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Stefania Tusini

Reading religious radicalization by Merton's strain theory

This article aims to analyse the process of radicalization of young Western Muslims employing the Merton's strain theory as an interpretative factor. Without necessarily underestimating other approaches, applying Merton's theory to this field means choosing to deal with it mainly from a sociological point of view, taking into account its political, economic, structural and social characteristics and embedding the individual paths within this framework¹.

As is known, in 1949 Merton conceived a means-and-goals pattern as a focal point of his broader theory of deviance. According to his famous theory, Americans were encouraged by their society to pursue some aims related to the so-called American dream according to which individual success had to be measured almost exclusively in terms of wealth and material possessions.

The general idea was that society defines some legitimate goals and promises that they are hypothetically feasible for all, regardless of class, gender or ethnicity. Furthermore, it also indicates legitimate means to pursue those goals, such as education and work.

Unfortunately, Merton stated, advancement opportunities are not equally accessible to everyone because there is a discrepancy between desires and possibilities; between culturally prescribed goals and possession of socially legitimate means to achieve them. Put differently, society proposes desirable aims to all, but at the same time it is not able to provide everyone the necessary means to achieve those same goals it has set. As a result, in every society there are people who aspire to something that they probably won't get, not now, not ever.

In this setting, individuals have to implement an adaptation strategy and Merton outlined a typology with five different combinations of (legitimate and illegitimate) goals and means: conformity (pursuing legitimate goals through socially approved means); innovation (using socially un-

¹ «Much academic research has tried to link personal circumstances to causes of terrorism. The attempts have been mostly unsuccessful. Though individual biographies certainly matter, the extensive focus on personal variables has produced false positives» (Groppi, 2017a, 69; Schmidt, 2013b).

approved or unconventional means to obtain culturally approved goals); ritualism (refusing culturally approved goals but using legitimate means for attaining more modest goals respect to those socially proposed); retreatism (rejecting both cultural goals and means, finding a way to escape from society); rebellion (rejecting or accepting the cultural goals and means with the aim to replace them with a revolutionary changing; 1949).

I think this pattern has retained its general heuristic validity even today and it is transferable to any contemporary, Western, developed capitalist society. This is why it will be used to try to understand some dangerous contemporary phenomena that have repeatedly put Western countries social coexistence at risk². I refer is to religious radicalization, which is particularly dangerous when turns into violence and attacks Western civilization³.

To do this, the living condition of migrant background population will be examined, knowing that a gap between means and goals can help to develop feelings of relative deprivation⁴ and frustration, especially for second-third generations. In this case a sense of growing extraneousness and belonging erosion could arise and people, reacting to anomie, could look for different significant reference frames (religious or political).

Obviously, relative deprivation and unmet expectations are just some of the significant push factors involved. For example, it seems that the social surrounding environment and in particular the peer group relationships play a significant role in the radicalization pathways. However, while personal and relational ones are certainly important but variable factors, structural ones seem to have a constant role in every Western country affected by the phenomenon of radicalization (Vergani *et al.*, 2018).

With regards to pull factors, it will be necessary to take into account one of the most significant: Islamic State's (hereinafter IS) project and its very effective propaganda system aimed at radicalizing and recruiting Muslims. The IS message speaks particularly (but not only) to disap-

² Although it represents a strong theoretical pillar, Merton's theory is not enough to face such a manifold phenomenon as radicalization. Thus, with the aim to better articulate the concept of expectation, basic to understand the attitudes of second-third generation migrants, it will be supported by other contributions such as Hirschman's theory (1970; Hirschman and Rothschild, 1973), Appadurai's concept of capacity to aspire (2004) and Fabian's allochronism theory (1983).

³ Obviously, as will be clarified below, it is not my intention to draw a direct relation between radicalization and violence or terrorism but rather to thoroughly examine their complex connection.

⁴ As known the concept, conceived by Stouffer in his study *The American Soldier* (*et al.*, 1949), refers to the perceived gap between one's personal situation and that of "others (considered) relevant". The feelings of relative deprivation derive properly from an unfavorable confrontation and tend to generate protests, rebellions and, in extreme cases, even revolution.

pointed young Western Muslims with migratory background. They are second-third generation young born and living in European countries that generally give them so little chance of life, that do not provide them any serious opportunity and marginalize them (economically, culturally, socially, urbanistically).

Socio-economic relative deprivation turns into a lack of identification and, as we will see, IS offers something to fill the void: the possibility of acquiring a full identity by participating in a radical panislamic political-religious project that restores their humiliated souls. Put differently: «when a political system becomes blocked on some burning public issue, radicalisation can be a rational, individual or collective response» (Schmid, 2013b).

It is certainly true that there is no linear relation between radicalization and terrorism (see *infra*), but it is very likely that no suicide bomber or terrorist attack would have occurred without IS calling and that the young Western Muslims' dissatisfaction would find different channels of expression. Consequently, the IS propaganda will be described and analysed by paying attention to a particular «evolution» of the European Islam which, joint to the structural factors mentioned above, would have paved the way for radicalization.

