undermining the “internal/external” parameters traditionally used by politics and institutions in the field of security management. In this sense, the study of the geopolitical strategies hostile of the West could allow European scholars and decision-makers a change of perspective useful for visualizing the weakening of Westphalian categories and rethinking the terms of their application. In particular, the volatility of the positions taken by the regional actors around the Abraham accords reflects the complex relationship that is sometimes established between “interests”, on one side, and “values”, on the others. Behind that relationship lies the generalized “decline of ideologies” that characterizes the XXI century, when the latter are more and more sacrificed in the cause of individual national interests, especially in the field of security cooperation.

2.3.1- Security cooperation as an engine for diplomatic rapprochement

In the XXI century, inter-states historical rivalries which have been in force since decades on the bases of ideological positions seem to cede to the strategic interests of the actors involved. In the Middle Eastern area, the most emblematic example of such a dynamic concerns the polarization that stays around the so called “Palestinian question”, which is directly connected to the position of regional states towards the Abraham Accords. The roots of the question of Palestine date back to the time before the foundation of Israel, whose project emerged in the late XIX century. Since the beginning of the process of occupation and colonization of Palestinian territories at the hands of the Jewish people, Muslim volunteers came from all over the Islamic world to join the Palestinian resistance. The general identification of Muslims with the Palestinian people is due to the highly symbolic value taken by the territories involved. As it is well-known, Jerusalem is the third holy city of Islamic religion after Medina and La Mecca. In fact, it is from this city, and in particular from the Dome of the Rock, that the Prophet Muḥammad starts his ascent to heaven, where, according to the Islamic creed, he received from Allah a fundamental part of the divine message, including the indication for the Muslim daily prayer (*ṣalāt*). Moreover, the anger against the arrival of huge mass of infidels to the Islamic lands has progressively fueled the Islamization of the Palestinian cause, with the consequent birth of terrorist movements that tried to legitimize in religious key the use violence for anti-Israeli purposes. Thereby, the “Liberation of Palestine” became the slogan of most Arabic countries and has remained as such at least until support for this cause endangered their respective national interests.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ On the subject of the participation of Arab Peoples and Arabic countries to the Palestinian question, see B. Khader, *The Palestinian Question and the Arabs (1917-2017): Popular Support, Government Stakes*, European Institute for the Mediterranean, 2017, available on <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-palestinian-question-and-the-arabs-1917-2017-popular-support-government-stakes/>.

Except for Egypt, which normalized its diplomatic relationship with the Jewish state in 1979, no Arab state had ever maintained relationships with Israel until the sign of the aforementioned Abraham Accords. The adherence to the latter was meant to allow Israel, UAE and Bahrain to enlarge the perspective of defense and security cooperation with the aim of countering the Iranian threat to the stability of the region, even at the cost of betraying a brotherly people such as the Palestinian one and, therefore, of evading the Islamic imperative to safeguard the integrity of the *Ummah*.

Once upon a time, support for the Palestinian cause was functional for the Arab states to counter a form of Western neo-colonialism that threatened the independence of the countries of the region, but nowadays the geopolitical framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict has profoundly changed. Western global hegemony is something generally acknowledged, both by that part of the Ummah which rivals the West (i.e., the front of the “Islamic alternative” led by Turkey), and by those countries which wish to take refuge under its protective wing. Among the latter group of states, we find Saudi Arabia. At first, the Kingdom seemed to be part of the Abraham Accords’ coalition, but after a couple of years it declined to formalize its ties with Israel, even though Muḥammad Bin Salmān demonstrated in multiple occasions its willingness to cooperate with Tel Aviv. The point is that, unlike the Emirates and Bahrain, Saudi Arabia has already reached an agreement with Iran which allowed the two countries to begin a process of de-escalation beneficial to both. On the Saudi side, Riyadh has considered the rapprochement with Teheran as part of a wide-scope foreign policy aimed at supporting its plan of socio-economic development called “Vision 2030”. On the Iranian side, the Islamic Republic has seen the appeasement with the Kingdom as functional to come out of diplomatic isolation and obtain economic support from

its rich neighbor.⁶¹ In turn, the decision of Bahrein and UAE to join the Accords should be interpreted not only in anti-Iranian key, but in the perspective of the strengthening of economic cooperation with Israel. The other two signatory, that are Morocco and Sudan, were interested in giving their contribution to the enhancement of regional security cooperation, but not without some concession from the US. In fact, to encourage the two countries to enter the Accords, Washington recognized Rabat's claims to Western Sahara, and removed Khartoum from the list of sponsors of terrorism.⁶²

«The Palestinian issue was and remains the central issue for Arab countries, and it is at the top of the kingdom's priorities» declared Muḥammad Bin Salmān at the Jeddah Conference (2023).⁶³

In this framework the position of countries towards the Palestinian question seems to only reflect respective geopolitical interests, even at the cost of overlook what are considered to be violations against other Muslims (that's what the signatories of the Accords did), or feed divisions inside the Sunni community while cooperating with the major Shiite country (it is the case of the political shift of Saudi Arabia).

Values and ideological positions, even the ones with a political-religious foundation, are easily sacrificed on behalf of interests, as it is very common in non-democratic countries, but not impossible at all in Western democracies. It is self-evident in the field of security cooperation. As already said, UAE, Bahrein, Morocco and Sudan renounced to defend Palestinians for security convenience.

⁶¹ See Y. Farouk, cit.

⁶² See B. Gosh, *US Doesn't Need Saudi Arabia to Sign the Abraham Accords*, The Washington Post, 2023, available on https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/2023/06/02/us-doesn-t-need-saudi-arabia-to-sign-the-abraham-accords/69a03b20-014a-11ee-9eb0-6c94dcb16fcf_story.html.

⁶³ See J. Magid, *MBS says Palestinians 'the central issue' for Arabs, as US pushes Israel-Saudi peace*, The Times of Israel, 2023, available on <https://www.timesofisrael.com/mbs-says-palestinians-the-central-issue-for-arabs-as-us-pushes-israel-saudi-peace/>.

In winter 2022 the same reason pushed several Arabic and Islamic countries to take part at a naval exercise, led by the US and held mainly in the Red Sea, which brought together 60 countries, including Israel and a number of States which have no formal ties with Tel Aviv, such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, Yemen and Pakistan.⁶⁴

The primacy of defense needs over political polarization did not spare the main actor of the latest rivalries inside the *Ummah*. In the wake of its efforts to restore political relationships with regional rivals (such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE) and in order to counterbalance the enhancement of defense cooperation between Greece and Cyprus (its historical enemies), in 2022 Ankara agreed with Tel Aviv on strengthening formal defense ties.⁶⁵ The previous year, following the normalization of diplomatic relationships between Ankara and Abu Dhabi, the two countries signed a deal aimed to enhance defense security cooperation.⁶⁶ In 2023, discussions about the possibility to strength military ties are in course as well between countries which have been bitter rivals for a long time (it is the case Turkey and Egypt, and of Saudi Arabia and Qatar), but that now are concerned with safeguarding their own security prerogatives.

Thus, security cooperation has become the engine of diplomatic rapprochement in Middle East. Evidently, regional stability and good neighborly relations are more and more considered necessary for the pursuit of economic and geopolitical goals, even at the cost of putting aside historical divisions and rivalries.

⁶⁴ See J. A. Gross, *Israel to join massive US-led naval exercise in Red Sea for first time*, The times of Israel, 2022, available on <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-to-join-massive-us-led-naval-exercise-in-red-sea-for-first-time/>.

⁶⁵ See E. Akin, *Turkey, Israel agree to strengthen defense ties*, Al-Monitor, 2022, available on <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/10/turkey-israel-agree-strengthen-defense-ties>

⁶⁶ See A. Bakir, *The UAE just received twenty drones from Turkey. What's the backstory?* Atrantic Council, 2022, available on <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/the-uae-just-received-twenty-drones-from-turkey-whats-the-backstory/>

Defense is among the fields that benefit the most from cooperation between states. Combining “attack surfaces” (a concept that will be explored later) from different jurisdictions makes it possible to more effectively face threats that would arise at the respective borders. In the Islamic sphere, this trend reflects the Islamic geopolitical vision, which sees territories inhabited by Muslims in a transnational key. But that is not enough to explain the aforementioned developments when military cooperation also involves the Jewish state, the Islamic republic of Iran and the Christian West. One could dismiss the question by saying that idealism yields to realism, but we would not have explained why this happens. To get to the heart of the matter it is necessary to resort to the conceptual categories of Western thought, in whose horizon all the great geopolitical phenomena of our time move, even those belonging to non-Western political-cultural traditions, including the Islamic one. In fact, the action of both political and economic subjects, and also of criminal entities, is more and more guided by an unstoppable desire for self-empowerment that is, for “effectiveness” in achieving goals. This is the very logic which underlies the action of the rivals to the West, including those entities, as the jihadist one, who denounce its alleged cultural decline.

CHAPTER II

The “Westernization” that is threatening the West: Islam under the sign of Technique

1- “Westernization” as result of the spread of the Western thought

At the dawn of the III millennium, new geopolitical tensions are obscuring the American unipolarity that seemed to have consolidated after the Cold War. The economic rivalry between America and China is increasingly cutthroat, while the hegemonic velleity of Vladimir Putin, who seems eager to become the “last tsar”, threatens Europe on the Eastern front. The jihadist threat, then, spreads in Middle Eastern scenarios of instability (i.e. Libya, Syria and Iraq), and threatens the old continent from within in the form of “antagonistic integration”.⁶⁷

In this scenario, the West reconfirms itself as the most solid bulwark of democracy on a global scale, while the rule of law and pluralism that traditionally distinguish Western democracies are in sharp decline in the rest of the world. In several cases, this has been demonstrated by the covid-19 pandemic. The paradigm adopted for emergency management, in fact, has highlighted the true nature of state systems. This is the case of China, where Xi Jinping's “zero-covid” policy has resulted in a further centralization of power in the figure of the head of state, or of Tunisia, where the pandemic emergency and the galloping economic crisis have been exploited by President Kaïs Saïed to dissolve the parliament and start a process of constitutional reform which has almost

⁶⁷ On the topic of transnational terrorism in the shape of antagonistic integration see C. Sbailò, *Europe's Call to Arms*, cit. 158-160.

completely nullified the progresses made after the Arab Spring.

This notwithstanding, a process of global “Westernization” has been witnessed since decades. According to what Samuel Huntington, already in 1996, critically called the «modernization argument», Western culture is considered to be enveloping the world, this in terms of spread of scientific and engineering knowledge, industrialization, urbanization, education and welfare level. The point is to understand whether “modernization” is necessarily synonymous with “Westernization”. In this regard, the case of Kemal Ataturk, who tried to make the Republic of Turkey a modern country through a policy of political, economic, and socio-cultural westernization, is still school. However, in line with Huntington’s thesis, it could be argued that modernization in the above senses does not necessarily imply succumbing to Western cultural influence. On the contrary, according to Huntington, political and economic development would have positive effects in terms of sense of cultural belonging.⁶⁸

This thesis holds true if “culture” is understood just as the sum of language, religion, traditions, and historical memory, but not if it is considered in the broadest sense of “cultural atmosphere”, or even “logical schemes”. Actually, modernization foresees a high degree of “Westernization” in terms of cultural atmosphere, especially when it involves techno-scientific development. The latter, in fact, is moved by a way of thinking and of looking at *things* both originating within the Western civilization. Western thought was shaped on the meaning assigned to “things” by the ancient Greeks a few centuries before Christ. This meaning consists in affirming that every entity “is”, and at the same time “is not”, since it comes from “nothing” and is destined to return to “nothing”. This existential paradigm is applicable to any entity, including objects (e.g. a table, a house, a chair), people (a craftsman, a carpenter), phenomena and systems (war,

⁶⁸ S. P. Huntington, *The West unique, not universal*, Foreign affairs, 1996, 28-46.

capitalism, etc.). Since I can see and think of them, they “are”, but there was a time, before they were created (this concerning objects), or before they were born (people), or before they began or appeared (phenomena and systems) in which they “were not”. And there will be a time when they cease to be (which coincides with the end of the life of an object, the death of a person, the end of a phenomenon or the failure of a system). The idea that entities can become “nothing” starting from being something and that they can be something starting from “nothing” means that they can “become other”.⁶⁹

Since antiquity, therefore, the belief has been consolidated that the meaning of “being a thing” is that of “becoming something else”, which makes objects available to that supreme form of transformation which is Technique. The latter, in turn, is the philosophical engine of those models of techno-scientific development that are no longer the exclusive prerogative of the West.

In this perspective, it would be legitimate to argue that modernization coincides with “Westernization”, understood as the spread of the abovementioned Western mindset far beyond the borders of the West. This notwithstanding, the theses on the alleged decline of the West are acquiring more and more success among the rivals of Europe and the United States, unaware of the fact that by now they are moving within the same Western philosophical horizon.

⁶⁹ On the Greek meaning of *things* see: See E. Severino, *Techné*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1979, 232 and ff.; E. Severino, *Filosofia e storia dell'Occidente, ἐπιστήμη della verità* In: *Volontà, destino, linguaggio: Filosofia e storia dell'Occidente*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino, 2010, available on <https://books.openedition.org/res/603?lang=it>.

1.1 The Westernization that is threatening the West

According to some Chinese leaders, «the East is rising, and the West is in decline».⁷⁰

At the beginning of the XXI century, theories about the alleged decline of the West are very popular among its geopolitical rivals. These theories are supported not only, as already mentioned, by the front of the Islamic alternative, but also by China, which under the rule of Xi Jinping is running a policy of soft power expansion very effective in putting the West under pressure. With the latter, in fact, Beijing contends not only for global economic primacy, but also for military hegemony.⁷¹

Another great supporter of the thesis on the unavoidable decline of the West is the Russian president Vladimir Putin, who is leading a project of soviet restauration under the sign of panslavism. The invasion of Crimea in 2014 and the war against Ukraine launched in 2022 could be just the very first steps of Putin's project.

Teheran as well is leading an anti-Israeli, and indeed anti-Western, geopolitical project. In fact, the Iranian regime not only harms the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens within its borders, but it also represents a threat abroad, especially due to its nuclear program and the outright refusal to

⁷⁰ See *China is betting that the West is in irreversible decline*, The Economist, 2021, available on <https://www.economist.com/china/2021/03/31/china-is-betting-that-the-west-is-in-irreversible-decline>.

⁷¹ Since the launch of the military modernization program in the Nineties, China's defense expenditure has risen, on average, of 9% every year. Furthermore, there may be no correspondence between the budget announcement released by Beijing and the actual Chinese military spending, which, according to the US defense department, could actually be even the double of what it declared. See: *China says military budget to increase again by 'appropriate' level*, The Guardian, 2023, available on <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/04/china-military-budget-increase-again-appropriate-level>; *China v America: how Xi Jinping plans to narrow the military gap*, The Economist, 2023, available on <https://www.economist.com/china/2023/05/08/china-v-america-how-xi-jinping-plans-to-narrow-the-military-gap>.

recognize legitimacy of the State of Israel.

These actors are not rarely in solidarity to each other. Russia and Iran share the status of “enemies of the West”. Not by chance, Moscow and Tehran are subject to severe economic sanctions by Europe. The deterioration of relations with Brussels, then, also damaged the economies of both countries due to the interruption of Russian and Iranian gas flows to the EU. The convergence of interests on the energy dossier has already led to the signing of a memorandum with which Russia pledges to invest \$40 million in Iran’s gas sector. Continuous cooperation between the countries which are the two main gas holders in the world is likely to lead to the creation of a “global gas cartel”. In early 2022 China, in turn, signed a joint statement with Russia aimed at strengthening the friendship between the two countries. In the framework of the Russian-Ukrainian war, Beijing maintained a position of pro-Russian neutrality, subtly supporting Putin’s argument about the need to balance the increasing hegemony of America and the NATO alliance.⁷²

All these countries are great supporters of the thesis about the unavoidable decline of the Western civilization, considered to be victim of a process of unregulated secularization destined to lead it to *nothing*. This belief arouses, in these geopolitical players, a desire for revenge on the United States and Europe, with which they rival for the world economic and political premiership. This rivalry, in turn, is nourished by the approximation of the level of development of these countries to Western standards in the techno-scientific sector, which allows them to compete with the West on an industrial, military and welfare level. Among these actors, in fact, there are economies in strong

⁷² On the subject see N. Smagin, *Could a Russia-Iran Gas Partnership Bear Fruit?*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88497>; *The friendship between China and Russia has boundaries*, The Economist, 2022, <https://www.economist.com/china/chinas-friendship-with-russia-has-boundaries-despite-what-their-leaders-say>

growth (i.e., China, although the Chinese growth rate is slowing down) and economies in the balance, penalized by the efforts made to compete with Western military standards (it is the case of Iran and Russia).

All this, however, results from a process of “Westernization” which is enveloping also the “East” of the world. As already mentioned, such process should not be understood – at least, not only – as some kind of cultural hegemony, neither in terms of merely technological development, but as the spread of a way of thinking which we would define “technical”, deeply rooted in the Western horizon of thought. This Western technical way of thinking has at its core the indefinite desire to satisfy the human atavistic demand for health and power.⁷³ Westernization, namely, concerns the spread of a way of thinking and of acting, originating in the West, aimed to empower one’s ability to increase in power and, therefore, to achieve purposes. This attitude, which has historically been the engine of Western development from a political and economic point of view, leading Europe and the United States to conquer and firmly maintain world hegemony, is spreading like wildfire in all cultural realities that come into contact with it, including the non-Western ones.

The first symptom of Westernization is the decline of ideologies. By way of example, fidelity to ideology, in this case to a religious ideology, is what led Galileo Galilei in 1633 to renounce some astronomical discoveries that would have revolutionized our civilization.

As the historical course has shown, ideologies are bound to give way under the pressure of progress. History is still proving it.

As already mentioned, the subsiding of geopolitical tensions around the Abraham accords and the Palestinian question is an example of this dynamic. Security cooperation is a matter of high importance for every political subject

⁷³ See C. Sbailò, *Europe’s Call to Arms*, cit., 110.

owning hegemonic claims, even at the cost of overseeing historical-cultural fractures such as the one between Sunnis and Shiites or the one that opened up in the Middle East with the foundation of Israel. In case of danger, in fact, an efficient military apparatus constitutes the indispensable premise for the survival of the system.

The second symptom of Westernization is the race for technological development as a decisive factor for the achievement of political, geopolitical and economic goals. This explains the massive investments in nuclear power by players rivals of the West – such as Russia and Iran, but even Turkey⁷⁴ –, the unbridled modernization in the Arabic gulf countries, or even the challenge that is being played around the Chinese monopoly of the so-called “rare earths”, indispensable materials for the construction of key components of some devices, like smartphones or cars.

However, technology can only advance where it is free to do so, and this is not the case for non-democracies. This was demonstrated during the Covid-19 pandemic, when China, free from the compromises imposed by democracy, promptly called a general lockdown and formulated a vaccine in a very short time. Western democracies, on the other hand, appeared unable to deal with an emergency which, as such, required the temporary suspension of some fundamental freedoms. During the pandemic, even the political stability of some European countries seemed to vacillate.⁷⁵ Not to mention, then, the very long process that regulates, in the West, the formulation and approval of vaccines by

⁷⁴ In 2023 Erdoğan inaugurated the first Turkey’s Nuclear plant that was funded by Moscow and built by Rosatom, the Russian state nuclear energy company. See *Erdogan thanks Putin for his help on Turkish nuclear plant*, Al-Jazeera, 2023, available on <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/27/putin-erdogan-speak-before-inauguration-of-turkish-nuclear-plant>.

⁷⁵ In January 2021, the head of the Italian government Giuseppe Conte resigned over some disagreements that arose between left-wing parties on the Italian welfare system and on justice reform. The United Kingdom, in turn, was shaken by some rumors, later proved to be true, about the participation of Prime Minister Boris Jonson in clandestine parties during the lockdown.

pharmaceutical control bodies.

All this notwithstanding, on the long-term, Western democracies have been able to overcome the emergency more effectively. In 2022, in fact, China is grappling with a third wave of Covid-19 infections, and the population is showing restlessness and intolerance towards a situation that has very high economic and human costs. Not only are Chinese citizens insufficiently vaccinated, but the vaccine formulated by Sinovac Biotech, a biopharmaceutical company based in Beijing, has proved to be until 50% less effective than ones based on mRNA technology.⁷⁶

Thereby, the country is dealing with a health impasse that risks negatively affecting the stability of Xi Jinping's regime. Evidently, scientific research, which feeds on freedom of expression and discussion between experts and researchers, has been hampered by the constraints of the undemocratic "Chinese model".

Not only autocracies are doomed to remain second to democracies in terms of techno-scientific development, but the export of the Western technical way of thinking in non-democratic, or even criminal, contexts is a harbinger of violence and suffering, with destabilizing effect in the security field. Before delving into the consequences of this process of unbalanced Westernization and its link with contemporary jihadism, it is worth dedicating some space to describe the theoretical premise of this work. Indeed, next paragraphs are devoted at clarifying some key concepts, namely, the way of thinking which hides behind the global race for technological development, in the framework of the historical and philosophical path towards the acknowledgment of the "dominion of Technique".

⁷⁶ See *How China's Sinovac compares with BioNTech's mRNA vaccine*, The Economist, 2023, available on <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2022/04/19/how-chinas-sinovac-compares-with-biontechs-mrna-vaccine>.

2. The dominion of Technique

The investigation about the very meaning of “Technique” and the consequences of its dominion over the world cannot be separated from the study of the philosophical thought of Emanuele Severino, one of the most relevant contemporary philosophers. The latter supported two main theses about the role of “Technique”. First, the inevitable reversal of the means-end dialectic involving Technique, which ends necessary up to be not a mean for the achievement of aims, but the aim itself. Second, the conflict resulting from Technique’s inherent energy and those systems which try to contain its Power – a thesis which is directly connected to the threatening effects of Westernization within non-democratic context. But before delving into the reasoning about the relationship about these theses and the subject of the present dissertation, it is worth analyzing the true meaning of Technique and the leap from Technique to Technoscience.

2.1 From “Technique” to “Technoscience”

The attitude to technical action, understood as that action aimed at developing ever more effective ways to achieve goals, has characterized human history since long before the birth of philosophy. In fact, from the very beginning, human beings have been confronted with the need to solve problems such as the impossibility to see at night, health implications of the exposure to cold in winter, or security risks faced while hunting of wild beast. Those needs led to the discover of fire, first, and of electricity, then, to the improvement of hunting technique till

the invention of firearms. Indeed, not only tried humans to solve those problems, but they constantly substituted a solution to another capable of overcoming the secondary effects of the previous one. That's the essence of Technique, which we would define as "the ability to achieve goals". Those goals have long been considered to be functional to the satisfaction of specific needs – first for surviving, then to live comfortably – and, indeed, to be subordinated to the human will. Hence the assumption, which here is disproved, that Technique and its products are nothing but the means to achieve goals of a multiple nature.

At the time of the birth of philosophy, the ancient Greeks used to strictly separate Technique (*Techné*), meant as the science of dealing with what was produced (*Poiesis*) – and, indeed, marked by space-temporal contingency, according to the meaning attributed to "things" by Greek philosophers – from *Episteme*, the science that deals with the immutable and eternal truth. The difference between *Techné* and *Episteme* is clearly expressed by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, so that «the art (*Techné*), in fact, does not have as its object things which "are" or which come into being by necessity», while «science [*Episteme*] has for its object universals and things that necessarily are». ⁷⁷

All this was based on the assumption that an immutable and necessary truth, which ontologically precedes everything else, did exist. However, despite the due dignity of "Technique" as the science of *Poiesis* (i.e., all those things that oscillate between being and not being) what was supposed to save humans by death and pain, that is, from the "eternal becoming" of things which otherwise would lead to "nothing", was that belief in an eternal and immutable truth. The essence of the latter has been the object of intellectual speculation of philosophers and religious men and has been for a long time associated with the

⁷⁷ See C. Mazzarelli (cur.), *Etica Nicomachea*, Rusconi Libri, Milano, 1993, 235-237 (translated by the Author).

assumption that a divine dimension, marked by non-contingency, did exist. The logical foundation at the base of that firm belief in the existence of *Episteme*, as something eternal and immutable, was the juxtaposition between the latter and Technique, as the science of *Poiesis*. Two major historical steps, that are, the emergence of modern science and the invention of robotics and artificial intelligence (AI), marked the overcoming of that juxtaposition.⁷⁸

Across the late XVI and the early XVII century, the introduction by Galileo Galilei of the experimental scientific methodology, based on the artificial reproduction in the laboratory of natural phenomena as method of verification of scientific hypotheses, marked the overcoming of the traditional qualitative vision of nature, in favor of a quantitative approach. Until then, Nature (*Physis*) was considered at the crossroad of *Techné* and *Episteme*. In fact, according to the Ancients, nature was continuously changing – indeed, it couldn't be assimilated to *Episteme* –, but that change was based on self-production of itself – while *Techné* concerned production of something other. Galileo Galilei, taking for granted that Nature is instead knowable from a quantitative point of view, began to apply mathematics, previously considered in the framework of *Episteme*, to the study of Nature. Galileo, that is, reduces the traditionally qualitative elements to measurable mathematical quantities for the empirical observation of the phenomena. The hypotheses formulated by observing nature are no longer verified in a logical-deductive way (i.e., through reasoning), as the ancient people did, but through “experiments” (i.e. the artificial reproduction of a phenomenon). With this last step, that is, the introduction of the experimental method, the idea arose consolidated that external reality is measurable and predictable with mathematical instruments and that its rules are true only if they can be reproduced. Technique, as the ability to artificially reproduce phenomena, is now

⁷⁸ See N. Cusano, *Etica e tecnica nell'era digitale*, La filosofia futura, 18/2022, 28-48.

the basis of Science.

Until that moment, Science (*Episteme*) had been responsible for unveiling the truth of “things”, while Technique had been responsible for applying the knowledge of that truth on human activities. The emergence of modern science, in its turn, result in the affirmation of Technique as the most powerful – where power is measured in terms of capacity changing the world – kind of knowledge, thus marking the sunset of was considered to be the «incontrovertible truth»⁷⁹.

Science and technology no longer oppose each other. Hence, the emergence of Technoscience.

The impetuous technological development that followed, culminating in the invention of robotics and artificial intelligence, is a full expression of the consolidation of faith in the eternal becoming of things: everything is available for transformation, for becoming other than itself, in functional way to achieve the human purposes. In this perspective, denied here, Technoscience often is considered the means by which to operate that transformation.

2.2 The unavoidable reversal “means-ends”

The sociologist and philosopher Gunther Anders, husband of the more famous Anna Arendt, in his work “The Obsolescence of Humankind” identified a socio-psychological phenomenon of modern man, which he called «Promethean shame». Anders carried out his philosophical speculation starting from the myth of Prometheus, who stole fire from Jupiter, to bring it to men. According to Greek mythology, the fire represents the power of knowledge. Recontextualizing that

⁷⁹ See E. Severino, *Techné*, cit., 10.

myth nowadays, that fire represents the Technique. Human shame towards Technique lies, according to Anders, in the fact that the Technique produces perfect objects, “more perfect” than those produced by man. Humans, subsequently, feel a sense of shame and inferiority compared to machines, whose results are unmatched in terms of efficiency and perfection.

Anders’ claims seem to move from the Aristotelian maxim according to which every “action”, as well as every “non-action” has an end, but some ends, if looked at from the outside, appear as mere means to the achievement of a higher goal, in a constant tension towards the pursuit of happiness and wellbeing. («Since the ends are manifestly numerous, and since we choose some in view of others, it is clear that they are not all perfect: but the Supreme Good is, manifestly, something perfect [...] therefore, we say perfect in an absolute sense what is always chosen for itself and not for something else»)⁸⁰.

The most efficient and effective action – which achieves the expected results at a proportionate cost – is the one that contains all its potential in itself, according to the archetype “acting to act” (as walking to breathe fresh air and stretch your gaze out, or memorizing a poem for the pleasure of remembering it). It is in this sense that Technique is the prototype of perfected action because it is finalized to self-fulfillment. Thereby, Technique is autarkic, that is, it is self-sufficient.

Man’s shame towards that “modern fire”, which is Technique, therefore, is an inevitable fact. However, such shame is not perpetual, but, by its nature, transforms over time: after having experienced a sense of inferiority, some kind of addiction to shame appears, which progressively leads to admiration. To make an example in the field of sociology, a similar dynamic is actualized is that of childish shame towards adults: a seed of shame is inherent in the child, from

⁸⁰ C. Mazzarelli (cur.), *Etica Nicomachea*, cit., 63 (translated by the Author)

which the sense of admiration and the desire to emulate the adult will soon emerge. At first, the shame of men towards that “perfected action” which is Technique, leads to passivity, but through a process of idealization humans end up idolizing the technological object. The destiny of Promethean shame, therefore, is to project onto the object of shame a supernatural power, benevolent or malevolent, making it comparable to a fetish, like those of the primitives.

The Promethean shame of man towards the perfection of the Technique is in stark contrast to the conviction, rooted in contemporary culture, which reduces Technoscience to a means at the service of the human being for the realization of his objectives. From a theoretical point of view, in fact, the Technique can be conceived in two diametrically opposed ways. The first meaning, borrowed from Greek philosophy, defines Technique as a type of action that has its own specific end, i.e. as art that creates the means to achieve ends. The second, consolidated in today’s culture, considers Technique as a means usable for the achievement of the end of its user.⁸¹ The second position moves from the assumption that the absence of a specific end indicates the total absence of ends, which is typical of the means. In the case of technology, this axiom fails, because the absence of a specific end does not denote the absolute absence of ends. Technoscience is itself the will to achieve ends: it is will-to-power at its purest state. At the root of this misunderstanding is the fact that Technoscience is a system aimed at general purposes, that is, its purposes never collide with the purposes of other systems. Capitalism, for example, in pursuing its objectives, sometimes clashes with ecologism: the objective of the former, i.e., making profit, is often in contrast with the ends of the latter, the protection of the environment. The same can be said of the relationship between political and

⁸¹ An overview of the philosophical positions on the subject is provided in N. Cusano, *Etica e tecnica nell’era digitale*, cit.

humanitarian interests, or between the meat industry and animal welfare associations, and many more examples could be made in this regard. Instead, the purpose of Technique (i.e., the increase in power) can be aligned with the ends of the other systems without losing its essence. This is what happens when companies invest more and more in their R&I (research and development) sector: this way of acting allows them to increase profits and always gives new impetus to technical progress in the various fields.

This position is one of the cornerstones of the thoughts of Emanuele Severino, according to whom, since «Technique does not aim at a specific and excluding purpose, but rather at the indefinite increase of the ability to achieve goals», it «tends to constitute itself as a planetary apparatus, ever more free from the conflictual fragmentation to which these forces (those who would like to use technology as a means) reduce it». Severino, therefore, warns against the fact that «not enough attention is paid to the reversal [...] which inevitably occurs when the economic, political, ethical-religious, spiritual, cultural forces propose to assume the Technique as a simple means for the realization of their purposes»⁸².

Thereby, the empowerment of Technique has led contemporary man to go from being the master of the machine to be its servant: our need of the help of machines to do those things that once could be done by hands translate into techno-scientific empowerment. Digitization, for example, forces citizens to do at least two operations: to buy a device and download onto it the applications or the programs necessary to carry out common actions, such as monitoring their e-mail box or making payments. All this uploading their personal data to a smartphone and identifying themselves on interfaces designed by engineers who work on the constant improvement of the machine. Sometimes, all this ends up

⁸² See E. Severino, *Il destino della Tecnica*, Rizzoli, Milano, 2011, 33 and ff.

“lengthening” the “chain of ends-means” that separate Aristotelian action from the realization of the ultimate goal. The advancement of technology and its penetration into society, in this sense, seems to come at the expense of immediacy.

The reversal of the Hegelian “slave-master” dialectic, in turn, leads to the reversal between means and ends. Actually, the Hegelian slave-master dialectic and that of the Severinian means-end dialectic are linked both by the common logical structure and in causal terms. Man, in fact, having become a slave to technology, is animated by the continuous need to enhance his own means, or supposedly such, necessary to achieve his own ends. Thus, the enhancement of the means itself becomes the end. It is according to this logic, in fact, that our dependence on technological devices always gives new impetus to the high-tech industry, thus leading to the reversal of the relationship between means, i.e., the empowerment of technological devices, and ends, i.e., empowerment of human endeavor: investing in the high-tech industry, whose products are functional to human purposes, becomes the immediate objective. Thereby, the company that invests in the R&I sector (means) to increase profits (end) will invest more and more efforts in the research and development sector, which ends up becoming the end itself. This dynamic is pushed to its extreme consequences by Kurzweil's theory of the technological singularity, which predicts a future in which man will not be able to keep pace with technological progress, until he is overwhelmed by it.⁸³

⁸³ See R. Kurzweil, *The Law of Accelerating Returns*, 2001, available on <https://www.thekurzweillibrary.com/the-law-of-accelerating-returns>.

2.3 - Western nihilism (and beyond)

Technoscience, as we tried to explain, embodies man's will-to-power, that is, the engine for self-growth, the desire for power and the conceptual dominion over what surrounds us, which feeds itself. But dominion needs transformation. Therefore, it needs Technique, namely, the ability to compose and decompose things. To do it, it is necessary to think that things come out of nothing and return to nothing, since «the will to achieve goals presupposes that things become something else by themselves, that is, that they oscillate between being and nothingness»⁸⁴. In this perspective, the inherent nature of Technique, aimed at the unstoppable enhancement of the ability to achieve goals, regardless of the nature of the goal, is the full expression of Western nihilism, according to which everything comes from “nothing” and to “nothing” is destined to return. In fact, man has violated the Parmenides precept which prevents us from conceiving “non-being”. The Western discovery of “nothing”, determines the belief in perpetual “becoming”, which leads, in turn, to the belief in the absence of a foundation.