In the end, taking into account all these aspects, an analysis of the Italian situation and a brief risk profile related to radicalization and possible attacks will be proposed. To this aim, different interpretative lines will be examined attempting to reconstruct the complex framework that (so far) has kept Italy safe.

1. *Radicalization: brief history of the concept and its operational use*

The studies carried out so far have stated that there is greater likelihood of developing radicalized attitudes if there is a social exclusion climate, if the political system is instable, if a political or religious radical ideology is available.

First of all, it is interesting to examine the concept semantically and historically. As the Cambridge Dictionary states, «radical» as a noun means «a person who support great social and political change»; as an adjective means «believing or expressing the belief there should be great or extreme social or political change» while «radicalization» is «the action or process of making someone become more radical (extreme) in their political or religious beliefs».

Differently, according to the Italian Treccani Dictionary the term «radical» comes from the Latin word *radicalis* (derived from *radix*). Literally it is a botanic term (root in English) while in a figurate sense means «intimate essence of something». It is curious enough that, as a political term, it derives from the English word «radical» because Italian language

has no one with that meaning. It is easy to understand why: the term «radical», already used in the 18th century, became widespread in 19th century in the Anglo-Saxon context when it was referred to a political agenda advocating thorough social and political reform.

Actually, in the above definitions there is nothing that recall the baleful sound that the term has nowadays. It is well known that many political parties in the 19th century are defined «radical» because advocating republicanism rather than royalism, or pleading for a more democratic system that expanded the right to vote. Most of them were reformist and not revolutionary and «“radical” was [...] almost as respectable as “liberal”». The connotation of the concept has changed quite dramatically in a few years: «while in the recent past “radical” referred primarily to liberal, anti-clerical, pro-democratic, progressive political positions, the contemporary use, as in “radical Islamism”, goes to the opposite direction: anti-liberal, fundamentalist, anti-democratic and regressive» (Schmid, 2013a, 6).

Moreover, this negative connotation is reinforced by many official and scholarly definitions that closely link radical attitudes to political or religious violence and terrorism. To list only some examples, the Danish Security and Intelligence Service defines radicalization as «a process by which a person to an increasing extent accepts the use of undemocratic or violent means, including terrorism, in an attempt to reach a specific political/ideological objective» (2009, 1). The UK's Home Office refers to radicalization as «the process by which people come to support terrorism and violent extremism and, in some cases, then to join terrorist groups» (2011). Again, according to Wilner and Dubouloz radicalization is «a personal process in which individuals adopt extreme political, social and/or religious ideals and aspirations, and where the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence» (2010, 38). Lastly, Crosset and Spitaletta define it as a process of transformation from legal means to the use of violence for political purposes (2010).

On the contrary, we agree with Laurano and Anzera that there is no evidence that a radical ideology is a necessary premise for embracing terrorism (2017). Indeed, it is better to distinguish between «ideological or cognitive radicalization» and «violent or behavioral radicalization» (Vergani *et al.*, 2018). As defined by Dalgaard-Nielsen radicalisation is «a growing readiness to support and pursue far-reaching changes in society that conflict with or pose a direct threat to the existing order», while «violent radicalisation [is] a process in which radical ideas are accompanied by the development of a willingness to directly support or engage in violent acts» (2010, 798).

Kundnani (2012) has reconstructed the recent history of the concept and its role in the current debate. In brief, he claims that generally the source of terrorist violence is traditionally seen in psychopathology and

fundamentalism rather than in political reasons⁵. To him, this pathway (reassuring but very misleading) have affected the security policies with heavy consequences both on their efforts effectiveness and on citizens' private life.

After 9/11 attacks this framework was globally applied and hatred of freedom and/or Islamist religious fanaticism were the reasons attributed to the terrorists. In this way, the search for the underpinning political causes was simply cancelled because attributing some sort of reasonableness to terrorists seemed like an attempt to justify them (Neumann, 2008). «Terrorism became an evil ideology that did not require further analysis» (Kundnani, 2012, 4).

In the following years a new debate to better guide the counter-terrorism effort was opened and «the concept of radicalization emerged as a vehicle for policy-makers to explore the process by which a terrorist was made and to provide an analytical grounding of preventative strategies» (*ibidem*). Consequently, the concept of radicalisation was not used to understand the terrorism roots but just as a tool for counter-terrorism policy-makers.

The term became much more popular after the 2005 London bombings that changed the public perception of Islamic terrorism. «The revelation that the perpetrators of the London bombing were British residents [...] raised the spectre of a new kind of threat, that of “homegrown terrorism”, and the notion that residents of peaceful Western nations could become terrorists *through exposure to radical ideas*» (Bennet, 2019, 48; emphasis added), as if it was a sort of virus.

In this scenario, it became crucial to find the main indicators, the signs, the markers of individual radicalization to construct an early warning system to prevent the phenomenon. «Rather than providing governments with a causal analysis of homegrown terrorism – stated Kundnani – thinktanks and terrorism studies departments [...] began to model the process by which an individual can become a supporter of the extremist ideology» (2012, 6).