Techno-scientific development is fully part of the nihilist parable, since by its nature it is moved by the rejection of a definitive truth: every result, in fact, will be denied and surpassed by the next innovation.

This nihilistic vein, originating in the West, is destined to spread in a parallel and symmetrical way with the expansion of the race for techno-scientific development, giving rise to processes of «Westernization without democratization», which, as already mentioned, risk triggering entropic drifts dangerous for global stability.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ See C. Sbailò, *Europe's call to arms*, cit., 55.

⁸⁵ Ivi, 103-116.

Therefore, even in non-Western countries, technology, which originally was a substitute servant, has bypassed its master, thus losing its purely instrumental nature and becoming an end in itself. This dual nature of technology, which is autarkic on the one hand and “master” of the human on the other, will lead it to monopolize the other systems. Outside the West, all this is likely to take the nihilist parable to its extreme consequences.

This phenomenon inevitably affects the sphere of security. Nowadays entities comparable to the criminal world make use of the most sophisticated technical products and aim to constantly enhance their “means” (which end up becoming ends) to challenge institutions and security personnel, as well as asserting their sphere of influence with respect to criminal competition.

In this regard, it cannot be denied the impact of the Internet and the increasingly efficient technological devices in the historical development of contemporary jihadism, regarding both the dimension of structured terrorism and emerging patterns of radicalization. However, it would be simplistic to attribute such a development to the mere technological innovation, since it wouldn't explain the roots of existing ideological and doctrinal cleavages internal to the Muslim environments between conservative, secular-modernist, and extremists currents. Without neglecting the inherent dynamicity and multifaced nature of Islam as a religious belief and a political system⁸⁶, it is ascertained that jihadist ideology comes from a deep – maybe the deepest ever – fracture inside the Muslim World, which, in its turn, results from the inconsistencies between “Westernization” and “Tradition”.

⁸⁶ In addition to the major division between Sunnis and Shiites, the revelation is the source of four different legal schools and its political implementation in Muslim Societies is object of political struggle between two different, but not opposite, strategies, that are, the “statalization of Islam” and the “islamization of society”. See C. Sbailò, *Diritto pubblico dell'Islam Mediterraneo*, cit.

3 - Islam between “Westernization” and “Tradition”

After the colonial period, most of the Muslim world was subjected to a double wave of “Westernization”. The first one took place between the late XIX century and the Fifties of the XX century and concerned the almost complete dismantlement of previous political systems based on *Šarī‘a* Law. The latter were substituted by modern institutions of Western inspiration, which were considered to be more efficient ways of governments to achieve the community’s interests (according to the already mentioned principle of *Istiṣlāḥ*). Although the adoption of modern culture, institutions and technology had allowed Muslim states to become “modern” entities, this process led to the paradox whereby the modernization process gave as result the economic dependence on Western countries from which independence and identity otherness had long been claimed.⁸⁷ Thus, the affirmation of modern National State confronts Muslims with the dilemma of how to reconcile Islam and modernity, that is, how to adopt the Westphalian-style National State as a model for rationalizing public space within the framework of the Islamic paradigm based on non-territoriality and communitarianism. This intellectual crisis has led to the affirmation of a “neo-Islam”, embodied by the Muslim brotherhood and its national branches in the Arab world, which applies the *salafī* method to draw a socio-political ideology from Islam.⁸⁸

Thereby, the second wave of Westernization manifests itself as a return to Islam in disguise. Starting from the Seventies, what appeared as a process of re-islamization promoted by the circles of People’s Islam has actually enhanced a

⁸⁷ See Hallaq W. B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 184.

⁸⁸ See A. Laroui, *Islam et modernité*, Editions la Découverte, 1987, 82 and ff.

second wave “Westernization”, affecting, in particular, the exegetical activities on the sources of Islamic Law. Among the outcomes of this process there are Islamic ideologies of extremist nature which are in direct contrast with the traditional interpretation of the Quran. Those developments, according to the thesis which here is supported, are attributable to the spread, also in the Muslim world, of the same nihilistic cultural atmosphere which has been dominant in the Western world and that seems to be part of a historical-philosophical parable marked by the dominion of the Technique.

3.1 – Salafism and People’s Islam

From the middle XIX century the Islamic world was torn apart by a profound intellectual crisis which resulted in the unprecedented success of Salafi-inspired ideologies. As we will try to illustrate, the *Salafīyya*, which yearns for a return to Islamic tradition, actually represents a form of neo-Islam which is more committed to facing current and future challenges than respecting tradition.⁸⁹

The already mentioned People’s Islam⁹⁰ was the undisputed protagonist of the re-Islamization instances observed at the end of the XX century and, last but not least, during the so-called “Arab Spring”. The Muslim Brotherhood, with its numerous branches all over the Islamic world and beyond, is its most significant political and social expression. Formally, the People’s Islam, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood, does not have formal recognitions that distance it from

⁸⁹ See A. Laroui, *Islam et modernité*, cit.

⁹⁰ The expression “People’s Islam” is referred to a Sunni moderate-conservative current, that is to say, neither fundamentalist nor secularized. Extensive definition is provided in C. Sbailò, *Diritto pubblico dell’Islam Mediterraneo*, cit., 19.

Sunni Islam. However, this current has specificities resulting from the mingling – inevitable in Islam – of political and religious actions. One of these specificities is, namely, the *salafī* ideological matrix, which place this current at the antipodes of the circles of Muslim *ulemā*, anchored in strictly traditional doctrinal and jurisprudential positions.

Nowadays the various *salafī* groups offer a somewhat uneven panorama, even though they share the main pillars of the *Salafīyyah*. Among its cornerstones there is the conviction of looking to the pious companions of the Prophet – namely, the *salaf* – as models of right conduct. Secondly, there is the rejection of *taqlīd* as a jurisprudential practice, together with the return to the sources, the Quran and the Sunna, to be interpreted faithfully and rigidly. Lastly, accordingly to the first points, there is the rejection of the legal pluralism of the Sunni Islam.⁹¹

In order to correctly frame contemporary Salafism within the framework of the thesis which here is supported – the Western matrix of Islamic extremism – it may be useful to retrace the fundamental points of the debate on the controversial relationship with Tradition by describing the cultural context in which contemporary *salafī* reformism has took shape.

3.1.1 Salafī reformism and the Muslim Brotherhood

In the period between the two World Wars, Egypt, that has always been the scene of great cultural and intellectual ferment, went through strong political turmoil, experiencing at the same time an intense cultural revival. From the

⁹¹ See M. Campanini, *Salafismo e islamismo nel pensiero politico islamico contemporaneo. Storia ed evoluzione dell'islamismo arabo. I Fratelli musulmani e gli altri*, Mondadori, Milano, 2015, 49.

constant and nourished confrontation between religion and politics, beside the emergence of a secular current of nationalist orientation, known as “Pharaonism”, a religious current appeared, which advocated of a “return to Islam”. A fundamental figure of this second orientation was Rašīd Riḍā, the main disciple of Muḥammad ‘Abduh, one of the undisputed protagonists of Islamic reformism of the XX century. ‘Abduh was among the Muslim thinkers who between the XIX and XX centuries recovered the *salafī* thought and reformed it in a more modern key, thus giving rise to what could be called a kind of “progressive Salafism”.⁹²

‘Abduh’s *salafī* reformism condemned the corrupt individualistic paradigm of the West, but it did not reject modernity outright. However, he refused that it corrupted Islam: modernity had to undergo a process of “Islamization”, and not vice versa. The recovery of the true Islamic ideology and the return to the straight path indicated by the *salaf* reinterpreted in a modern key would have “lightened” Islam, making it compatible with the contemporary world. Faithful to the *salafī* ideal, Abduh assumed that Islam was a rational religion and postulated the need to renew it by drawing on its primary sources. Having great faith in the potential of the Quran, he started drafting a Quranic commentary, or *tafsīr*, which will be continued, precisely, by his disciple Riḍā. Muḥammad ‘Abduh had no political goals, but his thought was absorbed into the ideological horizon of the Muslim Brothers. They recovered the *salafī* concepts of rigid and direct interpretation of the sources and the need to rebuild the Caliphate. In this sense, Riḍā was a sort of ideological intermediary between ‘Abduh and the Brotherhood: undoubtedly assuming more orthodox and conservative positions than those of his master, he systematized some political concepts, such as that of the Caliphate, in his work “The Caliphate or Supreme Imamate” (*al-Ḥilāfah aw al-Imām ah al-‘uẓmā*). Riḍā

⁹² Ibid.

also praised the *salafī* pillar of returning to the sources, rejecting *taqlīd* and arguing that everyone has the right to freely interpret the word of God. In fact, the stabilization of a state on Islamic foundations would have been possible only by reopening the gate of *iġtihād*: reinterpreting the sources in a more current key would have made it possible to reconcile Islam and the modern world.

At the antipodes the positions of Riḍā there are those of the ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Razīq, former scholar of al-Azhar, according to whom the constitution of the Caliphate is not prescribed by the Quran and nor by the Sunna. Furthermore, according to him, the purely religious prophetic message would have no political implications. The position of ‘Abd al-Razīq attracted much criticism from those who interpreted his statements on the Caliphate as a condemnation of much of Islamic history.⁹³

It is precisely in this era of lively debate that the group that was and is – despite the numerous political failures of the last years⁹⁴ – the main exponent of people’s Islam bodies, the Muslim Brotherhood, emerged.

The association of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ġamā‘at al-‘Iḥwān al-Muslimīn*) was founded in 1928 by the young elementary school teacher Ḥasan al-Bannā, who turned out to be a charismatic preacher. Collecting the legacy of

⁹³ About Salafi reformism from Muhammad Abduh to Rashid Rida' and the dialectic with the conservative position of Abd al-Raziq, see: M. Campanini, *Storia dell'Egitto. Dalla conquista araba a oggi*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2017; A. Bausani, *L'Islam. Una religione, un'etica, una prassi politica*, Garzanti, Milano, 1999, 184-192.

⁹⁴ The political parties of the People's Islam, linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, were the protagonists of the Arab Spring but ended up being marginalized from the political scene in most North African countries. Almost everywhere, in the decade 2012-2022, these parties recorded a decline in electoral support. Tunisia, where the popular Islamic party Ennahda has governed for almost ten years, is an emblematic case of this trend, since President Saïed managed to cut Rāšid al-Ġannūšī's party out of the political scene without facing the disapproval of the population. On this topic see: C. Sbailò, *Il fallimento dei Fratelli musulmani e la crescita dell'opinione pubblica nella Ummah. Una lettura della crisi costituzionale tunisina*, DPCE online, 48 (3), 2021, available on <https://www.dpceonline.it/index.php/dpceonline/article/view/1400>; O. Giardini, *Saïed e la nuova Costituzione tunisina. Verso il tramonto definitivo dell'Islam popolare?*, Osservatorio area MENA, DPCE online, available on <https://www.dpceonline.it/index.php/dpceonline/OsservatorioMENA>.

Riḍā he managed to involve large groups of supporters. Beyond its historical origins, the name of this Muslim organization takes on other meanings. In fact, since the 1940s, the message of the Muslim Brotherhood has spread throughout the Arab-Islamic world, leading to the formation of networks of activists who, while mirroring the structure and *modus operandi* of the original organization, have adapted its tactics to different political and social contexts.⁹⁵

Although the ideological structure of the association is salafi-style, putting the Muslim Brotherhood – or People’s Islam in general – and modern *salafī* currents in one big pot would represent a hasty solution, if not a real mistake. Modern *salafī* ideology, in fact, has distanced itself far from the reformism of ‘Abduh and Riḍā. Historically, what clearly distinguishes the Muslim Brotherhood from the other *salafī* currents is the relationship with democracy, recognized by the former, who have made its affirmation on Islamic bases their main objective, and rejected by the latter, for which a system based on positive law betrays Islamic orthodoxy.⁹⁶ The politicization of Salafism by the Muslim Brotherhood has strongly influenced the development of political Islam, including its violent wings. This can be seen, for example, in Ḥassan al-Bannā’s⁹⁷ change with respect to the

⁹⁵ In countries where they were tolerated, the Muslim Brothers operated as a social movement and political party (this happened in Jordan and, intermittently, in Egypt), while in countries where they were ill-tolerated or persecuted they operated clandestinely carrying out proselytizing and, sometimes, armed struggle activities. See L. Vidino, *The closed circle*, cit., 9 and ff.

⁹⁶ One of the essential elements of democracy, rejected by the Salafis, is the multi-party system. The existence of several parties, even admitting the possibility of establishing a democratic regime in which Islamic Law has undisputed centrality, would clash with the universality of the *Ummah*, since the interests of the whole community would be put before those of a small group. These positions strongly influenced the Egyptian political course. Here, in fact, the *salafī* movements for a long time refused to take part in the democratic system, and therefore to participate in electoral competitions, which the Muslim Brotherhood, however, tried to win elections for decades. And it is thus that, especially under Mubarak, *salafī* associations such as al-Da'wah had with ample margins of freedom, because their social activism could act as a barrier to that of the Brotherhood without posing a threat to established power. See M. Campanini, *Le correnti dell’Islam in Egitto*, Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, 119/2016, 21-25;

⁹⁷ Ḥassan al-Bannā was an Egyptian politician and religious personality who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928

themes of *Ġihād* and martyrdom, absorbed in the motto of the organization «Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Qur'an is our constitution. *Ġihād* is our way. Martyrdom is our highest hope». Both *Ġihād* and martyrdom, in fact, are absorbed in the ideological cornerstones of the Muslim Brotherhoods:

I. the emphasis on *tawḥīd*, that is to say the oneness of God, an essential pillar of the Muslim religion, as well as an integral part of the *šahādah*, the profession of faith with which one becomes part of the community of believers;

II. the ambition to emulate the life and works of the Prophet Muḥammad, the only model of behavior for the believer;

III. the belief that the only acceptable Law – and therefore Constitution – is the Quran;

IV. the *Ġihād*, not as a “holy war” – which is not, in fact, the semantic translation of the word – but as a continuous effort of the believer in his path of faith;

V. the strong desire to sacrifice one's life in order to pursue the will of God.⁹⁸

In the context of the present dissertation, the second point is of particular interest. The ambition to emulate the lifestyle of the prophet Muḥammad, in fact, is the main point of contact between the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and the *salafī* one. It refers to the age-old question of *iġtihād*, the interpretative effort from which the *corpus* of principles was drawn, then systematized in jurisprudential treaties, aimed at regulating the public life of Muslim societies. In fact, in the second half of the XX century, there was a radical change of attitude towards Europe and modernity. Historically, the otherness of Muslim identity

⁹⁸ See M. Campanini, *Storia del Medio Oriente contemporaneo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2017, 97 and ff.;

with respect to the Western one has been supported to the utmost. In the periods in which the *Ummah* went through moments of political crisis, this otherness was synthesized with the expression *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*, used to express the *aut-aut* “friends or enemies”, or “fidelity or rupture” (§ II, 3.2.1). This syntagma, used abundantly by the most rigorous *ulemā'* in reference to warlike times such as the period of the *Riddah* wars or the Christian Reconquista of Andalusia, fell into disuse during the colonial period. In this era, the close contact with Europe led the Muslim elites to wonder about the reasons for the alleged backwardness of the Islamic world, identified as the cause of the submission of the Middle East to the West. As it has been authoritatively noted, the urgency of learning from the latter «the *techniques* and ways of reasoning that had made his civilization dominant» emerged among reformist intellectuals, such as Ğamāl al-Dīn al-Afġānī and his disciples (including, precisely, Muḥammad 'Abduh). They argued for the need to re-interpret the holy texts to harmonize true Islam and modernity. This current of thought leads the *ulemā'* to lose authority, or at least, to lose their monopoly on exegetical activities⁹⁹.

The reopening of the “gate of interpretation”, even if justified with the need to recover tradition, marked the diffusion, also in the Islamic world, of logical schemes based on the “nihilation” of what was previously considered to be immutable. This approach, embodied by popular Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood, reaches the paroxysm in the thought of radical Islamist ideologues.

⁹⁹ See G. Kepel, *Fitna, Guerre au cœur de l'Islam*, Editions Gallimard, 2004, 193 and ff.

3.2 – Neo-*iġtihād* currents: modernism, conservatism, and extremism

«Old interpretations no longer provide suitable answers to the difficult questions facing the Muslim world». This affirmation appears among the premises in the special report published in 2004 by the United States Institute for Peace, entitled “*Iġtihād*: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the Twenty-first Century”.¹⁰⁰

Nowadays, in fact, it is not uncommon for Western scholars or Muslim intellectuals to settle on positions that postulate the need to reopen the “gate of interpretation” in order to heal the *vulnera* of the Islamic jure formulated centuries ago.

Through the practice of *iġtihād*, the Muslim jurisconsults of the classical period developed a sophisticated and articulated doctrine. The prevalence of some specificities, then, together with political and historical experiences which differs from country to country, led to the formation of the four legal schools (or *madhāhib*) existing in Sunni Islam: the *Mālīkī*, the *Ḥanafī*, the *Šāfi‘ī*, and the *Ḥanbalī*.

The interpretative activity on the sources was interrupted around the X century, when the principle of *taqlīd* (which can be translated as “imitation”, or “tradition”) prevailed: it was no longer allowed to formulate new interpretations starting directly from the texts, but it was necessary to refer to the doctrine as it had been systematized by Islamic jurists in the *fiqh*. The concept of *iġtihād* is closely related to that of *lġmā* (consensus), one of the sources of the Islamic Law, beside the Quran, the Sunna, and the analogy (*qiyās*). *lġmā* doesn’t mean “consensus” in the democratic sense, but rather in a “oligarchic” one: it is the

¹⁰⁰ Full text available on <https://www.usip.org/publications/2004/08/ijtihad-reinterpreting-islamic-principles-twenty-first-century-arabic-edition>.

consensus of the *fiqh* experts, the so-called *fuqahā'*. The consensus that has the greatest value as a source of the Law is the one of the *salaf*, the prophet's companions who personally observed him and draw directly from his teachings. In terms of importance, immediately after comes the consensus of the followers of the *salaf*, and so on. This approach is similar to the logic that underlies the parameters of reliability of the *aḥādīṭ* (plural of *hadīṭ*, the sayings and facts about the life of the Prophet that make up the Sunna), which are considered credible as much as the "chain" of word of mouth (*Isnād*) through which they have been transmitted over the centuries is judged reliable. Beyond the fifth generation of "followers of the followers" (X century) the recourse to *lġmā* was considerably reduced.

The closure of the gate of interpretation was not clear-cut and sudden. Initially, only the principles that had become the subject of *lġmā* were removed from the exercise of *iġtihād*, while the cases governed in an ambiguous way in the texts continued to be interpreted, so that human reasoning could reveal God's will on the most difficult cases. Furthermore, moderate forms of interpretation continued to be practiced on previously uninterpreted matters – in Sunni Islam, some legal decisions taken by judges represent soft forms of *iġtihād*.¹⁰¹

Still today, it happens that the jure codified by the *mugtahidīn* in the treatises of *fiqh* does not provide the theoretical principles for deriving legal-religious decisions. Not rarely, in fact, the Muslim judge has to codify contemporary phenomena not contemplated by traditional doctrine. In these cases, it is customary to ask for the legal opinion of a jurisconsult, who assumes the denomination of *mufti*. The latter, faithfully to the *taqlīd*, has the task of

¹⁰¹ See S. Masood, *The concept of Ijtihad in the history of Islamic Jurisprudence*, available on <https://stevenmasood.org/article/concept-ijtihad-history-islamic-jurisprudence->

moderately interpreting the *fiqh* to apply it to particular cases. Thus, he issues *fatwas*, i.e. legal opinions that the *qādī*, i.e. the judge of positive law, can adopt to resolve a controversial case.¹⁰²

The theme of the closure of the interpretation is the subject of controversial debate among Islamic scholars. On the one hand, some consider the closing of the gate of *iġtihād* as a means to defend doctrine and jurisprudence. According to them, the latter were “crystallized” to be protected from any attempts at manipulation. This position is strongly supported by the University of al-Azhar, at odds with the Muslim Brotherhood, which has not rejected the exhortations of the Egyptian president ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Sīsī to carry out a «revolution of religious discourse» to protect Islam from attempts of manipulation for political purposes. In this regard, after the Arab Spring and the banning of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, al-Sīsī made several speeches in front of al-Azhar scholars, calling for a reform of the education system, promoting moderate Islam and rejecting false interpretations.¹⁰³ In those speeches, al-Sīsī was targeting the Muslim Brothers and movements of political Islam, which are among those who, on the other hand, retain that *taqlīd* has led to a stagnation of intellectual activity. Indeed, they call for a return to *iġtihād* to reconcile Islam and modernity and to remedy the contaminations of Western law.

For the difficulty of promptly derive legal decisions from traditional Islamic Law, in the contemporary era there is no lack of cases of restoration of the interpretative activity, even though the gate of interpretation has been formally closed for centuries. It is important to underline that the front in favor of “*neo-iġtihād*” is anything but homogeneous and compact. Simplifying, we could say

¹⁰² On the typologies and roles of judges in Islamic society, see A. Bausani, *L’Islam*, cit., 41-42

¹⁰³ The main speeches held by al-Sisi in front of al-Azhar’s scholars between 2014 and 2019 were analyzed and translated by the Author, see G. Deiana. *Il discorso di al-Sisi ad al-Azhar, inquadramento storico-giuridico e sviluppi politici*, Master’s degree thesis, Academic Year 2018/2019.

that it consists of a modernist, a conservative and an extremist current. These currents, in turn, are composite and multifaceted. In fact, this categorization does not reflect any network of rivalries and deliberate strategical alliances but is functional to the structuring of a methodology of analysis.

Among the “modernists” there are Muslim intellectuals who deem it necessary to carry out a theological reflection to bring *Šarī’a* up to date with modernity. A contemporary exponent of this current is the Sudanese scholar Aḥmad An-Na’īm, who argues that the rejection of a modern exercise of *iğtihād* is an obstacle to reform those aspects of Islamic Public Law that are in contrast with International Law and Human Rights (such as the principles governing the status of women and non-Muslims). Therefore, according to An-Na’īm, such rigid positions can even produce a paradox whereby some aspects of *Šarī’a*, rather than being re-interpreted according to a modern criterion, would be completely ignored in the public sphere.¹⁰⁴ Similar positions are expressed by the Pakistani scholar Muḥammad Taḥrīr-ul-Qadrī, who argues that «the old laws give way and render the system into a sterile process, unable to cover with the new realities».¹⁰⁵

In turn, the conservative current consists of all those puritanical and conservative movements emerged in different times and places within the Islamic world, which reject the legal and religious commentaries resulting from previous *iğtihād* and claim the reopening of the gate of interpretation. In fact, the Wahhabites, like the Salafis, invokes the rejection of *taqlīd*, albeit remaining within a traditional conceptual horizon. Thereby, Saudi Arabia, which is the homeland of Wahabism, is one of the most backwarded countries in the world in

¹⁰⁴ See A. A. An-Na’īm, *Riforma islamica. Diritti umani e libertà nell’Islam contemporaneo*, Laterza: Bari, 2011, 76-89.

¹⁰⁵ See M. T. ul-Qadri, *Ijtihad (Meanings, Application & Scope)*, Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications Lahore, Pakistan, 2007.

terms of human rights.¹⁰⁶ Salafi thought, in turn, rejects all those modernizations adopted in the eras following that of the *Salaf*, which would have corrupted what they claim to be “true Islam”. The point is what we mean by “true Islam”. If it is to be found in the earliest times of Islam, it would be on a collision course with what is currently considered to be traditional Islamic doctrine as the result of an intense hermeneutical activity carried out on the texts over the centuries. But what seriously threatens public security, in terms of extremists and violent drifts, is the success achieved by models of neo-*iġtihād* completely devoid of any methodological setting. It is the case of many exponents of people’s Islam, who, unlike the ulema, have not received a solid religious education and read the Quran and the prophetic tradition ignoring traditional hermeneutics. This attitude results in the implicit legitimization of incoherent and unfounded methods of interpretative synthesis to produce forms of “religious knowledge” which are likely to be exploited for extremist propaganda purposes.¹⁰⁷ The violent drifts of this attitude flow into the extremist current of neo-*iġtihād*, which encompasses all those ideological current, often of Salafi inspiration, which reject mainstream legal and religious interpretations and claim the right to draw directly from the Quran and the Sunna. From the reckless interpretation of the texts, they obtain the theoretical material to justify the use of violence as a means to bring about political and social change.

The boundaries between one current and another are blurred and fuzzy, which makes further topological efforts useless and methodologically incorrect. What is important to underline here is that the neo-*iġtihād* front and all the currents that are part of it – both the modernists and the extremists – are the result of the spread of a way of thinking originating in the West. This thinking is

¹⁰⁶ See M. Campanini, *Jihad e Neo-Ijtihad*, Gnosis, 3/2017, available on [https://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/Gnosis/Rivista52.nsf/ServNavig/52-30.pdf/\\$File/52-30.pdf?openElement](https://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/Gnosis/Rivista52.nsf/ServNavig/52-30.pdf/$File/52-30.pdf?openElement).

¹⁰⁷ See W. B. Hallaq, cit., 185.

based on the double assumption that nothing is immutable, and everything is questionable, especially if it is for a good cause, that is, for a necessary purpose. Islamic extremism is one of the dangerous entropic drifts of this process.

3.2.1 Salafi-jihadism: *Ĝihād, Takfīr and Martyrdom*

The *salafī* thought, as already said, was – and still is – a very prolific ideology in the history of Islam, serving as an ideological basis for both moderate and quietist currents, as well as extremist movements in favor of *Ĝihād* properly understood as “holy war”. Terrorist groups such as *al-Qā'idah* and the Islamic state have a markedly *salafī* attitude, as they reject traditional exegesis and the latest sources of traditional doctrine and jurisprudence. Direct reference to the first sources of Islam, although it is in contrast with legal Tradition, has allowed the ideologues of jihadism to reach a level of doctrinal legitimacy sufficient to recruit followers and trigger radicalization processes. From a doctrinal point of view, jihadism differs greatly from traditional positions on issues likely to feed violent visions. Among the examples of this behavior is the narrative built around the concepts of *Ĝihād, Takfīr* and *Martyrdom*.

i. Ĝihād

The purpose of these lines is not to contribute to the scientific production of disciplines that focus on the study of the history and doctrine of Islam, where specialist research and theories already exist, but to provide an overview as complete as possible of the *non-traditional* roots of the prescriptions of *Ĝihād* as “armed struggle”, although its proponents claim literal adherence to Islamic

tradition.

The investigation into the meaning of *Ġihād* in scriptural sources should be conducted with particular attention, both because their interpretation requires specific exegetical methods, and because the texts of the Quran and the Sunna present some objective ambiguities. In fact, Quranic exegesis provides for the application of the principle of abrogation, or *Nash*, whereby the later verses abrogate the earlier ones. Furthermore, to apply the *Nash* principle, the structure of the Quran should be taken into account. Here, the chapters, or Suras, are collected in order of length (from the longest to the shortest), and not in order of revelation. Indeed, the manifestations of admiration towards the “people of the Book” mentioned in the Meccan suras are, therefore, abrogated by the exhortations to combat expressed in the verses which were revealed in the city of Yathrib, the ancient name of Medina. However, the Quran does not specify what kind of struggle to conduct, nor is this struggle geographically limited (the Quran never mentions territories outside the Arabian Peninsula).¹⁰⁸

Ġihād is an Arabic term on which lots of religious currents and political strategies have speculated over the centuries. In the West, this loanword is usually associated by Media to the so-called “Holy war”. This expression, ironically, was born in the West in the IX century at the hands of Piero the Hermit, to indicate the military campaign to reconquer Muslim territories, i.e. the First Crusade.

Actually, the semantics of the word *Ġihād* has little to do with violence and weapons. *Ġihād* is a *maṣdar*, that is, the “name” of the verb *ġahda*, which means “to make an effort”. Since it is mentioned both in the Quran and in the Sunna, its meaning was subject to the exegetic activities which, as already mentioned,

¹⁰⁸ On the scriptural sources of *Ġihād*, see A. Morabia, *Le Ġihād dans l’Islam Médiéval, Le «combat sacré» des origines au XIIe siècle*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1993.

resulted in the *fiqh*. Indeed, *Ġihād* has taken the meaning of “effort in God’s way” with the aim of achieving religiously and ethically legitimate purposes. In particular, *Ġihād* encompasses the Greater *Ġihād* (*Ġihād al-Akbar*), which indicates the effort that every good Muslim should make to respect the divine will, and the Lesser *Ġihād* (*Ġihād al-Aṣḡar*), which has a warlike tinge, but much more moderate than that attributed to it by the ideologues of radical Islam. According to Islamic Law, in fact, war *Ġihād* is a collective duty (*Farḍ al-kifāyah*), that is, generally addressed to the entire community of believers. The responsibility for the fulfillment of a collective duty is shared among the members of the Ummah, but it is sufficient that a part of the community participates in it. War *Ġihād* is considered to be an individual duty (*Farḍ al-Ayn*), which must be fulfilled by every single member of the Ummah individually, only for defense purposes in case of aggression.¹⁰⁹

Armed *Ġihād* was codified by medieval jurisprudence in the form of legal warfare, with specific prescriptions regarding the *ius ad bello* and the *ius in bellum*. According to the *fiqh*, the declaration of war is lawful in the following cases: a) to spread the religion; b) to protect religion when threatened by external dangers; c) to avenge the violation of a right.

In the first case, *Ġihād* is a form of armed struggle aimed at redefining the areas of *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-Ḥarb*. In the territories of the second type, military campaigns should be periodically carried out for the affirmation of Islam. Historically, this principle has rarely been applied, as it would mean periodically conducting military actions until all non-Muslim territories are absorbed into the House of Islam. Therefore, the doctrine has elaborated the category of *dār al-ṣulḥ*, or “House of Peace” (§ III, 1.1). The reasons referred to in points b and c are based in the Quran (22:39-40: «Permission [to fight] has been given to those who

¹⁰⁹ A. Bausani, cit. 60.

are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory»), where, however, the radicals ġ - h - d of the Arabic word *Ġihād* do not appear. Moreover, the meaning of this verse must be placed in the historical context of the Revelation: before the *hiġrah* (the migration of the Prophet and the first converts from Mecca to Medina) Muslims were harassed by pagans who had not yet converted, therefore they decided to leave Mecca for Yatrib (today Medina). This principle was then generalized and made applicable to all cases in which it was necessary to claim the violation of a right or wrong suffered. However, although the Quran speaks of a «permission», some radical currents have interpreted the verse in question as an obligation.¹¹⁰

According to the doctrinal elaborations of jurists stratified over the centuries, lesser *Ġihād* encompasses five different types of effort:

- the *Ġihād* by the soul (*Ġihād al-nafs*), which consists in the sincere personal fight against sins, such as the desire for power and lust, or diabolical ideas;
- the *Ġihād* by the tongue (*Ġihād bil-lisān*), i.e. the effort of faith to be made through speeches or writing (for example proselytism, or *da'wa*);
- the *Ġihād* by the hand (*Ġihād bil-yad*), i.e. the effort towards good and against evil to be carried out through concrete actions, such as pilgrimage and fasting;
- the *Ġihād* by the pen (*Ġihād bil-qalam*), that is, the religious effort through study and intellectual commitment.
- *Ġihād* by the sword (*Ġihād bi-s-sayf*), which foresees the spread of Islam “by the sword”, that is, through armed fight.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ See M. Campanini, *Jihad e Neo-Ijtihad*, cit.

¹¹¹ About the discussions of jurisprudents on the different kinds of *Ġihād*, see D. Cook, *Islamism and Jihadism: The Transformation of Classical Notions of Jihad into an Ideology of Terrorism*, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 10(2), 2009, 177–187. On the nuances of the concept of *Ġihād* in Islam, see I. A. Alani Seriki, *The interpretation of “Jihad” in Islam*, *Journal of philosophy and culture*, 2.2, 2005, 110-117.

The coexistence of many different meanings of *Ġihād* is the result of the historical attempts to religiously legitimize the prescription of behaviors aimed at territorial expansion through armed struggle, on the one hand, or at moderation for the maintenance of social peace, on the other.

To analyze in depth the roots of *Ġihād* it is necessary to place the anthropological and economic-political analysis in a historical context that starts from the pre-Islamic era and reaches the present day.

Originally, the inhospitable environment, from a political and geographical point of view, in which the Bedouin tribes lived favored the establishment of a political and social order which contemplated the use of violence. In fact, the Arabic term *Ġihād* was already used in the period of *Ġāhiliyya* (Arabic for “ignorance”), i.e. in pre-Islamic Arabia. Subsequently, the *Ġihād* was rationalized within the Revelation at a time when the Prophet Muḥammad, and after him the Umayyad dynasty, carried out important territorial conquests. The deeds of Muḥammad made the armed struggle a means of conquest and, therefore, of expanding the Islamic public space. At his death, since he had not indicated any successor, the newly born Islamic community was affected by schisms, defections and internal struggles. To sort-out the situation, the first caliph Abu Bakr launched the so-called War of Apostasy (in Arabic, *riddah*), which began a long series of Muslim conquests. History seems to suggest that the subsequent reconstructions that link these battles to the precept of *Ġihād* as the “war against infidels” are nothing more than speculations. In fact, not all the combatants who served with the caliphs in the War of Apostasy were Muslims. Furthermore, the caliphs established a pact of protection (in Arabic, *ḍimmah*) with non-Muslim citizens of the conquered regions, whereby they were free to practice their religion, on

condition of paying a tax – thereby, they took the name of *dimmi*.¹¹² Only after a long time, were they forced to convert to Islam. In this context, the identification of wars of Islamic expansion as a form of armed *Ĝihād* seems to be the result of an *ex-post* historical reconstruction for political purposes.

In the period of maximum expansion of the territories of Muslim domination (between the VII and VIII centuries) the war *Ĝihād* was mainly interpreted in an offensive key, both with respect to the territories to be conquered and to the peoples to be subjected. Under the Abbasid dynasty (VIII-XIII century) Muslim territorial expansion suffered a setback (due, among others, to the Crusades from the West, and the Mongol invasion from the East). Furthermore, since in this period the Muslim conquests turned to the East, Islam came into contact with various philosophical and religious currents which “contaminated” Islamic thought and tempered the rhetoric of *Ĝihād*. Consequently, it was progressively reinterpreted in a defensive sense.¹¹³

This term began to imply a war meaning again in the period of Ottoman expansion. The sultans, in fact, made *Ĝihād* a rhetorical tool at the service of the expansion of the empire. With the emergence of Wahhabism and the birth of the Saudi emirate, then, *Ĝihād* took on a shade that is in some ways current, namely that of war against non-Wahhabis, considered as infidels, even though they were Sunni Muslims. This interpretation, hand in glove with the *Takfīr*, which will be discussed later, has created a dangerous precedent destined to create division within the *Ummah* between good and bad Muslims. Furthermore, ibn Sa‘ūd attempted to increase his hegemony by hiring a Bedouin organization, which took the name of *Iḥwān*, to support him in his military enterprises. The *Iḥwān* defined themselves as purely Wahhabis and practiced offensive *Ĝihād*. They rebelled

¹¹² Moderate forms of religious freedom are foreseen by the Quranic verse « Let there be no compulsion in religion» (2:256).

¹¹³ See A. Morabia, *Le Ĝihād dans l’Islam Médiéval*, cit.

against ibn Sa'ūd they were defeated in 1929 in the battle of Sabilla but left militant *Ġihād* as a legacy.¹¹⁴

In the colonial period, the debate about *Ġihād* gained new momentum. In the treatises drawn up by Muslim jurists between the XIX and XX centuries, in fact, *Ġihād* is understood in a predominantly defensive sense. Salafi-inspired ideologues, however, such as Sayid Qutb, have recovered the concept of armed *Ġihād*, first as a struggle against the modern state of the Western type within the Islamic world (the “near enemy”), then as a war against the United States and the West (“far enemy”).¹¹⁵

Among of the most important contemporary thinkers to interpret *Ġihād* in the sense of armed struggle was the Egyptian writer, poet and critic (and member of the Muslim Brotherhood) Sayyid Quṭb. The latter, in turn, draws on the works of previous thinkers, such as Ibn Taymiyya, Ḥasan al-Bannā and Mawlana al-Mawdūdī.

The first was an Arab jurist and theologian (faithful to the Ḥanbali legal school) who lived in present-day Syria between the XIII and XIV centuries. In his works, he prescribed *Ġihād* against the Crusader and Mongol invaders, and believed that Muslims who did not respect divine law had no right to join the Ummah. However, Ibn Taymiyya's position must be interpreted in an anti-Mongol key. The Mongols, in fact, despite having embraced Islam, did not apply to Islamic Law and therefore it was imperative for Muslims under Mongol hegemony to practice *Ġihād* against apostate rulers.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ See P. Manduchi, N. Melis (cur.), *Ġihād Definizioni e riletture di un termine abusato*, Mondadori Università, Milano, 2019 5-7. On the topic of the *lḥwān* in Saudi Arabia see Y. Trofimov, *The siege of Mecca*, Doubleday, 2007.

¹¹⁵ See A. Borrut, *Le Jihad. Origines, interprétations, combats*, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 140/2007, 157-310.

¹¹⁶ In particular, Ibn Taymiyya was called upon to pronounce three fatwas on the legitimacy of the Mongol state, which he doesn't include neither within the *dār al-ḥarb* nor the *dār al-Islām*, but as an intermediate

In contemporary times, Ibn Taymiyya's work has been paraphrased by radical Islam theorists to legitimize warfare against apostate rulers in the Islamic world and against the non-Muslim West. Ḥasan al-Bannā, in turn, interpreted *Ġihād* as the struggle to protect the Ummah against European colonialism and, after decolonization, against the apostate governments of the Arab world. Similarly, al-Mawdūdī, founder of the Indian Islamic movement *Jamaat-e-Islami*, blamed the decline of Islam in the Near East on British and French colonialism in the region. In his view, *Ġihād* was an effort to Islamize society aimed at countering nationalism (especially Hindu nationalism), which threatened the replacement of Muslim identity with one based on ethnicity and citizenship.¹¹⁷

The proliferation of political-economic models originating in the West, during and in the aftermath of the colonialism, was associated by radical thinkers with a return to *Ġāhiliyyah*, the ignorance of pre-Islamic pagans, to be overcome by waging *Ġihād* against apostates and infidels. In this sense, Sayyid Quṭb interprets Egypt at the time of Sādāt as a state with a Muslim majority, whose citizens are controlled by an apostate government. Quṭb's thought denies the existence of a "middle ground" between the House of War and the House of Islam and supports the either-or of participation in armed *Ġihād* and apostasy.¹¹⁸ To do so, he explicitly denounces the «stagnation» of Islam which, in his view, resulted

region where Muslims live under the dominion of unbeliever rulers (M. Campanini, *Ġihād E Società in Sayyid Quṭb*, Oriente Moderno, vol. 14 (75), 7/12, 1995, 251–266). These fatwas, hardly available for non-Arabic speakers, were exploited by jihadists and radical movements (among others, the Wahhabites and the Islamic state) to justify the accusation of apostasy against Muslim political elites or against those Muslims which do not join their circles. See: J. S. Maihlula, *Translation and Analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's Third Anti-Mongol Fatwa*, International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS), 2(12), 2018; A. Hidayah, *The Misinterpretation of Ibn Taymiyyah's Mardin Fatwa by the Modern Jihadist*, Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah dan Studi Keagamaan, 10(2), 2022, 315 —328.

¹¹⁷ Both Quṭb and al-Mawdūdī are considered to be the masterminds of global *Ġihād*, although their different interpretation of *Ġihād*, which was understood, respectively, in terms of Islamic utopia and in reformist key. See M. M. Raza, S. K. Khan, S. B. Aamir, *Political Islam as Explained by Sayyid Qutb and Maulana Mawdudi A Comparison*, Pakistan Journal of International Affairs, 4(1), 2021.

¹¹⁸ See J. M. B. Porter, *Osama Bin-Lāden, jihad, and the sources of international terrorism*, Indiana International & Comparative Law Review, 13(3), 2003, 871.

from the closing of the gate of *iğtihād*, this calling for reviving the principle of interpretation. In supporting this thesis, he draws (although partly criticizing it) on the thought of Muḥammad ‘Abduh, which places Quṭb at the crossroads between *salafī* reformism and Islamic radicalism.¹¹⁹

ii. *Takfīr*

Takfīr is an Arabic term that indicates the practice, carried out by some Muslim currents, of defining, often arbitrarily, their co-religionists “unbelievers” (in Arabic *Kuffār* or *Kāfirūn*). The latter, according to the *Takfīrī* doctrine, deserve to be expelled from the *Ummah*.

This practice was introduced by the Kharijites, a schismatic movement in Sunni Islam, in the VII century under Caliph ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and revived by several ideological currents in the following centuries.

The birth of Kharijism dates back to the battle of Siffīn (657), when Alī, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad, was defeated and accepted a truce with his enemies. Against Alī's gesture, some of his followers broke away from his party and assumed the name of “Kharijites” (from the Arabic *ḥaraġa*, which means, in fact, to “go out”). The Kharijites elaborated their own doctrine, at the core of which there is *Takfīr* : anyone who works against the Law of Allah is to be considered a *Kāfir* (singular for *Kuffār*) and must face the most severe legal consequences.¹²⁰ In this perspective, the distinction between believers and non-believers takes place through a negative formula (i.e. by identifying the former only after having condemned the latter), an attitude which has been

¹¹⁹ See S. Quṭb. *The Islamic concept and its characteristics*, American Trust Publications, 1991. An overview of Quṭb's rhetoric about defensive/offensive *Ġihād* is provided in M. Mir Ahmadi, *Sayyid Qutb, Islamic Jihad and Extremism*, *Journal of Islamic Political Studies*, 3(5), 2021, 60-82.

¹²⁰ See A. Bausani, *cit.*, 156 and ff.

inherited by contemporary extremist groups.

Other Islamic currents, such as the Mu'tazilites, the Mu'taridites, the Murgites and the Ash'arites contemplate a much more restricted applicability of *Takfīr* or completely exclude the possibility of an intra-Sunni *Takfīr*.¹²¹ Among the most important supporters of intra-Islamic and intra-Sunni *Takfīr* is the medieval theologian and scholar Ibn Taymiyya. Once again, the doctrinal speculations are the result of historical conjunctures. Not surprisingly, he addresses the excommunication, among others, to Mongols, Tartars, Sufis, Mu'tazilites and Shiites. Also in this case, Ibn Taymiyya's legacy will be taken up by the various Salafi Takfīrī groups, such as *Dāesh* and *al-Qā'idah*, who invoke intra-Islamic *Takfīr* to legitimize initiatives of political overthrow.

In modern times, Taymiyya's thought passed down to Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, who, in turn, is often quoted by *Dāesh* media. The Takfīrī propaganda promoted in contemporary times by Saudi Arabia, in the framework of its attempt to dominate the Islamic world by spreading its own vision of Islam in an anti-Shiite key, has had terrible results in terms of international terrorism.

The most recent doctrine on *Takfīr* has been systematized by Sayyid Quṭb, who, as already mentioned, calls for the overthrow of corrupt Islamic regimes, which are considered as part of the *Ġāhiliyyah*.

The concept of *Takfīr* has been the subject of much debate between legal and theological schools. Muslim theologians and jurists who have studied this concept over the centuries have also severely warned against attempts to exploit *Takfīr* and, in particular, to identify the parameters for formulating an accusation of *kufr* (literally "unbelief"). However, this concept has been widely exploited by extremist groups which used it a pretext for violence and bloodshed in the Middle

¹²¹ See J. Kadivar, *Exploring Takfir, its origins and contemporary use: The case of Takfiri approach in Daesh's media*, *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, 7(3), 2020, 259-285.

East and the West.

Traditional Islamic exegesis provides for different types of *kufir* depending on the kind of negative behavior in question. They are divided into major *Kufr* and minor *kufir*. The first, or *Kufr al-Akbar*, i.e. the unequivocal disbelief in Allah and in revelation, results in the loss of any right and dignity deriving from religion for the *Kāfir*. The second, *Kufr al-Aṣḡar* also has no legal consequences, the burden of setting the punishment is deferred to God's will on the day of judgment. Furthermore, in Islamic Law there are eleven rules governing the application of *Takfīr*. Each of them establishes to what extent the person accused of *Takfīr* is condemnable, providing for different cases. According to the first rule, for example, charges of *kufir* can be dismissed depending on the context and background of the person involved; the second rule, in turn, establishes that the sentence of those who commit minor *kufir* can be postponed until the day of judgment, and so on.¹²²

Although *Takfīr* is not explicitly mentioned in the Quran (the radicals *ka - fa - ra* appear in the text, but not the *masdar* of the respective second-form verb *kaffara*), the text of the revelation has inspired various interpretations of it. Sura 5, called *al-Māidah* (the table), is a point of reference of the radical *Takfīr* doctrine. Here Muslim believers are warned against allying themselves with Jews and Christians, since «whoever takes them as allies becomes one of them», that is, a *Kāfir* (Quran, 5:51). This Qur'anic passage inspired the aforementioned expression *al-walā' wa-l-barā*, with which jihadist circles have tried to give a theoretical foundation to the intra-Muslim *Takfīr*, to be conducted against those who form alliances with the People of the Book. However, the parameters for verifying the occurrence of these alliance seem to have never been identified.¹²³

¹²² About the rules of *kufir* see H. S. Timani, *Takfir in Islamic thought*, Lexington Books, 2017, 9 and ff.

¹²³ About the origins and uses of *al walā' wa-l-barā*, see G. Kepel, *Fitna*, cit, 193 and ff.

The polarization between believers and non-believers is also expressed in other Qur'anic passages, such as Sura 9, which states that «believers and female believers are allies of each other» (9:71). Sura 9, called *al-Tawbah* (literally “repentance”), which is also of particular interest in the context of *Takfir*, deserves particular attention. It is among the last to be revealed and therefore has great importance according to the doctrine of abrogation. It mentions numerous references to *Ĝihād* and, indirectly, to *Takfir*. For this reason, it is a point of reference for the ideologues of jihadism, who adopt a scriptural and literalist approach to the sources of Islam.¹²⁴

The interpretations resulting from the abuse of *Nash*, which differ considerably from *Taqīd*, are not compatible with today’s world and make sense only if placed in a pre-modern war context such as that of the *salaf*. Radical interpretations of *Takfir*, who claim to restore the alleged Islamic tradition are often paired with poor religious upbringing. This can be deduced by observing the thought and the biography of well-known thinkers of radical Islam, such as the Palestinian ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Azzām, the Egyptian Ayman al-Ḍawāhirī, and the Jordanian Abū Mus‘ab al-Zarqāwī. In fact, the jihadist declination of Salafism seems to be the more radical the scarcer the level of religious formation.¹²⁵

Both in the case of al-Qa’ida and in the case of *Dāesh*, the *Takfir* has been, on various occasions, the filter through which to interpret the national political dynamics and the regional geopolitical ones. However, there are some remarkable differences between the approaches of the two organizations. *Al-Qā’idah* interprets *Takfir* in a mostly anti-Western sense, while *Dāesh*'s target is both the Shiite and Sunni Kuffar. In fact, *al-Qā’idah*'s *Ĝihād* had a defensive

¹²⁴ Regarding the interpretation of *Takfir* through a literalist approach to sura 9 see J. Gilliam, *The ethics of ISIS: Takfir in Surah 9*, *The Ethics of Future Warfare*, 2017, 53.

¹²⁵ See S. Drennan, *Constructing Takfir: From Abdullah Azzam to Djamel Zitouni*, *CTC Sentinel*, 1(7), 2008, 4.

purpose of *Dār al-Islam*, that is, against American violations in Muslim territories. Qaedist leaders depart from the doctrine by calling *Ġihād* a *Farḍ al-ayn*, but generally reject the anti-Shia *Takfīr*.¹²⁶ The Islamic state organization, on the other hand, views *Takfīr* in terms of intra-Muslim, and also intra-Sunni, polarization. In fact, *Dāesh* conceives two types of Kuffar: 1) non-Muslims, who have never pronounced the *Šahādah* (the testimony of faith with which conversion is sanctioned) and have never joined Islam; 2) “Apostate” Muslims, including not only Shiites, but also the Muslim Brotherhood and other *Takfīrī* groups.¹²⁷

iii. Martyrdom

On the occasion of the 9/11 attack and in many subsequent cases, jihadist violence in the West manifested itself in the form of suicide attacks (in which suicide is an integral part of the planning of the attack) or simple homicidal attacks in which the bomber dies and assumes the status of martyr. However, it should be noted that the Salafi-jihadists were not the first to resort to this terrorist tactic, already used by Tamils and Lebanese nationalists.

The concept of martyrdom, like *Ġihād* and *Takfīr*, has a historical dimension, and has been given different meanings throughout history. In periods of exogenous domination, the most recent of which were Western colonialism and the Jewish occupation of Palestine, the concept of martyrdom and the figure of the martyr are correlated with the fight against Westerners and Zionists. During the war in Afghanistan, the martyrological narrative receives a strong boost thanks to the preaching of ‘Azzām, who considers martyrdom a form of redemption. He clearly states this in his work “Martyrs: The Building Blocks of

¹²⁶ See G. Kepel, *Jihad Ascesa e declino*, Carocci, Roma, 2000, 161 and ff.

¹²⁷ See J. Kadivar, cit.

Nations” (2002), where he writes «The extent to which the number of martyred scholars increases is the extent to which nations are delivered from their slumber, rescued from their decline and awoken from their sleep». ‘Azzām created a real martyrological mythology that draws on both classical sources and Sufi literature – although Sufism is generally free from extremist tendencies.¹²⁸

Although it is a recurring element in Shiite Islam, martyrdom understood as suicide, can be considered a spurious precept of Sunnism. Suicide, in fact, is strictly forbidden in the Quran (2:195, 4:29). The same cannot be said about the martyrdom understood as loss of life in circumstances that honor the deceased believer.

A first reflection should be made on the etymology of the Arabic word *šahīd*, often translated as “martyr”, but which literally means “witness”. In a similar way to what has been said for “jihad” and “war”, there is no real semantic correlation between “*šahīd*” and “martyr”. The correspondence of meaning between the two words, moreover, would be illogical, so that in the Christian tradition, which is rooted in Western culture, the martyr is considered as such under two conditions: the believer decide to die in order not to deny God, and the martyr’s death can only be traced back to his executioner. Quite different is the Muslim martyr in the jihadist perspective, who voluntarily sacrifices his life to carry out the war jihad.¹²⁹

In Shiism, instead, suicide-martyrdom is perfectly integrated into the belief system, based on the memory of the tragic fate of some descendants of the

¹²⁸ See D. Cook, *Martyrdom in islam*. Cambridge University Press, 2007, 161. As regards the position of the Sufis with respect to *Ġihād* and the concepts connected to it, a biased discourse must be made. In Sufi thought, the meaning of *Ġihād* prevails as a spiritual and inner effort against the impulses of the soul, considered a *Farḍ al-Ayn* to be fulfilled individually. Sufis have not refrained from participating in military jihads throughout history, but have always regarded the lesser *Ġihād* as *Farḍ al-Kifāya*; See F. A. Leccese, *Il Jihad nello spirito del Sufismo*, in P. Manduchi, N. Melis (cur.), cit., 67-89.

¹²⁹ See R. Denaro, *Il martirio come morte nel gihad, breve storia di una definizione*, in P. Manduchi, N. Melis (cur.), cit., 91-101.

Prophet and the tragic death of some Imams. According to Twelver Imamism, in fact, the status of martyr is attributed to all Imams apart from the twelfth one, who is in concealment (in Arabic *ġayba*). Shiites attach great importance to the martyrdom of *Imām* Al-Ḥusayn in the battle of Kerbelā (680), still today commemorated on the tenth day of the month of Muḥarram (Islamic calendar). In contemporary times, martyrological operations have been widely used, especially during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and in the context of the Arab-Israeli wars since the birth of Ḥizballāh (1982).¹³⁰

In Sunnism, the concept of martyrdom is elaborated in the *aḥādīṭ*, in the biography of the Prophet and in the Qur'anic commentaries, but the term *istišhād* (a *masdar* usually translated as “become a martyr”, or simply “martyrdom”) or *šahīd* never appear in the Qur'an in this sense – although in some passages those who lose their lives «*fī sabīl Allāh*» are praised.¹³¹

In the Sunna, the concept of martyrdom is treated extensively. In some *aḥādīṭ* the circumstances for being considered a martyr are listed, many of which have little or nothing to do with warfare or combat, and rewards are provided for the *šahīd*. The Sunna indicate dozens of different circumstances in the light of which a person is defined as a martyr, thus reflecting an objective difficulty in defining a concept that isn't treated extensively in the primary sources.¹³²

With respect to the legitimacy of martyrdom-suicide, there are numerous legal opinions which reconstruct its scriptural foundation, but the reliability of these opinions most of the times depends on the prestige and religious authority of the issuer. The strength of some Fatwas, in fact, does not lie in the solidity of

¹³⁰ See Bausani, cit., 99-105.

¹³¹ «Never say that those martyred in the cause of Allah are dead—in fact, they are alive! But you do not perceive it», Quran, 2:154; «[...] as for those who were slain in the way of Allah, He will not let their works go awry», Quran, 47:4.

¹³² D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, cit., 33 and ff.

the exegetical methodology with which martyrdom operations are justified, which sometimes seem to be speculative, but in the popularity of the judges. However, starting from the II intifada, the number of legal opinions justifying martyrdom increases exponentially, so there would seem to be a broad “consensus” (*iğmā'*) on the point.¹³³

In conclusion, it could be argued that the Salafi-jihadist interpretations of *ğihād*, and of the related concepts of *Takfīr* and Martyrdom, is the result of a flattening of the numerous exegetical nuances of these words. This flattening, in turn, is the result of the loss of authority of the exponents of official Islam (i.e. experts in religious sciences) due to the spread of a Salafi-inspired attitude that treats the sources of Islam, traditionally hidden under the veil of *Taqīd*, as an object available to be grasped and manipulated. Such attitude, as has been said, is brought to paroxysm by the ideologues of jihadism.

The paradigm of using religion to legitimize political projects and geopolitical strategies has several historical precedents, both in ancient and contemporary times. In antiquity, the dynamicity of the prophetic message was exploited to consolidate the political ambitions of the Ummah (both in defensive and offensive terms) and of schismatic groups, some of which institutionalized their doctrinal peculiarity, thus giving rise to Islamic doctrinal and legal diversity. This trend is witnessed even in the contemporary era. In the XX century, in fact, a multitude of movements and currents of thought, which fall under the definition of neo-*iğtihād* groups, emerged. In this framework, the novelty lies in the global diffusion of currents of thought in open controversy with the official Islamic positions.

This discussion is not meant to argue that Salafism is a spurious current

¹³³ *ivi*, 151.

with respect to an alleged true Islam. This religion, in fact, is intrinsically versatile and dynamic, above all due to the absence of a clerical elite who guided its doctrinal developments from above and fixed its dogmas. In fact, as it was already mentioned, some political leaders of the Muslim world tried to contain its violent and anti-system outbursts by appealing to the political-religious polarity and implementing strategies of “statalization of Islam”. Despite the absence of religious leaders in the technical sense, there is general agreement among the exponents of official Islam in recognizing the *Salafīyya* as legitimate, on a par with Islamic legal schools, the Shiites and the Sufis. Intra-Muslim *Takfīr*, together with fatwas issued without the necessary preconditions, on the contrary, are strongly condemned. These positions, which constitute the three points of the Amman Message¹³⁴, highlight some kind of side effect of the *salafī* approach, given by the interaction of this current of thought and globalization phenomena. It is increasingly common to come across Fatwas on the internet, or to hear of cases of radicalized young people who practice *Takfīr* without even being aware of it. Most of the radicalized among European people (the so-called “home-grown jihadists”), in fact, are almost completely devoid of religious education, and adhere to global *Ġihād* sometimes without even having the rudiments of jihadist rhetoric on *Ġihād* and *Takfīr*. One could even claim that delving into jihadist ideology, as we have tried to do in this paragraph, does not contribute at all to understanding such an elusive phenomenon, or whether it is mere intellectual speculation. In this sense, some scholars believe that Middle Eastern Islamic radicalism and European radicalism should be treated as two separate phenomena, with different causes and outcomes. Although this thesis is effective in a descriptive key, it does not seem to be equally effective in an interpretative key. Indeed, we maintain that Islamic radicalism, in the East and in the West, share the same logical-conceptual schemes and follow the same paradigm,

¹³⁴ The full text of the Amman Message is available on <https://ammanmessage.com/>.

characterized by a requalification of the concept of “authority”, information processing models and forms of social aggregation. The extremist degeneration of the *salafi* approach must be read in the context of the wave of political and social changes observed between the XX and the XIX centuries. These changes are largely attributable to the techno-scientific development, which has revolutionized the world of information and communication, the structure of socio-psychological dynamics, and, indeed, the field of security management.

CHAPTER III

Security management in the digital age: Islamic Radicalization and Exponential Technology

1 - Emerging challenges: 2001 watershed year

«In the post-9/11 world, threats are defined more by the fault lines within societies than by the territorial boundaries between them. From terrorism to global disease or environmental degradation, the challenges have become transnational rather than international. That is the defining quality of world politics in the twenty-first century».¹³⁵

Over the years and the decades, these words, taken from the 9/11 commission Report, not only have been confirmed by the emergence of new security threats, but have also acquired a somewhat prophetic character. Humanity has been experiencing the increasingly destabilizing effects of the transition from the international order to a transnational one. In this sense, 2001 can be considered a watershed year.

At the very beginning of the III Millennium, the emergence of two phenomena, different to each other in terms of nature but not of roots, gave the evidence that the world had irreversibly changed, as well as *had changed the way in which the world changes*.

¹³⁵ The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 361-362.

The first phenomenon we are referring to is international terrorism of jihadist inspiration. Although its ideological roots dates to the last century (first formulated by jihadism theorists such as Sayyid Quṭb or al-Mawdūdī, then consolidated with the formation of the Afghani resistance to the soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the Eighties), its first great appearance in the West occurred on the 9/11 attack against the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon.

The second phenomenon that is worth mentioning here is the anti-globalization movement, which emerged in the end of the Nineties in the United States and appeared in Italy for the first time in July 2001, in the occasion of the G8 summit which took place in the Italian city of Genoa. The latter became sadly well-known for the great disorders and the episodes of violence which took place in that occasion, on the pattern of what had happened two years before during the Summit of the World Trade Organization in Seattle, to which the birth of the movement is traced back.¹³⁶

However, the unexpected impact with the anti-globalization movement, before in the US and then in Europe, gave the political and institutional world the chance to observe the transformation which had occurred in the political and economic system through the filter of the movement itself, which we would consider the “archetype” of contemporary emerging challenges.

A common matrix must be recognized in what happened in the summer of 2001, first in in Genoa, and then in New York and in Washington. Both the riots on the edge of the G8 summit and the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon underlined a clash of paradigm resulting from the loss of

¹³⁶ During the Genoa G8 summit, violent clashes between protesters from the diverse groups of the anti-globalization movement and Italian police took place. Alongside the high number of demonstrators arrested and people which remained wounded during the clashes with the police, the young man Carlo Giuliani died killed by a shot from an Italian security official, causing the breaking out of a controversy about the “state of health” of the Italian democracy. See *Da Marx a Matrix – Editoriale sul G8 di Genova*, Limes Rivista Italiana di Geopolitica, 4/2001, available on <https://www.limesonline.com>.

congruence between decision-making agents and areas in which decisions have their effects.

Indeed, it was more and more clear that traditional geography had become obsolete.

The accomplishment of a terrorist attack designed outside the American borders and accomplished on national territory did question the traditional Westphalian binomial inside/outside on which the intelligence activity had been articulated until then. The anti-globalization movement, in turn, even questions the concept of “decision-maker”, together with that of “decision”, and of “scope” – and global *Ĝihād* will do the same as its operational patterns pass from those of the “organization” to those of the “network”. The threats that struck the West in 2001 forced security officials and jurists to question the traditional conceptual categories. As will be seen, the “scope” no longer necessarily coincides with the “territory”, and the “hierarchy” is no longer purely vertical and shaped on a top-down structure.

1.1 - 9/11 Intelligence Failure

The generation of jihadists, or aspiring jihadists, currently operating on European soil certainly have a profoundly different *modus operandi*, as will be described, from that adopted by the generation of Bin Lāden. However, it should be noted that both structured international terrorism and the so-called “lone wolves” have challenged the Western interpretative framework on multiple levels, thus riding the wave of the erosion of Westphalian categories.

The intelligence failure of 11/09 is attributable, together with strictly internal operational causes (i.e., the lack of transparency and insufficient

information sharing within the intelligence community, the will of pleasing the Presidency, together with the scarce resort to human intelligence) to the general misunderstanding, by the West, of the conceptual framework adopted by *al-Qā'ida*, and in part inherited by the Islamic state. This misjudgment is deeply rooted in American history and has had dire consequences in both the Middle East and the West. In this regard, the most significant historical precedent dates back to 1979, the year of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The United States, together with Saudi Arabia, focusing on its own strategical interests in the framework of the Cold War, provided the anti-Soviet militias for financial and logistical support, thus laying the foundation for the empowerment of the two main groups within the Afghan rebels. Among the latter there were the Taliban, the “students” educated according to the traditional Islamic principles of the Pakistani Deobandi schools (ar. *Madrasas*), and Muslim fighters coming from all over the Islamic world, with a predominance of individuals from the Persian Gulf – among them, there was Osama Ben Lāden, the terrorist considered the mastermind of the 2001 suicide attack. Those fighters absorbed the radical Deobandi ideology and received military training together with modern technical equipment and enhanced an armed fight that, eventually, was not addressed only to the Soviet attackers, but to all the “crusaders” on the Islamic territory.¹³⁷ This unexpected drift of anti-Soviet resistance reflects the Islamic conception of the earthly space, as well as the Islamic view of geopolitics, even if the latter in that occasion was interpreted in an extremist key.

According to Islamic doctrine, the earth is divided into two main areas. The first-one is the “House of Islam” (ar. *Dār al-Islām*), that includes the *Ummah* with no boundaries by space nor by time, and thus marked by a strong *vis expansiva*. Within the House of Islam, pagans must convert to Islam, while Christians and

¹³⁷ M. Campanini, *Storia del Medio Oriente contemporaneo*, cit., 239-242.

Jewish can maintain their religious belief but in the framework of the communitarian affiliation with the *Ummah*, of which they are integral part. Outside this area, chaos and ignorance prevails in the so called “House of War” (ar. *Dār al-Ḥarb*), where the fight against the *Kuffār* for the affirmation of Islam is carried out. Here Muslims are in charge for islamization through the affirmation of an Islamic political order, which, in turn, demands the application of *Shari’a* Principles. Besides these two areas, modern doctrine introduced a third space (ar. *Dār al-Sulḥ*) that is not included in the House of Islam but in which peaceful relationships with non-Muslim people are possible through non-belligerence agreements. According to this ideological framework, the boundaries between an area and another do not correspond to political borders on the earth surface, but to the expansion of the Islamic revelation and of the community of Muslim believers.¹³⁸ This geopolitical vision, drawn from classical Islamic doctrine, is interpreted in radical terms by jihadist ideologues in the Afghan field. In particular, according to the Palestinian ‘Abdullāh Azzām, the invasion of Afghanistan by troops of unbelievers (Soviets first, and then Americans) represented a form of offense thus making the *Ġihād* against the infidels an individual obligation, or *Fard al-Ayn*, comparable to the five pillars of Islam.

1979 is also the year of two other important events: the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the siege of Mecca, which, on the one hand, reflect the Islamic interpretation of the geopolitical space and, on the other, are linked to 9/11 from a relationship of historic causality. The victory of the Shiite Āyatollāh Khomeynī over a powerful enemy like the Shah has fed the narratives of various groups belonging to the galaxy of militant Islamism, according to which it would have been possible to overcome political obstacles by carrying on *Ġihād*. In this

¹³⁸ This subdivision of the earthly world is the result of the exegetical activity of the *muġtahidīn* and has long been the subject of debate among Islamic legal schools. See M. H. Hassan, *Revisiting Dar Al-Islam (Land Of Islam) And Dar Al-Harb (Land Of War)*, RSIS Commentaries, 1/2007.

sense, the “shock wave” of the proclamation of the Islamic Republic determined the Islamization of the Palestinian cause and a significant Islamist momentum in Senegal, Indonesia and Malaysia.¹³⁹

More generally, the idea that it was possible and legitimate to overthrow impious regimes and take revenge on corrupt political elites gained strength within the *Ummah*. In this sense, the assault on the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November 1979 by Wahabi extremists who challenged the Saudi regime for the presence of American soldiers and military arsenals in the “House of Islam” is emblematic. The apparent paradox lay in the fact that the proclamation of the Islamic Republic was welcomed with particular enthusiasm in the circles of People’s Islam, that is, those in which Wahhabism had taken root most thanks to the policies adopted by the “petro-monarchies” of the Gulf in the 1970s. Precisely for this reason, the effects of the Iranian revolution can also be read in antagonistic key: in the 1980s Saudi Arabia exploited the network of influence created in the previous decade to contain the Khomeinist thrust and preserve its teaching on Sunni Islam. This strategy includes the appeal to the Afghan *Ĝihād* as an Islamic cause capable of arousing a popular impetus greater than that linked to the Iranian turnaround, together with economic support for violent Islamic fringes¹⁴⁰.

The events described thus far can be considered the very first steps for the affirmation of what is known under the name of “global *Ĝihād*”.

Once the Afghan *Ĝihād* ended, three other main war fronts had opened in Algeria, Egypt and Bosnia, where former Afghan *Ĝihād* fighters, native or foreign, arrived, with the aim of mobilizing local populations to overthrow the regimes in

¹³⁹ On the strategy of cultural hegemonization implemented by the countries of the Arab Gulf see G. Kepel, *Jihad ascesa e declino*, cit., 131 and ff.

¹⁴⁰ Ivi, 153 and ff.

power, considered corrupt and not in line with what they thought to be Islamic orthodoxy.

It is worth mentioning that the jihadist network that began to take shape in the early Nineties has a press center that operates undisturbed from the so-called “Londonistan”, in the British capital.¹⁴¹ From here the theaters of war communicate with each other and an interactive and coordinated global *Ĝihād* takes shape for the first time. Subsequently, for mainly strategic reasons linked to the general rejection of the jihadist cause by the Muslim masses of the Islamic world, the scope of the war against impiety expands enormously until the sword of *Ĝihād* is drawn no longer against the Muslim regimes but against the West. Moreover, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the American administration took off the Afghan issue from its political agenda. Saudi Arabia, in its turn, stopped its support to the Afghan mujaheddin since the rivalry with Iran for the influence within the Islamic *Ummah* had decreased.