Counter-terrorism policy emerged as an independent field and dictated its needs to the research world. Then, studies on individual radicalization factors were heavily funded, influencing the conceptual framework used to make sense of the data. The result was that attacks did not happen because of political reasons, but for radical religious commandments (Laqueur, 2004). Following this pathway, scholars provided answers in terms of an individual cultural-psychological or/and theological dispo-

⁵ For example, the Mau Mau rebels captured by the British army in Kenya in the 1950s were psychiatrically defined as «an irrational force of evil, dominated by bestial impulses and influenced by world communism» (Carothers, 1953); consequently, no counter-colonialism political reason was ascribed to their cause.

sition rather than political, making available lists of potential dangerous attitudes as markers of risk. In a few words, «instead of asking what causes terrorism [...] radicalisation discourse claims predictive power» (Kundnani, 2012, 10).

In this way it shaped the counter-terrorism policy that became not only a military action, but also a global ideological campaign with heavy civil liberties consequences. In fact, since the mid-2000s, several northern European countries have developed counter-radicalization strategies involving security agencies but also Muslim communities, local authorities, health workers, teachers, and so on, with the aim of identifying individuals vulnerable to radicalization based on indicators provided by scholars (Vidino and Brandon, 2012; Ranstorp, 2010; Mellis, 2007). The problem is that, as in a vicious circle, that «scientific» indicators have often driven governments to implement surveillance strategies that disproportionately invaded the citizens' private life.

Despite the differences, all research branches agree on one point: radicalization is a process. It is not necessarily linear, can mix endogenous and exogenous factors, can lead to the use of violence and is potentially reversible. In the literature the main factors are generally divided into pull and push factors; structural or psychological factors; subjective or objective factors.

The main problem I see in the existing literature on radicalization is that too often scholars try to find something like a universal scheme that can identify the signs of radicalization all over the world, forgetting that space-time coordinates should be used as independent variables. It would be rather obvious that different backgrounds shape different radicalization processes; instead, it has often been forgotten and geographically circumscribed studies claim to provide global interpretative frames (Migotto and Miretti, 2017).

At this aim, Vergani (*et al.*, 2018) have carried out a very useful systematic scoping review that not only collects the reasons for radicalization, but also shows their variance in different world areas. The authors have examined articles (published in English between 2001 and 2015) on the causes of radicalization into violent extremism and grouped them in three broad categories: push, pull and personal factors, knowing that they are non-exclusive categories and that the three factors result closely interrelated. Anyway, analytically «push factors overlap with structural roots causes [...]. Pull factors capture the aspects that make extremist groups and lifestyle appealing [...]. Personal factors include individual characteristics that make certain individuals more vulnerable to radicalization» (ivi, 3). In general, the former focus on structural, political and sociological explanations; the second on group-level sociocognitive ones, and the latter on psychological and biographical interpretations.

The most cited push factor is the relative deprivation of a social group, from time to time defined as injustice, inequality, marginalization, griev-

ance, social exclusion, frustration, victimization, stigmatization, unemployment⁶. «In the case of global jihadist radicalization [relative deprivation] derives from the aggressive foreign policies of Western states in Muslims majority countries [...] and more in general from the perception of Western dominance in world politics» (ivi, 8). Interestingly, in a global perspective the concept is specified keeping in the foreground different roots from those considered relevant in the European context, as we will see later.

The most cited pull factors are consumption of extremist propaganda, peer pressure and identification with the group, material (mostly in literature focusing on Africa) and emotional incentives like the desire of adventure and excitement for violence (Roy called it «Islamization of radicalism»; 2015). In particular, the consumption of extremist propaganda is examined *per se* but also in terms of culture, myths, beliefs and views aimed to justify violence. This, together with a simplified version of Islam, is the main pull factor for the simple reason that, without it, no other personal or structural factors could have turned disadvantaged young Muslims into potential mujahidin.

The personal factors found by the review often deal with mental health (sometimes even using a medicalized approach; Paulussen *et al.*, 2017): i.e. mental illness, psychological disorders, disturbance (especially referred to lone wolves), personal traits and cognitive structures (nihilism, narcissistic personality, low tolerance, impulsiveness, black-and-white type of thinking). Others factors take into account demographic characteristics such as to be young and male, and previous experiences such as criminal behaviour, substance abuse, military experience, jail detention (Vergani *et al.*, 2018, 11). Of course, some biographical features as identity weakness, dysfunctional families, low schooling, and so on, are included as well.

The analysis is then carried forward by crossing data with geographical, ideological and methodological variables. Interestingly, indicators of socio-economic disadvantage are cited as the main factors of radicalization worldwide. (ivi, 15). Therefore, as stated above, it is precisely our intention to carry out an analysis of the phenomenon from a sociological point of view, taking into account the structural variables and interpreting the individual cases as embedded in a socio-economic-political framework. To do this, it is necessary to return to Merton's theory.

⁶ In some geographical areas also political instability is considered as a push factor.

2. Pursuing material success: what does it mean?

First of all, it is necessary to clarify what does «pursuing material success» (Merton, 1949) concretely mean for migrants living in Western countries, and particularly in Italy.

At this aim, some socio-economic indicators on migrants' life conditions will be examined knowing that in our country they draw on average a landscape of poverty and deprivation, linguistic and cultural as well. These (worrying) data are well known, so it is not necessary to show them. Rather, they represent a necessary starting point to face another issue: to compare natives' and migrants' socio-economic indicators with the aim of bringing out any relative deprivation relationships⁷ due to immigrants spatial and temporal marginalization (Tusini, 2014).

To assess the socio-economic distance between natives and migrants it is necessary to compare them diachronically. To do it, we carry data on migrants back in time (so to speak) to the point where they correspond to those of natives. In this way, the temporal collocations of migrants in the «host» societies can be assessed. To give some examples: nowadays the average age of migrants living in Italy is about 32 years while Italians were on average 32 years old in 1951. The fertility rate of migrant women is now 2,37; Italian women had the same rate in 1971. Percentage of immigrant population aged 0-4 is now around 9; Italians had this rate in 1971. Percentage of extended families among migrants is around 33%; the same was in Italy in 1951. Nowadays, 63,4% of migrant families has only one income earner, while in Italy the same percentage was reached around the 50s (and has progressively decreased) (Istat Census data; Istat Time series; Bank of Italy data).

The possession of durable goods is a relevant indicator too. As known, some sociologists (like Veblen and Bourdieu, to name a few) tried to establish social class boundaries examining possessions, aspirations and habits. Riesman called «standard package» the set of goods families perceived as necessary for being an American style of life member (1964). In Italy Francesco Alberoni (1968) defined TV, washing machine, fridge, and so on as «beni di cittadinanza», claiming that they were loaded with symbolic meaning and their possession represented membership at the growing urban and consumer society. So, owning some type of goods marks the transition from a traditional way of life to the modern consumer society and, roughly speaking, it indicates the passing from subsistence to wellbeing.

To this respect, from Italian data emerges that nowadays only 78% of migrant families in Italy have their own washing machine; 78% of Italians owned one in 1975. 86% of migrant families own a fridge and a TV,

⁷ In fact, religious radicalization it is more likely to be a consequence of relative deprivation feelings than of poverty *tout court* (Schmid, 2017a; Vergani *et al.*, 2018).

like Italian families around 1972. Only 52,4% of them own a car, while Italians achieved this percentage in 1971 (Istat, 2011a; Istat Time series).

Income allocation pattern is also a very significant indicator for assessing population's living conditions. According to Engel's law, the share of income spent for basic necessities decreases as income grows. So, a large share of income allocated to food shows people living in poverty, forced to invest most of their earnings to satisfy their basic needs (Engel, 1895; Halbwachs, 1913; 1933). In this regard, nowadays migrants in Italy spend between 40 and 47% of their income to buy food; Italians did it around 1970 and now spend on food only around 19% of their total budget (Censis-E-st@t Gruppo Delta, 2006; Ismu, 2007; Istat, 2011c; Istat, Time series).

Moreover, the Italian labor market shows a vertical and horizontal segregation of immigrants (Tedesco *et al.*, 2012) and often they do what Italians no longer want to do, but that they did in the past (Dossier Caritas Migrantes; Istat, 2011a). On average, migrants working life is longer than natives one (just like Italians a few generations ago; Istat, 2011b) and their probability of doing unskilled jobs is fivefold than natives (Istat, 2015). Consequently, most of migrants represent a typical case of working poor, just like most of Italians before the modernization (Bank of Italy data; Cingano *et al.*, 2013). Finally, overcrowding and bad housing conditions of migrant families are like ours just a few decades ago, especially in some southern regions or in the countryside (Censis, 2004; Eu-silc, 2009; Istat Census data).

Summarizing, from diachronic data analysis emerges how living conditions of today's migrants in Italy seem the same of Italians during the transition to modernization, between the late fifties and the mid-seventies. Therefore, immigrants residing in Italy are living according to socio-economic parameters typical of a very different period than contemporary one. Using Fabian's terminology (1983), migrants are living an allochronic state than natives, experiencing a socio-temporal apartheid (Tusini, 2014), although they both live in the same historical period.

Using a diachronic analysis does not necessarily mean assuming the existence of a sort of evolutionary scale. There is no linear relationship between the developmental stages of natives and migrants, and therefore it is very far from our intentions to interpret this phenomenon deterministically.

Our goal is instead to build a nominal diachronic comparison between two social groups to carry out an evaluation in terms of equality/difference. In fact, the data shows that the indicators relating to the migrant nation not only illustrate their poor living conditions but, compared to the native ones, report an allochronic state. In other words, on the basis of this analysis, it is certainly possible to say that on some important indicators migrants nowadays have the same data as the natives several decades

ago. It is a comparison between two fixed points at different times that does not imply deterministic consequences.

Indeed, on the basis of the same data, it would be absolutely not possible to say that the migrant nation will develop in exactly the same direction and in the same ways as the natives. This is an unsustainable conclusion both theoretically and empirically as it implies the acceptance of an evolutionary and deterministic model, typical of late nineteenth century Sociology, that has long been abandoned and is truly foreign to our theoretical approaches.