The first sign of this change of direction came in February 26th, 1993, when a terrorist attack against the World Trade center, symbol of Western capitalism, took place. The architectural complex designed by a Japanese architect and built on South Manhattan in 1973 houses a commercial complex that changed the face of the city. The Twin Towers are part of a complex of seven buildings close to the Wall Street Stock Exchange. In 1993 an explosion on the second level of the underground car park in one of the towers threw the entire metropolis into panic, causing five deaths and more than 400 injuries, but without compromising the stability of the building, which remained standing until 2001. Very few victims were recorded on that occasion, but not thanks to the efficiency of the intelligence apparatus, nor to that of Law enforcement agencies, but because of

¹⁴¹ On the topic of Londonistan, see: T. Dominique, *Le Londonistan. Le djihad au coeur de l'Europe*, Paris, Michalon Editions, 2005; M. Phillips, *Londonistan*, London, Encounter Books, 2006.

organizational mistakes made by the attackers. These were part of Bin Lāden's network and had planned the attack by both Afghan, Pakistani and American soil. The adoption by American authorities of a strict judicial approach allowed to easily identify those responsible and to bring them to justice, but it did not allow to shed light on the network that Bin Lāden was creating and on the new form of terrorism that was emerging.¹⁴²

In this regard, 2001 can be considered a watershed year just in symbolic terms, since 11/09 marked the acknowledgment of changes which had already started during the previous decade. In that period, a structural transformation occurred at a global level, determined by the spread of technological devices and the introduction of the Internet. The revolution of information technology witnessed in the Nineties, also known as "Fourth industrial revolution", caused a great increase in the number of channels of access to information, thus leading to structural transformations of the politic and economic system with deep social implications which reflected also on the security field. The globalization process led to the creation of a multitude of relationships of a political, economic and cultural nature between subjects who were once not in contact. This phenomenon goes beyond the traditional logics of causality and affiliation, thus darkening the traditional paradigms based on the concepts of "hierarchy" and "territory".

¹⁴² The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, 71 and ff.

1.2 - The anti-globalization archetype

1.2.1 From Third-Worldism to the “No Global New Global”

As already said, the attack on the Twin Towers follows, by a few months, the riots observed on the occasion of the G8 summit in Genoa. Not only it was the first time that the anti-globalization movement appeared in Italy, but it was something new for the whole old continent. The anti-globalization movement emerged as a late expression of Third Worldism, which, in turn, can be defined as a «political theory and practice that saw the major fault-line in the global capitalist as running between the advanced capitalist countries of the West and the impoverished continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and saw national liberation struggles in the Third World as the major force for global revolution».¹⁴³

Generally speaking, Third Worldism can be defined as a cultural behavior of rejection of the political and economic domination of the capitalist West over the rest of the world. It emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War – when several national liberation projects were carried out – by initiative of a group of Nation-states the rulers of which refused to take part to the Cold War. Those actors, therefore, postulated the existence of a “third way” which was alternative to both capitalism and communism, being the latter considered the sole two options available during the Cold War period. In their view, instead, the ongoing battle between the “East” and the “West” was replaced by the conflict between the “South” and the “North” of the World.¹⁴⁴

The thesis of the Third World theory was based on the idea that the capitalist West (i.e., the “North”) had organized a global system of production that exploited the cheap workforce of the Third World (the “South”). Such system

¹⁴³ A. Nash, *Third worldism*, *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, 7(1), 2003, 94-116.

¹⁴⁴ On the emergence and the evolution of the Third World see M. T. Berger *After the Third World? History, destiny and the fate of Third Worldism*, *Third world quarterly*, 25(1), 2004, 9-39.

was the historical heritage of the colonization age in Asia and in Africa. To the eyes of Third Worldists, the economic strategy of the West had progressively thrown Asian and African populations into a state of political subjection and economic backwardness which was convenient for Western economics. Therefore, the West was accused of hypocrisy and of adopting policies leading to formal freedom but substantial slavery.

When in the Nineties the term “globalization” spread to describe the progressive elimination of the obstacles that prevented the free movement of goods and capital, it was targeted by a fringe of Third Worldism, which gave rise to the anti-globalization movement. The latter, therefore, emerged as a phenomenon of contestation against the negative effects of the changes that had taken place in the political and economic system. The bitter enemies of the anti-globalization movement are corporations and financial institutions which have acquired more and more power at the expense of Nation-states, on one side, and of economically vulnerable groups, on the other. The movement challenges the global governance of big economic players, such as the IMF or the WTO, which erode the role of states and create a situation of global segregation, thus excluding some regions of the world from this system of power and from welfare.

To carry on its battle the anti-globalization movement uses the same global paradigm of the system that it wants to fight. One could even say that the movement is one of the products of that same paradigm. Just as a vaccine contains a weakened version of the virus it should fight, the anti-globalization movement faithfully reflects the changes in the political-economic system and the crisis of the Westphalian paradigm.

1.2.2 Deterritorialization, horizontal hierarchies and blurred values

The most significant characteristics that the movement shares with other entities and phenomena which are also products of globalization concern its relationship with territory, together with the absence of a hierarchical structure. These characteristics identify what a recent doctrine defined as the paradigm of “bebelarchy”, a neologism coined through Greek etymology which refers to the primacy of what is “profane” (*bebelos*) over what is “sacred” (*ieros*), and, therefore, to the supplanting of hierarchies by predominantly horizontal relationships and the rarefaction of the centre-periphery paradigm, replaced by the network.¹⁴⁵

The anti-globalization movement has no official headquarters or decision-making subjects. Its objectives and strategies, which do not respect political borders, reflects the general will of the movement and are pursued by its members on a global scale. The absence of a leader and of a hierarchical pyramid within the anti-globalization movement highlights its net-like structure. Just like a fisherman’s net, or the net of a soccer goal, the movement does not have a center, but has many “nodes” which act like “hubs”. Ideas, information and inputs move from one node to another through the meshes of the network, where they are detected, reworked and constantly returned to the network. This “network paradigm” encourages the formulation of objectives to be achieved in the short term, given that a strategy structured in a long series of objectives linked to each other would naturally be dismantled by the network sharing system. Here, only simple objectives which lead to immediate results can survive. Furthermore, objectives which are easy-to-achieve are also those shared by the greatest

¹⁴⁵ Extensive explanation of the etymological roots and conceptual meaning of bebelarchy are provided in C. Sbailò, *Dall’11 settembre all’emergenza Covid-19: sicurezza nell’età della Bebelarchia (2001-2021)*, Editoriale Scientifica, Napoli, 2021.

number of people, since they bring a collective benefit and imply actions that can be easily implemented by individual initiative.

Given the non-hierarchical structure of the movement and its consequent preference to put forward again and again the same concepts, together with easy-to-achieve and short-term goals, it turns out that its ideological framework is also vague and marked by a high degree of abstractness. The movement holds together very different currents of thought (from laymen to Catholics, from reformists to radicals) which share the same “master frame”. Despite the name with which it is commonly referred to, the “anti-globalization” movement does not reject globalization *tout court*. The movement rejects its harmful effects on politics, which has become incapable of managing the social consequences of unregulated economic liberalization. Globalization is seen, instead, as a pool of opportunities for the strengthening of democracy, the realization of social justice and the guarantee of rights on a global scale. The September 11 attacks – together with the measures adopted by the American administration in Afghanistan and Iraq in the context of the fight against terrorism – deeply affected the rhetoric of the movement. In fact, the rejection of war and the promotion of peace consolidate as the *fil rouge* of the movement’s requests, thus favoring “frame bridging” operations: war and militarism enlighten Western economic hegemony, social inequalities, racism and violence against women.¹⁴⁶ The absence of a precise and well-established ideology guiding the action of the movement is the basis of its ambivalent relationship with violence, allowing peaceful groups to coexist with violent groups without internal friction.

¹⁴⁶ See D. Della Porta, M. Andretta, L. Mosca, *Movimenti sociali e sfide globali: politica, antipolitica e nuova politica dopo l'11 settembre*, *Rassegna italiana di sociologia*, 44(1), 2003, 43-76.

1.2.2 Internet, the quintessentially network

It is worth enlightening, here, that the “net-like” structure of the movement and of its *modus operandi* are mainly based on the use of the quintessentially network, that is, the Internet. In fact, the real headquarters of the movement are not physical, but online. In the digital dimension, the movement has websites accurate in every detail and updated content that act as hubs of information, ideas, and experiences. The centrality of the Internet in the life of the movement causes the marginalization of the “real” sphere, creating a sort of self-referential parallel universe that do not welcome external inputs. Information channels and spaces for discussion outside the movement’s network are, therefore, considered corrupted by the influence of financial and economic institutions¹⁴⁷. However, the isolationism of the people of the Internet reflects an attitude of the users, but its outcomes, as will be seen later, do not allow attributing ontological independence to the digital sphere from the “real” one.

With its absence of hierarchies and of strict relationships with the physical territory, together with its net-like structure, the anti-globalization movement can be considered, in several respects, the archetype of other global phenomena, including economic, financial and social issues, but also contemporary warfare and organized crime. Security threats, indeed, result to have an increasingly transnational character which makes it difficult for States – and in some cases also for super-national institutions which struggle to pass the Westphalian categories – to detect, anticipate and tackle criminal behaviors.

¹⁴⁷ See C. Sbailò, (2021), *Dall'11 settembre all'emergenza Covid-19*, cit., 9-33.

1.3 The anti-globalization movement and contemporary jihadism: a common destiny

If on the occasion of the 2001 terrorist attack, it became clear that we were in front of a “new syntax of terror”, the observation of the anti-globalization movement can be considered a first step to understand its “rules”. In particular, the latter shares with contemporary jihadism characteristics relating to its historical roots and to its functioning mechanism and, most important, to its most likely destiny.

First of all, the anti-globalization movement shares with radical Islam some historical and political roots. In the period of maximum success of Third-Worldism, in fact, the theories on the alternative character of the Islamic model with respect to those proposed by the two conflicting blocks during the Cold War were consolidated. It is the case of the Persia under the Shahs regime. Here the revolutionary demands that elsewhere were placed in communism or Third Worldism were transferred to Khomeinist Shiism, thus determining the rise of people’s Islamic parties in other countries of the Islamic world and the flourishing of jihadist Islam, driven by a desire for redemption and revenge on corruption and injustice.¹⁴⁸

Secondly, the anti-globalization movement and contemporary jihadism share several structural aspects, the most visible of which is the deterritorialized character, whereby the appeal to *Ġihād* is addressed to all Muslims – and to non-Muslims which are called to convert – regardless of their geographical location, so that the “holy war against infidels” assumes a universal character. Other significant aspects of commonality are the dramatically known jihadist ambivalence with respect to the use of violence and the model of aggregation,

¹⁴⁸ See: G. Kepel, *Jihad: ascesa e declino*, cit.

more and more based on the pursuit of easy-to-achieve and short-term objectives. Since jihadist ideological framework is marked by blurred contours, the resort to violence ends up being just one of the numerous existing ways to practice the *Ġihād*. Islamic radicalization itself, indeed, involve a wide range of degenerative processes leading to extremist behaviors which does not necessarily foresee the resort to violence, but can be limited to manifestation of appreciation towards the jihadist cause or to the spread of extremist ideas (both online and in the physical environment) without adopting violent behaviors.¹⁴⁹

The aggregation model determined by the predilection for simple objectives could be defined, using a technological metaphor, as a «fourth-generation model, or 4G»¹⁵⁰. The passage to the criminal act does not necessarily assume – at list no longer – formal membership in a pyramidal and logistically structured organization, but it is consequent to the dissemination on the network of “calls to action”, to which every Muslim is called to answer. Jihadist terrorist attacks planned in response to those calls, indeed, appears often to be unsophisticated, that is to say, scarcely planned and carried out using primitive and hazardous methods.¹⁵¹ Indeed, beside jihadists directly recruited by the Islamic state, *al-Qā'idah* or their numerous branches, there are often self-radicalized individuals with little or no-ties with terrorist organizations. Furthermore, the very rapid diffusion of information and inputs favors their

¹⁴⁹ On the concepts of “violent” and “non-violent radicalization, see A. P. Schmid, *Violent and non-violent extremism: Two sides of the same coin*, The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague 5(5), 2014, 29.

¹⁵⁰ See G. Kepel, *Le prophète et la pandémie. Du Moyen-Orient au jihadisme d'atmosphère*. Editions Gallimard, 2021, 236.

¹⁵¹ This is the case of the Pakistani Zaheer Hassan Mahmoud, who in September 2020 carried out the attack on the old Charlie Hebdo headquarters using a butcher's knife similar to those brandished by his compatriots during the demonstrations held in Pakistan against the satirical newspaper (Counter Extremism Project, www.counterextremism.com/extremists/zaher-hassan-mahmood) or, as well, of Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, a Tunisian lorry driver resident in France who perpetrated a truck-ramming attack in Nice in July (Counter Extremism Project, www.counterextremism.com/extremists/mohamed-lahouaiej-bouhlel).

reworking over again and again, thus determining dangerous intersection areas between the virtual and real worlds and fueling the trend to emulate extremist behaviors. To such a violent dynamic can be mainly attributed the wave of Islamic terrorist attacks witnessed in Europe in the second decade of 2000.¹⁵²

The anti-globalization movement anticipated not only the abovementioned network paradigm that characterizes contemporary jihadism, but also the centrality of the Internet. The displacement of a major part of jihadist activity from the real to the virtual sphere makes it possible the spread of vast amount of propaganda materials, thus reaching the maximum number of people and the highest level of participation to the cause, both in terms of merely ideological support and of violent action. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the algorithms on which the functioning of social networks and the Media is based (especially the ones most used by youngsters, such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, but also LinkedIn and Google). The latter, in order to pursue their own interest, that is, the increase in profits, aim at keeping users in front of the screen as much as possible by selecting content that is likely to interest them or fuel their beliefs. This dynamic encourages the creation of “thematic bubbles” within the network, that lead to self-reference and the multiple-time reworking of the same inputs. All the Media have, of course, their own policy against extremism, but this does not prevent the sharing of content that polarizes users’ opinion and can lead to the adoption of extremist positions nor the circulation of propaganda material that is shared hundreds of times before being detected and removed.

Ultimately, the Internet plays a central role in the resilience of the jihadist universe, making it able to endure the elimination of its leaders, to survive the destruction of its territorial bases and giving it the possibility to acquire recruits “at low cost” without even looking for them.

¹⁵² G. Kepel, *Le prophète et la pandémie* cit., 267.

Last but not least, the anti-globalization movement and the jihadist network seem to share some kind of a common destiny. Both are apparently indestructible, mainly thanks to their structured online presence. In fact, also contemporary jihadism, as it will be explored, has become more and more digitalized, thus making the internet the very common denominator of the majority of radicalization cases leading to violence and terrorist acts. But on the other hand, the jihadist network, although apparently unbreakable, is increasingly marked by doctrinal, and indeed ideological, inconsistencies. If at the time of the first jihadist thinkers and theorists the aim of overthrowing Middle Eastern regimes, first, and of defeating the West, then, was justified throughout an allegedly orthodox interpretation of the Quranic message, nowadays the meaning attributed to that message is more and more blurred, because most of the radicalized do not even know it. The doctrinal strictness, in fact, has proved to be counterproductive concerning the scope of dissemination of the jihadist cause. The involvement of young Muslims, often with scarce religious education and, sometimes, grown within Western society and culture, demands, instead, ideological flexibility, and even vagueness of purposes. Unsurprisingly, both these features go hand in hand with the digital syntax, which structurally favors the spread of contents which are easy to understand and to place back on the net.

The large amount of extremist material on the net suggests that the masterminds of jihadism are aware of the potential of the Internet. But on the long term, all this is likely to lead to an heterogenesis of purposes where the search for the highest level of effectiveness results in great efforts made to empower the “means” at the expense of those made to reach the goal. The awareness of this process, which will be explored in detail later, comes, first of all, from the observation of the impact of technological devices on all fields of human action. Such awareness is functional to allow for an in-depth

comprehension of the paradigm shift witnessed between the end of the XX and the early XXI century.

2. The «exponential gap» and the increase in the attack surface

In the era of global technology, it is increasingly complex for the intelligence and the judiciary to detect and prosecute criminal entities whose activities are mostly displaced on the digital sphere. The unstoppable enlargement of the latter has even led to the emergence of new forms of crime which wouldn't exist without the spread of the Internet, such as online frauds, phishing and vishing. But the complexity of the intelligence and security tasks is not attributable solely to the criticalities of the digital dimension, which hinder accountability and enlarge the potential impact of the criminal activity regardless of physical boundaries. Many of the difficulties faced in the field of security management are due, instead, to the distress in front of the structural transformation of human action's schemes following– or enlightened by – the spread of Technoscience.

In the present work, the observation of the anti-globalization movement is functional to shed light on the overcoming of the monolithic conception of human activity, often rationalized into “organizations”. The latter are traditionally conceived as organic forms of association of people who cooperate together for the achievement of a shared purpose.¹⁵³ What has changed is the very meaning of being “together” and the true essence of “purposes”. The value of these words changes, in the end, the nature of the “organization” itself.

¹⁵³ For a literal definition, see ORGANIZATION, on Cambridge dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/organization>

The meaning of “being together” has undergone, of course, deep changes following the – still ongoing – digitalization process. Let’s take the example of the business world. Here, diverse professional activities can now be carried out at home, where a personal computer and a firm connection to the Internet allow you to work in synergy with your colleagues and to achieve results often even more efficiently and effectively than what it could be at the workplace. Going to work, in fact, demands a waste of energy (to be measured in terms of time and economic resources) which, instead, could be devoted to your job. Changed the meaning of “working together”, the nature of the job has changed as well. Remote working, in fact, demands the division of work into “tasks”, that are short or middle-term objectives to be accomplished individually, which are functional to achieve the final purpose of the company. Concerning remote working, not only is such method of work possible, but it is necessary.

Translated this dynamic in the field of crime, criminal entities result in multiple archipelagos of communicating islands, working together for the achievement of several short-term purposes which are functional, in turn, to implement a wider project. All this causes greater difficulty not only in prosecuting the single individual who has adopted criminal conduct, which falls within the responsibilities of the judiciary, or in identifying and dismantling criminal networks, which is the task of intelligence. The most complex thing is to “put the picture together”, that is, to clearly identify the links of casualty, the decision-making flows and the paradigm which regulates the allocation of responsibilities.

These difficulties are attributed by Azeem Azhar to the “exponential gap” between the pace of development of technology which is, precisely, exponential, and that of the political and legal apparatus responsible for managing the collateral effects of globalization, which instead follows a linear trend. Thereby, this “gap” results in areas of vulnerability which, in the end, cause the

enlargement of the “attack surface” of our societies. Nowadays, security management practitioners, in fact, face with new types of threats, that also follow unprecedented paradigms. The more technology advances – both in terms of scientific progress and in terms of technological accessibility – and the more the “attack surface”, understood as the set of vulnerable points that can be exploited by an enemy, increases. While criminal entities can use the most performing and economically accessible means (given by technological progress), political and institutional apparatus, especially in Western democracies, have to deal with the physiological lag of Law behind the phenomena that legal systems aim to deal with. As far as technology is concerned, its rate of growth is such as to give rise to a real “gap” compared to that of other systems, including legal and political ones.

An example of this dynamic is given by the challenges of hybrid warfare in the framework of NATO, concerning the application of the article 5 of the Treaty – stating the duty of mutual support in case one or more of its members fall victims of an armed attack. Criticalities appeared in the occasion of the 2007 Russian cyberattack against critical infrastructures in Tallin, Latvia, in response to the governmental decision of removing the statue of a soldier dating back to the Soviet dominion over the country. At the time, even though an ally was under attack, the principle of mutual defense was not applied because the attack – which occurred exclusively in the cyber domain, but with consequences also in the physical one – did not cause a number of casualties even comparable to what would have resulted by a traditional armed attack.¹⁵⁴

In the field of counter extremism, for legislations and public authorities the aforementioned “gap” has resulted in hard time dealing with the overflow of

¹⁵⁴ D. McGuinness, *How a cyber attack transformed Estonia*, bbc, 2017, available on <https://www.bbc.com/news/39655415>

jihadist materials in social networks environments, and the related risks of triggering radicalization processes. Tackling subversive phenomena attributable to terrorism and extremism was, in fact, extremely complicated, at list before platforms such as Facebook and Twitter adopted specific regulations and parameters allowing to ban whoever use the platform for illegal, offensive, or destabilizing purposes. It is still not rare, however, that the disseminators of terrorist material manage to bypass the interception systems based on artificial intelligence with rather simple expedients, such as the removal of the logo of the terrorist organization.¹⁵⁵

The issue of the relationship between technology and security is even more complex in the domain of information, where simple disinformation can compromise the social order and the democratic life. That's what happened during the Covid-19 Pandemic, when nearly 700 Iranian citizens died from having ingested lethal doses of ethyl alcohol following the spread on the web of fake news according to which drinking disinfecting solutions was useful for neutralizing the virus.¹⁵⁶ In this case, as in many others, the boundaries of the attack surface are blurred, as blurred are the boundaries between digital and real dimension.

¹⁵⁵ S. D'Ambruoso, *Il terrorista di Brescia e il proselitismo social fra i giovani. L'analisi di Dambruoso*, Formiche.net, 2023, available on <https://formiche.net/2023/06/tiktok-instagram-terrorismo-social-brescia/>

¹⁵⁶ See A. Azhar, *Exponential. How Accelerating Technology is leaving Us Behind and What to do about it*, London, Random House Business, 2022, 201-204.

2.1 “Onlife Manifesto”: re-ontologizing the digital sphere

«There is no online or offline, only onlife. We are living in a mangrove society. The real challenge is not technical innovation but the governance of digital». ¹⁵⁷

In this Tweet released in February 2018, Luciano Floridi¹⁵⁸ poses a question of central importance for the management of the relationship between man and technologies, namely that of the boundary between the real and the “virtual” dimension. Technological development and the spread of its products, in fact, have affected every field of human action, from the professional one to leisure and sociality, thus bringing significant changes in our behavioral models in the aforementioned fields. The appearance of modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), then, not only has made possible to overcome the physical barriers that hindered interactions but has led to the formation of new spaces in which such interactions can take place.

Floridi, as a professor of moral philosophy, approaches the subject from a philosophical point of view. He describes the blurring of the difference between what is real and what is virtual through the metaphor of the «mangrove society». These plants live in brackish water environments, at the crossroad of the flows of the rivers and that of the sea. Such environment, in fact, is unconceivable if one adopts the binary logic of “fresh water/salt water”. It is precisely what was theorized by Floridi in the “Onlife Manifesto”, a collection of theses regarding the impact of technology and communication on human life, whose core is the idea that there is no more difference between “online” and “offline”. Human, instead, are always “onlife”, since human life is hybrid like the mangrove habitat.

¹⁵⁷ L. Floridi, Twitter: <https://twitter.com/floridi/status/960190279235096576>

¹⁵⁸ Luciano Floridi is an Italian-British philosopher, full professor of Philosophy and Ethics of information at the Oxford Internet Institute of the University of Oxford and professor of Sociology of communication at the University of Bologna.

Thereby, the term “infosphere” was coined, a neologism introduced to define the unitary nature of the «informational environment». In the digital age, therefore, the latter would be made up of all existing informational entities. In Floridi’s perspective, the infosphere not only presupposes the inseparability of the online and offline environment, but also includes the information agents themselves and their interrelationships. The diffusion of ICT technologies, then, is such that the shares of the infosphere made up of digital material are increasingly nourished, to the detriment of those occupied by analogical data. It is because of this trend, by way of example, that e-books are increasingly preferred to respective paper books, or that economic investments in the metaverse alongside the traditional ones are taking hold. It follows that technology is leading to a «re-ontologization» of the information environment; that is, it is modifying the intrinsic nature of the infosphere, causing an unstoppable expansion of the digital space. This process, in turn, ends up erasing the «ontological friction» hindering the flows of information between different regions of the infosphere, so that «the lower the ontological friction in it, the higher the accessibility of that amount of information becomes». As the digital region of the infosphere expands, the ontological difference between processing agents and processed data becomes increasingly subtle, thus eroding the boundaries between “real” and “virtual” reality.¹⁵⁹

This reasoning, far from representing an exercise in erudition for its own sake, leads to a perspective shift which we consider necessary for an in-depth understanding of the true nature of security risks in the era dominated by the digital.

¹⁵⁹ See L. Floridi, *A look into the future impact of ICT on our lives*, The information society, 2007, 23(1), 59-64.

2.1.1 “Online radicalization” under an ontological perspective

In June 2023 Italian authorities arrested a Muslim teen-ager, based in the city of Brescia, accused of being part of a virtual network of young supporters of the Islamic state operating on an international scope. According to the investigators, the young man, an Italian citizen of foreign origin, would have become radicalized online and was about to plan an attack on Italian soil. In fact, he was in possession of numerous *Dāesh* propaganda materials and instruction manuals on the use of weapons and the manufacture of explosive devices. He has been accused of association for the purpose of international terrorism and of training for the purpose of terrorism (respectively, art. 270 quinquies, and 270 bis of the Italian penal code). The Italian legislator includes in the first case the behaviors of who, regardless to the resort to the internet and social media, decide to join a terrorist group, even without physical relationships with other members of the organization. Similarly, since legislative amendment the adopted in 2015, the second case also includes cases of self-training for terrorist purposes using material found online.¹⁶⁰

The case of the radicalized teen-ager from Brescia, similar in its premises and epilogue to many cases of jihadist extremism, provides an interesting food for thought on the topic of “online radicalization”. In fact, the Italian legislator seems aware of the futility of differentiating between crimes related to terrorism perpetrated online or offline. Not even the aggravating circumstance of acts “perpetrated through IT tools”, also envisaged by the Italian legal system, does not seem to assume that online radicalization represents a crime in its own right. Rather, it seems to be attributable to the need to increase the penalties linked to

¹⁶⁰ For further detail on this case, see: *Terrorismo: arrestato a Bergamo sostenitore jihadista*, Poliziadistato.it, 2023, available on <https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/terrorismo-arrestato-a-bergamo-sostenitore-jihadista>; S. Dambruoso, *Il terrorista di Brescia e il proselitismo social fra i giovani*, cit.

a trend, that of the use of IT tools in terrorist crimes, extremely dangerous for public security.

The tendency to isolate the digital dimension, however, seems to be rooted in a significant part of the scientific literature on the topic of violent radicalization since the first studies on the relationship between violent extremism and IT tools.

The process of technological integration that combined telecommunications with the Internet between the 1990s and 2000s gave as result social networks, video games and augmented reality experiences, thus consolidating the idea about the emergence of other “dimensions”. These dimensions, usually defined as “virtual”, are sometimes considered separate and independent from the “real” dimension. Based on this assumption, the concept of “online radicalization” was theorized, understood as a particular process of adhesion to radical and violence-prone systems of thought that has causes and manifestations inherently different from the same process occurring “offline” and, indeed, entirely attributable to the digital sphere.

In the early 2000s, noting the existence of a new generation of terrorists who operate mainly on the web, Sageman denounced that «face-to-face radicalization» was being progressively replaced by “online radicalization”,¹⁶¹ the latter defined by Binder et al. as «a process during which individuals get exposed to, imitate and internalize extremist beliefs and attitudes, by means of the Internet, in particular social media, and other forms of online communication», which is «dominated or entirely guided by Internet-related activity».¹⁶² Other authors, instead, has placed greater emphasis on the dual individual/collective

¹⁶¹ See M. Sageman, *A Strategy for Fighting International Islamist Terrorists*, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 618(1), 2008, 223-231.

¹⁶² See J. F. Binder, J. Kenyon, *Terrorism and the internet: How dangerous is online radicalization?*, *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 2022.

declination of the phenomenon. Among them, Winter et al. define online radicalization as «Internet activism that is related to, engaged in, or perpetrated by groups or individuals that hold views considered to be doctrinally extremist». The same authors, however, specify that it is almost never possible to isolate the parable of this process to the digital dimension alone.¹⁶³ In fact, the dichotomy of “online radicalization” and “offline radicalization” is contested by a significant part of the scientific community, due to the impossibility of attributing the causes, the development and the violent implications of radicalization processes solely to the Internet. In many cases, social networks are an integral part of the semantic context in which the radicalization process develops, and the terrorist act is carried out, but this context does not end there.

We would expose, by way of example, the attack against the French professor Samuel Paty, beheaded on October 16th 2020 by the Chechen terrorist Abdullakh Anzorov for having shown, during a class on free speech, some satirical cartoons that portrayed the Prophet naked. On October 8th, the father of a Muslim student attending Paty’s class – who, moreover, seems to have been absent on the day of the offending event – had expressed his indignation for what had happened live on Facebook, launching an appeal for the expulsion of Paty from the institute and a general exhortation to protest against his teaching methods. The following day, the *Imām* of the Grand Mosque of Pantin, a member of the Conseil des imams de France – which was already known to the French counter-terrorism – shared the man’s arguments, again live on Facebook. On the day of the attack, images of the victim’s disfigured body circulated on Twitter for a few minutes before being removed from the platform. The photos of the

¹⁶³ See C. Winter et al., *Online extremism: Research trends in internet activism, radicalization, and counter strategies*, in *International Journal of Conflict and Violence (IJCV)*, 14, 2020, 1-20.

incident are shared online again, some time later, by Ajmal Shahpal, a British citizen originally from Kashmir, found guilty in 2023 of incitement to terrorism.

In the case of Samuel Paty, as in many others, the boundary between what happens “offline” and “online” is very blurred. In fact, separating the two spheres would mean dismantling the causal chain that led to radicalization and, eventually, to the violent act, compromising the logical coherence of the facts.

The risks of emulating violent behavior as well, which are reported also by the Italian society of psychiatry, demonstrate that radicalization processes are the result of hybrid situations. The reckless dissemination, online or on traditional Media, of images and texts concerning news stories about terrorism can, in fact, trigger emulation processes, and therefore, lead to an escalation of terrorist attacks.¹⁶⁴ In this picture, the step from the news of the fact (online) to the replication of the fact (reality) is very short, and the boundaries between what fall under the radicalization process and what, instead, is part of the transition from ideas to action, is very blurred.

Sharing these concerns, the French newspaper *Le Monde* has renounced to publish images extracted from Islamic state propaganda or claims documents, in order to avoid cases of unvolunteered glorification posthume.¹⁶⁵

Furthermore, as it is underlined by Gill et al., the compartmentalization of radicalization processes in the two dimensions, real and virtual, clashes with the empirical evidence of radicalized people who operate fluidly in both domains. For example, verbal exchanges between individuals who embrace the same extremist ideology can be accompanied by online communications to coordinate the

¹⁶⁴ On this subject, see: *Terrorismo, presidente Società italiana di Psichiatria: “Non pubblicare nome e foto attentatori: si rischia emulazione”*, *Ilfattoquotidiano.it*, 2016, available on <https://t.ly/sGzeW>; F. Zucali, *Terrorismo ed Emulazione, Ordine degli Psicologi della provincia di Bolzano*, 2016, available on <https://t.ly/4cENg>.

¹⁶⁵ J. Fenoglio, *Attaque de Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray : Résister à la stratégie de la haine*, *Le Monde*, 2016, available on <https://t.ly/-YhkM>.

operations to be undertaken.¹⁶⁶ Whittaker, starting from the observation of the extremist activities conducted by the Islamic state – which maximizes the advantages of the Internet, while also continuing to operate “offline” – underlines the need to shift the focus of scientific research from the identification of the processes of “online radicalization” to the analysis of the role of technologies in these processes. Taking up the already mentioned thesis of Floridi’s “Onlife Manifesto”, he proposes an ontological requalification of online radicalization that rejects any distinction between the “real” world and the “virtual” one.¹⁶⁷

3 - Islamic radicalization and technology

3.1 - A side note about existing literature

Radicalization phenomena can be triggered by a wide variety of factors and their possible sources of ideological inspiration are equally numerous. Indeed, the study of this subject traditionally involves diverse scientific fields, thus making existing literature on violent extremism quite variegated. The latter includes monodisciplinary studies that seek to identify causal links between socio-economic, political or demographic factors, taken separately, and the targeted phenomena, as well as multidisciplinary approaches that promote the observation of extremist behaviors and the elaboration of tackling strategies through the filter of multiple disciplines and fields of expertise. Together with the

¹⁶⁶ P. Gill, E. Corner, M. Conway, A. Thornton, M. Bloom, J. Horgan, *Terrorist use of the Internet by the numbers: Quantifying behaviors, patterns, and processes*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, 2017, 16(1), 99-117.

¹⁶⁷ J. Whittaker, *Rethinking online radicalization*, in *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 16, 2022, 27-40.

disciplinary sector, another distinctive parameter of radicalization studies concerns the collective/individual dimension: there are studies on extremism and terrorism focused on roots and drivers of radicalization at individual level (e.g., psychological and economic theories), and approaches based on the observation of parameters linked to the framework of reference of radicalized individuals (such as the social context and the geopolitical juncture).¹⁶⁸

There are also studies that operate a meta-discourse on existing research. In this regard, some scholars point out that a large portion of the literature on the subject has a methodology that is not very rigorous, especially relating to the humanities. Moreover, an objective difficulty was found in collecting empirical data on which to carry out analyses and research.¹⁶⁹ It was also pointed out that the numerous studies which support the thesis of the connection of extremism with situations of poor education and economic and social distress, mainly involving disciplines related to the social sciences, are not able to unequivocally identify the profile of the average radicalized person.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ As we have tried to explain, the theme of extremism in general, and of Islamic radicalization in particular, is the subject of a large and extensive scientific literature resulting from decades of academic activity. This proliferation of research and theories is due, among other things, to the difficulty in assigning the study of extremism, radicalization and terrorism to a single discipline. An overview of the main theories focused on the endogenous and exogenous factors of radicalization processes is provided in F. Benolli, C. Sbailò, and G. Rapisetta, *Emerging Strategies to Prevent Islamic Radicalization in Europe: Evidence from Italy*, in "International Security Management: New Solutions to complexity", 2021, 187-207. A literature review about social sciences theories can be found in R. Borum, *Radicalization into violent extremism: A review of social science theories*, *Journal of strategic security*, 2011, 4(4), 7-36. On the studies about psychological drivers of radicalization, see: M. King, D. M. Taylor, *The radicalization of home-grown jihadists: A review of theoretical models and social psychological evidence*, *Terrorism and political violence*, 2011, 23(4), 602-622; B. Misiak et al., *A systematic review on the relationship between mental health, radicalization and mass violence*, *European Psychiatry*, 2019, 56(1), 51-59.