We are aware that the profile of the migrant population that emerges from here is partial and the phenomenon is more complex and nuanced than that. However, the materialistic/economic dimension plays a key role in the field of integration studies, together with cultural aspects. Therefore, supported by Feuerbach's aphorism «Man is what he eats», we believe that concretely examining some typical dimensions of the lifestyle of migrants is fundamental to understand their socio-temporal position.

3. Attitudes and expectations of different migrant generations

Returning to Merton's theory and summarizing the previous observations, we can state that although most migrants share the typical goals of Western societies in which they live permanently (especially consumption habits)⁸, they generally don't possess the means necessary to achieve them. Their goals are placed in the present (and perhaps achievable in the future) but their means are located in the past and consequently they are inadequate and/or insufficient to get aims. Understandably enough, this produces marginalization and frustration especially – this is the point – for second-generation migrants who differ greatly from their predecessors, particularly in terms of expectations.

The first-generation migrants generally comply with the marginal social role assigned by the hosting hegemonic culture because of their linguistic, economic, legal and cultural weakness. They well know the reasons that brought them far from home and they don't want to put their project at risk. All these factors drive their compliant attitudes and low expectations.

The second- and third-generation show a more composite profile. They generally are young people born or grew up in the «host» countries, having advanced linguistic skills, attending school, wearing fashionable

⁸ At this respect, it is generally affirmed that migrants (especially second-generations) tend to converge to Western models of life (Rebughini, 2010; Secondulfo, 2012; Setiffi, 2013) because they claim a «right to similarity» rather than a desire for distinction and separateness (Ambrosini, 2009b).

clothes, having native friends, and so on. Most of them are completely culturally assimilated, especially to the consumer society, and have adopted the Western society's value system, included expectations (Ambrosini, 2009a; Queirolo Palmas, 2006; Wihtol de Wenden, 2004).

The problem is that in Southern European countries like Italy there is a subaltern integration model with little chance of emancipation (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Ambrosini, 2009a). Most of second-third generations experience an illusory (or anomic) integration that implies a culturally successful socialization (especially regarding lifestyles and consumption patterns) but a lack of opportunities for economic and social improvement (*ibidem*). An Italian nationwide research carried on by Dalla Zuanna (*et al.*, 2009) revealed how the great desire for social inclusion emerging from second-generation migrants clashes with an unfavourable opportunity system, both at school and in the labour market, with the risk to prepare a future of tension and resentment towards the «host» society. Ambrosini confirmed that second-generation migrants «have the same expectations, interests, lifestyles and consumption habits of their native peers. Therefore, they reject the first generation model of social and cultural integration and require different opportunities, of a higher social and economic level» (Ambrosini and Molina, 2004, XIV).

To understand their attitudes, it may be useful to recall the Hirschman's «tunnel effect» theory: «Imagine you are driving in a two-lane tunnel with both lanes headed in the same direction. All traffic is jammed as far as you can see – which is not very far. Suddenly the lane next to you starts to move. Initially you feel better, even though you are still stuck, because this signals to you that the jam has ended, and your own lane will soon start moving too. But after waiting at a standstill and watching the other lane moving for some time, your feelings change. You become envious and furious. You and others stuck in the lane begin to suspect foul play. You begin to search for a way to address the injustice of the situation by drastic action – including making illegal moves, such as crossing the double line that forbids moving from one lane to the other» (Hirschman and Rothschild, 1973).

Hirschman's theory deals with expectations: we accept inequality, this is the point, just because we believe that sooner or later «will be our turn». But if the other lane keeps moving and we are still stopped, we will begin to get impatient and maybe want to change lane. So, the more we perceive that there is something wrong, the more we rebel.

4. *The Mermaids' singing: oversimplified Islam and IS's propaganda*

The second- and third-generation migrants do not intend to stay neatly lined up like their parents did. This should not be surprising because, to quote Merton, «those who perennially suffer defeat may, understand-

ably enough, work for a change in the rules of the game» (Merton, 1949, 188). In this regard, Hirschman (1970) conceived a typology of individual reactions towards a perceived malfunctioning system: exit, voice, loyalty.

The last is self-evident. It should be just added that excessive loyalty is dysfunctional for democratic systems that, on the contrary, need dissent to function at their best. Differently, «exit» is the escape, the defection, *lato* or *stricto sensu*. The system is perceived as an enemy and the individual reaction is to leave it. It can simply mean becoming apathetic and disinterested (retreatism; Merton, 1949), but also planning a real escape. The latter is an extremely «expensive» and hardly applicable option. This was the case of East Germans who fled during the Cold War years or, to come to our days, of migrants fleeing to the Western countries, but also of foreign fighters who leave their countries to join the jihad.

«Voice is political action *par excellence*» (1970, 16). «Voice is here defined as any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion» (ivi, 30). Therefore, voice «is a “messy” concept that can fluctuate from a weak grumbling to a violent protest» (ivi, 16). In its peaceful version it can imply highlighting a dysfunction, articulating an interest, exercising the so-called «protest vote», publicly demonstrating some ideas, but it can grow to become violent rebellion.

A crucial aspect of Hirschman's thought is the function of dissent within democratic systems. The democratic vitality is safeguarded by providing adequate channels for expressing protest. In this way, according to the author, democratic systems will be able to maintain internal cohesion; differently, they will shatter. It is the same for Appadurai (2004), especially when he claims that hegemonic political systems are obliged to create the conditions for marginal and/or minority groups to develop their own «capacity to aspire». That is, to develop a cultural ability to organize a political action to pursue realistically achievable aims. According to Appadurai, economic and cultural means are not equally distributed, as well as the availability of «navigational maps» (namely, the capacity to turn needs into actions). In fact, «navigational capacity» is more widespread among affluent groups that possess more power, material resources and dignity.

Political systems are required to guarantee the necessary conditions because the social classes with less navigational capacity (materially and symbolically deprived) can grow their capacity to aspire and «democracy must now measure its success not only against tyranny but also against misery» (Appadurai, 2007, 34). Otherwise, sooner or later the temporal and socio-economic distance built by the blind exercise of hegemonic power could generate rebellion, as happened in 2005 in France when French citizen of migrant origin heavily protested for their inclusion and

against their social, economic and urban marginalisation in the *banlieues* (Revel, 2006; 2008; Wieworka, 2005; 2007).

Interestingly, that was a secular protest with no traces of religious radicalization: nothing has been done in the name of Islamism, ethnic grievances or racial hatred. Migrant background youths «simply» asked for having means to achieve goals that their country propose to their nationals, as even they were in fact. So, at that time it was difficult to imagine that only 10 years later some French of migrant origin would shoot Charlie Hebdo journalists in the name of Allah. During that 10 years, in some cases, the growing gap between means and goals has been filled by finding a new identity and belonging to radical Islam. Some young European citizens radically reject the Western way of life to embrace IS's aims and values. According to Roy's well-known interpretation (2002; 2008), such a radicalization is produced by deculturation and re-islamization phenomena⁹.

A sort of weakening of ethnic Islam in Europe was already evident for a long time¹⁰, but in the early analysis its consequences appeared neither linear nor obvious. In a 2008 interesting contribution, Pacini noted that «it can carry on a reform of Islam in a liberal or neo-orthodox sense, but also a fundamentalist regression» (Cesari and Pacini, 2005). Drawing the boundaries of this «silent revolution», Pacini outlined 3 different believer profiles: seasonal practitioners, liberal Muslims and re-Islamized believers.

The first is the most secularized: religious norms are observed only for rites of passage (circumcision, marriage, funeral) or important festivities. The second type, liberal Muslims, conceives Islam as a simply private source of values and meanings; consequently, they do not want strong and visible links with their religious community. The last type (re-Islamization) is the expression of orthodox Islam tendencies and involves completely the believers in a communitarian dimension. It is based on an identity rediscovery and a re-appropriation of a purer Islam thanks to a direct relationship with the sacred books.

Moreover, at that time was already clear that young Muslims living conditions in the European context were able to shape their religious affiliation modes. In fact, Pacini stated that «recent [around 2008] studies show that the more difficult is integration, the more widespread are

⁹ The first-generation migrants have developed their first religious experience within a coherent culture and, once migrated, usually have adopted the so-called «ethnic Islam» that reproduces the codes of the countries of origin. The following generations, living in a cultural and territorial «elsewhere», rediscover Islam in a deculturized form and «rewrite» it in terms of a «pure» religion, closely linked to its literal, normative, political aspects.

¹⁰ According to Khosrokhavar (1997), already 20 years ago youth of migrant origin began to adopt a non-ethnic Islam with a progressive affirmation of an individual relationship with religious dimension and a contrast against traditional codes.

neo-traditionalist or radical orthodox. The lack of professional, economic and social integration pushes young people of immigrant origin to re-Islamization, seen as a possibility to affirm their identity against exclusion and marginalization» (2008).

Almost in the same period books never seen before began to circulate. Books written by beginners that claimed to explain Islam¹¹. «“What is Islam?”, “What is Muslim?”, “What is the faith?”, “How to live Islam” [...] with the aim of objectively define what Islam is [...]. The knowledge produced by Ulamas is no longer a point of reference and has become useless enough for believers; they do not offer the answers sought by the “new” believers. [These pamphlets] are not generally written by Islamist scholars, but by people who are completely secular and who reflect on Islam as self-taught» (Roy, 2007a).

The so-called born-again Muslims phenomenon must be read within this framework characterized by taking distance from the moderate faith typical of the family of origin (ethnic Islam), by returning to integral Islam without the Ulamas mediation, and by a self-indoctrination via peer-group, pamphlet or Web, in a «sort of protestantization of Islam» (Guolo, 2015, 16).

Often (but not always) this spiritual rebirth is inspired by Salafism¹² that claims to be the purest Islam. Its basic idea consists in reading the sacred books literally and without interpretation or mediation. While Sunni Islam gives great importance to the *silsila* (a spiritual genealogy in which knowledge is passed generation after generation), Salafism is based directly on the ancestors' words, without any mediation. It apparently democratizes Islam and makes it easier for believers to understand it: far from the sophisms of the Ulamas, each question has only one correct, comprehensible and simple answer (Amghar, 2011).