¹⁶⁹ See P. Neumann, S. Kleinmann. *How rigorous is radicalization research?*, *Democracy and Security*, 2013, 9(4), 360-382.

¹⁷⁰ This connection was effectively invalidated, see A. B. Krueger, B., J. Maleckova, *Education, poverty, political violence and terrorism: Is there a causal connection?* *National Bureau of Economic Research*, Cambridge, 2002.

Within the scientific community and among professional, there is growing awareness that the dominant trend of terrorism and radicalization phenomena concerns their relationship with the Internet and emerging technologies. Such awareness has led to the emergence of a constellation of entities engaged in monitoring online extremism and terrorism and their relationship with technology. These are mainly research institutions or companies, many of which belong to international organizations, with the aim of providing recommendations to the political decision-maker on the matter.¹⁷¹

Islamic extremism, in fact, is riding the wave of technological development, especially in the field of digital innovation. Thereby, within an extremely diversified literature on the subject of Islamic radicalization, studies and research that focus on the relationship between technological development and the evolution of radicalization phenomena and their terrorist implications are more and more high in number.¹⁷² Thereby, a field of research focused on the so-called “online radicalization” that analyzes radicalization phenomena in the digital dimension emerged. In order to bring forward elements useful for anticipating the future developments of the phenomenon, the next paragraphs, also by means of the relevant scientific literature existing on this topic, will be

¹⁷¹ Among these entities, by way of example, see: GNET – Global Network on Extremism and Technology, which is aimed at enhancing the understanding of the terrorist use of technology and that is the academic branch of the GIFCT – Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, an NGO engaged in the fight against the use of digital platforms for terrorist purposes <https://gifct.org/about/>; Tech Against Terrorism, a United Nations initiative that works in synergy with the technology industry to counter the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes in respect of human rights, <https://www.techagainstterrorism.org/about/>; the Terrorist Content Analytics Platform (TCAP), owned by Tech Against Terrorism, aimed at countering the dissemination of terrorist material online by alerting tech companies when extremist material is found on their platforms, <https://www.terrorismanalytics.org/about/>; The Middle East Media Research Institute, (MEMRI), a non-profit organization dealing with publications and translations from the Near and Middle East which, among others, runs the Cyberterrorism & Jihad Lab project, <https://www.memri.org/cjlab/>; Jihad Analytics, a company engaged in scientific dissemination and training on the online jihad threat, <https://jihadanalytics.com/about/>.

¹⁷² Among the most complete and up-to-date bibliographies, see J. Tinnes, *Terrorism and the Media (Including the Internet)* Part 6, 17(2), 2023.

dedicated to a brief diachronic analysis of the use of Internet by jihadist entities and individuals in the West.

3.2 Online radicalization from websites to instant messaging applications

The digital revolution observed since the second half of the 1900s, which was welcomed with great optimism, has brought significant benefits to the most diverse sectors, from business to leisure, without neglecting information and communication. This revolution reaches a peak between the end of the second and the beginning of the third millennium, when the performance of devices connected to the Internet has significantly improved, and their number increases in all areas of the planet. In 1998, in order to allow easier use of sites and pages that proliferated exponentially, Google was founded. In the following years, a qualitative transformation of devices connected to the internet was witnessed: the enhancement of graphics cards made the web more colorful and dynamic, and the possibility of sharing videos was introduced. These innovations also have changed the attitude of users, whose role is no longer limited to that of consumers of content, but also to that of independent producers. In the wake of this phase of transformations – both concerning technological development and human attitude towards technology – it can be observed a shift in European jihadism with the consolidation of the use, in radical Islamic circles, of online platforms. Such a shift, however, is the result of the global geopolitical situation which arose after the most destructive terrorist action witnessed in the West, which, consequently, strongly enhanced its counterterrorism activities. Indeed, it is in the aftermath of the 9/11 hijacking, and the Madrid and London bombings which occurred, respectively, in 2004 and 2005, that the transition of *al-Qā'idah* occurred towards an organizational system less hierarchical and less centralized

in terms of operational aspects.¹⁷³ Thereby, the consolidation of the use of the Internet made it possible to progressively dismantle the existing “transnational network” in favor of a more “liquid” model. The latter, however, never completely displaced the former. The two, instead, has started to complement each other, thus making extremely difficult tackling activities. On the net, in fact, it is possible to disseminate contents without the need to obtain any approval – as, instead, it would be on television or on mainstream media – nor to be compliant to the policies of the satellite channels. Islamic terrorist organizations, as highlighted by Sageman, has progressively transferred to the web most of the operations initially carried out “offline”, as regards communication and coordination between militants, but also the risky training activities which in previous years were carried out on the Afghan soil.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, terrorist entities explored the possibilities offered by the web from time to time, with particular attention to maximize one of the most important benefits derived from the use of the web: the removal of physical barriers that limit the accessibility and the spread of propaganda material. In this sense, Zelin divides the history of jihadist media into three main phases, underlining the transition from static websites in vogue in the Nineties to the interactive forums that spread in the 2000s, up to the migration of jihadist organizations on social networks at the beginning of the following decade.¹⁷⁵ According to Rogan, the sites and forums of the first two phases can be divided into: a) official websites of Muslim organizations or scholars, b) blogs and discussion forums administered by charismatic personalities but without formal recognition, and, lastly, c) a multitude of jihadist

¹⁷³ On this transition, see: L. Vidino, *Radicalization, linkage, and diversity: Current trends in terrorism in Europe*, RAND - National Defense Research Institute, 2011; M. Sageman, *Leaderless jihad: Terror networks in the twenty-first century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

¹⁷⁴ See M. Sageman, *Leaderless jihad*, cit.

¹⁷⁵ See A. Y. Zelin, *The State of Global Jihad Online. A Qualitative, Quantitative, and Cross-Lingual Analysis*, New American Foundation, 2013.

sites who promote the cause and disseminate content from other sites.¹⁷⁶ The owners of domains used to exercise a rigid control over their own websites, thus making the latter uncomfortable to host ideological incubation processes and not very favorable to the personal interpretation of the jihadist cause. Indeed, organizations increasingly opted for forums and blogs which promote interaction and active participation in the sharing and processing of inputs and the retain of a thematic specificity which, in the case of Islamist militancy, takes a high ideological charge.

Forums, in turn, have progressively been abandoned and replaced by social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. This is explained, on the one hand, by the success achieved by the latter among the young people to whom propaganda and indoctrination efforts are mainly addressed, and, on the other, in the light of the increasingly vulnerable nature of semi-centralized sites to the counterterrorism measures. Operating on social networks, on the contrary, not only makes it more difficult for law enforcement and intelligence analysts to monitor activities attributable to jihadism, but also has the advantage of dramatically expanding the audience of possible users to indoctrinate and, at best, recruit.

The use of social network, indeed, has allowed jihadist organizations to create and use a huge number of accounts, which is useful both to maximize the impact of online activism and increase the resilience of the organization.¹⁷⁷ Other two orders of problems linked to the use of social networks concern, respectively, legal barriers to counterterrorism activities and emerging identity strategies. In fact, for the counterterrorism forces of a given country, it can be particularly problematic to tackle the activity of sites whose domain is entrusted to hosting

¹⁷⁶ H. Rogan, *JIHADISM ONLINE-A study of how al-Qaida and radical Islamist groups use the Internet for terrorist purpose*, FFI Report, 2006.

¹⁷⁷ See A. Y. Zelin, cit.

providers located abroad. Furthermore, social networks can contribute to the dissemination of trans-cultural and trans-national identity strategies which could complement socio-economic factors in radicalization processes.¹⁷⁸

Different platforms, then, pose different challenges. Unlike what happens on static websites, those platforms which are characterized by the primacy of the image over the word, such as YouTube, allow jihadist propaganda to overcome linguistic barrier and become accessible also to non-Arabic users. That's why traditional radicalization patterns which follows a top-down scheme – that is, triggered by recruiters and indoctrinators engaged in looking for “workforce” – are more and more complemented by patterns of radicalization following a bottom-up direction, also known under the name of “self-radicalization” – caused by the spontaneous consumption of jihadist material on the web, often without formal relations with terrorist organizations, nor with their leaders.¹⁷⁹ The more jihadist material is available online, the more phenomena of the second type increase in number. The role of the Internet in this regard is analyzed by scholars under a double perspective. According to some theories, phenomena of self-radicalization can be mainly attributed to the normalization of some online behaviors – which, instead, would be considered unacceptable in “offline” environments. Other approaches, instead, pay most attention to the “bubble effect” of the web, which acts as an echo chamber within which jihadist content bounces between users who frequent the same virtual environments, thus reinforcing their extremist attitude and inclinations and accelerating the process

¹⁷⁸ See D. Pisiou, *Coming to Believe “Truths” About Islamist Radicalization in Europe*, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 25(2), 2013, 246-263.

¹⁷⁹ See M. Conway, L. McInerney, *Jihadi video and auto-radicalisation: Evidence from an exploratory YouTube study*, *Intelligence and Security Informatics: First European Conference on Intelligence and Security Informatics*, Esbjerg, Denmark, 2008, 108-118.

of “jihadization”.¹⁸⁰ Some authors, then, focusing on the phenomenon of “home-grown radicalization”, underline how the use of social networks for propaganda and recruitment purposes has interacted with the long-recorded technological gap between the Muslim world and the West, thus making radicalization risks in Europe and in the US relatively higher than the Arab-Islamic world.¹⁸¹

Starting from 2010s, applications for instant messaging have become more and more popular beside social networks, until they almost completely displaced the traditional short message services (SMS). Thereby, with the appearance of apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram new spaces of communication have been created reserved for private interactions, and even here the jihadist presence seems to be consolidating. Encrypted messaging programs, in fact, have a double advantage for criminals: on the one hand, they allow terrorists to “transplant” their organizational chart on digital platforms (e.g., many apps foresee the possibility to create groups, which are particularly suitable for that purpose); on the other, they represent spaces completely detached from the external context in which operation of ideological manipulation leading to radicalization can be effectively advocated.¹⁸² Most of these apps, indeed, are protected by end-to-end encryption, thus allowing the exchange of messages and multimedia contents between single individuals or within groups privately, which drastically reduces the risks that other users become aware of the communications that have taken place or of the shared contents. Moreover, these characteristics hinder the retrieval of data useful for carrying out empirical evaluations, and this is at the basis of the scarce scientific literature on the subject.

¹⁸⁰ On these two perspectives see respectively: J. P. Bjelopera, *American Jihadist Terrorism: Combating a Complex Threat*, DIANE Publishing Silber, 2010; M. D. Silber, A. Bhatt, e Senior Intelligence Analysts, *Radicalization in the West: The home-grown threat*, New York, Police Department, 2007, 1-90.

¹⁸¹ See R. Thompson, *Radicalization and the use of social media* Journal of strategic security, 2011, 4(4), 167-190.

¹⁸² See T. E. Mitew, A. Shehabat, *Black-boxing the Black Flag: Anonymous Sharing Platforms and ISIS Content Distribution*, Perspectives on Terrorism, 12, 2018, 81-99.

3.3 Gaming online and Metaverse

The in-depth investigation of radicalization linked with gaming and augmented reality experiences deserves a separate discussion. This is due to some particular qualities of these two “environments”, which are extremely different from those offered by other platforms.

The industry of online gaming is one of the largest globally, and one of the fastest growing sectors. Indeed, as video games increase in popularity, various complementary platforms have emerged to facilitate communication between users and the creation of online communities. Therefore, even though research about the relationships between videogames and extremism is still at an early stage, the risks associated with the use of video games by extremists are bound to increase in terms of quantity and to diversify in terms of quality.

The main peculiarity of gaming online concerns the fact that it foresees activities (i.e., the game) having a specific purpose (that is, beat opponents, and win) the achievement of which envisages competitiveness and, sometimes, virtual violence. In this regard, several studies claim that there is no evidence of direct causal relationship between violent videogames and real-world violent actions, such as homicides, assaults or shooting incidents.¹⁸³ Of course, it would be simplistic to establish direct links between videogames and terrorist activities. However, this does not exclude the possibility that gaming circles become the incubators for aggressive tendencies and behaviors which could make some individuals vulnerable towards extremists which deliberately use videogames

¹⁸³ On this issue, see: P. M. Markey, C. N., Markey and J. E. French, *Violent video games and real-world violence: Rhetoric versus data*, *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 2015, 4(4), 277; C. J. Ferguson, *The school shooting/violent video game link: Causal relationship or moral panic?* *Journal of investigative psychology and offender profiling*, 2008, 5(1-2), 25-37.

platforms for terrorist purposes.¹⁸⁴ In the contemporary globalized world, very often, relations of casualty are not so linear, but they are still there. Indeed, although since the early 2000s the production of video games by terrorist groups has drastically decreased in frequency, the link between online gaming and violent extremism remains a highly topical issue. This link can be investigated both starting from the features of videogames (e.g. themes, graphics, purpose of the game, etc.), which could be likely to contribute to the creation of cultural atmospheres favorable to radicalization processes, and as regards the risks linked to specific dynamics that can arise in the communication spaces related to online gaming.

Among the most complete studies on the subject there is the one carried out by Lakhani for the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), where, in addition to the so-called “bespoke games” (i.e., videogames created ad hoc by extremist organizations which, as already mentioned, have been declining in number since the last two decades) and the well-known “grooming” (the use of accessory platforms of video games for recruitment purposes – a subject widely covered in the literature), the focus is placed on the risks associated with the “gaming culture”, which is more and more spread and structured among videogamers, especially youngsters, and that can be exploited to trigger the unconscious legitimization of violent behaviors.¹⁸⁵

In another paper, also adopted by the RAN, Schlegel analyzes the threats posed by the processes of “gamification”, i.e. the export of gaming design elements into non-gaming contexts in order to influence users’ behavior. In this

¹⁸⁴ N. Robinson e J. Wittaker, *Playing for Hate? Extremism, Terrorism, and Videogames*, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 2020, 1-36.

¹⁸⁵ S. Lakhani, *Video gaming and (violent) extremism: An exploration of the current landscape, trends, and threats*, Radicalisation Awareness Network (Policy Support), European Commission, 2021.

regard, it is enlightened how the same strategy could be applied in P/CVE programs.¹⁸⁶

Further concerns regard the relationship between the phenomena of violent extremism and augmented reality experiences, which represent the very last development of digital innovation. Among the most popular is the Metaverse, the digital universe created by the owner of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg which everyone can access with his/her avatar and experience 3D and multisensory experiences. The fundamental quality that distinguishes the Metaverse from Facebook and other digital platforms, including those related to gaming, is the “presence”, understood as the feeling of “being” in a given place, where it is possible to act and interact with others.

Furthermore, the Metaverse, unlike other digital applications, stands out for being a technology aimed to “general purpose”, i.e. designed to be used for both recreational and professional purposes, and, therefore, also for criminal and terrorist purposes. In this sense, for some time risks and opportunities related to the Metaverse in terms of radicalization and terrorism has been under the attention of the international community. In a note from the Council of the European Union of 2022, it is highlighted how «all aspects of terrorism can be reinvented in the Metaverse», underlining the need to monitor the development of this technology, still in the enhancement phase, in order to anticipate the risks associated with it in terms of radicalization and terrorism and promptly adapt the regulatory framework.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, perspectives of implementing CT (counter-terrorism) and P/CVE programs focused on the Metaverse was the

¹⁸⁶ L. Schlegel, *The gamification of violent extremism & lessons for P/CVE*, Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, 1-15.

¹⁸⁷ Council of the European Union, *The Metaverse in the context of the fight against terrorism*, Special Report (June 2, 2022), <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9292-2022-INIT/en/pdf>.

subject of a workshop organized in 2022 by the United Nations “Office for Counter Terrorism”.¹⁸⁸

4 – Jihadism under the wave of technological development

The exponential gap and the consequent expansion of the attack surface describe a situation of chronic delay of our institutions and security systems with respect to criminal phenomena. Technology advances around the world. The entropic drifts resulting from endemic Westernization increases security risks to Western democracies.

In this context, the prophecies about the decline of the West seem destined to come true.

However, these entropic drifts also turn against the subjects who suffer them, and this also seems to apply to contemporary jihadism. This means, therefore, that jihadism, here understood as an entity aimed at an objective, is destined to remain subjugated by the means-end reversal described in the previous pages. But to support this thesis, the terms of the problem must be described in detail.

The end of global *Ĝihād* seems to be multifaceted and has changed throughout history. First of all, it should be outlined a distinction between the approach of *al-Qā'idah* and that of *Dāesh*. The former, in fact, for most of its history, addresses its call to *Ĝihād* against the political elites of those countries of

¹⁸⁸ Office of Counter-Terrorism (United Nations), *Safeguarding the Metaverse: Countering Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism in Digital Space* - Expert Panel, November 2022, available on <https://t.ly/u-1yj>.

the Islamic world allied to the West.¹⁸⁹ The organization of the Islamic state, on the other hand, while adopting a *Takfirī* posture towards its coreligionists, gives priority to the internationalization of *Ġihād*, especially in the West. Here, in fact, *Dāesh* has been the trademark of most of the terrorist attacks of jihadist inspiration accomplished in European metropolis and villages. This difference in target also implies a different *modus operandi*: if the fight against the impious Muslim regimes can be waged from within the House of Islam (e.g., throughout guerrilla warfare), the fight against the distant enemy necessarily implies a strictly terroristic strategy. Furthermore, it is worth specifying that the discrepancies in target between these two organizations reflects the diachronic evolution of the jihadist project. The organization of the Islamic state, in fact, arose from an internal ideological fracture within *al-Qā'idah*, from which a more extremist and bloodthirsty fringe led by Abū Mus'ab al-Zarqāwī separated in 2004. The appointment of Ayman al-Ḍawāhirī, then, as head of *al-Qā'idah* after Bin Lāden's death has also caused disunity and discord. In fact, only the Yemeni branch of *al-Qā'idah* sworn allegiance to the new leader, while the fringes of *al-Qā'idah* in Iraq (AQI) and in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) limited themselves to declarations of deference.¹⁹⁰ In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, while *al-Qā'idah* slackened due to the change of leadership, the newborn organization of the Islamic state consolidated its first territorial nucleus, realizing what had already been an objective of *al-Qā'idah* in the previous decade, i.e. the establishment of the «pious caliphate».¹⁹¹ The latter, which in Bin Lāden's plans would have been

¹⁸⁹ This extremist vision of Islamic universalism must be placed in the historical context of the Soviet penetration in Afghanistan, first, and in Saudi Arabia, then. The reasons for the anti-American claims have been systematized, among others, in the *Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holiest Sites*, an English translation available on the website of the Combating Terrorism Center, available on <https://t.ly/CSO1>.

¹⁹⁰ See J. P. Filiu, *Al-Qaeda since the Death of Bin Lāden*, European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2012, available on <https://www.iemed.org/publication/al-qaeda-since-the-death-of-bin-lāden/>.

¹⁹¹ See *Pakistan Interviews Usama Bin Ladin*, March 18, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) 1997, available on <http://hdl.handle.net/10066/4735>.

founded in Afghanistan, was established by *Dāesh*, under the rule of Abū Bakr al-Baghdādī, in 2014 with the proclamation of the Caliphate between Iraq and Syria.

Therefore, although *al-Qā'idah* has not stopped its activity, since the post Arab Spring the global *Ġihād* scene has been mainly occupied by the *Dāesh*, whose main objective is to fight the apostates (in Arabic *murtaddīn*) through the weakening of their Western allies. This has had serious consequences in Europe, where most of the terrorist attacks recorded in the period between 2014 and 2019 were claimed precisely by IS. Here, the Islamic extremist threat has progressively penetrated the social dynamics, giving rise to the phenomenon of «antagonistic integration».¹⁹² Undoubtedly, this would not have been possible without resorting to technology and digital devices, which, as we tried to show in the previous paragraph, have allowed unprecedented results in terms of propaganda and recruitment, that is, in terms of effectiveness and efficiency.

But that comes at a price.

The will to maximize the advantages that can derive from the use of techno-scientific products has led to the adoption of unprecedented tactics and strategies which, in turn, affected the true nature of the jihadist system.

4.1 – Beyond the *aut-aut* between *lġtihād* and *Taqīd*

Contemporary jihadism not only rejects the *Taqīd*, as it is done by variably moderate Islamic currents, but its hasty propaganda has nihilated the very debate on the alternative character of Interpretation with respect to Tradition. Jihadism, as already said, stands out for a change of attitude towards sources of Islamic Law. Islamic radicals, in fact, reject the ban on the direct interpretation of the

¹⁹² See C. Sbailò, *Europe's call to arms*, cit. 158-160.

holy texts. This attitude, inherited from Salafism, is certainly not a consequence of the use of technology, but it seems to have been exacerbated by the digitization of propaganda and proselytism, which, in turn, led to an ideological hybridization that seems even difficult to trace back to forms of neo-*iġtihād*.

4.1.1 – Ideological Hybridization

In 2022 the European Commission outlined the tendency of contemporary jihadism «to detach from ideological coherence and traditional ‘brands/groups’ such as *al-Qā’idah* and ISIS, in favor of wider perceptions and acceptance of violent extremists ideologies», thus warning against the emergence of «hybrid ideologies».¹⁹³ Increasingly relying on the Internet, the jihadist propaganda system have gradually abandoned the top-down communication paradigm for one of a horizontal nature, in which each user is potentially both the recipient and the producer of jihadist material.¹⁹⁴ The Internet, by its nature, makes all users “prosumers”, i.e. *pro*-ducers and *con*-sumers of contents at the same time.¹⁹⁵ The landscape of prosumers is potentially boundless, and, therefore, very heterogeneous from a socio-cultural, psychological and ideological point of view. On the web, then, the contents are not only shared, but elaborated, reframed and combined with other contents found online or with inputs coming from the background of the prosumer. As in Chinese Whispers, at each node of the chain the message to be transmitted can be modified, lose some elements and/or

¹⁹³ Strategic orientations on a coordinated EU approach to prevention of radicalisation for 2022-2023, European Commission.

¹⁹⁴ See M. Arnaboldi, L. Vidino, *Califfato, social e sciama in Europa: l’appeal della propaganda dello Stato Islamico tra i nostri aspiranti jihadisti*, in “Twitter e Jihad: la comunicazione dell’Isis”, ISPI, 2015, 135-155.

¹⁹⁵ See M. Vergani, *Neo-Jihadist Prosumers and Al Qaeda Single Narrative: The Case Study of Giuliano Delnevo*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37(7), 2014.

acquire some new, and therefore radically change with respect to the starting one. These mechanisms favor both ideological hybridization and ideological flattening, and, in the case of jihadism, they produce what some authors have defined as forms of “neo-jihadism”, meant as the re-interpretation of the mainstream jihadist narrative creating hybrid symbols and identities.¹⁹⁶ An example which, in this sense, can provide a suitable school case is that of the radicalized Italian Giuliano Delnevo, which left Italy to reach Syria in 2013. In fact, from his online activism it emerges that Delnevo combined some typical elements of *al-Qā'idah* narrative (such as the celebration of jihadist martyrdom, the rigid division of the world into “good” and “bad”, the victimization of Islam and Muslims, the outrage at alleged acts of blasphemy against the Prophet Muḥammad, and so on) with extraneous elements (such as the admiration for Ernesto Che Guevara, the call for the restoration of an unidentified golden age in Italy, cinematographic tastes oriented towards films that portray behavior of crime and delinquency in contrast with Islam, etc.), thus giving rise to a heterodox form of jihadism.¹⁹⁷

In addition to ideological hybridization, digitalization produces decentralization, which, in turn, favors ideological arbitrariness: the legitimacy of a message is no longer the product of the authority of whoever formulated it, nor of its coherence with a doctrine or an exegetical methodology, but is measured in terms of its ability to appeal and, therefore, to survive on the web. Ideological flattening makes ideology, or what remains of it, available to anyone, giving rise to forms of radicalization and acts of terrorism that are difficult to trace back to a specific belief system and, therefore, often attributed to mental health disorders.

¹⁹⁶ See P. Lentini, *Neojihadism: Towards a new understanding of terrorism and extremism?*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013.

¹⁹⁷ See M. Vergani, cit.

4.1.2 –Ambiguous plots and mental health

This dilution of the jihadist ideological framework seems to explain the relatively high number of attacks which, although perpetrated with methods similar to those of the jihadist “lone wolves”, are not directly attributable to the trail of Islamic terrorism. The Europol TEA-SAT report for the year 2022 reports the case of three attacks of this kind which took place in Germany at the hands of three men of Iraqi, Afghan and Somalian nationality. They carried out three stab attacks that were not attributed to religious radicalism, even though in all cases there was evidence of links with the jihadist cause: the first one of the attackers had already been investigated for terrorism in 2017, the second one was heard shouting «*Allah Akbar*» (literally “Allah is greater”, an exclamation integrated into traditional Sunni orthopraxy and sadly adopted as the banner of Ġihād) while hitting the victims, and the third one asked to its victims some explanations about their origins before attacking them, a behavior which could be linked to the *takfīrī* narrative.¹⁹⁸

Similar cases have also been observed in Italy. In April 2023, in the town of Vicenza, a man of Moroccan nationality, after shouting «*Allah Akbar*» for a long time in the middle of the street, shot a policeman and was killed in a firefight with the gendarmes. In the same days, in the historic center of Sanremo, a Sudanese immigrant attacked his former employer, who was also Jewish, shouting «*Allah Akbar*». Both events have been traced back to situations of psychic and psychiatric problems of the aggressors.¹⁹⁹ In this framework, in fact, the annihilation of jihadist ideology on the web also seems to explain the growing

¹⁹⁸ See European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE_SAT) 2023, available on https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Europol_TE-SAT_2023.pdf

¹⁹⁹ See: F. Enrico, *Vicenza, urla “Allah akbar” e spara a un vigile. Ucciso dai carabinieri*, Repubblica, 2023, available on <https://tinyurl.com/yeywtzmz>; P. Isaia, *Straniero aggredisce commerciante per strada, ricoverato in Psichiatria*, Il Secolo XIX, 2023, available on <https://tinyurl.com/3mhd73te>.

concerns about the intersection between extremism and mental illness. The passage to the violent act does not necessarily result from adherence *tout cour* to an ideological system, but can simply derive from the random exposure to violent contents, often via the web, with devastating results in psychologically precarious subjects.

There are numerous theories and scientific research that investigate the connections between mental health and the attitude to embrace extremist views. The Radicalization Awareness Network has even established a working group on the subject, aimed to prevent the triggering of radicalization of vulnerable individual.²⁰⁰ Scholars seem to agree on the importance of involving mental health practitioners in the strategies for tackling terrorism and extremism, and links have been found between the occurrence of love wolves' behaviors and mental disorders. However, the recourse to sole psychology and psychiatry has not proved sufficient to identify a particular psychiatric profile prone to radicalization.²⁰¹ This confirms, on the one hand, the need to deal with the theme of radicalization through an interdisciplinary approach and, on the other, to make an intellectual effort to go back to the roots of the phenomena, rather than just describing the combinations of factors that come with their manifestation.

4.2 – Islamization of extremism or extremization of Islam?

One could claim that cases of both ideological hybridization and of intersection between mental disorders and radicalization call into question the

²⁰⁰ Web page of RAN Mental Health Working Group available on <https://tinyurl.com/2yu2f2vm>.

²⁰¹ See B. Misiak et al., *A systematic review on the relationship between mental health, radicalization and mass violence*, cit.

true nature of contemporary forms of jihadism and its Islamic roots. These dynamics could be traced back to the phenomenon that Olivier Roy calls “deculturation of the religious”, which consists in the release of religious knowledge from its cultural, philosophical and literary roots. The Internet is undoubtedly a facilitator of this process, since the syntax of the web favors information over knowledge.²⁰² As far as jihadism is concerned, we would talk about the “dejihadization” of radicalism, in which the call to *Ġihād* takes the form of a generic call to violence – or, at least, is received as such. Embracing this view, one could object that nowadays it makes no sense to study the religious roots of jihadism, since it has reduced to a mere violent subculture or an anti-system current of thought. But these forms of “dejihadized radicalization”, or “neo-jihadism”, are only one facet of a complex phenomenon that, over time has taken on new forms that have not supplanted but complemented the previous ones. In fact, alongside the radicalized individual with psychic problems, barely aware of the ideological framework that inspired his move to action, we still observe cases of jihadists who radicalize themselves after voluntary conversion to Islam or through direct affiliation with terrorist organizations. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that hybridized forms of jihadism are the degeneration of mainstream jihadist narratives and thinking. The study of the latter, therefore, is still functional to the anticipation and combat against the former.

Rather, the analysis carried out so far, despite enlightening some advantages from the resort to the digital, seems to question the unity of the jihadist system as a whole.

The flexibility and horizontality of the internet unequivocally bring some advantages to criminal entities. The jihadist narrative, open to the personal

²⁰² Olivier Roy has expressed his thoughts on this in various writings, the most comprehensive of which is *La sainte Ignorance, le temps de la religion sans culture*, Edition du Seuil, 2008.

interpretation by every single user, has a greater chance of acquiring followers. Furthermore, the horizontality of the web makes the jihadist front liquid and non-hierarchical, or, at list, hierarchically heterogeneous. This makes it difficult to identify operational strategies and anticipate both radicalization processes and terrorist attacks, which can occur in response to an explicit “call to arms” by the terrorist organization, but also on free initiative after having received some input. All of this hinders accountability and brings resilience to organizations. Therefore, it is likely that the trend of digitization of jihadism will consolidate and increase.

However, the resort to technology has also disadvantages and the cons seem to outweigh the pros. In fact, ideological hybridization is likely to create fractures and divisions within the jihadist landscape, some fringes of which could gather around specific, even unusual, ideological nuances and claim independence from the main group.²⁰³ These risks increase with the increasing success of encrypted messaging applications, such as Telegram, which favor the creation of ideological echo chambers.²⁰⁴ The ideological flattening, in turn, annihilates the identifying features of jihadism and pushes it away from achieving its goals. This was demonstrated by the recording of numerous attacks that, barely attributable to the trail of terrorism, are far from bringing the media and intimidatory results obtained by the operations orchestrated by the first generation of jihadists.

The dynamics described in this paragraph, in fact, call into question the entire jihadist project, its ideology and the ability to achieve its main end, which is to defeat the West. Islamic radicalism, greedy for the boost of power that only Technique can give, is the victim of the reversal means-ends. The radicalization

²⁰³ See T. Hegghammer, *The ideological hybridization of jihadi groups. Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 9, 2009, 26-46.

²⁰⁴ On the role of the “echo chambers” phenomenon in triggering radicalization processes in the USA, see S. Shane, M. Apuzzo and E. Schmitt, *Americans Attracted to ISIS Find an ‘Echo Chamber’ on Social Media*, the New York Times, available on <https://tinyurl.com/yk6hzzfz>.

processes, mostly triggered by online inputs, are part of a project kept alive thanks to the branding of the jihadist cause allowed by the web, but ideologically weakened by the use of digital Media.

CHAPTER IV

Jihadist radicalization in Europe and in Italy: patterns, trends, and perspectives

1- Historical Roots of Home-grown jihadism in Europe

In the third millennium, beside forms of terrorism linked to old standing political and cultural issues which mainly affected the old continent at national level, European countries began to be affected by a new type of terrorism with exogenous roots, which was responsible for major terrorist massacre of the first two decades of the XXI century.

In Europe, until the early 2000 radicalization phenomena leading to violent behaviors and to terrorism had been witnessed mostly at a national level, when Spain and UK were struck by two train bombings, respectively in 2004 and 2005. During the previous decades, terrorist organizations were mainly structured on a national scope – even though forms of cooperation between criminal entities sharing the same ideological background did exist. Also their aims, that were the achievement of societal and political change, mainly pertained to national-scope projects. Major terrorist phenomena of a strictly transnational type appeared only in the third millennium even in those countries, including Italy, which had already experienced forms of “triggered terrorism” and “widespread terrorism”. One could claim that forms of transnational terrorism had been witnessed at the hands of anarchist, leftist and jihadist movements in correspondence to the second wave of globalization which occurred in the late XX century. Examples of the latter are the kidnapping of Israeli athletes at the hand of the Palestinian

“Black September” during the Munich Olympics (1972), the hijacking of Air India 182 by the terrorist group Babbar Khalsa (1985), and the Paris bombing by Algerian terrorists close to the *Group Islamique Armée* (1995), which occurred, respectively, as expression of the Palestinian resistance against Israel, in response to the Indian action against the Sikh separatist movement, and in opposition to the French support to the Algerian regime. What brings together the abovementioned incidents is the Westphalian-shaped logic structure on which they are based and the state-national paradigm they follow. The organizations responsible themselves had their headquarters and their top leaders on the territory of the country in which they aimed to achieve their results. The desired outcomes of the terrorist attack, even if the latter was carried out abroad, were measured in the national-state context (this notwithstanding, their behaviors had security implications also abroad).

The 9/11 terrorist attacks, carried out simultaneously in Washington and New York, are an historical turning point towards the consolidation of true transnational terrorism. The attacks were planned abroad and carried out inside the US. Moreover, they were plotted by a terrorist organization which was settled in Middle East, but with branches also in the West, specifically in Europe, and whose principal aim was the weakening of Western countries supporting secular regimes in the MENA area. Major efforts were addressed to the United States, which after the arrival of US military arsenals in Saudi Arabia during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (1990) became the main target of *al-Qā'idah*. As it was already mentioned, the organization, back from more than a decade of anti-Soviet resistance in alliance with the United States, didn't accept the presence of “infidels” on the holy ground of Saudi Arabia, worse, with the approval of the royal family. A long series of actions attributable to, or claimed by, *al-Qā'idah* against the Western superpower were recorded before 9/11 hijackings, such as the previous bombing to the World Trade Center (1993), the attack against 18

American operation forces in Mogadishu (1993), and the US embassies bombings in Kenya and Tanzania (1998). The 9/11 attacks, therefore, were part of a wide geopolitical project – whose further steps would have been accomplished in Europe – to be achieved through the strategic resort to violence in different countries of the globe, all at the hands of a terrorist entity behaving without regard to state-national borders.

However, it is worth enlightening at the edge of the third millennium, *al-Qā'idah* was still rigidly structured from an organizational point of view, although there was already a slight decentralization of some cells in Europe. The organization owned physical operational bases and training camps disseminated between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Africa, its “services offices” (*maktab al-Ḥadamāt*) for recruiting and fund-raising were spread all over the world. Moreover, the organization had a clear hierarchical pyramid which in 2001 was dominated by Osama Bin Lāden and ‘Abdullāh al-‘Azzām. But starting from the early XXI century, the increasing attention from the American and European Intelligence communities, together with the geopolitical juncture witnessed in the years that followed, led *al-Qā'idah* and the whole jihadist landscape to leave these last organizational constraints in favor of innovative models, cheaper both in terms of economic resources and logistical efforts, even more effective for the achievement of strategic goals and increasingly resilient to tackling measures.²⁰⁵

Of course, a major step was related to the requalification of the relationship with territory, that progressively ceased to be the sole ground on which carry out dangerous and expensive recruiting, training, and fund-raising activities. Territory, indeed, has ended up merging into the virtual environment.

²⁰⁵ About the shift in structure of *al-Qā'idah* see R. Gunaratna, *The evolution of al Qaeda*, in “Countering the financing of terrorism”, Routledge, 2007, 63-78.

The merging of the physical milieu into the digital one has brought further changes regarding, among other, the hierarchical structure.

The leaders of *al-Qā'idah* have long been the uncontested masterminds of the global *Ĝihād*, responsible for the identification of the strategy to adopt and having the last word on which behaviors were in line with the organization's ideology and which were not. But in the first two decades of the XXI century, most efforts have been made in the promotion of the individual acceptance of the jihadist appeal, thus triggering radicalization processes, often with no regard to formal adhesion to the mother organization. Paradoxically, these developments marked a major step towards individualism at the expense to traditional Islamic communitarianism.

The shift of paradigm witnessed after 9/11 led to the emergence in Europe of the so-called "Home-grown jihadism", which was not accompanied by the complete disappearance of the paradigm which was in force before. In fact, it would be extremely simplistic to imagine those changes as some kind of sudden transformation, where previous schemes are totally displaced by the new ones. Such a position would reflect a linear and binary way of thinking, shaped on the assumption of symmetry and congruence which, in turn, results from the classical binomial "inside/outside", "before/after", and "yes, it is/no, it isn't". That's not to say that his conceptual horizon has not disappeared, but it isn't anymore the only one possible.

Since the aftermath of the Arab Spring, some kind of hybridization among exogenous and home-grown radicalism was witnessed: European extremists started participating in the jihadist struggle side by side with Muslim foreigners, including both first generation immigrants legally based in Europe and irregular immigrants seeking for political asylum.

This chapter is dedicated to the analyses of the contemporary jihadist landscape in Europe and in Italy, aiming at enlightening the major steps that led to the emergence of the so-called “home-grown” European jihadism. The focus will be on evolving patterns and trends of Islamic radicalization across the end of the 1900s and the beginning of 2000s, with particular attention to the Italian scenario.

1.1 The Parable of European Jihadism from 1979 to 2011

The evolution of Islamic terrorism on European soil is historically linked to the geopolitical repercussion of historical developments resulting from the end of the Cold War, the Western policy of interventionism in the MENA area, and the 2011-2012 uprisings known under the name of “Arab Springs”. Those developments and their consequences interacted with the effects of the digital revolution which resulted from the consolidation of innovations linked to the Internet and the spread of technological devices all over the world. The migration of the jihadist universe on the Internet, as already described, has not occurred all at once, nor activities on the ground have completely been stopped. Between 1979 and 2011, in fact, it was observed a deep change of paradigm of European jihadism towards a more liquid and unstructured model, while in the following decade a process of “hybridization” of the paradigms that had previously alternated was recorded.

For a diachronic reconstruction of the development of European jihadism, factors related to both the collective and individual spheres, as well as the mutual interaction between them should be taken into account. Among the aforementioned factors there are, for example, the internal organization of cells, their relationships with the “outside” and the radicalization patterns of jihadists.

The appearance and stabilization in Europe of the first terrorist cells took place in the Eighties – that is, in the decade between the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the collapse of the USSR – at the hand of some of the first Muslim immigrants in Europe. In this period, jihadist militants on European soil were still limited in number. Most of them came from the battalions of the Afghan resistance and from militant organizations hostile to the governments of their countries of origin. In Europe they obtained international protection as refugees. Indeed, their adhesion to the jihadist cause had occurred in Middle East. These early European jihadists were organized into cells internally arranged in precise hierarchies and linked to each other by relationships limited to manifestations of mutual ideological solidarity. Their relationship with Europe was purely utilitarian: the European countries that hosted them were not more than the operational bases from which they could act undisturbed, although they firmly rejected Western values which were considered too liberal.²⁰⁶

In the second half of the Nineties, then, a strategic and operational reorganization accompanied a gradual change of target, initiating a process of “globalization” of jihadist terrorism. *Al-Qā'idah* leaders considered that the most effective way to overthrow those regimes in the Islamic world considered apostate and corrupted was no longer local armed militancy coordinated from the outside (i.e., from Europe), but the interruption of the economic and military support provided to them by Western countries. The latter, in fact, since the very late period of American-Russian bipolarism, had been funding policies of democratic and economic liberalization in the area, which ended up having a destabilizing effect in several countries, also giving impetus to Islamic radicalism in the MENA area.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶See L. Vidino, *Radicalization, linkage, and diversity*, cit.

²⁰⁷ For decades, the West has granted, in alternating phases, financial support to North African regimes according to the strategic role they could play during the Cold War, before, and in the “War against

The jihadist struggle carried out in Afghanistan, as well as in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kashmir, fell under the project of a “global jihad” coordinated by Osama Bin Lāden against all the apostates and infidels, both in the Islamic world and in the West. So, European jihadist cells gradually ended up falling under *al-Qā'idah* control, thus taking the shape of a “network” of units which were cohesive both at the operational level and with regard to the objective to be achieved, namely, the annihilation of the West.²⁰⁸

At this stage, unlike what was observed in the Eighties, processes of radicalization, which continued to affect mainly first-generation immigrants, took place directly on European soil and were triggered by personal relationships with figures who carried out recruitment and indoctrination activities, especially in places such as prisons and radical mosques.

In the period between 9/11 and the Arab Spring, the increased attention of the Western authorities to the terrorist threat led to the slowdown of *al-Qā'idah* project. American actions in Afghanistan and intelligence activities conducted in Europe made it increasingly difficult for the central organization and the single cells to coordinate to each other, leading the latter to become more operationally autonomous and independent. In this context, which progressively became inhospitable to the model of the “transnational network”, European jihadism acquired more and more a national dimension, both in operational and organizational terms, and regarding the thematic focus, even though the single action still fell under the global *Ĝihād* project. Thus, the jihadist terrorist attacks recorded in Europe in the 2000s were planned and carried out mostly by individuals without affiliations with terrorist organizations. The motivations that

Terror”, after. In this area, this dynamic determined a double wave of constitutional reforms, whose destructive social effects led to the outbreak of the “Arab Springs”. See C. Sbailò, *Il doppio ciclo politico-costituzionale del Nord Africa*, in “Diritto Pubblico dell’Islam Mediterraneo”, cit., 41-47.

²⁰⁸G. Kepel, *Fitna*, cit. 113 and ff.

triggered the phenomena of radicalization, moreover, were often attributable to the internal domestic sphere, as well as the objectives of the actions of violence and those targeted by jihadist propaganda. The adoption of religious extremist ideologies, that in the previous decade took place mainly following a “top-down” pattern – that is, terrorist organizations used to go looking for adepts to indoctrinate – in the new millennium takes place mostly according to a “bottom-up” pattern – i.e., by individual and autonomous initiative.²⁰⁹

1.2 - The “hybridization” of European jihadism after the Arab Spring

In the afterwards of the Arab Spring and its geopolitical consequences, including the rise and dissolution of the IS and the outbreak of the Libyan civil war, a new season of jihadist effervescence can be observed both in the Middle East and in Europe. The Islamic state has become the “brand” under which some of the bloodiest attacks in European history were carried out, such as the Paris attacks of 29th January and 13th November 2015, the Nice massacre of 14th July 2016 and the Berlin attack of 19th December 2016, which recorded, respectively, 130, 85 and 12 victims.²¹⁰ The migration emergency, that was utterly mismanaged by European authorities, renovated the liaison between immigration and Islamic terrorism which had been witnessed in the Nineties and apparently exceeded in the 2000s. The attacks carried out in Europe after 2011 have highlighted, in fact,

²⁰⁹For a case study of the attacks carried out and foiled in Europe between 2006 and 2010, see L. Vidino *Radicalization, linkage, and diversity*, cit.

²¹⁰In paragraph 1.2, data on the number of victims, as well as data on the origins of jihadists who have carried out attacks or who have participated in terrorist activities on European territory are taken from Europol's annual reports on the terrorist situation (European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg), available on the website: www.europol.europa.eu

a process of hybridization of European jihadism: alongside the model that had prevailed in the previous decade – marked by poor internal hierarchy, lack of affiliations, and spontaneous individual radicalization – some features that had characterized the jihadist model observed in Europe in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR appeared again – marked by rigid internal hierarchies, direct affiliations with terrorist organizations and radicalization triggered by external agents. The methods of planning and implementing the attacks also reflect an overlap of paradigms, with the alternation of attacks designed for individual initiative and complex operations coordinated from the outside. The biographies of perpetrators, then, highlight the threat posed by the processes of self-radicalization, especially online, suggesting at the same time the return to prominence of the recruitment model of *al-Qā'idah*, based on the sharing of radical milieu.²¹¹

The operational models of the latest terrorist attacks carried out in Europe, as well, are of a diverse nature: beside a slight majority of unscripted and rudimentary attack (e.g., the attack on the Christmas market in Berlin, or the Nice attack in the Promenade des Anglais), several planned-in-details attacks demanding high levels of coordination are still witnessed (e.g., the Paris attacks at the Stade de France and the Bataclan event hall). However, it is important to underline that phenomena of the second type are not new to Western intelligence and Law enforcements. Although unique in its kind, the 9/11 attack also fits into this typology. The vulnerabilities identified in the aftermath of the intelligence failure, moreover, represent a huge heritage of “lessons learnt” in the field of intelligence cooperation and fight against terrorism²¹².

²¹¹See S. Brzuszkiewicz, *Radicalisation in Europe after the fall of Islamic state: Trends and risks*, *European View*, 17(2), 2018, 145-154.

²¹² In the years following 9/11, US Government instituted the “National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States” and the Select Committee on Intelligence, which were responsible, respectively, for detecting the circumstances which led to the intelligence failure and for reconstructing the Intelligence

Phenomena of the second type, instead, are relatively new to Western security forces. Furthermore, it is objectively difficult for the judiciary to prosecute processes of spontaneous radicalization before they lead to the criminal act. Such a task could more easily fall within tasks of the intelligence, which, however, face equally complex problems in monitoring a phenomenon, that of jihadism, which has found a potentially boundless field of action on the web. Moreover, this field of action often includes “virtual spaces”, such as social networks and augmented reality platforms, which are poorly regulated by State laws. In fact, it is widely agreed within the scientific community that the decisive challenge against violent extremism phenomena of will be waged on the Internet.

1.2.1 – European Jihadists among home-grown and foreigners

In addition to the coexistence of different organizational models and radicalization patterns, in the period following 2011, information on the origin of the jihadists judged responsible for having carried out, or simply warped, terrorist attacks on European soil is quite variegated. Although the data available do not include cases of non-violent radicalization – which constitute a subsection of “submerged radicalization” that escapes official estimates – they still give a reliable indication of the rate of foreign nationals among jihadists operating within European borders.

In the period between 2015 and 2022, immigrants constitute a large percentage of the jihadists arrested within Europe, and among them there are also refugees. In 2020, 50% of the attackers are non-European citizens; in 2019

activity carried out before the American invasion of Iraq. The interpretative errors made by the USA intelligence community are analyzed in depth in C. Sbaìò, *Dall'11 settembre all'emergenza Covid-19*, cit., 35-60

the estimate of foreigners among the attackers stands at 21 out of a total of 54 (of which 7 from unidentified nationality). In 2018 and in 2017, there was a slight prevalence of radicalized “home-grown” (in both cases 4 out of 7). In 2015 and 2016, two years in which there was a peak in jihadist violence both in terms of number of attacks and number of victims, the rate of non-European citizens is particularly significant among those responsible for the attacks of wider scope: if most of the perpetrators of the attacks in Paris in 2015 are second-generation Muslims, the attackers in Nice and Berlin are both Tunisian citizens. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the individual responsible for the Berlin attack is an irregular immigrant who arrived illegally in Europe from Sicily. The Nice bomber, in turn, regularly went to Italy to bring food to Syrian immigrants.²¹³ These data highlight the transnational character of the jihadist threat.

The three attacks recorded in 2021 in France, Spain and Germany were perpetrated by foreign citizens – respectively, a Moroccan, a Tunisian and a Syrian – including a refugee. Data on arrests also suggest a majority of non-European citizens and individuals provided of European passports but born outside the borders of the Union.

In 2022, the last year for which Europol published official data, a general decrease in the number of jihadist attack was witnessed. A total of six attacks were recorded (eleven in the previous year), of which two were completed and four were thwarted. The number of arrests for crimes related to jihadist terrorism, on the other hand, remains stable (266 in 2022 against 260 in 2021), with a significant proportion of non-EU citizens (36%). In Italy, the number of arrests is relatively high (21), in line with the figures of countries traditionally

²¹³ *Isis, l'attentatore di Nizza si recava regolarmente in Italia. Radicalizzato da un anno*, Repubblica.it, 2016, available on https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2016/10/06/news/isis_l_attentatore_di_nizza_si_recava_regolarment_e_in_italia_radicalizzato_da_un_anno-149237121/.

affected by Islamic terrorism, such as Belgium (22 arrests) and the Netherlands (21).

As far as Italy is concerned, the intelligence services have underlined the risks posed by the returning foreign fighters, who intend to come back to Italy by exploiting the networks of irregular immigration.²¹⁴ Foreign fighters' numbers reached its peak in the period of maximum expansion of the Islamic state and their progressive return to Europe is likely to fuel the terrorist threat in the years to come. Although cases of recidivism among terrorists are lower compared to numbers recorded for common criminals,²¹⁵ returning foreign fighters pose significant security risks for their country, given the high-level expertise acquired in Middle Eastern battlefields. Moreover, they pose a triple legal, political and social challenge. First, in order to bring the returnees to justice, the courts are supposed to prosecute crimes committed during the period spent in Syria and Iraq, a task which results to be extremely complicated. Secondly, the governments of the countries of return often must confront a public opinion strongly opposed to welcoming back foreign fighters. Thirdly, the repatriation of foreign fighters requires their inclusion in paths of de-radicalization and social rehabilitation with low chances of success in prison contexts.²¹⁶

Although in recent years the debate on Islamic radicalization has focused mainly on the radicalized home-grown, the data suggest that the link between immigration and the terrorist threat does still exist. A significant proportion of European jihadists are not citizens of the Union. The issues of border control, on the one hand, and the integration of immigrant communities, on the other, remain central. The processes of self-radicalization, relatively frequent among

²¹⁴Italian Report on information policy for security (2021), available on www.sicurezza.gov.it

²¹⁵See D. Malet, & R. Hayes, *Foreign Fighter Returnees: An Indefinite Threat? Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32(8), 2020, 1617-1635.

²¹⁶See A. Hoffman, M. Furlan, *Challenges posed by returning foreign fighters*, CW Program on Extremism, 2020.

second and third-generation Muslims, and the models of decentralized and a-hierarchical organization have not replaced, respectively, the processes of radicalization triggered “from above” and traditional terrorist organizations. The former just coexist with the latter.

The observation of the evolution of on contemporary jihadism and radicalization patterns demonstrates how this phenomenon follows an increasingly uneven and unpredictable trend. The progressive integration of Muslims into the European social fabric has certainly fueled the phenomenon of home-grown radicalization, which, however, affects about half of the cases of radicalization leading to the resort to violence observed in recent years, with still relevant numbers of foreigners among jihadists.

From a security point of view, all this leads to greater unpredictability and difficulty in contrasting terrorist phenomena. In the West, all this poses an unprecedented challenge to the political and legal authorities and institutions whose task it is to preserve the integrity of the system without compromising the democratic order. Equally complex is the challenge that European Public Law must face in preventing the threats that can arise from the mismanagement of multi-culturalism.

1.2.2 – Immigration and multi-culturalism

The discourse about the risks factors of Islamic extremism is strictly linked to the coexistence of multiple cultures in the same public space. In Europe, this issue is very relevant today because of from the East and from the South, which have led to the emergence of a true “European Islam”. The is the outcome of the spread of Islam in Europe not only as a religion, but as a cultural and geopolitical

element, linked to the Muslim religion, Arab culture and their historical-philosophical heritage.

Of course, immigration to Europe is something with which European policymakers have had to do for decades, starting with the immigration flows from Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Wall of Berlin. Usually, the 2010/2011 uprisings are considered the trigger for the increase in migratory flows of Arab peoples and Muslims towards Europe. Actually, some statistics show that the emigration rates of Muslims to Europe, but also to other Middle eastern countries, were already skyrocketing in the decade 2000-2010. In fact, the Arab Spring was the culmination of a process of deterioration of the economic and social sphere of several countries of the Muslim world that had begun decades earlier due to the progressive failure of the westernization policies on respective national economies.²¹⁷ Not by chance, such failure can be clearly observed in those countries where the outbreaks had the most relevant political consequences, such as Tunisia and Egypt. However, before the Arab Spring, Southern Europe countries, such as Spain, Italy and France, were already among the favorite destinations of Muslim immigrants. Spain and in Italy were very attractive thanks to the numerous low-skilled employment opportunities and rising living standards. France, on the other hand, has long time been one of the traditional destinations for immigration from North Africa. Indeed, migrants were pushed there mainly for reasons of familiar reunification.²¹⁸ Not even in other Western European countries was the immigration of Muslims a new phenomenon. In the UK and the Netherlands, arrivals peaked with the collapse

²¹⁷ Between the end of the Cold war and the September 11 attacks, North African governments, urged by international economic organizations, adopted a series of economic liberalization and privatization reforms that ended up widening social and economic inequalities. Among the most detrimental results was a general increase in the rate of education and expectations of social mobility, which was not corresponded by an increase in wages or an improvement in the labor market.

²¹⁸ See P. Fargues, C. Fandrich, *Migration after the Arab Spring*, Migration Policy Centre Report 2012/09.

of their colonial empires, while in other countries it was observed as an effect of the labor shortages recorded in the Fifties and the Sixties.²¹⁹

Nonetheless, nowadays the immigration has become an emergency the qualitative change of immigration to the West is remarkable: most of the countries of departure of immigrants willing to reach Europe, both crossing the Mediterranean and through the “Balkan route”, are Islamic countries. Before the Arab spring, instead, most of immigrants came from Eastern Europe and flows from Africa were under control. Italy, as one of the countries of first arrival, had stipulated bilateral agreements with North-African countries for the control of flows and for repatriations. After the political turnover of 2011-2012, these agreements have failed, and the inability to control the migratory phenomenon is seriously threatening Europe from a political, social and security perspective.²²⁰ The management of immigration from the Southern shore of the Mediterranean requires from the EU a great effort to understand and give preventative responses to the political turmoil occurring in the MENA area, and to deal with the Islamic communitarian paradigm. The latter, when exported on European ground, could feed demands for legal self-reference, thus ending up clashing with the Western secularist individualistic model, or merging with emerging Western communitarian instances.

What is certain is that migration flows have led to numerous demographic and social changes. Even in rather homogeneous countries from a historical and cultural point of view – Such as Denmark, Sweden and France – immigration has led to linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversification. As far as Islam is concerned, the consolidation of European Muslim communities has raised the

²¹⁹ See P. Norris, R. F. Inglehart, *Muslim integration into Western cultures: Between origins and destinations*, *Political Studies*, 2012, 60(2) 228-251.

²²⁰ See C. Sbailò, *Dall'11 settembre all'emergenza covid-19*, cit., 150-163.

problem of how to regulate relations between the state and these communities, on the one hand, and that of the role of religion in the public space, on the other.

As regards the institutional status of Islam, the European countries that have been dealing with Islam the longest, such as France and the United Kingdom, have developed peculiar recognition policies, while countries that have only recently become destinations of massive immigration flows from the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, such as Germany or Italy, have developed decentralized or informal recognition strategies.²²¹

As regards the role of religion in society, the latter is closely linked to the management policies of exogenous cultural instances. Two opposite poles, in this sense, are represented by France and the United Kingdom, which are champions, respectively, of the assimilationist and multiculturalist approach. France has implemented an integration model based on the neutralization of public space, whereby religion is reduced to the status of a private fact. Britain, in turn, has adopted a communitarian approach based on cultural relativism. Both models have proved to be ineffective in terms of social stability, with claims, even violent ones, of Islamic religious identity in the French suburbs, and the birth of phenomena of separatism heralding extremist tendencies in the UK.²²²

Germany is a country of more recent immigration if compared to France and Britain, but it is nonetheless affected by growing cultural diversification. On German soil there is a non-homogeneous integration model, where many decisions are left to the *lander*. In general, great attention is paid to the teaching of the national language and the placement of immigrants in the labor market.

²²¹ An in-depth overview of the relations between European Islamic communities and their respective national institutions is provided in B. Godard, Official Recognition of Islam, in S. Amghar, A. Boubekeur, M. Emerson, (cur.). *European Islam: challenges for public policy and society*. CEPS, 2007, 183-203.

²²² On the problematic legal nature of the forced neutralization of public space, see C. Sbailò, *Dopo la strage di Parigi*, cit. Concerning the argument about the concept of “multiculturalism” and “inclusion” in a legal key, see C. Sbailò, *Who Integrates Whom, in What and, above all, Why?*, cit.

All this, according to the paradigm of “promoting and demanding”, i.e. based on the search for a balance between the duty of institutions to protect minorities and the duty of the latter to integrate into the host country.²²³

The Italian strategy for managing the coexistence of multiple cultures is poorly defined, and for this reason criticized by many scholars. The demography of this Mediterranean country has naturally prevented phenomena of “ghettoization”. In fact, the Italian Muslim community is very heterogeneous from the point of view of the nationalities of its components, and this has prevented the emergence of closed and self-referential groups, as happened, for example, in the United Kingdom, where the majority of Muslims come from the countries of the former British Empire. Again for demographic reasons, since Italy does not have a colonial past and is a country of recent immigration, many Muslims present on national soil aspire to reach central and northern Europe for linguistic and cultural confidence, or to reunite with family members already present there. But in 2023 the migratory flows to Italy show no signs of decreasing and there is a dizzying increase in foreigners, especially Muslims, present illegally on the national territory, risking being intercepted by organized crime or terrorism networks. These are just some of the factors that make it urgent for Italy too to anticipate the threat of Islamic extremism.

2 – The Italian Scenario: a qualitative analysis

In the preceding pages, numerous references have been made to the Italian situation in terms of radicalization and jihadism within the framework of a

²²³ See G. C. Feroni, V. Federico (cur.), *Società multiculturali e percorsi di integrazione: Francia, Germania, Regno Unito ed Italia a confronto*, Firenze University Press, 2017.

global observation of the phenomenon. The latter deserves a more systematic treatment in the Italian context. Despite the increasingly transnational nature of threats, the fluidity of the Internet and the permeability of European borders, each national reality retains historical-cultural specificities and geographical, geopolitical and demographic characteristics for which an *ad hoc* treatment is needed. Furthermore, the scarce politicization of the European public space still requires each member state to formulate its own strategy for the fight against terrorism. Therefore, the next paragraphs will be dedicated to an analysis of Italian jihadism, with particular attention to the impact of technologies and the internet on the organizational and ideological aspects of contemporary Islamic extremism, which reflect, respectively, the new syntax of security threats, and the criminal implications of a widespread nihilistic intellectual attitude.

As it was already said, the demographic circumstances that have made Italy apparently immune to the threat of jihadist terrorism are set to change. In fact, the migratory phenomenon shows no sign of diminishing (as well as the political turmoil in North Africa), and over the years the number of home-grown Muslims is destined to increase. By way of example, it is estimated that by 2050 around 9% of Italian citizens will be Muslims. These figures are not only the direct consequence of migratory flows, but also of cultural factors affecting both foreigners in Italy and Italian society, such as the birth rate, higher in foreigners than in Italian people, or conversions to Islam, which are numerous in Europe and throughout the world. Naturally, all this does not in itself represent a problem for security and social order, but the turn taken by multi-culturalism in other European countries in terms of extremism and terrorism suggests that this issue deserves particular attention. Demographic trends, in fact, interact with socio-economic data, with geopolitical phenomena and with cultural transformations which, to a certain extent, are different from one country to another.

Aims and methodological constraints

The analysis proposed below will make use of information and data on cases of radicalization in Italy available from open and news sources to update the state of the art on the subject, with the ambition of moving along a line of continuity with existing literature in this field. Since this theme was quite extensively treated by scientific research up to mid-2010s, particular attention will be paid to the following period up to 2023.

Research in the field of Islamic radicalization has objective and inherent methodological constraints. The main problem concerns the collection of the data necessary to carry out empirical analyses. In fact, data are available only for cases of radicalization which, having resulted in criminal behavior, are disclosed in the news. But not all radicalization processes culminate in actions punishable by law. Therefore, as already mentioned, there is one subsection of underground radicalization that escapes our estimates. Indeed, the data collected offer only a partial view of the whole phenomenon.

For the same reasons, the assessment of prevailing organizational structures is likely to give corrupted results. The latter could be tainted by the fact that official networks, which have subsidiaries scattered in different geographical areas and which carry out recruitment and propaganda activities within a framework which is structured at hierarchical and organizational level, are more easily identifiable by the intelligence and law enforcement. Indeed, more information is available on this type of jihadism than on the activity of lone actors. The latter, therefore, risk being underrepresented in the analysis of the Italian jihadist landscape.

The problems related to data retrieval pose another constraint, which concerns the possibility of carrying out statistics. In fact, the cases under examination are quite small in number if compared to a much higher number of factors featuring the patterns of radicalization. A statistic assessment that quantifies the occurrence of many characteristics in a relatively limited number of case studies would give somewhat significant results, not allowing the identification of recurring trends. This disproportion would make the attempt to carry out a quantitative analysis useless and methodologically incorrect.

This problem is exacerbated by the presence of asymmetric information from one case to another. Taking into consideration some specific aspects (e.g., the educational level of the subjects involved, their family history or their respect for Islamic orthopraxy), it could happen that such information is not available for all the cases examined. On the other hand, limiting ourselves only to those cases of radicalization of which we have complete and exhaustive information in every respect would mean further restricting the sample observed.

For the aforementioned reasons and consistently with the objective of the present research, which is to demonstrate the connections between the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism and the nihilistic attitude originating into Western thought, the following paragraphs will be dedicated to a qualitative analysis. Therefore, the collected data will be examined in a narrative way and synthesized in a non-numerical form, with the aim of developing key concepts for a global understanding of contemporary Italian jihadism.

2.1 Hints about the history of Italian jihadism

Italy has been scarcely affected by episodes of Islamic terrorism. Someone could explain this by stating that there was no time for this threat to mature. In fact, Italy has recorded high rates of Muslim immigrants only in the last two decades. Therefore, the Italian Muslim community is much smaller than those present in other European countries, and also the number of Muslims born in Italy by foreign parents is quite low if compared with Central and Northern Europe. Nonetheless, Italy has been a fundamental theater of the historical evolution of European jihadism in the period between the late 1980s up to 2000s. At first, jihadists on Italian soil were concentrated in the north of the country (especially in Milan and other cities in Lombardy, such as Gallarate, Varese, Como and Cremona), but then also in southern Italy. Here, they carried out propaganda, recruitment and fundraising activities mainly in support of terrorist groups operating in North Africa. These first Italian jihadists – who we would define as “Italians” not because of their nationality but because of their geographical location – were mostly foreign immigrants coming, sometimes illegally, from North Africa and many of them lived in conditions of socio-economic hardship.²²⁴

However, in the early 2000s, the first Islamic terrorist to take action on Italian territory had a completely different profile from that of the other Italian jihadists operating in the same period. His name was Domenico Quaranta, a 29-year-old Italian citizen from Sicily which had recently converted to Islam. He had a small criminal record and radicalized in prison by some cell mates. Quaranta worked as a house painter, but at the time of the attacks, he lived doing humble odd jobs. Biographical details available are few, but according to some sources Domenico Quaranta was poorly educated. Indeed, it is highly probable that his

²²⁴ See L. Vidino, *Home-grown jihadism in Italy: Birth, Development and Radicalization Dynamics*, ISPI, 2014.

conversion to Islam was not preceded by a path of religious education and that both his profession of faith and his decision to join the jihadist cause took place in almost total ignorance of the Islamic exegesis. This is even more probable since some sources defined Quaranta as “mentally unstable”. In Italy, he carried out four terrorist attacks between 2001 and 2002, three of which perpetrated in Sicily and one in Milan, all organized in a rudimentary way, to the extent that he could not claim even one victim. In 2020, after 16 years in prison, Domenico Quaranta was denounced again, this time not for terrorism, but for vandalism, which the investigators traced back to an attitude of generic anti-system protest and rebellion towards the police. Such were the positions that Domenico Quaranta expressly embraced on his social media profiles.²²⁵

The case of Domenico Quaranta, which is considered by the Italian authorities the first case of jihadist terrorism following home-grown radicalization, offers numerous food for thought on the subject of Islamic radicalization. The historical period in which these attacks were perpetrated (i.e., in the aftermath of the attack on the Twin Towers and the subsequent American invasion of Afghanistan in compliance with the “war on terror” launched by President Bush), in fact, highlights the problems deriving from terrorism as a result of instances of emulation, on the one hand, and the geopolitical dimension of Islamic radicalism, on the other.

Of course, one single case cannot summarize all the features of the Italian jihadist landscape. Unlike the Sicilian terrorist, in fact, many Muslims who became radicalized in the same period and later, as it was already said, were

²²⁵ Information about the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Domenico Quaranta and details on its profile were derived from academic and journalistic sources. See: L. Vidino, *Home-grown jihadism in Italy*, cit., 34-36; M. De Pascalis, *La radicalizzazione del terrorismo islamico. Elementi per uno studio del fenomeno di proselitismo in carcere*, Quaderni ISSP, Ministero della Giustizia, 9, 2012; Lo Verso R. Scala dei Turchi, *Domenico Quaranta denunciato per aver imbrattato la scogliera: era stato arrestato nel 2002 per l'attentato di Milano*, Corriere.it, 2022, available on <https://tinyurl.com/yc4swife>.

foreigners, were not converts and were officially affiliated with terrorist organizations based in Middle East or, at list, had relationships with like-minded subjects.

Another event that, almost ten years later, marked a turning point in the history of Italian jihadism is the attack perpetrated by the Libyan terrorist Muhammad Game against the Santa Barbara barracks in Milan. Game was a 35-year-old engineer who had once been wealthy and had since fallen into disrepair. In 2003 he emigrated to Italy with his family. He lived with his Italian wife and their four children in a battered apartment on the outskirts of Milan and supported himself by doing odd jobs. According to the reconstructions, the radicalization of Game was very gradual and had moments of acceleration following various events concerning both his private life and national public debate. Among the former there is the heart attack he suffered in 2008, following which he rediscovered his religious faith. According to the statements of his family, in fact, Game had begun to frequent the radical mosque in Viale Jannee in Milan and planned to carry out an attack to kill infidels and earn heaven. Concerning public debate, particular attention should be paid to the public confrontation which took place in front of the Ciak theater in Milan between the Italian politician from the Italian right-wing Daniela Santanchè, on the one hand, and some exponents of the Milanese Muslim community, on the other, on the treatment of women in Islam. In fact, Game was very close to some issues of national public debate, such as that around the presence of mosques in Italy, strongly opposed by the Lega Nord party. After this event Game swore allegiance to *al-Qā'idah* and matured the idea of carrying out a suicide attack in Italy. Furthermore, the case of Muhammad Game is marked by the constant use of the Internet to consult Islamic conservative and jihadist material, to identify the target of the attack, to choose which weapon to use and to find the instructions

necessary for its preparation. Finally, it seems that Game has received the logistical support of some of his co-religionists to cram the explosive.²²⁶

The cases of Domenico Quaranta and Muhammad Game are not exhaustive of Italian jihadism not even taken together, and they do not even represent the last stage of its historical evolution. In the years following 2009, the Italian jihadist scene developed on a double track. On the one hand, in the 2010s the European branches of terrorist groups operating in various regions of the Islamic world had subsidiaries on Italian territory, while on the other, the phenomenon of home-grown radicalization was growing also in Italy, albeit at lower levels than that found in other European countries. In 2015, the diffusion of the first propaganda document in Italian, entitled “Lo stato Islamico, una realtà che ti vorrebbe comunicare” reflect the increase in the level of risk also in Italy.²²⁷

However, the two cases mentioned above summarize some of the more complex problems related to the issue of radicalization. Both anticipate the problem of autochthonous radicalization, on which the Italian intelligence services will raise the alarm only in 2009.²²⁸ In particular, Domenico Quaranta exemplifies the problem represented by the Italian citizens who converted to Islam and then to jihadism. The latter, since they are less subject to security checks and perfectly integrated in the country in which they live, can be a strategic outpost of the jihadist network in Italy, especially in the absence of a large generation of second and third generation Muslim immigrants. The theme

²²⁶ See L. Vidino, *Home-grown jihadism*, cit.