Consequently, Salafism is very attractive especially for young «deculturized» Muslims (Roy, 2008) and grounds its success on oversimplification. Moreover, to be a Salafist makes you feel part of a family with particular identification marks, like dress- and somatic-codes, and that does not allow other memberships than the Islamic one. This is symbolized by the term *ghurabā*, that is: the otherness from the rest of the world. In this regard, Salafism is really a global religion (Adraoui, 2013) and its believers must have only one identity, one nation, one «citizenship»: they are just (exclusively) Muslims wherever they live.

¹¹ According to Roy, the authors were often engineers (2004). The link between this educational profile and radicalization is supported in a controversial book by Gambetta and Hertog which show how the rate of engineers among jihadists is overrepresented. The authors claim that the *forma mentis* that pushes towards engineering studies can be also a factor that potentially makes individuals prone to radicalization (2016).

¹² Among others, a German study on 514 foreign fighters' biography found that 81% have had contacts to extreme Salafi groups before leaving (Heinke, 2016).

Besides, there is also a political dimension very functional to IS project: generally, in case of war, Muslims have to help other Muslims, except the most radical Salafi group that takes into considerations the possibility to fight against the so-called «apostate rulers» to replace them with purer Muslims.

Radical Islam invites believers to give up the post-colonial Islam humiliated by Westerners, to embrace a purer religion that can restore their dignity. So, it is easy to understand how Salafi ideas can seduce second-and-third generation migrants, especially if their sense of belonging to the «host» countries is really low. It is easy especially if your identity is blurred and you are very disappointed with your life as it is. It is easy if you are aware that your country offers you so few chances to build your future; if you aspire to something that you know you will never get; if your aims are in front of you, but your means are inadequate to achieve them; if you feel like a second-class citizen with no prospects.

However, as stated above, there is not a necessary relation between a radicalized Muslim and a foreign fighter or a terrorist. For example, after the 2015 Charlie Hebdo terrorist attack, Atran (2016) carried out a survey in the Parisian *banlieues* to explore attitudes towards Islamic State. He found a wide and worrying sharing of the IS's values and actions. Did it mean that there was a Muslim Army ready to leave to the Middle East? Obviously not. But it was a fact that radical religious ideas had gained widespread consensus into the Muslims diaspora all over the world.

It is also a fact that the IS's communication office has worked to radicalise as many Western Muslims as possible. IS gave great importance to communication from the beginning and founded a Central Media Department (CMD) that controlled and coordinated the entire communication system activities. It built a very recognizable brand aimed at captivating and terrifying, and used globalised communication marketing as a weapon. In particular, it was useful to maintain internal cohesion, show the goals, publicize the mission, recruit new members, and give consistency to the entire organization.

The cyber-jihad message has been disseminated through a high-quality media production, addressed to different targets. All media have been used: social, newspapers, videogames, docufilms, witness stories, short films, magazines and so on. Moreover, it is surprising indeed how easy it is to find them online (Thompson, 2011; Maggioni and Magri, 2015; Guolo, 2016).

The CMD was helped by many IS press agencies and thousands of on-line supporters. It is assessed that IS communication system «manages up to 70,000 Twitter and Facebook accounts, with hundreds of thousands of followers, and sends about 90,000 SMS per day» (Atran, 2016)¹³. The

¹³ It is known that the web represents a very powerful channel of self-indoctrination if

«virtual fighters» are a very significant key to IS propaganda and represent a global network that over time has amplified the jihadist message producing material and translating the most important IS messages in multiple languages (Berger, Morgan, 2015). «Defending the word of Allah (*Haqq*) against the lies of Western hypocrites (*munaafiqun*) is considered an act of faith, similar to a mujahid effort [...]. Their web accounts represent a virtual *ribat*: the ancient guard posts placed on the conquered territory borders to fend off the Islam enemies» (Panuccio, 2017, 2).

IS's propaganda is directed to its enemies to spread fear, insecurity and terror, but also to the *Ummah* (global Islamic community) in order to build and defend its reputation, damage the enemy's image and recruit followers. The message directed to Western Muslims underlines the marginalization suffered in the Western countries since «the sophisticated Islamic State has learnt that personal frustrations can converge on collective topics as “Muslims persecution” or “Muslims humiliation”. It has learnt to translate anger and unfulfilled aspirations into moral indignation» (Atran, 2016) and into a political project.

Using Merton's words, radicalized European Muslims are generally individuals who tried to achieve goals proposed by the Western «host» society, but soon realized that there were no adequate or sufficient means for them to do it. They compared their life chances with those of their native peers and concluded that they are victims of injustice and marginalization. This unleashed their dissatisfaction and (sometimes) protest, but also a sense of growing otherness respect to the surrounding environment. IS offers them a life project and a redemption opportunity. Someone step forward, rejecting Western values (so called Westoxication) and replacing them with others. Radical religious beliefs seem very capable of filling the personal void and giving meaning to existence.