²²⁷ F. Marone, *Modernità e tradizione nella propaganda di IS*, 2015, sicurezzanazionale.gov.it, available on <https://tinyurl.com/323nr6np>.

²²⁸ That year, the intelligence report warned against several characteristics that would feature jihadism in the following decade, such as the radicalization of second and third generations of Muslims born in Italy, at the same time as the presence in Europe of *al-Qā'ida* cells ready to hit, and the qualitative leap made by the web, no longer just a privileged vehicle for jihadist propaganda, but also an interactive point of reference for recruitment. See *Relazione al Parlamento 2009*, available on <https://www.sicurezzanazionale.gov.it/sisr.nsf/relazione-annuale/relazione-2009.html>.

of conversion assumes particular importance linked to that of religious education and the relationship with Tradition. Domenico Quaranta was poorly educated and had a very humble standard of living. Rather than embrace radical neo-*iğtihād*, he seems to confirm the tendency of some fringes of contemporary jihadism to move unconsciously, and sometimes naively, on the terrain of Quranic exegesis. This trend is also confirmed by the case of Game, who, like many exponents of the Salafi world and of People's Islam, had a strictly scientific education. Game's *takfīrī* position confirms the jihadist attitude to nihilate Tradition, as if rejecting tradition could give him the power to emancipate himself from his condition of physical and socio-economic fragility.

In the case of Quaranta, then, the passage from common crime to terrorism and then the return to the former is particularly interesting. The context in which radicalization takes place emphasizes the role of prisons as places where adherence to jihadist ideology can take place, on one side, and the frequent concurrence of cases of radicalization with behaviors related to common crime, on the other. In the case of Domenico Quaranta, one wonders to what extent the adherence to a specific ideology is the matrix of his behavior. The events that took place ten years later confirm the criminal attitude of the subject, who is no longer in the ranks of Italian jihadists, but continues to nourish deep-seated anti-system feelings no longer expressed through terrorist violence but with acts of unscrupulous vandalism. Finally, the case of the Sicilian jihadist underlines the frequent concurrence of radicalization in subjects with mental disorders, already mentioned in the previous pages. This issue should follow under the umbrella of psychology and, in worst cases, psychiatry. However, the high frequency rate of cases of radicalization in conjunction with mental disorders seem to enlighten the ideological inconsistency of the jihadist message.

Muhammad Game, in turn, is the first home-grown Italian extremist and one of the few jihadists who actually carried out an attack in Italy. This case

highlights the threat posed by lone wolves, who radicalize themselves and decide autonomously to take action, and thus becoming “self-starters”. Furthermore, the facts involving the Libyan terrorist reflect the national thematic focus sometimes assumed by Islamic extremism, where the terrorist attack also acts as a political retaliation.

Both cases follow a pattern of radicalization that is among the most difficult to detect due to several factors, such as the absence of ties with the structures of international terrorism (both in Game and Quaranta’s case), or stable ties with other radicalized people (which is true at all for Quaranta, and that can be applied to Game until the very few days before his suicide attack). The operational model marked by autonomous initiative and the use of makeshift weapons, on one side, poses a serious challenge in the security field, but, on the other side, is less effective in claiming victims. Finally, the cases of Domenico Quaranta and Muḥammad Game exemplify the most widespread feature in the global jihadist panorama, both at the level of structured networks and at that of the lone actors, i.e. the role of the internet and social media in exacerbating radicalization and fueling anti-system positions. The Internet, therefore, is the undisputed protagonist of the Italian jihadist scene. The latter, as we will see, is very diverse from a demographic and organizational point of view, but the web seems to be the denominator of all cases of radicalization, not without consequences on the phenomenology, and on the destiny, on the jihadist mission.

2.2 – The Italian jihadist landscape

The existence of a large literature that examines European trends in the field makes it possible to compare the analysis of the scenario of Italian Islamic

extremism within the European context. As already mentioned, after the Arab Spring European jihadism has experienced a process of hybridization concerning both its demographic variety and patterns of radicalization. Processes of spontaneous radicalization of lone actors have been found to be flanked by processes of radicalization triggered from outside, and among the jihadists there were both foreigners and European citizens. Existing literature about the Italian situation seems to partially confirm the hybridization process recorded at European level. Between 2010 and 2015, a series of arrests and investigations into cases of radicalization suggested the appearance, also in Italy, of autochthonous forms of jihadism, that is, of increasing numbers of cases of Islamic radicalization affecting Italian citizens as well as foreigners born or grown up in Italy. However, in the mid-2010s, the Italian landscape was rather fragmented and varied. The appearance of forms of home-grown jihadism, characterized by the presence of lone actors, has not led to the disappearance of jihadists among foreigners and immigrants, nor of traditional patterns in which several radicalized individuals gather in clusters and operate in synergy with the subsidiaries of *al-Qā'idah* and the Islamic state abroad.

2.2.1 – Connections between jihadism and immigration

In addressing the issue of Islamic radicalization in Italy, it is essential to examine its relationship with the migratory phenomenon. It would be incorrect to assume a direct causal link between immigration and Islamic radicalism, but it is undeniable that out-of-control migratory flows pose the risk of infiltration of jihadists on European soil. This connection is confirmed by several news stories,

such as the capture by the Italian authorities of a 25-year-old Tunisian immigrant which was found to be part of a branch of *Dāesh* operating in Tunisia²²⁹, or that of a 18-year-old from Tunisia which was arrested for terrorism in Caltanissetta in April 2023. Even more striking are the cases of the terrorists of Berlin Anis Amri (2016) and that of Nice Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel (2020), who also arrived in France via Lampedusa.²³⁰

Moreover, substantial migratory flows can pose indirect security problems, such as those linked to the demographic impact of immigration and the possible negative consequences in terms of social tensions. This category includes the problem of the poor integration of immigrants, who can isolate themselves in marginalized and self-referential communities and develop feelings of revenge towards the rest of the population. Despite the impossibility of identify linear and unique casual links between social marginalization and radicalization, it was outlined that poor integration of immigrants in the hosting community, as well as the sense of no-belonging of second and third generation immigrants toward both their heritage culture and that of the country they live in, can feed attitudes towards extremism. Jihadism promises to give a purpose to their life, and the conversion to the jihadist cause is seen as a major turning point in their existence.²³¹ In Italy, as will be described, similar dynamics have been at the bases of several cases of radicalization, marked by rejection of Italian culture and society and by the desire to redefine one's identity. For historical and geopolitical reasons, the Italian Muslim community is quite varied and there are

²²⁹The man landed in Lampedusa in December 2021 and was headed for northern Europe, see *Terrorismo internazionale: arrestato appartenente al Daesh*, Poliziadistato.it, 2021, available on <https://tinyurl.com/2p9dsrvp>.

²³⁰ See respectively: F. Grignetti, A. Alviani, *Dallo sbarco a Lampedusa alla mancata espulsione: i cinque anni di Anis in Italia*, Lastampa.it, 2016, available on <https://tinyurl.com/7p2efn4v>; Nizza, *l'attentatore era arrivato a settembre a Lampedusa. Doveva lasciare l'Italia in 7 giorni*, ilfattoquotidiano.it, 2020, available on <https://tinyurl.com/24snrnuu>.

²³¹ See S. Lyons-Padilla et al., *Belonging nowhere: Marginalization & radicalization risk among Muslim immigrants*, Behavioral Science & Policy, 2015, 1(2), 1-12.

no phenomena of marginalization and ghettoization comparable to those observed, for instance, in Belgium or the United Kingdom.²³² This is mainly due to the variety and diversification of migratory flows over time, which make segregation phenomena less probable within Italian cities, although the majority of situations of social hardship are concentrated in the suburbs of the latter.²³³ It cannot be excluded, however, that the Italian situation will evolve negatively over time. According to recent statistics, beside the increase in the number of regular foreigners residing in Italy and in the number of residence permits issued by the Italian authorities, it is observed that poverty rate among foreigners is increasing.²³⁴ This seem to be the evidence of the diffusion of forms of underpaid work, which in Italy involve above all the agricultural sector, fueling the social isolation of some groups with respect to the host society with possible security threats.²³⁵

In line with this picture, the connections between jihadism and immigration are observable on several levels. Between the end of the 2010s and the early 2020s the Italian jihadist landscape continues to be extremely diverse as regards the nationality of the subjects involved, among which there are illegal immigrants, foreigners legally residing in Italy and Italian citizens. By way of example, the first two categories include the case of the 18-year-old Syrian illegal

²³² The most important example of ethnic ghettoization in Belgium is represented by the Molenbeek district in Brussels, from which also came most of the attackers responsible for the terrorist attack on November 13th 2015, in Paris. In the United Kingdom, although the phenomena of urban ghettoization are less accentuated, there have been instances of Islamization of public space aimed at giving rise to autonomous jurisdiction known under the name of Londonistan. About connections between urban geopolitics and radicalization, see P. Saberi, *Preventing radicalization in European cities: An urban geopolitical question*, Political Geography, 74, 2019.

²³³ See E. Mingione et al., *Immigrés à Milan : faible ségrégation mais fortes tensions*, Revue Urbanisme, 362, 83-6.

²³⁴ XXVIII Rapporto sulle migrazioni 2022 – Comunicato stampa 1.3.2023, available on <https://tinyurl.com/e8fuapn3>.

²³⁵ See A. Jinkang, *Vulnerabilità e sfruttamento dei lavoratori migranti nell'agricoltura italiana*, Policy Brief, 2022.

immigrant arrested in Messina in 2023 shortly after landing on the Italian coast for participation in an association with terrorism purposes,²³⁶ as well as that of a 22-year-old man from Egypt, whose visa was about to expire, accused to be an irregular ISIS soldier and arrested in Milan in 2018,²³⁷ or the 50-year-old men from Bosnia, legally residing in Italy, arrested in 2019 in Bologna for terrorist financing.²³⁸ The third category includes a multitude of very different cases, such as that of the 21-year-old Italian chemical expert of Kosovar origins, accused of preparing an attack in Trentino and arrested in 2022,²³⁹ or that of the 24-year-old Sicilian convert arrested in 2019 for sharing material jihadist via social media.²⁴⁰

Of course, for cases of jihadists among illegal immigrants it wouldn't be appropriate to talk about home-grown jihadism, since they have become radicalized abroad. However, such cases confirm the connections between the jihadist threat and migratory flows in Italy. These connections have been proved not only by cases of aspiring jihadists among both legal and illegal immigrants, but also by cases of incitement to illegal immigration which ended up being promoting international terrorism. This is the case of the operation "Wet Shoes", with which in the first months of 2023 the Italian authorities arrested three Tunisians belonging to a criminal organization dedicated to facilitating illegal immigration, thus helping IS fighters to reach the European countries they wanted to hit. This operation is only one branch of a much larger investigation

²³⁶ See *Messina, fermato terrorista siriano*, Poliziadistato.it, 2023, available on <https://www.poliziadistato.it/articolo/messina-fermato-terrorista-siriano>.

²³⁷ See F. Berni, *Milano, la vita invisibile di Issam Shalabi, il ragazzo Isis tra casa, moschea e pulizie al fast food*, Corriere della Sera, 2018, available on <https://tinyurl.com/39n4ew38>; N. Palma, *Milano, incubo jihad: il delirio di Issam tra urla e coca*, Il Giorno.it, 2018, available on <https://www.ilgiorno.it/milano/cronaca/terrorista-arrestato-1.4308707>.

²³⁸ See *Terrorismo Bologna, finanziava la Jihad dall'Italia: artigiano arrestato dai carabinieri*, il Resto del Carlino, 2022, available on <https://www.ilrestodelcarlino.it/bologna/cronaca/terrorismo-1.7841641>.

²³⁹ See *Terrorismo, arrestato è perito chimico: "Italiano radicalizzato via web"*, Enti Locali online.it, 2022, <https://www.entilocali-online.it/terrorismo-arrestato-e-perito-chimico-italiano-radicalizzato-via-web/>.

²⁴⁰ See G. Marinaro, *Il palermitano convertito all'Islam che inneggiava alla Jihad*, Agi.it, 2019, available on https://www.agi.it/cronaca/propaganda_jihad_palermo-5344193/news/2019-04-17/.

that began after the attack on the Berlin Christmas markets in 2016 by the Tunisian Anis Amri, who was able to move in Europe thanks to false Italian identity documents.²⁴¹ A similar case concerns an anti-terrorist blitz carried out in Palermo thanks to the revelations of a repentant jihadist about the background of the “ghost landings” and their connections to terrorism.²⁴²

Lastly, the presence of immigrants increases the possibility of creating links between clusters of jihadists located in Italy and branches of *Dāesh* or *al-Qā'idah* located abroad. Indeed, the evolving relationship between the jihadist threats and immigration is likely to impact the trends of aggregation model within jihadists circles.

2.2.2 Networks, clusters and lone-actors

As it was already mentioned, the analysis of the existence or otherwise of formal ties between radicalized individuals and terrorist entities is a bit complex. Jihadists who are members of informal clusters or terrorist networks, in fact, tend to be over-represented compared to self-radicalizing lone wolves. In the first case, the relationships and communications between the members of the clusters or networks produce large quantities of material that the security forces and intelligence can intercept and use to dismantle entire criminal groups. In cases of self-radicalization, on the other hand, the identification of subjects at risk is more complex. It is however possible to identify and monitor suspicious online

²⁴¹ See *È allarme profughi-jihadisti: "Arrivi in Italia per colpire l'Ue*, Ilgiornale.it, 2023, available on <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/allarme-profughi-jihadisti-arrivi-italia-colpire-lue-2111312.html>

²⁴² See *"Rischiare un esercito di kamikaze", parla il pentito della Jihad: 15 fermi*, Palermo Today, 2019, available on <https://www.palermotoday.it/cronaca/immigrazione-clandestina-terrorismo-arresti-9-gennaio-2019.html>.

behaviors. It follows that there is a high probability that the numbers of lone actors are underreported compared to those of their peers who are part of a cluster or a network.

From an overview of the latest cases of radicalization recorded in Italy, the trend of extremists which are part of a cluster or with variably structured and stable relationships foreign jihadist networks seems to prevail on that of the lone actors. Many of the extremists in the cases cited above, for example, had relationships with jihadist circles based abroad and/or like-minded individuals. It is the case of the Bosnian from Bologna, who maintained relationships with an *Imām* of Balkan origins, later arrested for recruitment. The man also managed the transfer of large sums of money from Italy to Bosnia and Albania for recipients belonging to jihadist organizations. The young Egyptian arrested in Milan had become radicalized after a long stay in his homeland, during which he joined the Muslim Brotherhood first and then Islamic state. The chemist stopped in Trento, after an online self-radicalization process, allegedly held virtual communications with a person belonging to the Islamic state. Even the Sicilian convert went hand in hand with a like-minded young Moroccan of his age and the two had stable contacts with radicalized subjects, both Italian and foreigners.

In Italy, few cases of old-fashioned transnational jihadist networks are still recorded. In 2022, 14 Pakistani citizens scattered between Italy, Spain and France were arrested for association with terrorism purposes. The members of the group, called the “Gabar Group” were in contact with the author of the attack on the former Paris headquarters of the satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo (2020), and communicated through social media, from which they instigated to commit acts of violence against infidels, unbelievers and blasphemers.²⁴³

²⁴³ See [Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza relativa al 2022](#), 2022, 88.

Then, there are cases of individuals who, despite not having formal relations with terrorist organizations, create around themselves a cluster of jihadists who reciprocally feed their own extremist attitudes. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the case of the 23-year-old Italian of Moroccan origins arrested in Turin in 2018 for having set up a jihadist network of foreigners and Italians who converted to Islamic radicalism. In previous years, the man had even drafted an essay more than fifty pages long aimed to «summarize a reality that is talked about a lot: the Islamic state that everyone knows through the accusing media but not through the media of the accused».²⁴⁴ This document circulated online and was then adopted as a sort of indoctrination manual by the extremist group “Aqīdah and Tafsīr”, within which the Italian foreign fighter Maria Giulia Sergio became radicalized.²⁴⁵ Another interesting case concerns the *Imām* of Foggia Mustafa Omar, who was arrested in 2018 for international terrorism. The 58-year-old man was president of an Islamic cultural center and carried out double-track propaganda and indoctrination actions. He held true jihadism and Takfirism classes to the children who attended the cultural center, and shared jihadist material of a doctrinal and operational nature on his social network profiles and through messaging channels. Furthermore, the man was found in possession of a large sum of money obtained by collecting the ritual almsgiving from the Muslims who frequented the center.²⁴⁶

Concerning lone actors, it should be outlined the objective difficulty posed by the advent of the Internet in clearly defining to what extent a jihadist can be considered a “lone wolf”. In case he attends jihadist circles online, in fact, talking

²⁴⁴ See F. Donadoni, *Pradalunga, scattano le perquisizioni anti-terrorismo*, Ilgiorno.it, 2018, available on <https://www.ilgiorno.it/bergamo/cronaca/pradalunga-perquisizioni-terrorismo-1.3815918>.

²⁴⁵ See *Chi è Maria Giulia Sergio e cosa c'entra con l'ISIS*, ilpost.it, available on <https://www.ilpost.it/2015/07/02/maria-giulia-sergio-isis/>.

²⁴⁶ See R. Volpe, *Foggia, arrestato presidente del centro islamico: legami con Isis. Ai suoi alunni diceva: “Tagliate teste dei miscredenti”*, Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2018, available on <https://tinyurl.com/56svpbxf>.

about lone actors could be contestable. The phenomenon of lone jihadists is made possible precisely by the large pool of information that is the internet, which allow people to become radicalized without the direct involvement of other subjects. Namely because of their intense online activity, it is very rare that an individual who has embarked on a path of self-radicalization on the web does not attempt to establish relationships with other jihadists through social media. Indeed, this expression can only be used to identify radicalized individual with unformal and unpersonal ties with the global terrorist network, which are truly “alone” only when they decide to take action. Since Italy has not been the scene of jihadist terrorist attacks in the last decade, identifying Italian lone actors is difficult and can only be done by assessing the existence of membership in structured groups or the planning of unfinished attacks. Therefore, the Italian lone wolf is characterized by an intense use of the web, where he gives signs of hit will to autonomously perpetrate acts of violence. Among the cases we have mentioned, that of the jihadist from Milan falls into this category, who, having returned to Italy after his stay in Egypt, had contact with other jihadists only through a telegram channel. He called himself a «lone wolf» and, according to what emerged from the wiretaps, he said to be «ready to fight and make war». However, according to the Italian anti-terrorism prosecutor, the young man received communications directly from the command of the self-proclaimed Islamic state.²⁴⁷ In the event that he had perpetrated a terrorist attack, therefore, it would have been difficult to assess the degree of autonomy and independence. This category also includes the chemist from Trento, who attended jihadist circles only through social networks. The man, provided with the substances necessary for the manufacture of explosives, together with his wife was planning an attack

²⁴⁷ See *Milano, preso lupo solitario dell'Isis. Intercettato diceva: "Sono pronto a combattere"*, la Repubblica, 2018, available on https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/21/news/milano_preso_lupo_solitario_dell_isis-212199924/.

inspired by the Islamic state.²⁴⁸ As regards the planning of the transition to action, it is worth mentioning the case of Abdel Salem Napulsi, arrested in Rome in 2018 and sentenced to four years in prison. Napulsi was a 38-year-old Palestinian who lived in Latina, where he frequented the local Islamic prayer center known for its radical positions. After becoming radicalized, he carried out research on the web, even on the deep web, on how to use firearms, on how to find heavy vehicles and on death as a “martyr”, suggesting his intention to carry out an attack. The arrest of Napulsi was part of a large-scale operation, called “Mosaico”, aimed at dismantling Anis Amri's network of Italian contacts, which saw the arrest of four other people between Rome and Latina.²⁴⁹ Indeed, even under the organizational profile, the Italian jihadist scenario seems to be quite variegated. The coexistence of several attitudes towards the adherence to the jihadist cause case be observed, thus making difficult to clearly define the borders of prevailing patterns.

2.3.4 – Mosques, Prisons and Internet

Among the main concerns of scholars and practitioners in the field of countering violent extremism there is the identification of those places that act as incubators of radicalization processes. Concerning Islamic radicalization, particular attention is usually paid to places of worship and prisons.

²⁴⁸ L. Vidino, *Arrestati mentre preparavano un attacco. Il pericolo jihadista che viene dall'Italia*, 2022, available on https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/06/24/news/il_pericolo_jihadista_che_viene_dallitalia_quegli_insicospettabili_pronti_a_colpire-355318503/

²⁴⁹ See *Terrorismo. Smantellata in Italia la rete di Anis Amri, il killer di Berlino: 5 arresti*, [ilfattoquotidiano.it](https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/03/29/terrorismo-smantellata-in-italia-la-rete-di-anis-amri-il-killer-di-berlino-5-arresti/4259086/), 2018, available on <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/03/29/terrorismo-smantellata-in-italia-la-rete-di-anis-amri-il-killer-di-berlino-5-arresti/4259086/>;

In 2023 the theme of mosques is at the core of the Italian political debate. The government party Fratelli di Italia has presented a bill which provides that cultural associations cannot change the intended use of their premises to establish places of worship. The measure, which addresses just religions that have not signed an agreement with the state, was justified by the need to respect the intended use of the buildings and avoid cases of planning incompatibility. Some exponents of the Party, then, explained that the members of the Muslim community can currently found a cultural association, obtain a seat, and then use part of that seat as a place of prayer. Thereby, the absence of legal constraints would be exploited by the Islamic communities to settle in the Italian territory, creating mosques and *madrassas* in the complete indifference of the institutions. According to the opposition parties, this proposal, harshly criticized by some Italian Imams, would strongly discriminate against the Italian Muslim community, the only one among the major religious groups not to have signed a pact with the state. In fact, if the bill is approved, many hundreds of unofficial mosques scattered throughout the country will be closed.

According to the Union of the Islamic communities in Italy (UCOII), in 2017 there were 1.217 Muslim places of worship in the country, most of which were prayer rooms set up in sheds, garages and warehouses.²⁵⁰ Many of the uncensored prayer centers have been funded by Gulf countries, which seek to extend their cultural influence in Europe by making real estate investments and subsidizing centers of worship. In this context, large sums of unprocessed money circulate, often in cash. Most of the funding comes from Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Qatar. Doha already invested millions of euros in Italy for the financing of the mosques linked to the Muslim brotherhood. Moreover, the

²⁵⁰ See L. Pons, *Come Fratelli d'Italia vuole chiudere centinaia di moschee con una proposta di legge*, Fanpage.it, 2023, available on <https://www.fanpage.it/politica/come-fratelli-ditalia-vuole-chiudere-centinaia-di-moschee-con-una-proposta-di-legge/>.

corruption and money laundering events involving Qatar and the European Parliament in 2022, known under the name of “Qatargate”, seems to confirm Doha’s hegemonic ambitions. Likewise, large sums of money have come from Saudi Arabia, which in 2014 alone donated 334,000 euros to the Mosque of Rome. Furthermore, Riyadh aims to promote the spread of Islam in the West by training and sending Imams with non-transparent curricula to Europe. It seems that some battles of the intra-Sunni conflict are being fought in Europe.²⁵¹

This scenario undoubtedly presents risk factors for public safety. In fact, unregistered mosques are even more sensitive places than places of worship usually are. The latter, as underlined by the European Commission «are powerful symbols and are thus a potential target to extremists whose aim is to send a political message, spread radical ideologies or instill fear».²⁵² However, the likelihood of links between mosques and radical Islamic circles seems to be high just because these places of worship serve as a meeting point for local Muslim communities. Therefore, it could happen that in the mosque’s environment links are established between individuals having the same cultural background and sometimes the same ideological inclinations. In fact, for Muslims settled in Western countries, the mosque is an available source for companionship with other Muslims. Especially in case the hosting community is perceived as hostile and unwelcoming, both expatriates and second-generation immigrants can resort to the mosque to make new acquaintances. In this sense, authoritative scholars underline that assiduous attendance at the mosque after a sudden increase in faith should be considered as the result, and not the cause, of a

²⁵¹ See: L. Tirinnanzi, *Moschee abusive e fondi opachi*, Panorama.it, 2019, available on <https://www.panorama.it/news/moschee-abusive-italia-soldi-fondi-islam>; A. Giannoni, *Affari immobiliari, islam e moschee: l'ombra del Qatar ha invaso l'Europa*, ilgiornale.it, 2022, available on <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/affari-immobiliari-islam-e-moschee-lombra-qatar-ha-invaso-2094300.html>.

²⁵² See *Protection of Places of Worship*, European Commission, 2020, available on <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/pps/items/696367>

general process of increased faith which, in a few cases, culminates in conversion to the jihadist cause.²⁵³

In Europe, connections between mosques and jihadist clusters seem rather rare. On the contrary, mosques have proved to be valid partners for projects to combat radicalization and extremism. In fact, mosques and moderate imams can play a key role in spreading counter-narrative messages and sensitize Muslims themselves on the issue.²⁵⁴

In Italy as well, the trend of openly radical mosques is in sharp decline. In this sense, a historic case is that of the Viale Jenner Mosque in Milan, established under the guise of the city's Islamic cultural institute, which was part of a network that in the 1990s provided logistical and financial support to the jihadist network linked to the war in Bosnia. A more recent case concerns the already mentioned mosque of Foggia, linked to the arrest in 2018 of Mustafa Omar, the president of the Islamic center al-Dawa. The latter, where jihadist indoctrination activities were carried out, had already come to the attention of the Italian anti-terrorism in 2017, when the Chechen Eli Bombataliev, who operated as "vice-imām" and had contacts with other extremists located in the province of Foggia, was arrested for crimes of terrorism. The investigation that led to the imprisonment of Mustafa Omar also involved a 36-year-old Moroccan who collaborated with the *Imām* to teach radical Islam classes to second-generation Muslim immigrants, with the aim of converting them to a radical vision of Islam and convince them of the wickedness of the West.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ See M. Sageman, *Understanding terror networks*. University of Pennsylvania press, 2004, 93-94.

²⁵⁴ In particular, mosques have played an important role in the CVE strategy of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. See L. Vidino; J. Brandon, *Countering radicalization in Europe*, London, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2012.

²⁵⁵ See L. Di Marzo, *A lezione di islam radicale: marocchino espulso da Foggia*, *ilgiornale.it*, 2018, available on <https://tinyurl.com/mrymr5z2>.

In most recent cases, however, the prevailing tendency sees mosques occasionally frequented by extremists and radicalized individuals without specific operational or organizational reasons linked to proselytism or indoctrination activities. Most of the times, mosques' custodians and managers are unaware of the ideological orientation of radicalized Muslims, when present. An example of this dynamic is given by the facts which involved the Mosque of Latina. In 2017, an expulsion order was issued against a 37-year-old Tunisian who, in addition to being part of a virtual cluster of Islamic state-affiliated extremists, was member of a radical group which usually met at the mosque of Latina. The *Imām* of the prayer center, who is of a moderate orientation, was unaware of these dynamics.²⁵⁶

Therefore, places of worship seem not to represent anymore a fundamental node of processes of radicalization and linkage in Italy. As underlined by the study commission on the phenomenon of radicalization and jihadist extremism (2017), the places that seem to have assumed greater importance in this regard are prisons and the Internet.

Prisons are notoriously a great incubator for extremists. The phenomenon of radicalization in prison allows jihadism to feed itself. In the period of maximum terrorist alert in Europe, in fact, arrests for terrorism increased significantly, with the consequent proliferation of radicalized individuals in jail, especially in France and Belgium. This issue is the subject of a working group within the Radicalization Awareness Network, committed to supporting prison staff in preventing radicalization and providing recommendations to policy makers.²⁵⁷

Connections between prison detention and radicalization are observed, albeit to a lesser extent, also Italy. Establishing direct causal link between being a

²⁵⁶ *Terrorismo, espulso tunisino residente a Latina*, Repubblica.it, 2017, available on <https://tinyurl.com/mv35tsnf>.

²⁵⁷ See RAN Prisons working group web page, available on <https://tinyurl.com/bdfd6yhf>.

Muslim and being an extremist would be incorrect, but the high rate of foreigners, including many Muslims, in Italian prisons raises the alarm about the risk of extremist tendencies. According to statistics updated in October 2021, 37% of foreign prisoners in Italian prisons come from the Middle East and North Africa alone, without taking into account those from Turkey, which together with Russian and Eastern European prisoners represent 20%. Furthermore, five of the first ten nationalities of Italian prisoners correspond to countries with a Muslim majority. Morocco is the leader, with 19% of Italian foreign prisoners.²⁵⁸ The risks of radicalization in Italian prisons are exemplified by the data relating to arrests and convictions for jihadist terrorism. In 2021, there were 83 detainees subject to the high security regime (AS2) for national and international terrorism, of which 43 were accused or convicted of international terrorism of Islamic origin.²⁵⁹ Between 2018 and 2020, 40 people were arrested for crimes related to jihadism. The number of arrests is 14 in 2021 and rises to 21 for 2022.²⁶⁰

Generally speaking, the prison environment tends to favor radicalization processes more than other contexts, since it hosts individuals who often have a difficult personal history and are in bad socio-economic situations, and who, consequently, can develop a desire for social or personal redemption, as well as retaliation against institution and authorities. Major radicalization dynamics concerns mutual self-reinforcing mechanisms between prisoners who have already started a radicalization process and the establishment of relationships between a not yet radicalized Muslim prisoner and an extremist.²⁶¹ Moreover,

²⁵⁸ Data provided by Garante Diritti Detenuti, Consiglio Regionale del Lazio, <https://www.garantedetenutilazio.it/il-garante/>.

²⁵⁹ See *LA CALDA ESTATE DELLE CARCERI. Rapporto di metà anno sulle condizioni di detenzione in Italia*, 28 luglio 2022, Antigone, available on <https://www.antigone.it/upload2/uploads/docs/RapportoLuglio2022.pdf>.

²⁶⁰ See *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2022*, available on www.europol.europa.eu.

²⁶¹ See Report *Verso un approccio italiano alla prevenzione della radicalizzazione*, Commissione di studio su fenomeno della radicalizzazione e dell'estremismo jihadista, 2017, summary for the Media available on http://www.ristretti.it/commenti/2017/gennaio/pdf2/commissione_vidino.pdf.

the danger of radicalization of prison staff cannot be excluded.²⁶² These processes interact with psycho-social dynamics such as the camaraderie that develops between inmates, the perceived polarization between the prison population and the outside population or, again, the desire to atone for one's sins.

In non-Muslim detainees, these factors can lead both to decide to convert to Islam and even to take the leap and convert directly to jihadism. However, not all conversions that take place in a prison environment are a symptom of hardship. Religion, in fact, can be a mean for recovering one's identity and producing claims and protests against the prison system. Furthermore, faith can strengthen the resilience of the prisoner and dissuade him from self-harming and subversive behavior.²⁶³ The factors and dynamics that regulate the radicalization of prisoners pose a difficult challenge to the prison administration, especially as regards the prison regime to be adopted for these subjects. In fact, radicalized prisoners can have a bad influence on other prisoners, but their isolation in maximum security structures can trigger dynamics of mutual ideological reinforcement. These difficulties compromise the role of prisons as places in which to implement rehabilitation and social reintegration processes, and the re-educational function of the prison sentence.

Two relevant Italian cases of radicalization in prison are those of Domenica Quaranta, who converted in the early 2000s in Sicilian prisons, and Giuseppe D'Ignoti, who converted in prison while serving a sentence for sexual assault and was arrested again in 2019 for apology of terrorism.²⁶⁴ With regard to the role of prisons as incubators of Islamic extremism, the most significant case of all in the

²⁶² F. Marone, M. Olimpo, *Jihadist Radicalization in Italian Prisons: A Primer*, Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2019.

²⁶³ See T. Sarti, *Dalla strada alla galera: conversione e radicalizzazione*, *Rassegna Italiana di Criminologia*, 4, 2019, 290-299.

²⁶⁴ *Istigava a guerra santa, arrestato italiano convertito*, Ansa.it, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/2kr854wr>.

Italian panorama seem to be that of Anis Amri, the young Tunisian responsible for the attack in the German capital in 2016. Before swearing allegiance to *Dāesh*, Amri had a past of petty crime and led a dissolute life. He also had a criminal record in his homeland, where he was sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment for theft. In 2011 he left Tunisia for economic reasons, and arrived in Sicily he was sentenced to 4 years for various crimes, including arson and threats. According to the Italian authorities, Amri spent this period in six different prisons in the region. Some friends who hosted him once he was released from prison tell of how much Amri had become a believer and observant, suggesting that his path of radicalization had begun right in prison. When the request for political asylum presented in Italy was refused, Amri reached Switzerland and then Germany, where he applied for international protection several times under false identities. Arriving on German soil, Amri established a network of acquaintances, mainly via the Internet, with *salafī* preachers, *Dāesh* supporters and fundamentalist personalities known for trying to indoctrinate young Muslims in Islamic radicalism. Also in Germany, Amri downloaded jihadist content from the web, including manuals teaching how to make explosive devices. After the attack, carried out in Berlin the 19th December 2016, the authorities discovered that the young man had described on a Telegram chat his plan of attack, using coded language to mislead any interceptions. It is hard to say if Amri became radicalized in Italy or had already started a process of radicalization in Tunisian prisons, but according to the statements of his friends, the period of detention in Italy was followed by a sudden increase in faith, thus suggesting that the adhesion to the jihadist cause had occurred in Italian prisons.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ About the biography of Anis Amri see: K. Connolly, *Anis Amri: from young drifter to Europe's most wanted man*, *theguardian.com*, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/2w6nh7xs>; *Parla la ragazza che ospitò Amri «Dopo il carcere era cambiato»*, *Milano.corriere.it*, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/475fkd6y>; A Troianovsky, *Anis Amri, Suspected Berlin Attacker, Had a History of Criminal Activity, Extremism*, *The Wall Street Journal*, 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/3ktar8wb>.