Although phenomenologically there are different radicalization degrees, all radicalized believers refuse to identify themselves with the «host» society values and institutions. Someone goes further and becomes a foreign fighter; therefore, not only rejects Western goals and means, but also decides to join the Islamic State and go to Syraq. Some of them decide to bring jihad to Europe (it is the so-called «blowback phenomenon») and attack their home country now considered the most dangerous enemy. This has placed the phenomenon on the international agenda as one of the most pressing transnational security issues of our time (Reed *et al.*, 2015).

supported by a surrounding social network. So, peer groups, friends and acquaintances met in prisons, schools, universities, mosques, neighbourhoods, workplaces, seems to play a key role to spread the IS ideology.

5. Conclusion

Unlike other European countries, Italy has not suffered serious terrorist attacks so far. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to assess how many radicalized individuals there are in Italy nowadays. It has been estimated that there are almost 2.6 million Muslims in the country and that operated in the Syraq scenario almost 140 foreign fighters connected to Italy (1 out of 5 with Italian citizenship), but these are only proxy indicators. Clearly, so far the country has benefited from some protection factors (Guolo, 2018; Simcox, 2019) which we try to briefly list:

- (a) a shorter migration cycle. The second generations are numerically lower than in other European countries and are known to be the most sensitive to radical mermaids. Moreover, until now there is no evidence that jihadism has particularly taken root in Italy. At this regard it is noteworthy that from 2014 to date only 2 in 13 accused of planning Islamist attacks in Italy were Italian (Groppi, 2017a);
- (b) the fragmentation and the pluralism of the Islamic community. In Italy there is not a dominant Islamic group and communities are characterized by an ethnic diversification¹⁴. Different groups are linked to their culture and customs, rather than to the common religion, and this represent a barrier to radical panislamic ideology penetration;
- (c) since Muslims considered radicalization as an obstacle to the legitimacy of Muslim nation, many mosque leaders in Italy act as sentinels, as a kind of internal intelligence system, although it must be remembered that in the 1990s there was a very active jihadist scene centred on Northern mosques (Hilzenrath and Mintz, 2001);
- (d) the lack of a strong and generalized urban marginalization¹⁵ (as instead happens in the French *banlieues*; Groppi, 2016) and the existence of a universal welfare system (free public schools and universal health care) seem to someone significant integration tools able to discourage radicalization;
- (e) the experience gained by security forces in taking on domestic terrorist groups and mafia. Indeed, effective collaborations between all security agencies, trained staff for telephone tapping, increasing capability to decipher «weak signals» to implement preventive interventions represent powerful tools to control radicalization;
- (f) the possibility of expelling people who could favour radicalization and terrorist activities, even if they had not been convicted or accused of a

¹⁴ To get an idea of the associative pluralism of Muslims in our country see <https://arabmediareport.it/archivio-articoli/sitografia-lislam-italiano-sul-web/>).

¹⁵ It is true that in Italy there are not large urban segregation areas like the French *banlieues*, but there are some blocks in our cities where residents are mostly Islamic (Giacalone, 2019).

crime. Under the recent rules, appealing to a judge does not suspend the expulsion process in any case. In 2018 over 100 suspects of Islamic extremism were expelled from the country;

- (g) a less noble protection factor seems to be linked at the geopolitical position of Italy. Being located at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Middle East, it represents a transit area for weapons, jihadists, false documents and others illicit traffics (Vidino, 2018); a sort of logistic base that it would be mindless to attack (Sarti, 2017);
- (h) an even less noble reason would be represented by the thesis of the journalist Francesca Musacchio (2019), who hypothesizes an Italian State-IS agreement to protect the country. So far no evidence supports this idea;
- (i) not even evidence supports the alleged agreement between Italian mafias and jihadists. Since both are traffickers in Italy – it is said – both would be interested in not triggering the reaction of Italian security forces that would be inevitable in case of an attack.

Together with the protection factors, we cannot forget other non-protective ones: a very banishing migration policy; a path to obtain citizenship very long and difficult; the granting of citizenship to second generation only after turning 18; the existence of a large sovranist party that launched a strong anti-immigration message claiming «Italians first». Nor can we forget the data presented above on migrants' life conditions, summarized as a marginalizing «socio-temporal apartheid» (Tusini, 2014), that could represent a potential «social bomb».

In addition, some analysts reveal significant recent changes in our national panorama. Vidino (2018), for example, believes that the protection due to our logistical role is over. Basing on data emerging from counter jihadists operations, he states that new dynamics in the Italian Islamist world are developing: involvement of Italian citizens of migrant origin (and not only foreigners as in the recent past), use of the Italian language (instead of Arabic), foundation of Koranic schools (*madrassas*), use of social media. These trends show that our country is heading towards those typical of other European countries more «advanced» on this topic.

It is illusory to think that IS decline in the war scenario stops radicalization. It is a fact that its strategy is turning a traditional war into a very dangerous low intensity war. To do this, IS must continue to gather new affiliates, asking its foreign fighters to bring war to their return countries (Barone, 2019). As seen, Italy is positively «late» with respect to the phenomenon of radicalization (Guolo, 2018) but the temporal distance is starting to fill up. Therefore, in agreement with Appadurai, our political leaders are responsible for implementing strong integration measures (starting from school) capable of preventing radicalization and anomic alienation, and offering better life prospects to the migrant nation living

in Italy. Otherwise, our risk profile is likely to change rapidly (Gropi, 2017b).

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