That of the Berlin bomber is a fundamental case study. First, it exemplifies the role of Italian prisons in radicalization processes. In this sense, it would not have been strange if Amri had decided to attack Italy, where, as already said, he had a good network of contacts with other jihadists.

Second, Amri's case reflects the transnational nature of jihadism and the security risks posed by illegal immigration. When his request for international protection was refused, in fact, Italian authorities couldn't identify his country of origin for repatriation, allowing him to remain illegally on Italian and European soil. This situation is the result of the European Union's incapacity, or unwillingness, to manage the migratory emergency at a community level, leaving the countries of first arrival with the burden of managing an enormous amount of identification procedures and asylum requests.²⁶⁶

Thirdly, this story reminds us of the role of mosques as hubs of radical Islamic groups. Amri, in fact, used to frequent a local mosque together with other jihadists who, according to the authorities, were ready to carry out more attacks. Although radical mosques are in sharp decline, they remain highly sensitive places in terms of security management, where problems of religious extremism and social and cultural isolation are intertwined.

Finally, the central role of the Internet emerges from the case of the Tunisian terrorist in the processes of recruitment, self-indoctrination and linkage with preachers, radical Salafis and Islamic state affiliates, and as a source of training on how to carry out terroristic attacks. Mosques and prisons are undoubtedly relevant places in the study of the phenomenon of Islamic radicalization and can play a key role in prevention and contrast policies. However, their relevance seems not to be comparable to that of the online

²⁶⁶ On the need to enhance the European strategy to manage migration flows see C. Sbailò, *Immigrazione: il fallimentare approccio europeo e i limiti della risposta neo-sovranista*, in "Dall'11 settembre all'emergenza Covid-19", cit., 185-206.

environment. The latter, as underlined by the 2022 TE-SAT Report, is used by extremists and terrorists of any ideology to build relationships, share instructions and propaganda, and recruit new followers.²⁶⁷ In fact, it seems that the Internet plays a role in all processes of Islamic radicalization, potentially in all their phases. The Internet can be the place to get in touch with jihadist ideology or where to deepen it. On the Internet you can even receive a “call to action” from another area of the planet. Of course, offline processes should not be underestimated. Radicalization processes, in fact, can consist of online and offline phases that act in an integrated manner. In the case of prison radicalization, for example, the triggering factor of the process most often belongs to the offline sphere. In the radicalization of youngsters, instead, the web plays a fundamental role, which has been amplified by the situations of social isolation imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As underlined by the Italian study commission on jihadism, the extensive use of the internet by terrorist groups for propaganda purposes has led also in Italy to the appearance of real online communities of jihadists, or jihadist sympathizers, who interact according to the network scheme. The Internet, in fact was involved in various ways in all cases of radicalization mentioned thus far. In some cases, the Internet absorbs all the activities of the extremists, the Italian-Algerian minor from Trieste and the eighteen-year-old from Brescia (whose cases will be explored in detail in the next paragraph) arrested respectively in 2019 and 2023, the radicalization process seems to have occurred mainly online and their extremist attitude was practiced exclusively on the web. In other cases, participation to global *Ġihād* is carried out on several levels, only some activities that are part of the commitment to *Ġihād* are carried out online. Among these cases are the Sicilian convert Giuseppe Frittita, who made extensive use of social

²⁶⁷ See *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2022*, available on www.europol.europa.eu.

networks to share jihadist material, while at the same time cultivating concrete relationships with other jihadists, as well as the case of the Palestinian Napulsi, who, on the one hand, frequented radical circles at the mosque of Latina, and on the other, did online research on how to organize a terrorist attack. Napulsi, was even part of the online network of Anis Amri. In still other cases, among which the Gabar group stands out, the Internet is the means of communication and coordination of an international terrorist network, according to a model seems destined to give way to a more fluid one, based on a sort of digital jihadist communitarianism. The Internet is a particularly important asset for the spread of jihadism in the West, where terrorist organizations seem not to be able to preserve the traditional organizational model, based on hierarchies and decision-making flows. This model, in fact, is more vulnerable to the tackling activities put in place by the West. After the attacks in New York(2001), London (2004) and Madrid (2005), Europe brought about ad hoc reforms to the organization of their security and intelligence apparatuses for anti-terrorism purposes, and constant effort is made in order to tackle violent extremism phenomena on the web.²⁶⁸ But the criminal entities always try to move within the gap that separates the development of technology from that of Law and politics, where there are numerous spaces of arbitrariness and non-accountability. An example, as already mentioned, are social media covered by encryption, which pose a serious

²⁶⁸ The first steps of the EU towards the definition of a common counter-terrorism strategy were taken after the 9/11 terrorist attack, the European Union adopted the Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 on combating terrorism, which was also the first initiative to align the laws of European countries on the fight against terrorism. Subsequently, after the attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), Europe adopted the European Union Counter Terrorism Strategy. In 2012 the European Commission founded the Radicalization awareness network, i.e. a “network of networks” for the acquisition of skills and the sharing of good practices for the prevention and contrast of radicalization. Among the most recent steps is the adoption in 2020 of the counter-terrorism agenda for the EU. However, the Community strategy to fight against terrorism has remained hindered in various forms of judicial cooperation, such as the European arrest warrant and the forced removal of DNA, due to the still scarce politicization of the European public space. See C. Sbailò, *Europa e terrorismo: perché prevale l’approccio giudiziario*, in “Dall’11 settembre all’emergenza Covid-19”, cit., 61-81.

challenge to anti-terrorism forces with regard to monitoring operations, or augmented reality experiences, which represent the new frontier of the web and are still poorly regulated.

2.2.3 – Home-grown Muslims and converts: the need for a de-radicalization strategy

The theme of the jihadist presence among converts is particularly interesting, but once again its treatment presents some objective constraints. Estimating the rate of radicalization among converts is quite complex, since even just estimating the number of converts in a given country would be complex. Indeed, Islam does not contemplate the sacraments, and conversion through the profession of faith, or *Šahādah*, leaves no trace of adherence to Islam. As regards second and third-generation Muslims, however, the discussion is facilitated by the presence of reliable estimates and statistics on the number of Muslims among Italian citizens (in 2020 they were 1,242,000),²⁶⁹ although this number does not include all those Muslims which are “Italians” from a cultural point of view. The Italian law on the granting of citizenship, in fact, ensures that there are Muslims born and raised in Italy by foreign parents unable to apply for Italian citizenship until they reach the age of majority. Furthermore, law provides for the acquisition of citizenship *iure sanguinis* by transmission, even by people born abroad of Italian parents but who have never lived in Italy.²⁷⁰ The examination of radicalization phenomena among converts and Italian Muslims, therefore, is hampered by the impossibility of collecting exhaustive and complete research

²⁶⁹ F. Ciocca, *Musulmani in Italia: una presenza stabile e sempre più italiana*, Lenius, 223, available on <https://www.lenius.it/musulmani-in-italia/2/>.

²⁷⁰ The acquisition of Italian citizenship is regulated by law n.91/1992.

material. However, it is worth trying to identify some key elements of these processes.

Radicals among converts, together with second and third generation Muslims, represent cases of pure home-grown jihadism whose development is quite totally independent from immigration. In fact, most of the times, converts are Italian citizens from birth, perfectly integrated into Italian society from a cultural, linguistic and socio-economic point of view. Therefore, the reasons that lead them to become radicalized cannot be traced back to the desire for social redemption but has often to do with the desire to renew their own identity. Thereby, radicalization is the result of the rejection of their cultural roots, which are linked to Western society. Such rejection can translate, after conversion, into adherence to sectarian and extremist religious forms. Something similar happens to second and third-generations Muslims, relatively numerous among extremists, who reject both Western society and that of their ancestors and are pushed towards jihadism by the search for their own identity. That's why the latter are referred to also as "neo-converts".²⁷¹ The search for identity explains the propensity of radicalized converts to leave Italy to reach the Middle Eastern theaters of war. In this regard, it is interesting to note that according to authoritative estimates, converts represent more than 11% of Italian foreign fighters, of which they are an over-represented component compared to the largest Muslim population residing in Italy.

Among the best-known cases of Italian foreign fighters among converts, it is worth mentioning Maria Giulia Sergio, the 28-year-old from Naples who left Italy in 2014 for Syria, and Lara Bombonati, who stayed in Syria between 2015 and 2017 when she was arrested while on her way to Belgium.²⁷² The desire to

²⁷¹ See *Verso un approccio italiano alla prevenzione della radicalizzazione*, cit.

²⁷² See F. Marone, L. Vidino, *Destinazione Jihad, i Foreign Fighters d'Italia*, ISPI, Milano, 2018.

enlist with the Islamic state was also shared by the already mentioned 24-year-old convert from Sicily. His name is Giuseppe Frittita, and in 2018 he was investigated for instigation to commit a crime. Together with his Moroccan colleague, Ossama Ghafir, he shared contents of an extremist-jihadist nature on his social networks' profiles and maintained stable contacts with Italian and non-Italian converts to Islam, some of which were extremists. Frittita operated through social media, where he usually shared propaganda material, both textual and video-photographic, which in turn he had received from subjects close to Islamic extremism residing in Italy. Among the latter, according to the press, there were supporters of the *salafī* ideology. An interesting aspect concerns the strong intolerance of Frittita and Ghafir towards the fact of living in a country with a non-Muslim majority of people, where, they claimed, they could not be true Muslims. To redeem themselves from this situation, they planned to go to Syria and enlist in the Islamic state, as if only the *hiğrah* to *Dār al-Islām* would allow them to find their identity again. Similar dynamics were observed in the case of the chemical expert radicalized in Trento with his wife. Both were of Kosovar origin and were born and raised in Italy, where they were well integrated into the social fabric and had a good level of education. Also in this case, the couple planned to leave Italy and join a *Dāesh* cell in Africa. Cases like these suggest the consolidation of the phenomenon of home-grown jihadism also in Italy, where many paths of radicalization are not attributable to problems of integration of foreign communities but to individual situations. The latter are numerous and very different from each other and therefore difficult to trace back to recurring patterns.

The two cases mentioned above represent two virtuous examples towards the definition of a P/CVE strategy, but there is still a long way to go until a true

de-radicalization, aimed of tackling phenomenon of home-grown extremism, is recognized as a fundamental part of the Italian anti-terrorism policy.²⁷³

2.2.4 - Towards an Italian P/CVE strategy

Both converts and home-grown jihadists pose a serious challenge to the Italian approach to preventing terrorism. Expulsion, in fact, is one of the pillars of the Italian predominantly repressive approach against terrorism. Italian citizens cannot be expelled from the national territory, thus hindering the Italian counter terrorism strategy. The Italian legislator has tried to circumvent this problem with the introduction of the disputed provision which allows the revocation of citizenship to Italians who have obtained it for the benefit of the law. This rule, introduced in 2018 in the context of the decree on security and immigration passed by the then right-wing government, was applied for the first time in 2022, when the revocation of citizenship made it possible to expel a Moroccan citizen from the national territory.²⁷⁴

The revocation of citizenship, however, is not applicable to Italian citizens from birth, and therefore does not solve the problem of radicalized among converts or among second-generation immigrants with Italian citizenship. This issue provides an incentive to formulate prevention and de-radicalization strategies. In this regard, the case of the 40-year-old from Bari, Alfredo Santamato, is particularly relevant. Santamato is an Italian convert to Islam which in 2017 was investigated for apology of terrorism. He maintained numerous

²⁷³ On this topic see G. Spanò, *De-radicalisation in Italy: is 'emergency' a strategy per se?* DPCE online, 7/2023.

²⁷⁴ See Relazione sulla politica dell'informazione per la sicurezza relativa al 2022, 89. Full text available on <https://tinyurl.com/phbj2c6a>.

contacts via the web with jihadists and people suspected of terrorism, had spoken in favor of the attack on the Christmas markets in Berlin and had expressed positions that foreshadowed the will to die as a martyr. What most worried the authorities was the fact that Santamato, who worked as a truck driver, had a truck at his disposal, which made him a potential mass murderer. Therefore, despite the fact that Santamato's extremist inclinations were concentrated on the web, the judges considered that he represented a «concrete and current» social danger. Thus, in 2017 the judicial authorities ordered a two-year special surveillance measure for Santamato, during which he joined a program of social reintegration. This was possible thanks to the collaboration between the university, the Italian police, and the judiciary, who managed to legitimately force Santamato to attend a deradicalisation course even though he had not yet committed terrorist acts. In 2019 this former jihadist is the first Italian to have embarked on a structured path of de-radicalization.²⁷⁵

The Italian strategy to tackle terrorism and radicalization is also severely tested by the presence of radicalized among minors. This issue challenges the Italian approach on two levels. First of all, most of the times minors cannot be subjected to expulsion. In fact, if the minor in question is an unaccompanied illegal immigrant, he cannot be repatriated. In 2023 there are almost 21,000 unaccompanied minor foreigners in Italy, many of them coming from Egypt and Tunisia.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, teen-agers between the ages of 15 and 17 are the

²⁷⁵ About the case of Alfredo Santamato, see: R. Schena, *Camionista di Turi convertito all'Islam* Giudici: è un estremista, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, 2018, available on <https://tinyurl.com/2us5kapr>; S. Vespa, *L'italiano che inneggiava al jihad e voleva infibulare le figlie, ora non fa più paura*, *Formiche.net*, 2019, , available on <https://formiche.net/2019/05/deradicalizzazione-terrorismo-martucci/>; *Un rehab per l'integralista islamico*, *Panorama*, 2019, , available on <https://www.panorama.it/news/rehab-integralista-islamico>

²⁷⁶ Official estimates provided by [Integrazionemigranti.gov.it](https://integrazioneimmigranti.gov.it), Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche sociali, available on <https://integrazionemigranti.gov.it/>

segment of the population that surfs the web the most and being the internet the main place where to come into touch with jihadist narratives, teenagers are particularly exposed to radicalization's risks.²⁷⁷ Not surprisingly, another pilot experience of de-radicalization concerns an Italian minor of Algerian origin residing in Trieste. In 2019 Italian Authorities discovered that the boy ran several channels on Telegram, on which he carried out proselytizing and incitement to terrorism activities through the dissemination and translation of propaganda documents. In addition, he was doing web research on how to evade security checks and was ready to make a rudimentary weapon to carry out a terrorist action in a school. The young man was born and raised in Italy, where he appeared to be perfectly integrated, attended school normally and had excellent marks. He was not part of a jihadist cluster and appeared to have had no relationships with other extremists. The radicalization process, of which his parents were found to be unaware, had taken place exclusively on the web, where the boy was the among the main translators of jihadist content into Italian.²⁷⁸ Furthermore, he used his channels on Telegram, which were joined by around 60 people, to coordinate the translation into Spanish and French of propaganda messages and their subsequent dissemination on the net.²⁷⁹

Aiming at the social rehabilitation of the boy, the Police and the Public prosecutor of Trieste (Minors' Office) started a recovery process trying to exploit the possibilities made available by the legal system. Indeed, an *ad hoc* radicalization program has been formulated in order to «disconnect» the radicalized young person from the «cyber jihad». The program intervenes on a

²⁷⁷ Statistics on the use of the internet by Italian citizens by age group is available on the website of the Italian Institute of Statistics ISTAT, at <http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx?QueryId=23020#>.

²⁷⁸ See P. Treppo, *Terrorismo, il ritratto dello jihadista friulano: 15 anni, studente modello e perfettamente integrato*, *ilgazzettino.it*, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/u8ykrdt4>.

²⁷⁹ See *Terrorismo: chiuse chat e canali Telegram. Messaggi di propaganda Isis in italiano*, *ilgazzettino.it*, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/yx43sb97>.

double track, namely behavior and ideology. The boy was banned from using the Internet and social media, and was supported by a mentor, i.e., a figure with a deep knowledge of Islamic culture and religion who is able to explain the inconsistencies between the jihadist narrative and the Islam.²⁸⁰ The main characters of the cases of radicalization described thus far, in fact, adopt *takfīrī* views which exemplify the break with the Islamic Tradition, often in the grip of *salafī* influence, resulting from an allegedly scarce religious culture, on the one hand, and from a way of thinking deeply rooted in the Western nihilistic attitude, on the other. The latter is increasingly based on the principle of self-determination of the individual, which is considered to be the only subject responsible to define both his roots and his destiny, without reference to any objective instance that precedes him and which he shares with all human beings.

²⁸⁰ C. Attanasio Ghezzi, Il primo caso di deradicalizzazione in Italia: parla la psicologa, Lettera43, <https://www.lettera43.it/italia-deradicalizzazione-udine-isis-jihad-terrorismo/>.

Conclusions

Terrorism, extremism and radicalization are phenomena that can be inscribed in a wide range of different ideological frames, usually related to politics and religion, but also to issues such as food choices and environmental protection. The phenomena of political-religious radicalization and their violent drifts, which often take the form of terrorist acts, have the objective of undermining the foundations of public life, and therefore receive particular attention from political decision-makers. Islamic radicalism, in particular, is at the center of the attention of security personnel and public authorities. In the last decade, Jihadism, in fact, has proved to be the most lethal in terms of loss of human lives among the ideologically oriented types of terrorism. Furthermore, it raises the question of the confrontation with a paradigm, the Islamic one, asymmetrical with respect to the Western Westphalian paradigm and with which the occasions for contact will be more and more frequent due to the migratory flows and the media and cultural interconnection that characterizes the contemporary era.

For these reasons, academic literature consists of numerous studies and research that investigate the causes and roots of Islamic radicalization processes through the filter of numerous disciplines. However, given the complexity of this phenomenon, scholars often give priority to the observation and treatment of its symptoms, rather than its causes. The identification of the factors that underlie the processes of Islamic radicalization – the latter understood as gradual adherence to the jihadist cause – is made particularly complicated by the difficulty in obtaining data, leading the scholar to prefer the qualitative approach for identifying behavioral models. This is mainly due to the heterogeneous nature of the phenomenon, whereby there is general agreement that each case of radicalization is unique in many respects. Therefore, existing theories within the literature on the factors that would be at the basis of jihadist radicalization

processes, which are mainly focused on the socio-economic and psychological sphere, do not allow the identification of precise triggering causes, nor of a profile of the radicalized individual. Among jihadists and extremists, in fact, there are both non-European Muslim citizens of recent immigration, as well as second and third generation immigrants and autochthonous converted individuals. Furthermore, they can be both fully integrated socially and economically, and on the margins of society. Problematic, then, are the cases of “non-violent radicalization”, which, when they are observed, are limited to the ideological component, without the concrete passage to the violent act. Within the global jihadist cybercommunity, there are various levels of membership, from simple, and sometimes naive, sympathy to militant activism, but the space that separates the passage from one level to another is very short. These cases often escape the eyes of the authorities and remain outside the official estimates, preventing the scholar from having a global vision.

The digital dimension seems to be the only common denominator of the empirical manifestations of these phenomena and, therefore, the only one whose roots are worth to be investigated. The virtual sphere, in fact, plays a fundamental role both for aspiring jihadists and for terrorist organizations. For the former, the network represents the main gateway to radical milieus; for the latter, it is a boundless pool of potential followers and militants, as well as the ideal place to carry out propaganda and recruitment, logistic planning and fundraising activities.

In the period ranging between the late 2010s and the early 2020s, there was intense investigative and police activity on the front of the fight against jihadist extremism and terrorism. The high number of arrests and convictions for crimes connected to jihadism confirms the persistence in Italy of the threat of Islamic radicalization, although not a single attack was carried out. However, among the reasons why the level of alert in the country remains high is the fact that some

European jihadists, such as the attackers of Nice and Berlin, had connections with Italy.

In this work, it was not possible to report all the cases of radicalization that can be traced back to Italy, both for reasons of brevity and for methodological constraints. Among the latter, in addition to an objective difficulty in retrieving data, there is a disproportion between the number of variables to consider (i.e., origin and social extraction, criminal records, attendance of places of worship, affiliations and memberships with terrorist organizations, links with other radicalized people) and the number of cases which can be examined. These limitations were avoided by favoring a qualitative approach, i.e. through an examination of the most significant cases of radicalization in the Italian scenario in the reference period. Consequently, quantitative considerations were limited to the variables for which it was possible to obtain information and data from official and/or reliable sources (e.g., connection between immigration and jihadism and radicalization in prisons).

In order to provide an overview as homogeneous as possible, several cases were taken into consideration for each variable. Thereby, we have tried to compare the Italian dynamics with the European ones starting from the state of the art on the subject. The result was quite heterogeneous, but in many of the cases examined it was seen how the use of the Internet and the digital sphere had an impact on the recurrence of the other variables, especially as regards affiliations and membership with terrorist networks and organizations. The nature of memberships and connections, in fact, seems to depend on the possibilities offered by the Internet. In most cases, the individual informally frequents radical milieux on the web, but if there is a propitious convergence in some node of the network, face-to-face contacts with other jihadists are not disdained. These dynamics do not seem to follow a predictable trend. In fact, radicalization following an indoctrination process or as result of a given propaganda strategy

does not necessarily lead to the subsequent establishment of formal ties between the newly radicalized person and the terrorist organization. These ties can also be established after radicalization has taken place by the will of the radicalized person and, only at that point, can they be transformed into stable and recurrent relationships.

Particular attention has been paid to the so-called “lone jihadists” in the framework of the connection between jihadism and the Internet. If we update this term with the contemporary world, where the virtual and the real dimension do not identify two separate contexts, but two ways of realizing what is possible, hardly any case of radicalization would fall into this typology. This consideration concerns especially converts to Islam, who, having been born and raised in Italy by Italian parents, presumably have fewer channels of contact with foreign networks, and frequent jihadist circles on the Internet.

Our survey on the Italian scenario confirmed the impossibility of identifying “typical processes” of radicalization, but it also highlighted that, from a diachronic perspective, the process of digitization of jihadism is going on, with consequences which seem to exacerbate over time. This aspect is of particular importance because it holds together the research hypotheses on which we have tried to build our thesis.

The first hypothesis concerns the partial overcoming of Westphalian-style categories, based on the double binomial inside/outside, before/after. The latter are no longer sufficient to constitute the interpretative framework of global phenomena, neither for political action nor for Public Law. In this regard, we underlined the otherness of the Islamic, communitarian and universalistic paradigm, compared to the Western-one, that is individualistic, territorialized and, above all secularized. A part of European and Italian comparative doctrine, in fact, especially since the Arab Spring, has focused its attention on the Public Law dynamics of Mediterranean Islam. Nowadays, the dialogue with the Islamic

world is made unavoidable by the combination of several factors of a demographic and geopolitical nature. The first is due to the formation of substantial Islamic communities in Western cities, even in countries like Italy, which do not have a great colonial past. This is attributable to the dynamics of migratory flows, which are likely to continue to develop with great intensity. The second concerns the on-going geopolitical confrontation within the Islamic world, which is one of the fundamental variables in the international political scenario, especially in the Euro-Mediterranean quadrant. Finally, the third is given by the growing media and cultural interconnection that characterizes the contemporary age, also thanks to the exponential development of techniques and means of communication.

The second hypothesis, indeed, regards the “exponential gap” and the consequent expansion of the attack surface, which reflect a situation of chronic delay of our institutions and security systems with respect to criminal phenomena. Although technical development envelops the whole of human history, major technoscientific results were only achieved in the XX century. This is due to the unprecedented acceleration witnessed in several fields during the 1900s, especially in the automation and information technology sector. The reasons of this surge in progress have been carefully investigated by representatives of the scientific community and the economic-entrepreneurial sector. It is worth recalling Gordon Moore’s estimation (1965) according to which the physical space occupied by integrated circuits was meant to decrease every year by about 50%, without reducing the number of transistors. Indeed, new chips would have been faster and faster, but with smaller components. Therefore, according to Moore’s hypothesis, thanks to these developments it would have been possible to double the effective speed of a chip in a given period

of time without any increase in price being recorded.²⁸¹ The estimations of Moore have proved to be right. Techno-scientific progress, which proceeds at unparalleled speed, leaves behind an empty space in which those entities that claim to use Technoscience without constraints move. But in the long term, they are doomed to fail.

The third hypothesis, in fact, rejects the idea that there is an instrumental relationship between man and technoscience, or rather, it reverses it. Technoscience advances following an exponential trend, that is, faster than any system that attempts to use it. Over the course of human history, the idea – distinctly anthropocentric – has consolidated that technical progress was the sum of a series of minor goals useful for the achievement of major goals, that is, bringing benefits to our way of life, in terms of satisfying needs (primary and secondary) and improving the quality of life under various profiles (e.g. health, safety, security and so on). Recalling the words of Emanuele Severino «The original function of the Technique is to be an exceptionally effective means for promoting a certain economic and social order».²⁸² The relationship between man and Technoscience, as it has been underlined by Severino drawing on Hegel, is commonly – and improperly – interpreted as that existing between a God and his subjects, or rather, between a master and his servant, in which the products of technology are subservient to the purposes of human beings. This misconception is due to the fact that technoscience, which could be define as the technique attitude in the scientific field, is a general-purpose system, and the absence of a specific purpose is often interpreted as total purposelessness. This translate in the apparent instrumentalization of technoscience and its products,

²⁸¹ Gordon Moore was an American entrepreneur and engineer born in 1929 and dead in 2023. He was the creator of the well-known theory of technological evolution of computer chips and one of the leading figures of the Silicon Valley. See A. Azhar, *Exponential. How Accelerating Technology is leaving Us Behind and What to do about it*, London, Random House Business, 2022.

²⁸² See E. Severino, *Techné*, cit., 225, translated by the Author.

which, instead, consist in the spread of a “technical” way of acting, that is, aimed at the constant development of technoscience, which that goes from being a means to being a purpose. The seed of the technique, based on the faith on the eternal becoming of things, germinated in the West, but here, technical action is limited within the borders imposed by the rule of law and democracy. In the “East”, instead, it seems to have no boundaries. But this is not entirely true.

The fourth and last hypothesis regards the diffusion of the Technique and its consequences. Scientific progress, in fact, feeds on Technique, and geopolitical success seems to feed on scientific progress. Then, it is inevitable that technique spreads. Technoscience is advancing in the world and endemic Westernization increases the risks associated with the entropic drifts of the diffusion of a technical way of thinking in authoritarian and criminal contexts. To compete with the West, considered at the end of its nihilistic parable, some geopolitical players in the Islamic world draw on the very categories of Western philosophy. An exemplary case is that of Saudi Arabia. Prince Muḥammad Ben Salman, in fact, has launched a modernization project of the kingdom, called Vision 2030, aimed at diversifying the economy, too focused on the oil market, and at achieving cutting-edge technological levels. But Saudi Arabia remains an autocracy, in this case, based on one of the most rigorous interpretations of Islam. Technoscience, as already mentioned, feeds on Technique, but the latter, in non-democracies, where the scientific community is not free to operate, bends over itself, producing disorder and suffering.

The Internet, as has been said, holds the aforementioned hypotheses together. In this work we have tried to apply them to the relationship between Jihadism and the Technoscience, and therefore between jihadism and Technique. Technoscience is a boundless system, but we decided to focus on the role of the internet and the digital dimension for several reasons. First, the web plays a fundamental role in creating opportunities for comparison with non-Western

paradigms and currents of thought. For a long time now, the web has been at the forefront of techno-scientific progress, to the point that if the Internet suddenly disappeared, it is probable that the “exponential gap” would cease to be “exponential”, almost to zero. Naturally, restricting scientific progress to internet-related innovations would be simplistic, but the latter is widespread all over the world and is among the most involved innovations in the security management field. In fact, many of current security challenges concerning subversion are related to the Internet and its opaque areas, such as the deep web and the dark web, encrypted messaging apps and, in general, social networks. Finally, the Internet is a particularly versatile innovation and, therefore, is among the most involved in the dangerous dynamic of instrumentalization which, if not controlled, risks producing a reversal.

Concerning the subject of the present dissertation, the Internet is one of the places where the geopolitical dimension of jihadism unfolds. Some currents of Sunni Islam predict the crisis of the Western paradigm and go so far as to compete with the West for regional and global leadership. The actors in question, identifiable as the front of the “Islamic alternative”, maintain relations of variable geometry with the jihadist circles, ranging from competitive spirit to basic ideological solidarity, sometimes passing through an instrumental sharing of short and medium-term objectives. Similar dynamics can also be observed in the Shiite universe, where Iran carries on a merciless fight against the United States and Europe, making use of a network of “proxies” to which it provides economic-financial, logistic and political support, and with who maintains relations of ideological solidarity or utilitarian cooperation. These proxies include both Shiite entities, such as *Ḥezbollāh*, and Sunni entities, such as *Ḥamās* and *al-Qā'idah*, but also actors outside the Islamic world, such as the South American drug trafficking cartels. These interrelationships should be read against the backdrop of the geopolitical projects carried out, respectively, by Erdoğan's Turkey and Ayatollah

Khomeini's Iran, which make use of modern communication systems, also employing their proxies, to spread their ideas and their own values, to generate friction and acquire consensus, even within the European borders. These geopolitical actors are not terrorist entities, but some of their proxies are, and their web narrative and propaganda strategies play into the hands of the jihadist project.

Terrorist alert seems to be waning, but jihadism is increasingly becoming a digital threat. From online forums to social networks, up to gaming and the metaverse, terrorist organizations have attempted to maximize the benefits of using the Internet, until they made it a purpose. In the early 2000s, as Europe and the United States learned to deal with the terrorist threat, digitizing *Ĝihād* became a priority, to allow its survival and give it resilience. But the internet is a network, and as we have seen, the network is selective. It favors superficial and immediacy-oriented content, as well as short-term and easy-to-achieve goals. Such goals have more chances of surviving on the net the more they are shared and participated, and they are more shareable the more ideologically vague they are.

The digitization of jihadism, as we have tried to show in this work, has led to its ideological flattening and the spread of amateurish operational schemes. This is demonstrated by the cases of ideological hybridization, in which adherence to the jihadist cause is part of a general anti-system posture (for example, in the cases of Domenico Quaranta and Giuliano Delnevo), and by the increase in attacks which are crudely organized and carried out with rudimentary weapons. The web, in fact, favors the copious circulation of generic and immediately achievable calls to action. The terms of membership in the digital jihadist community are just as simple. This membership, in fact, does not necessarily have to be formalized, nor does it need specific requirements, apart from converting to Islam and having internet access.

The attempt to use the internet as a means of networking, which is an attempt to subdue Technoscience, is affecting the achievement of the final purpose, thus causing the entropic drifts of the jihadist project. IS and *al-Qā'idah* have migrated to the web to give visibility to the jihadist project and gain consensus, to escape security checks and ensure the resilience of the system. All this lengthened the purposes' chain that were to culminate with the main purpose, i.e., the annihilation of the West, first, and of the apostate Arab regimes, then.

The resort to the digital in almost all the cases of Islamic radicalization suggests that the model of the classic terrorist organization, with cells scattered all over the world, will progressively give way to the model of the digital jihadist community. In the Italian news of the last few years, the cases of radicalization and informal affiliation are quite numerous, but no attacks have yet been recorded. The Italian situation reflects the European trend whereby arrests for terrorism crimes continue, but the number of attacks is decreasing. Those few attacks that are not thwarted often cause only a few injuries, because they are carried out in an awkward and amateurish manner.

The tendency to use technoscience as means to achieve goals reflects the progressive approach of some Islamic circles, including the radical ones, to the Western horizon of thought. Islamic radicalism and its terrorist drifts, in fact, can be reconstructed as products of the growing domination of Technique, not only as regards the diffusion of technological innovations, but also as regards the hermeneutic posture. The widespread propensity for a "technical" action, in fact, is the full expression of Western nihilism, according to which everything comes from "nothing" and to "nothing" is destined to return, *things* can be other than themselves, all become, and no truth is eternal.

Not even the *fiqh* is eternal anymore, and the "gate of *iğtihād*" is seen as an obstacle to jihadist aims. This translates into the claim by the jihadists to re-

interpret the scriptural sources, especially the themes related to war and the management of the geopolitical space on earth. This posture reflects an ambivalent relationship with Tradition that jihadism shares with the Salafiyya, people's Islam and some moderate Islamic scholars. The latter agree on the assumption that a return to Quranic exegesis is needed to allow Muslims to face current challenges. Except that for jihadists, and for some exponents of people's Islam, this challenge involves a clash with the West. The departure from the Islamic exegetical tradition, then, has proved to be exacerbated by the mechanisms that regulate information and communication online. The structure of the web, in fact, encourages the processes of re-elaboration of the contents. All this seem to have annihilated the ideological-religious basis of the jihadist project, to such an extent that in some cases, terrorist acts have an ambiguous source of inspiration.

As we have tried to demonstrate, the jihadist system is experiencing a phase of downturn and anomie, from both a doctrinal, ideological and organizational point of view. Doctrinal abuses have nullified traditional interpretative methods, and this is leading jihadism to be increasingly "other" than the political-religious tradition it claims to recover. The digitization of the jihadist cause, then, has exacerbated this process, annihilating the ideological stability of its message, as it is done with a file that is too heavy or a text with too many characters. However, this threat has not disappeared, nor it will in the near future. Contemporary jihadism, in fact, is benefiting from the resilience guaranteed by the network. The numerous propaganda and inciting material circulating online makes the Internet a source of potential processes of radicalization and terrorist actions, which may or may not happen. These risks are repeated at every node in the network.

Transliteration system

ā - ا ;	ḍ - ض
b - ب ;	ṭ - ط ;
t - ت ;	ẓ - ظ ;
ṭ - ث ;	‘ - ع ;
ǧ - ج ;	ġ - غ ;
ḥ - ح ;	f - ف ;
ḫ - خ ;	q - ق ;
d - د ;	k - ك ;
ḍ - ذ ;	l - ل ;
r - ر ;	m - م ;
z - ز ;	n - ن ;
s - س ;	h - ه ;
š - ش ;	w/ū - و ;
ṣ - ص ;	y/ī - ي .
‘ - ء	

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